

State Profiles

Wisconsin State Profile



Wisconsin's State of Sex Ed

Sex education is not mandated in Wisconsin. However, if schools choose to teach it they must stress abstinence. Since Wisconsin schools are not required to provide sex education to students, school districts are left to decide what type of sex education—any at all—they provide to youth that has resulted in disparities regarding the quality of sex education that students receive.



Sex Ed Requirement



Sex Ed Content



Overall State Policy Grade

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[Current Requirement](#)

Current Requirement

- Wisconsin schools are required to provide instruction on STDs.
- If a school chooses to provide human growth and development instruction, curriculum is required to **stress abstinence** and must be **medically accurate**.
- Curriculum is not required to include instruction on sexual orientation or gender identity. However, Wisconsin's **state standards** for human growth and development instruction includes instruction on sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Curriculum is not required to provide instruction on consent. However, Wisconsin's **state standards** for human growth and development instruction include instruction on consent.
- Parents or guardians may remove their children from the human growth and development instruction with a written request to the teacher or principal. **This is referred to as an "opt-out" policy.**

RECENT LEGISLATION SHAPING THE STATE LANDSCAPE

Advocates have faced a continuous uphill battle in advancing Wisconsin sex education requirements since the state's statute was revised in **2012** to no longer mandate instruction on human growth and development. A lack of existing sex ed policy allows for the implementation of curriculum that stigmatize marginalized youth, such as students of color and LGBTQ youth, and presents further challenges in ensuring that low income districts have access to the resources needed to implement sex education.

Most recently, multiple bills concerning sex education have been introduced or carried over into 2022. **Senate Bill 796**, introduced in 2021 by Senator Andre

Jacque and carried over into 2022, sought to require a video depicting an abortion procedure be shown during sex education instruction. An identical bill, [Assembly Bill 823](#), was introduced in 2022 by Representative Shae Sortwell. Additionally, [Senate Bill 746](#), introduced in 2021 by Senator Jerry Petrowski and carried over into 2022, sought to require the Department of Public Instruction to develop a child sexual abuse prevention policy and instructional program for students in grades K-6 by July 1, 2022. A companion bill, [Assembly Bill 764](#), was introduced in 2021 by Representative John Spiros and carried over into 2022. [Senate Bill 986](#), introduced in 2022 by Senator Jerry Petrowski, aimed to require school boards to provide age-appropriate instruction to pupils regarding teen dating violence and sexual violence and establish certain criteria governing the instruction provided. All of these bills were unsuccessful and died in committee.

Further in 2022, there was an increase in efforts to rescind inclusive human growth and development curriculum. One [such effort](#) was conducted in Wauwatosa School District where a motion was heard to rescind the adoption of curriculum instructing on sexual orientation and gender identity earlier in August. This effort was ultimately unsuccessful but reflects the opposition movement to restrict LGBTQAI+ inclusive sex education.

Right now, advocates can take action to ensure young people in their community have access to quality sex education. After contacting their local school board, advocates can determine what topics are missing from sex education instruction, such as consent, sexual orientation and gender identity, and contraceptives. They can then vocalize the important need for advancing sex education requirements in their community and contact their representatives. While advocates face an uphill battle in advancing sex education requirements statewide, advocates report that passionate community members play a powerful role in advancing sex education in their individual schools and districts. Advocates are encouraged to take action on pending legislation that seeks to advance or restrict the principles of sex education. For a current overview of pending legislation, see table below. Advocates are encouraged to use the SIECUS [Community Action Toolkit](#) to guide local efforts to advance sex education and to reach out to [EducateUs](#) to get connected to local advocacy groups.

More on sex ed in Wisconsin...

State Law: A Closer Look

Wisconsin law § 115.35 establishes a “Health Problems Education Program,” which includes instruction on sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and human growth and development. While teaching about STDs is a required component, schools are no longer obligated to teach the human growth and development section due to a revision of Wisconsin law § 118.019 in 2012. To see a comprehensive list of changes to the law, please visit the [Department of Public Instruction \(DPI\) website](#). If it is offered, the “Health Problems Education Program” must include:

- 1. The importance of communication between the pupil and the pupil’s parents or guardians;
- 2. Reproductive and sexual anatomy and physiology, including biological, psychosocial, emotional, and intellectual changes that accompany maturation; ...
- 5. The benefits of and reasons for abstaining from sexual activity ... stress[ing] the value of abstinence as the only reliable way to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and identify[ing] the skills necessary to remain abstinent; ...
- 10. Adoption resources, prenatal care, and postnatal supports; and
- 11. The nature and treatment of STIs.

An educational program in human growth and development must also “use instructional methods and materials that do not discriminate against a pupil based upon the pupil’s race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or ethnic or cultural background or against sexually active pupils or children with disabilities.”

School boards that choose to provide instruction must provide annual notification to parents outlining the curriculum used for their child’s particular grade level. Parents and guardians must be given the opportunity to review all materials related to sex education classes. Parents or guardians may remove their children from the human growth and development instruction with a written request to the teacher or principal. [This is referred to as an “opt-out” policy.](#)

State Standards

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) has produced *Human Growth and Development: A Resource Guide to Assist School Districts in Policy and Program Development and Implementation*, which provides assistance on implementing the optional human growth and development curriculum. Furthermore, the DPI offers *Wisconsin Standards for Health Education*, which provide guidance for the general health education curriculum. “Risky sexual behaviors” are mentioned as a component of the curriculum.

State Legislation

State legislative activity related to sex education does not take place in isolation from the broader embroiled political and policy climate. In 2022, a national wave of attacks on the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning (LGBTQAI+) individuals, attempts to restrict or prohibit instruction on “divisive concepts” such as “Critical Race Theory” (which is not taught in public schools), and efforts to limit access to abortion care and other reproductive healthcare services swept the country in an effort to prevent students from receiving sex education and accessing sexual and reproductive healthcare services. Below are highlights of current legislative activity related to these topics. Wisconsin’s legislature meets throughout the year. **Wisconsin’s 2023 session convenes on January 3rd, 2023, operating as a full-time legislature.**

Youth Sexual Health Data

Young people are more than their health behaviors and outcomes. While data can be a powerful tool to demonstrate the sex education and sexual health care needs of young people, it is important to be mindful that these behaviors and outcomes are impacted by systemic inequities present in our society that affect an individual’s sexual health and well-being. To learn more about Wisconsin’s Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) results, [click here](#). At the time of publication, the 2021 YRBS data has not been made available yet.

Wisconsin School Health Profiles Data

In 2022, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released the 2020 School Health Profiles, which measure school health policies and practices and highlight which health topics were taught in schools across the country. Since the data were collected from self-administered questionnaires completed by schools' principals and lead health education teachers, the CDC notes that one limitation of the School Health Profiles is bias toward the reporting of more positive policies and practices. In the School Health Profiles, the [CDC identifies 22 sexual health education topics](#) as critical for ensuring a young person's sexual health. **However, Wisconsin's 2020 data was not weighted to be representative of its sample and therefore was excluded from the 2020 School Health Profiles Report.** .

Visit the CDC's [School Health Profiles](#) report for additional information on school health policies and practices.

The quality of sex education taught often reflects funding available for sex education programs. To learn more about federal funding streams, [click here](#).

