



District of Columbia State of Sex Ed

Sex education is required. Must be age-appropriate, but not required to be medically accurate. Must cover HIV/STIs, contraception, SOGI, pregnancy options (including abortion), consent, and healthy relationships education. Only required to cover abstinence, not stress. Not required to meet the NSES, however, DC has passed menstrual health access and education as of 2022.



[View Bill Tracker](#)

Current Requirement

- District of Columbia schools are required to teach sex education.
 - Sex education occurs within what is described as a required “comprehensive school health education” program. However, curriculum is not required to align with the [National Sex Education Standards](#).
 - Curriculum must emphasize abstinence
 - Curriculum must include options on all pregnancy options, including abortion.
 - Curriculum must include menstrual health education
- Curriculum must **include** instruction on how to “differentiate between gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, and sex assigned at birth/biological sex,” and detail that “as people grow and develop, they may begin to feel romantically and/or sexually attracted to people of a different gender and/or to people of the same gender.”

- Parents can submit a written request to the principal to remove their children from sex education. This is referred to as an “opt-out” policy.
- The District of Columbia has no regulation regarding medically accurate sex education instruction

RECENT LEGISLATION SHAPING THE STATE LANDSCAPE

Since 2010, the [DC Healthy Schools Act](#) increased the amount of time dedicated to health education, clarified sex education requirements, and authorized the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) to [implement](#) an annual survey for fifth, eighth, and tenth graders on human sexuality, contraception, and drug use. In 2016, the DC [Health Education Standards](#) were updated to require instruction on sexual orientation, gender identity, and to provide guidance on topics such as consent, healthy relationships, and contraceptives. DC Public Schools, which serve approximately 54% of DC students, are required to use the comprehensive curriculum [Rights, Respect, Responsibility](#) (3Rs).

In 2022, legislators succeeded in advancing sex education by enacting [Bill 24-0582](#) which requires schools to provide access to free menstrual hygiene products in all middle and high school women’s and gender-neutral bathrooms, and at least one elementary school girls or gender-neutral bathroom. Additionally, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education, in consultation with the State Board of Education are required to develop and implement health education standards on menstrual education designed for all students, regardless of gender, in District of Columbia public schools and charter schools beginning in grade 4.

Right now, advocates can take action in their communities to bolster student access to sex education. After contacting their local schools, advocates can push for standards to align with the [National Sexuality Education Standards](#), including medically accurate instruction. Advocates are also encouraged to take action on pending legislation that seeks to advance or restrict the principles of sex education and supportive school climates. **DC’s 2025-2026 legislative session convened January 2nd, 2025, and is expected to adjourn on December 31st, 2026.**

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 DC...

State Law: A Closer Look

[District of Columbia Municipal Regulations §§ 5-E2304](#) and [5-E2305](#) state that public schools must provide comprehensive school health education, including instruction on human sexuality and reproduction. The instruction must be age-appropriate and taught in grades pre-kindergarten (pre-K)–12.

The superintendent of the District of Columbia public schools is charged with ensuring that sex education is taught in schools and that students achieve a minimum proficiency in this area. Accordingly, the superintendent must provide systematic teacher training and staff development activities for health and physical education instructors. A list of all textbooks for student and teacher training must be included in the list of textbooks submitted annually to the District Board of Education for its approval.

Parents or guardians may submit a written request to the principal if they wish to remove their children from human sexuality and reproduction education classes. [This is referred to as an “opt-out” policy.](#)

State Standards

The District of Columbia provides [Health Education Standards](#) for students in grades K-12, and schools are required to follow these standards. “Safety Skills,” “Human Body and Personal Health,” and “Disease Prevention” are three of the six learning categories. STIs, HIV, unintended pregnancy, abstinence, and contraception are all discussed. In 2016, the state standards were updated to ensure students learn how to “differentiate between gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, and sex assigned at birth/biological sex,” as well as to understand that “as people grow and develop, they may begin to feel romantically and/or sexually attracted to people of a different gender and/or

to people of the same gender.” In 2017, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education published the [Sexual Health Curriculum Review](#) to guide educators in providing sex education. In 2022, the Expanding Student Access to Period Products Act was passed, resulting in required learning standards for menstrual health education as of 2023. Students in grades 4 regardless of gender learn the information needed “to manage menstruation with dignity, safety and comfort.”

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 DC’s 2023 YRBS results, [click here](#).**

DC 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 DC’s 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](#).