



## Washington State of Sex Ed

Comprehensive sex education is required in Washington. Curriculum must be medically accurate, evidence-based, age-appropriate, and culturally responsive. It must include HIV/STIs, contraception, detailed healthy relationships education, and discussion of consent. It must discuss abstinence but abstinence may not be taught to the exclusion of other materials on contraceptives and disease prevention. There is no requirement to instruct on sexual orientation and gender identity, but curriculum must be inclusive. It is not required to meet the NSES.



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### Current Requirement

- Washington schools are required to teach comprehensive sex education.
- Curriculum must be medically accurate.
- Curriculum must stress abstinence, but abstinence may not be taught to the exclusion of other materials and instruction on contraceptives and disease prevention
- Curriculum must be inclusive of all students, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Curriculum is required to include instruction on affirmative consent.
- Curriculum must teach about healthy relationships with friends, family, and partners.

- Parents may also remove their children from the class with written notification. [This is referred to as an “opt-out” policy.](#)

## RECENT LEGISLATION SHAPING THE STATE LANDSCAPE

In 2020, advocates successfully advanced sex education across Washington with the passage of the [Healthy Youth Act](#). The Healthy Youth Act ([Senate Bill 5395](#)), sponsored by Senator Claire Wilson, required sex education curriculum to be medically and scientifically accurate and effectively required all public schools to provide sex education beginning in the 2022-2023 school year.

Since the passage of the Healthy Youth Act, there have been numerous improvements to state educational laws to ensure all students are represented in the curriculum. In 2022, the passage of [HB 1834](#) allowed schools to excuse student absences for mental health reasons. Then in 2023, [Senate Bill 5355](#) passed requiring instruction on sex trafficking prevention and identification in grades 7-12. Additionally, [HB 1207](#) also passed and is codified as [RCW 28A.300.286](#) requires each Washington school district to publish the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction’s (OSPI’s) [model student handbook language](#) in handbooks and on websites to notify the school community of district policies and procedures related to harassment, intimidation, and bullying (HIB); discrimination; sexual harassment; and gender-inclusive schools. In 2024, [Senate Bill 5462](#) was enacted and required curriculum to include histories and contributions of historically marginalized and underrepresented groups. This was a welcomed addition to statute because culturally responsive instruction is necessary when addressing the unique needs of youth of color, and Native American youth in particular.

A [2024 Report to the Legislature on Comprehensive Sexual Health Education](#) prepared by the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) highlights several trends seen across school districts during the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 school year. Washington schools are required to provide Social Emotional Learning (SEL) at least once in grades K–3 and to provide Comprehensive Sexual Health Education (CSHE) at least once in grades 4–5, at least twice in grades 6–8, and at least twice in grades 9–12. Of the districts reporting to this survey on average, **over 70% said they provided instruction in all grade bands!** This report also stated that there was a significant increase from 2022–23 to 2023–24 in the number of strategies

reported being used specifically to increase inclusive instruction for LGBTQ+ students and those with disabilities. While there is still work to be done in Washington to ensure educators have the training and support needed to provide quality sex education, Washington is a sex ed success story and the work of OSPI is continuously evolving in their provision of resources, technical assistance, and professional development.

Right now, advocates can take action to ensure young people in their community have access to quality sex education by ensuring the current mandate is being followed, advocating for expansion of education for people with disabilities, and staying vigilant against the anti-sex education opposition looking to roll back progressive policies that support respect and inclusion in educational spaces. They can then vocalize the important need for advancing sex education requirements in their community. **Washington's 2025-2026 Legislative Session convenes on January 13, 2025 and adjourns April 26, 2025.**

Further, advocates can contact their representatives to discuss the need for sex education policy that meets the needs of young people, including youth with disabilities, and supports implementation across Washington State.. 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](mailto:mestes@siecus.org))

## **More on sex ed in Washington...**

### **State Law: A Closer Look**

The Revised Code of Washington, [§§ 28A.230.070](#) requires schools to provide instruction on human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), “stress[ing] that abstinence from sexual activity is the only certain means for the prevention of the spread or contraction of the AIDS virus through sexual contact.” HIV/AIDS-prevention instruction must be given at least once each school year beginning in fifth grade and must “teach that condoms and other artificial means of birth control are not a certain means of preventing the spread of [AIDS], and reliance on condoms puts a person at risk for exposure to the disease.” Information must be medically accurate. In order to verify medical accuracy,

the Washington Department of Health Office on HIV/AIDS must review and approve all HIV/AIDS curricula and supporting materials. Health education that includes instruction on “methods to prevent exposure to and transmission of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)” is also required by Revised Code of Washington [§§ 28A.230.020](#).

The Revised Code of Washington, [§ 28A.300.475](#), known as the Healthy Youth Act, was amended in 2020 to require every Washington public school to provide comprehensive sex education. In addition to the previous mandate that required curriculum to be medically and scientifically accurate and age-appropriate, curriculum must now be inclusive of all students, regardless of their protected class under chapter [49.60](#) of the Revised Code of Washington. Curriculum is also required to include instruction on affirmative consent and bystander training. Comprehensive sex education must be provided once to students in kindergarten through grade three, once to students in grades 4-5, twice to students in grades 6-8, and twice to students in 9-12. Parents or guardians may remove their children from HIV/AIDS-prevention education if they have attended an information session about the HIV/AIDS curriculum and its presentation. If a school district chooses to provide sex education, parents may also remove their children from the class with written notification. [This is referred to as an “opt-out” policy.](#)

## **State Standards**

The Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Department of Health developed guidelines titled [Guidelines for Sexual Health and Disease Prevention](#). Any sex education program implemented in schools must be consistent with these guidelines. Washington also provides guidance for best practice for sexual health education in the [Health and Physical Education K-12 Learning Standards](#), released in 2016, and [KNOW HIV/STD Prevention Curriculum](#), a voluntary curriculum for use in grades 5–12, as well as a thorough list of other curricula that have been reviewed and approved by the Department of Health. Furthermore, Washington provides [health education standards](#) as guidance for curriculum development. Understanding “how to maintain sexual health throughout life” and “how communicable diseases are transmitted,” as well as discussion on harassment and bullying due to sexual orientation, are included.

## 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. The State of Washington **does not** participate in CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), instead conducting their own Healthy Youth Survey. **To learn more about Washington's recent Healthy Youth Survey results, [click here](#).**

## Washington 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 Washington'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](#).**