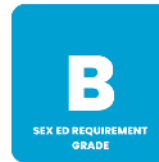




North Carolina State of Sex Ed



Current Requirement: Sex education, also known as "reproductive health education," must be taught in North Carolina schools.

- Curriculum is not required to be comprehensive and must emphasize the benefits of abstinence alongside instruction on contraception.
- Curriculum is required to include instruction on HIV/AIDS and STI prevention.
- Curriculum must be medically accurate and evidence-based.
- Curriculum is not required to include instruction on sexual orientation or gender identity. However, the curriculum must teach that a "faithful monogamous heterosexual marriage is the best lifelong means of avoiding STDs". Further, instruction on "gender identity, sexual activity, and sexuality" is prohibited in grades kindergarten through fourth grade.
- Curriculum must include instruction on consent and healthy relationships
- Depending on the school district, parents and guardians must either send a written notice to the school principal to excuse their children from any part of sex education instruction (an "opt-out" policy) or provide written permission for their children to take part in sex education instruction ([an "opt-in" policy](#)).

*In 2026, the overall grade of this state changed slightly from 2025 as a result of a change in our grading methodology. For more information on grading methodology, see the Executive Summary on the State Profiles webpage.

State Profile
Sections

Recent Legislation

More on Sex Ed

Bill Tracker

Recent Legislation Shaping the State Landscape

North Carolina advocates have seen a steady increase in efforts to roll back the progress of past years and restrict sex education curriculum across the state. In the 2025-2026 legislative session, [House Bill 595](#) has been introduced. It seeks to extend the ban on instruction of gender identity, sexual activity, and sexual activity to sixth grade and instead require human growth and development instruction only with a focus on puberty for grades fourth and fifth, which parents must “opt” their child into. It would also require parents to opt in to reproductive health and safety education and prohibit its instruction before seventh grade. Lastly, it would require public hearings that anyone can attend when discussing changes to the health education curriculum. Thus far, this bill has not progressed and is likely dead because it missed the crossover deadline; however, it reflects some of the challenges advocates in North Carolina continue to face in providing quality, inclusive sex education. Contrastingly, [House Bill 492](#) was also introduced in this session and sought to repeal the [2023 so-called parental rights law](#) that passed, which prohibits sex education before 5th grade and created confusing procedures for sex education enrollment that have led to some school districts requiring “opt-in” procedures while others still offer “opt out”. Thus far, neither bill has progressed, and both are likely dead because they missed the crossover deadline; however, these bills reflect some of the challenges advocates in North Carolina continue to face in providing quality, inclusive sex education.

Advocates in Action

Advocates can take action to ensure young people in their community have access to quality sex education. Advocates can contact their local school district to ensure it uses an evidence-based, high-quality curriculum to provide reproductive health and safety education. Advocates should also work to dispel myths and concerns regarding existing so-called “parental rights” legislation to prevent local school districts from switching to opt-in policies.

Advocates can also contact their representatives to discuss the need to strengthen implementation of mandated reproductive health and safety education and the newest edition of state health education standards. Advocates are encouraged to use the [Community Action Toolkit](#) to strengthen local organizing efforts. For additional guidance, advocates can contact the SIECUS Policy team by emailing info@siecus.org or join the Sexuality Education Policy Action Council (SEPAC) using our [interest form](#).

More on sex ed in North Carolina...

State Law: A Closer Look

North Carolina [General Statutes § 115C-81.25](#) and [115C-81.30](#) require schools to teach a comprehensive health education program, which includes instruction on the prevention of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). Schools must stress the importance

of parental involvement and teach refusal skills and strategies to handle peer pressure. Comprehensive health education must include “reproductive health and safety education” beginning in seventh grade. Such instruction must teach “that abstinence from sexual activity outside of marriage is the expected standard for all school-age children” and “that a mutually faithful, monogamous, heterosexual relationship in the context of marriage is the best lifelong means of avoiding [STDs], including HIV/AIDS,” among other stipulations. With respect to contraception and family planning, the law requires instruction to teach:

- “... how [STDs] are and are not transmitted, the effectiveness and safety of all federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved methods of reducing the risk of contracting [STDs], and information on local resources for testing and medical care for [STDs] ...; and
- The effectiveness and safety of all FDA-approved contraceptive methods in preventing pregnancy.”

Reproductive health and safety education must be age-appropriate, objective, and based on peer-reviewed scientific research accepted by professionals in sexual health education. Instruction must include information on healthy relationships, awareness of sexual assault, sexual abuse, and risk reduction. Students may receive information about where to obtain contraceptives and abortion referral services only in accordance with the local board's policy regarding parental consent; however, contraceptives, including condoms and other devices, shall not be made available or distributed on school property. Instruction is also required to include stigmatizing information about the risks associated with "preterm birth," including those linked to "induced abortion."

The State Board of Education is required to make a list of reviewed materials, any approved textbooks and other approved materials regarding pregnancy and STDs, including HIV prevention, available to parents and legal guardians at least 60 days before such instruction is provided in the classroom. Additionally, as a result of [Senate Bill 49](#) (2023), [General Statutes 115C-76.55](#) prohibits instruction on gender identity, sexual activity, and sexual activity in kindergarten through fourth grade.

North Carolina law also requires local school boards to “adopt policies to provide opportunities either for parents and legal guardians to consent or for parents and legal guardians to withhold their consent for the students’ participation in any or all of these programs.” [These are referred to as “opt-in” and “opt-out” policies, respectively.](#)

State Standard

North Carolina requires implementation of the [Healthful Living: Health Education Essential Standards](#), which offers model policies and content outlines; the most recent edition was released in 2024 for implementation in the 2025-2026 school year. Essential standards in this guideline include the skill to “evaluate abstinence from sexual intercourse as a positive choice for young people” and to “create strategies that develop and maintain reproductive and sexual health,” such as “illustrat[ing] skills related to safe and effective use of methods to prevent STDs, as well as access resources for testing and treatment.” In the most recent

edition, the standards added instruction on consent and physical boundaries. These standards serve as a framework for local school districts to base their curriculum on.

Youth Sexual Health Data

The CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) tracks [adolescent health behaviors](#), including sexual health behaviors. **To learn more about North Carolina's 2023 YRBS results, [click here](#).** The CDC's [School Health Profiles](#) measure school health policies, practices, and the sexual health topics taught in schools. **To view North Carolina's results from the 2024 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](#).