



Virginia State of Sex Ed

Sex education, also known as family life education in Virginia, is not mandated to be taught by law. If family life education is taught it must meet the requirements set forth by law and by Board of Education regulations. These laws and regulations include being age-appropriate and medically accurate. Instruction on HIV/AIDS, contraception, consent, and healthy relationships must be included according to the Standards of Learning for Family Life Education. Curriculum is required to emphasize abstinence.



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Current Requirement

- Virginia schools are not required to teach sex education, also known as “family life education”
 - If they do decide to teach family life education, they must follow state law and Board of Education guidelines, including the Standards of Learning (SOL).
 - The standards of learning include instruction on contraception and STI prevention.
 - This curriculum must emphasize abstinence.
 - The curriculum must be medically accurate
- Certain topics of the Family Life Education Guidelines and Standards of Learning must be taught, if family life education is provided, such as dating violence, violence prevention, consent, and personal boundaries.

- The curriculum is not required to include instruction on sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Parents or guardians may remove their students from any class. This is referred to as an “opt-out” policy.

RECENT LEGISLATION SHAPING THE STATE LANDSCAPE

Advocates in Virginia have worked to gradually advance sex education over the past few years. In 2022, [House Bill 1023](#) was signed into law, allowing for schools in Virginia to provide instruction on human trafficking as part of family life education curriculum. In 2024, [House Bill 1221](#) passed and allows for schools to teach menstrual health as a part of family life education.

Unfortunately, advocates have also had to work against restrictive sex education legislation. In recent years, several bills have sought to shift sex education to an “opt-in” model, restrict instructional time, or mandate the use of high-definition fetal development videos, specifically LiveAction’s “Meet Baby Olivia” video, alongside family life education. These proposals are designed to spread anti-abortion misinformation and reinforce abortion stigma in the classroom. Most recently, [House Bill 2440/Senate Bill 1066](#) (2025), fetal development instruction bills, were introduced but thankfully unsuccessful.

Additionally, Virginia has experienced a deluge of legislative attacks under the guise of the “parental rights” movement that seek to restrict access to inclusive and affirming curricula and classrooms. Many of these restrictive bills target transgender youth and their families, and protections for LGBTQIA youth, generally. Over **20 “parental rights” bills** have been introduced in the Virginia legislature since 2022. In 2022, [Senate Bill 656](#) was signed into law and requires schools to establish a policy for informing parents when students may receive instructional material that includes “sexually explicit material”, allow review of the material, and opt their child out if they wish to do so. “Parental rights” legislation like this ignores the fact that parents already have the right to do this under the education system and instead aims to create panic about what is being taught to students. Further, vaguely defined terms such as “sexually explicit material” can be erroneously applied to sex education or LGBTQIA+ inclusive instructional materials, limiting students’ access.

Since Virginia schools are not required to provide family life education to students, schools are left to decide what type of sex education, if any at all, they teach young people. 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 the resources needed to implement sex education. Many school districts, such as Fairfax County Public Schools, have faced [local backlash](#) from efforts to make sex education more inclusive, either through curriculum or by deciding to no longer [gender-segregate](#) FLE classes.

Right now, advocates can take action to ensure that young people in Virginia have access to quality family life education. After identifying what topics are missing from the local FLE curriculum, advocates can vocalize the importance of implementing specific elements of sex education, such as the inclusion of consent and discussion on sexual orientation and gender identity. Additionally, advocates can push for FLE to be taught in school districts currently not teaching any sex education. A [2021 report](#) showed that 86% of school districts in Virginia offer family life education. Advocates are encouraged to take action on pending legislation that seeks to advance or restrict the principles of sex education. **Virginia's 2025 legislative session convened January 8th, 2025, and adjourned February 22nd, 2025.**

Further, advocates can contact their representatives to discuss the need for a comprehensive sex education mandate in Virginia schools and alignment of existing state Standards of Learning with the [National Sex Education Standards](#). 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 Virginia...

State Law: A Closer Look

Virginia mandates health education, but sex education is not required. If sex education, also known as family life education, is taught then it must align with statutory law and Board of Education guidelines. [Virginia Code Annotated §§ 22.1-200, 22.1-207.1 and 22.1-207.2](#) state that all family life education programs that are offered must meet or exceed the “requirements of the [State] Board of Education.” Virginia permits local school boards to develop family life education programs with the “goals of reducing the incidence of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases [STDs] and substance abuse among teenagers.”

According to [Virginia Code Annotated § 22.1-207.1:1](#), “any family life education curriculum offered by a local school division shall require the Standards of Learning objectives related to dating violence and the characteristics of abusive relationships to be taught at least once in middle school and at least twice in high school.” The curriculum shall incorporate age-appropriate and evidence-based elements on prevention of dating violence, domestic abuse, sexual harassment, including sexual harassment using electronic means, and sexual violence. Additionally, family life education curriculum **may** incorporate age-appropriate elements of effective and evidence-based programs on child sexual abuse, child abduction, human trafficking, the harmful effects of female genital mutilation, the importance of personal privacy and personal boundaries, and the law and meaning of consent.

The law states that parents or guardians may remove their students from any class. [This is referred to as an “opt-out” policy.](#)

State Standards

The state Board of Education’s [Family Life Education Board of Education Guidelines and Standards of Learning for Virginia Public Schools](#) for grades K–12 offers curriculum guidance for Virginia schools. These guidelines must include the following: family living and community relationships; the benefits, challenges, responsibilities, and value of marriage for men, women, children, and communities; the value of family relationships; abstinence education; the value of postponing sexual activity; the benefits of adoption as a positive choice in the event of an unwanted pregnancy; human sexuality; human

reproduction; the prevention of human trafficking; dating violence; the characteristics of abusive relationships; steps to take to deter sexual assault, the availability of counseling and legal resources, and, in the event of such sexual assault, the importance of immediate medical attention and advice, as well as the requirements of the law; the etiology, prevention, and effects of sexually transmitted diseases; and mental health education and awareness

Local school boards are required to have school health advisory boards which decide what curriculum will be used for family life education. According to the guidelines, "The Family Life Education Standards of Learning objectives approved by the Board of Education shall be used by the local school board." but schools can reassign specific objectives to different grade levels, as they see fit.

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 Virginia's 2023 YRBS results, [click here](#).** In 2023, Virginia participated in high school and middle school YRBS data collection.

Virginia 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 Virginia'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](#).