



Rhode Island State of Sex Ed

Sex education is required. Must be evidence-based, age-appropriate, medically accurate, and culturally responsive. Must include instruction on HIV/STIs, SOGI, contraception, consent, and dating violence education. State health standards are required, but do not include menstrual education. Must stress abstinence.



[View Bill Tracker](#)

Current Requirement

- Curriculum is **not** required to align with the [National Sex Education Standards](#) by law, however, they are cited as a resource in state health standards.
- Curriculum must be age-appropriate, evidence-based, culturally responsive, and medically accurate.
- Curriculum must stress abstinence.
- Curriculum is required, according to health standards, to include instruction on sexual orientation and gender identity, HIV, STIs, and contraception.
- Curriculum must include instruction on consent by law.
- Curriculum must include discussion of varying types of dating violence by law.
- The administrative head of school(s) is required to designate a certified health educator to administer the health education program.
- Parents must be notified of sex education classes and may view the curriculum by submitting a written request. Students may be removed

from instruction by written notification from the parent to the principal. This is referred to as an “opt-out” policy.

RECENT LEGISLATION SHAPING THE STATE LANDSCAPE

Rhode Island has seen a recent rise in the number of bills that seek to add intensified parental oversight to public education. The current 2025 legislative session, three bills have all been introduced that seek to restrict student access to sex education or affirming resources in some way. First, [Senate Bill 395](#) and companion [House Bill 5837](#), would require schools to provide sex education curriculum to every parent prior to providing instruction and require their consent prior to students being taught—which would change Rhode Island from an opt-out to an opt-in state. [Senate Bill 396](#), also known as the “Rights of Parents and Guardians in Public Educational Instruction Act” would also implement an opt-in policy for sex education, as well requiring additional curriculum transparency procedures such as the online posting of materials. This policy was also introduced in 2024 during the previous legislative session as [Senate Bill 2517](#) and companion [House Bill 7873](#).

Another bill, dubbed the “Parents’ Bill of Rights,” was introduced in 2025 as [Senate Bill 284](#), in 2024 as [Senate Bill 2424](#) and [House Bill 7781](#), and as [House Bill 5688](#) in 2023. This legislation establishes fundamental rights of parents including directing child's education, but in doing so requires parental consent for all healthcare services (including mental health, STI testing, and other reproductive health services). It would also require districts to provide procedures for parents to remove their child from sex education, even though this already exists through opt-out policies. A monetary penalty would be implemented for schools that violate this potential policy. Finally, in 2023, [Senate Bill 957](#) was introduced, which would have required school principals to notify parents within five days if a student discloses gender identity change or is “considering” doing so. All of the above in the 2025 session have been introduced but have not moved out of committee as of May 2025, and all bills from previous years died in committee.

Other attempts to attack the rights of young people were also present in the 2022 legislative session. [House Bill 7539](#), introduced by Representative Patricia Morgan, sought to prohibit teaching divisive concepts in schools, and to prohibit sex education addressing sexual orientation and gender identity. While ultimately unsuccessful, these attempts showcase the importance for

advocates to continue to fight against legislation that fails to affirm young people.

Attempts to amend current sex education policy include [House Bill 7166](#), introduced in 2022. While ultimately unsuccessful, HB 7166 would have required family life or sex education to be culturally responsive, recognize sexual pleasure, same sex relationships, and be inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identity, including curriculum on the harm of gender stereotypes. The companion bill, [Senate Bill 2285](#), was also unsuccessful.

According to law, sex education in Rhode Island is required to include instruction on a variety of topics including reproduction, abstinence, dating and dating violence, marriage, and parenthood, as well as information about STIs, sexuality, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Despite these requirements, the curriculum is not required to be aligned with the National Sex Education Standards by law. The lack of such requirements presents further challenges in ensuring that low-income districts have access to the resources needed to implement sex education. Additional challenges presented by the absence of a comprehensive curriculum requirement allow 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 the resources needed to implement sex education.

Right now, advocates can take action in their communities to further promote access to inclusive sex education for all students in Rhode Island. They can contact their local board of education and determine what supports exist for the comprehensive implementation of required curriculum, and ensure equity for all school districts. Advocates are encouraged to take action on pending legislation that seeks to advance or restrict the principles of sex education. **Rhode Island's 2025 legislative session convenes January 7th, 2025 and is expected to adjourn on June 30th, 2025.**

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 Rhode Island...

State Law: A Closer Look

Rhode Island schools are required by [Rhode Island General Laws §§ 16-1-5, 16-22-17](#) and [16-22-18](#) to provide instruction including “HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus)/AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome): the causes, effects, treatment, and prevention”. Schools must also teach health education in grades 1-12. Further they are required to teach “the responsibilities of family membership and adulthood, including issues related to reproduction, abstinence, dating and dating violence, marriage, and parenthood, as well as information about sexually transmitted diseases [STDs], sexuality, and sexual orientation.” Programs must be age-appropriate and evidence-based, and “address abstinence from sexual activity as the preferred means of prevention.” Parents must be notified of sex education classes and may view the curriculum by submitting a written request. Students may be removed from instruction by written notification from the parent to the principal. [This is referred to as an “opt-out” policy.](#)

Additionally, [Rhode Island General Law §§ 16-22-24](#) mandates age-appropriate dating violence education for students in grades 7 through 12. Students must be provided with their school’s dating violence policy, and instruction must include “defining dating violence; recognizing dating violence warning signs; and characteristics of healthy relationships.” Students may also be removed from this instruction via the state’s opt-out policy.

State Standards

Rhode Island’s state health education standards are required to be implemented via [RI Gen L § 16-22-4](#), guided by the [Curriculum Framework for Health Education K-12](#). “Sexuality and Family Life” represents its own instructional outcome, with components such as “responsibilities of family membership and adulthood, issues related to reproduction, abstinence, dating and dating violence, marriage, parenthood, information about sexually transmitted diseases, the law and meaning of consent, sexuality and sexual

orientation, as part of comprehensive sexuality education pursuant to [R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-22-18](#). Health education curriculum must be age appropriate for K-12 students, evidence-based, medically accurate, and qualify as “culturally responsive and sustaining education.”

The [National Sex Education Standards](#) are cited as a resource within the Rhode Island state health standards.

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

Rhode Island 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 Rhode Island'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](#).