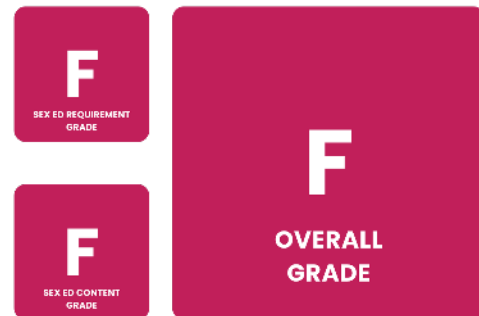




Arkansas State of Sex Ed

Sex education is not required, nor is HIV/STI education. If sex education is taught, it must instruct on abstinence before marriage and discourage adolescent sexual activity, but materials on dating violence must be evidence-based. Additionally, Arkansas prohibits classroom instruction on gender identity and sexual orientation before 5th grade and parents can remove their students through opt-out. The passage of 2025 legislation will require AR DoE to incorporate a discussion about human fetal growth and development into state education standards during the next revision cycle.



[View Bill Tracker](#)

Current Requirement

- Arkansas schools are **not** required to teach sex education or instruction on HIV or STIs.
 - If sex education is offered, the curriculum must stress abstinence.
- If sex education is offered, curriculum is not required to include instruction on consent.
- If sex education is offered, curriculum is not required to include instruction on sexual orientation or gender identity.
 - Arkansas prohibits instruction on sexual orientation and gender identity prior to 5th grade
- Parents or guardians must receive written notice of any sex education class and can remove their children from any part of the instruction.
This is referred to as an “opt-out” policy.

- Arkansas has no standard regarding medically accurate sex education instruction. However, instruction on dating violence must be based on scientific research.
- Students are required to complete 0.5 units of health and safety to graduate.

RECENT LEGISLATION SHAPING THE STATE LANDSCAPE

Arkansas' legislative landscape has been extremely challenging and increasingly hostile in recent years, especially when it comes to sex education and inclusivity in public schools. The state does not require schools to provide sex education; however, if offered, the curriculum must emphasize abstinence. There are no requirements for the inclusion of medically accurate information, consent education, or discussions on sexual orientation and gender identity. Local control over sex education presents unique challenges that have resulted in glaring disparities regarding the quality of sex education that students receive. This decentralized approach has led to significant gaps in the quality and content of sex education across districts, which often marginalizes LGBTQIA+ students and those in low-income areas.

For years, Arkansas has been restructuring public education, specifically sex education, under the guise of “protecting students” and “parental rights” despite advocates' best efforts. In 2021 the “Arkansas Student Protection Act”, [House Bill 1592](#), was enacted and prohibits public schools or open-enrollment public charter schools from entering into any type of transaction with an individual or entity that provides abortion care, effectively preventing sex educators from Planned Parenthood from delivering instruction which threatens students' ability to receive important, medically accurate information as Planned Parenthood is one of the largest providers of comprehensive sex education in the nation. Additionally, [Senate Bill 389](#) passed and requires parental notification if sex education, or instruction on sexual orientation or gender identity, is provided. Curriculum must also be made available for inspection and parents can remove their child from instruction in writing. During the 2025 legislative session, the Public School Access and Transparency Act ([SB 572](#)) passed and expanded the definition of public records to allow public access to “learning materials” such as curricula, lesson plans, presentations, books, and more including as well as the right to make copies. This law provides unprecedented access to educational content and could become a compliance burden for school districts and leaves

schools open to increased civil suits. While appearing to increase “parental rights,” in reality these bills police vital content in school, especially information provided under sex education, while infringing on young people’s right to education.

Arkansas’ overhaul of the state’s education system was furthered through the passage of the [2023 Arkansas LEARNS Act](#) which was an educational omnibus bill promoted by newly elected Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders that introduced sweeping education reforms that have had mixed implications for student inclusion, academic freedom, and public education. **Several acts pose threats to equity and inclusion:** [Act 294 \(Senate Bill 294\)](#) restricts instruction on sexual orientation, gender identity, and sexual content before grade 5; [Act 317 \(House Bill 1156\)](#) mandates restroom and overnight accommodation usage based on sex assigned at birth; and [Act 542 \(House Bill 1468\)](#) limits pronoun use by school staff unless explicitly approved by parents- all measures that could alienate LGBTQIA+ students. The LEARNS Act’s controversial [Section 16](#), banning so-called “indoctrination” (including content related to race or gender justice), has sparked a federal lawsuit led by Little Rock Central High families, citing violations of First Amendment rights and academic freedom. A federal judge [issued an injunction](#) halting enforcement of that section, but the state has appealed. Separately, a [legal challenge](#) is pending against the Act’s “Educational Freedom Account” program, arguing it undermines public education by diverting taxpayer funds to private schooling. As legal battles unfold, the LEARNS Act remains a flashpoint in Arkansas’ education landscape- offering some targeted support while also introducing policies that compromises student rights and inclusive learning. Positively, the Act includes supportive provisions for pregnant and parenting students ([Act 128; originally House Bill 1161](#))- mandating excused absences, lactation accommodations, and academic flexibility- as well as 12 weeks of paid maternity leave for educators. Additionally, [Act 514 \(originally House Bill 1576\)](#), known as the CROWN Act, expanded civil rights protections in schools by banning discrimination based on natural, protective, and cultural hairstyles, fostering a more inclusive environment for Black students and others.

Arkansas prides itself as being the “safest state in the nation for the unborn” and several pieces of stigmatizing legislation about abortion substantiate that claim. Beginning in 2021 with the passage of [SB 6](#), the ‘Arkansas Unborn Child

Protection Act', which created a trigger ban for the state to outlaw abortion if Roe v. Wade was overturned- which it was in June 2022. In 2023, [SB 384](#) was signed into law and required an adoption awareness curriculum which among other things requires that the "reasons adoption is preferable to abortion" is taught. Quality sex education may discuss alternatives to pregnancy outcomes, but it must include nonjudgmental and impartial instruction on abortion care. This bill intends to further stigmatize critically important [access to abortion care](#). That same session [SB 307](#) was also passed and was an act to erect a monument dedicated to "the unborn" lost to abortion on the grounds of the state capitol. In 2025, Arkansas made multiple attempts to pass legislation that would mandate schools to include fetal development videos in health education beginning in 5th grade. [House Bill 1180](#) attempted to specifically require the "Meet Baby Olivia" video developed by anti-abortion extremist group Live Action but was defeated by advocates on the ground. Unfortunately, [Senate Bill 450](#), which requires the Department of Education to include a human fetal growth and development discussion to standards during the next Arkansas Academic Standards revision cycle passed. This revision will only increase misinformation about abortion and perpetuate abortion stigma in a state that already has a [near-total abortion ban](#) with no exceptions for rape or incest.

During the 2025 legislative session, [SB 332](#) passed which appropriates \$4 million payable from the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education Public School Fund Account, for personal services, operating expenses, and grants and aid for the Sexual Risk Avoidance Education Program (SRAE) by the Department of Education. Sexual Risk Avoidance Education funding promotes abstinence-only programs that withhold critical information about contraception and abortion, reinforcing anti-sex ed and anti-abortion agendas that undermine young people's right to comprehensive, medically accurate health education. Further, there were multiple attempts to pass fetal development and ultrasound viewing requirements as a part of sex education - similar to the "Meet Baby Olivia" video created by anti-abortion group Live Action. Which resulted in the 2025 passage of [SB 450](#) which requires the Department of Education to include a human fetal growth and development discussion in the relevant standards during the Arkansas Academic Standards revision cycle. While this is a compromised victory for the opposition, given that Arkansas schools are not required to follow their academic standards, it

still undermines credible sex education and attempts to draw on students' sympathy versus critical thinking and decision making.

Right now, advocates can take action to ensure young people in their community have access to quality sex education. Particularly, advocates can invest in local school board races to elect strong advocates who support sex education. Advocates can also contact their local school board to determine what topics are missing from sex education instruction, such as instruction on consent, sexual orientation and gender identity, and contraceptives. **Arkansas' 2025 legislative session convened January 13th, 2025 and adjourned May 5th, 2025.**

Further, advocates can contact their representatives to discuss the critical need for a statewide sex education mandate. Advocates are encouraged to use the [SIECUS Community Action Toolkit](#) to guide local efforts to advance sex education. For more information on getting involved in local and state advocacy for sex education, reach out to our State Policy Action Manager, Miranda Estes (mestes@siecus.org)

More on sex ed in Arkansas...

State Law: A Closer Look

In Arkansas, schools are not required to teach sex education, HIV education, nor instruction on other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). However, if a school chooses to offer sex education or HIV/AIDS prevention programs, [Arkansas Code § 6-18-703](#) mandates that abstinence must be stressed, as “it is the policy of the State of Arkansas to discourage ... sexual activity by students.” Furthermore, every public school's sex education and AIDS prevention education programs must “emphasize premarital abstinence as the only sure means of avoiding pregnancy and the sexual contraction of [AIDS] and other [STDs].”

In order to be [accredited by the Arkansas Board of Education](#), education standards require public schools to offer health and safety education, and students are required to complete 0.5 units of health and safety in order to graduate high school. In 2015, [Arkansas Code § 6-16-1004](#) was amended to include dating violence awareness as a mandatory component of health and

safety education for students in grades 7-12. Materials must be age-appropriate and grounded in scientific research.

Local school boards are empowered to establish school-based health clinics, which may provide sex education. Such education must include instruction on abstinence. With written parental consent, these clinics may also prescribe and distribute contraceptives. However, state funds cannot be used to purchase condoms or contraceptives. Whether a school-based health clinic provides sex education or contraceptives is left to the discretion of the school board. Regardless, clinics cannot provide abortion referrals.

Under Arkansas Code [§ 6-16-1006](#), public schools must provide prior written notification to parents and legal guardians before offering instruction related to sex education, sexual orientation, or gender identity. Additionally, schools are required to establish a process allowing parents or guardians to inspect instructional materials and to submit a written request if they choose to exempt their child from such instruction- this is an opt-out policy.

In 2023, [SB 294](#) was enacted into law as an amendment to [Arkansas Code. § 6-16-157](#) and states the following:

“Before grade five (5), a public school teacher shall not provide classroom instruction on the following topics:

- (1) Sexually explicit materials;
- (2) Sexual reproduction;
- (3) Sexual intercourse;
- (4) Gender identity; or
- (5) Sexual orientation.”

Additionally, in 2023, [SB 384](#) was enacted into law as [Arkansas Code. § 6-16-161](#) which mandates all public schools in the state to provide up to one hour of adoption awareness instruction each year to students in grades 6 through 12.

State Standards

Arkansas maintains [curriculum standards](#) for physical and health education, addressing STIs and HIV beginning in grade five. The curriculum standards stress the importance of abstinence, as well as the possible physical, emotional, and social consequences of sexual activity. Specific course content is left to the discretion of the local school districts. Additionally, the

Department of Education's Division of Elementary and Secondary Education has developed grade-level [course content](#) to assist school districts in meeting the adoption awareness education requirement to provide one (1) hour of adoption awareness instruction to students enrolled in grades six through twelve (6–12). This instruction must take place at the beginning of the school year and may be conducted during a regular class period or at a special event organized for this purpose. The State Board of Education is responsible for developing the related curriculum, standards, materials, and instructional units. The content must cover a range of topics, including the benefits of adoption to society, types of adoption, the differences between adoption through the foster care system and private adoption, reasons adoption is considered preferable to abortion, available public and private adoption resources, statistical data on abortion, adoption, and childbirth, resources for pregnant students and parenting students, and an overview of child and human development.

Due to the passage of SB 450 in 2025, Act 915 requires the Arkansas Department of Education to include a human fetal growth and development discussion in physical and health education standards during the next revision cycle. Similar to other “Baby Olivia” type legislation, this will require a high-definition ultrasound that shows vital organs in early fetal development, if approved, and outlines the process of fertilization and every stage of development. Committee work to begin revising the physical and health education standards is set to begin in the summer of 2026 and be fully implemented in 2028 - 2029.

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. In recent years, there has been an increase in legislative attacks on the implementation of CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) which [tracks six categories of health risk behaviors](#) including sexual health behaviors. **To learn more about Arkansas'**

2021 YRBS results, [click here](#). In 2023, Arkansas' high school YRBS data was not weighted to be representative of all students and the state did not participate in the middle school YRBS data collection.

Arkansas School Health Profiles Data

In 2024, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released the 2022 [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. **To view Arkansas' results from the 2022 School Health Profiles Survey, visit CDC's [School Health Profiles Explorer tool](#).**

Visit the CDC's [School Health Profiles](#) 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](#).