



Iowa State of Sex Ed

Sex education is required, and must be age appropriate, medically accurate and evidence based. Some instruction on healthy relationships is required, along with STI education. Recent “Don't Say Gay” legislation, as well as the removal of HIV-specific education, impacts outcomes for LGBTQIA+ students. The curriculum must include instruction on human development inside the womb, high-def fetal ultrasound video, and animation of fetal development, also known as a “Baby Olivia” law. There is no contraception or consent education requirement.



[View Bill Tracker](#)

Current Requirement

- Iowa schools are required to teach sex education, also known as “human growth and development instruction”.
 - Iowa has no standard regarding the inclusion of abstinence in sex education curriculum. However, it permits abstinence-based or abstinence-only materials as long as those materials fall within the parameters of the law.
 - STI education is required, but recent legislation has removed HIV/AIDS education as an explicit requirement.
- Curriculum is not required to include instruction on consent or contraception, but does teach on healthy relationships.
- Instruction on gender identity or sexual orientation is banned for students in kindergarten through sixth grade.

- Parents or guardians may remove their children from any part of health education courses if the course conflicts with the student's religious beliefs. This is referred to as an "opt-out" policy.
- Sex education curriculum must be medically accurate, age appropriate, and evidence-based.
- Curriculum must include instruction on human development inside the womb, high-def fetal ultrasound video, and animation of fetal development, typically referring to "Meet Baby Olivia", an anti-abortion propaganda film.

RECENT LEGISLATION SHAPING THE STATE LANDSCAPE

In recent years, Iowa has passed increasingly hostile legislation against LGBTQIA+ Iowans and students. This year [Senate File 418](#) passed, which not only removes gender identity as a protected class under the Iowa Civil Rights Act, but also replaces the term "gender identity" with the term gender theory in different parts of law—including in Iowa's pre-existing ban on gender and sexuality instruction in certain grade levels. The bill also legally defines terms such as sex, gender, boy, girl, father, and female to only use cisgender and biologically exclusive language.

The preexisting gender and sexuality instruction ban was established in 2023 via [SF 496](#), which re-shaped human growth and development instruction in Iowa. Firstly, it repealed instruction on HPV and the HPV vaccine along with explicitly requiring instruction on AIDS. Secondly, it only allowed for human sexuality instruction in grades seven through twelve (whereas previously it was first through twelfth grade). Finally, it prohibits any instruction on gender identity and sexual orientation in grades kindergarten through sixth. Beyond impacting sex education, this law also requires school faculty to report students who have requested to go by different pronouns or names. Legislative attacks that stigmatize the vital and important information provided by inclusive sex education are efforts to infringe upon young people's right to access education that helps them make healthy, informed decisions for themselves. Moreover, the majority of parents and guardians along with the general public overwhelmingly support access to school-based sex education.

Iowa is also one of the states that has seen the introduction of a so-called “Baby Olivia” bill this legislative session. [Senate File 175](#) (formerly [SSB 1028](#)) would require human growth and development curriculum in grades 4-8 and health curriculum in 9-12 to include instruction on human development inside the womb, high-def fetal ultrasound video, and animation of fetal development. The bill has passed both chambers and has been signed into law. Another Baby Olivia bill was previously introduced in 2024 as [Senate File 2150](#). The videos outlined in both these bills are modeled after the “Meet Baby Olivia” video developed by Live Action - an extremist anti-abortion group known for their deceptive and manipulative tactics.

Advocates have worked tirelessly to advance sex education in Iowa, their most recent efforts culminating in the introduction of several bills in 2022 that sought to improve sex education requirements. These bills included language to require instruction on topics such as consent, healthy relationships, sexual assault prevention, and LGBTQIA+ identities. In 2025, [House File 480](#), was introduced but failed to pass. The law would have required the addition of inclusive human sexuality and effectiveness of contraceptive methods such as condoms, contraceptive implants, and IUDs to human growth and development curriculum. Another such bill, [House File 2448](#), introduced in 2023, would have required human growth and development instruction provided by school districts to include age-appropriate and research-based instruction inclusive of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender health practices. That same year, [House File 2098](#) and companion bill [Senate File 2071](#) were introduced in an effort to amend requirements for human growth and development instruction from kindergarten through grade 6 to include age appropriate and research based instruction on identifying parts of the body, the importance of empathy, and respecting physical boundaries. They would have also required age appropriate and research based instruction in grades 7 and 8 on consent, healthy relationships, and assault prevention. These bills ultimately were unsuccessful, but they represent the commitment of Iowa advocates towards advancing sex education.

While schools must teach sex education that is in accordance with state statute, districts are tasked with determining the quality of sex education that is taught in local schools. Local control over sex education presents unique challenges that have resulted in a glaring disparity regarding the quality of sex education that students receive. Such discretion allows for the

implementation of policies and curriculum that stigmatize marginalized youth, such as students of color and LGBTQIA+ youth, and presents further challenges in ensuring that low-income districts have access to resources to implement sex education. While curriculum is not permitted to include bias based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or gender identity, it is also not required to include instruction on such topics or be culturally responsive to the needs of young people of color. Advocates report that the current requirements, a lack of funding, and the tumultuous political climate in Iowa all impede access to sex education.

Right now, advocates can take action in their communities to address misinformation about Iowa's sex education requirements. They can contact their local board of education and determine what topics are missing from existing sex education curricula. Advocates can then vocalize the importance of implementing specific elements of sex education, such as trauma informed, culturally responsive curriculum that addresses the needs of youth of color and LGBTQIA+ youth, or age appropriate instruction on gender, sexuality, HIV/AIDS, and HPV. Advocates are encouraged to take action on pending legislation that seeks to advance or restrict the principles of sex education. **Iowa's 2025-2026 legislative session convenes January 13th, 2025 and is expected to adjourn on May 1st, 2026.**

Further, advocates can contact their representatives to discuss the critical need for a statewide sex education mandate. Advocates are encouraged to use the [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 Iowa...

State Law: A Closer Look

[Iowa Code 256.11](#) mandates that research-based, age-appropriate health education be taught in grades K-12, and the code details what must be covered in each grade. In kindergarten, instruction must include "age-appropriate and research-based human growth and development." In

grades 1–6, “the health curriculum shall include the characteristics of communicable diseases.” Previously, the law continued to include “...acquired immunodeficiency syndrome [AIDS],” but this was repealed in 2023, by the enactment of [SF 496](#). In grades 7–8, health education must include “the characteristics of sexually transmitted diseases [STDs].” Again, instruction on AIDS was removed by the passage of [SF 496](#).

In grades 9–12, students are required to take one unit of health instruction, which must include information on “age-appropriate and research-based human growth and development” which includes the “prevention and control of disease, including age-appropriate and research-based information regarding sexually transmitted diseases.” AIDS instruction, information about human papillomavirus (HPV) and the HPV vaccine were all previously included for high schoolers before the enactment of [SF 496](#).

[Iowa Code §§ 279.50](#) mandates that the curriculum use materials that are up-to-date, age-appropriate, and research-based/medically accurate. Topics include “self-esteem, stress management, interpersonal relationships, and domestic abuse” for students in grades 1 - 6, and “human sexuality, self-esteem, stress management, interpersonal relationships, domestic abuse, and the prevention and control of disease, including sexually transmitted diseases” in grades 7 through 12. Furthermore, all information must be free of biases based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or gender. School districts shall teach age-appropriate, science-based, sex education as part of the health curriculum, but they may also use abstinence-only materials so long as those materials fall within the parameters of the law.

Parents or guardians may remove their children from any part of health education courses if the course conflicts with the student’s religious beliefs. This is referred to as an “opt-out” policy.

In 2023, [SF 496](#) was enacted into law and became [Iowa Code §§ 279.80](#). In addition to the removal of HIV and HPV education, this prohibits “any program, curriculum, test, survey, questionnaire, promotion, or instruction relating to gender identity or sexual orientation to students in kindergarten through grade six.” In 2025, the passage of [SF418](#) removed gender identity as a protected class under Iowa Civil Rights Act, leaving trans and gender non-conforming Iowans especially vulnerable. The bill also revised [SF 496](#)

from 2023, changing the terms “gender identity” to “gender theory,” and redefines “male,” “female” and “sex” in Iowa state law. In May 2025, an Iowa district court judge ruled that **some provisions** of SF 496 are unconstitutional and are thus blocked from enforcement. This allows “neutral references” to gender identity and sexual orientation in instruction grades 6 and below, prohibits “forced outing” based on name change (but still notifies parents about pronoun changes), blocks all book ban components of the bill, and allows student participation in clubs related to gender and sexuality (GSAs).

In 2025, Senate File 175 was enacted and now requires human growth and development curriculum to include fetal development instruction, a high-definition fetal ultrasound video, and animation of fetal development (most likely utilizing LiveAction’s “Meet Baby Olivia”. It also removes mention of experts like ACOG, AAP, and NASN in the definition of “research-based” and adds “unbiased” as it relates to sex education.

State Standards

Iowa provides the *Iowa Core: K-12 21st Century Skills* as guidance for curricula development. The only mention of sexual health in the standards is for students to be able to “describe the interrelationships of the wellness dimensions: physical, emotional, intellectual, environmental, social, sexual, and spiritual wellness during adolescence.” Additionally, the Iowa State Board of Education adopted the [National Health Education Standards \(NHES\)](#) as the state’s recommended physical education and health education standards in 2019. These standards make mention of disease prevention, communication skills, risk reduction, and informed decision making but do not explicitly include sex education or sexual health.

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. **As of 2019, Iowa no longer**

participates in data collection for YRBS. To learn more about Iowa's 2019 YRBS results, [click here](#). Iowa currently administers its own Iowa Youth Survey in place of YRBS. To learn more about Iowa's most recent results from 2023, [click here](#).

Iowa 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 Iowa'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](#).