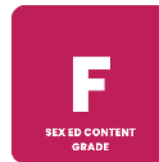




South Carolina State of Sex Ed



Current Requirement: South Carolina requires sex education under “comprehensive health education,” which includes reproductive health education.

- Curriculum is not required to align with the [National Sex Education Standards](#).
- Curriculum must stress abstinence.
- Instruction explaining contraceptive methods is not allowed before 6th grade.
- Curriculum is not required to include instruction on sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Curriculum is not required to include instruction on consent.
- Instruction on abortion as a method of birth control is prohibited unless in the context of discussing the “complications” it may cause.
- Parents must be informed in advance of any sexuality-specific instruction and are allowed to remove their children from any part of the health education classes. [This is called an “opt-out” policy.](#)
- South Carolina has no regulations regarding medically accurate sex education instruction.

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Recent Legislation Shaping the State Landscape

South Carolina continues to be an example of a state continually at the center of legislative attacks on sex education. While some proposals seek to improve the quality of instruction, most legislative activity aims to reinforce exclusion and create barriers to learning. A wave of attempted policy proposals and laws in recent years reflects a growing pattern of restrictions

on sex education, increasing so-called “parental rights” in public education, and requiring harmful misinformation to be taught through “Baby Olivia” bills.

In the 2025-2026 legislative session, lawmakers introduced a couple of bills ([House Bill 3011](#)/[Senate Bill 243](#), [House Bill 3118](#)) that emphasize parents' right to remove their children from any instruction related to sex education, HIV, gender roles, gender identity, relationships, or sexuality. These proposals also require schools to provide at least seven days' advance notice before delivering such instruction. Similar bills were introduced in the 2023-2024 legislative session ([Senate Bill 29](#) and [Senate Bill 337](#)). Creating unnecessary procedures like this simply restricts student participation in sex education. Another legislative attack on sex education is two bills ([House Bill 3256](#) and [Senate Bill 323](#)) that would require including a three-minute video showing organ development during early pregnancy, comparable in concept to the controversial “[Meet Baby Olivia](#)” materials seen in other states. The same bill was introduced as [House Bill 5290](#) in the 2023- 2024 session. These proposed bills are just another example of attempts to promote anti-abortion misinformation and perpetuate stigma. Thankfully, these restrictions failed to advance in this session.

Despite these oppositional efforts, advocates also continue to fight for policies that would ensure all students receive age-appropriate, medically accurate, and inclusive sex education. In 2025, [Senate Bill 41](#) and [Senate Bill 27](#) were introduced and could have updated state statutes to explicitly require that reproductive health instruction be comprehensive and not rely solely on abstinence as a method of pregnancy prevention, but did not advance in the legislative session. Other 2025 [proposed legislation](#) sought to incorporate dating violence prevention into health education for students in grades 6 to 12. While these bills failed to pass, they represent important steps toward building a more informed and safer school environment for all students.

Advocates in Action

Advocates can take action to ensure young people in South Carolina have access to quality sex education. Advocates can contact their representatives to discuss the critical need for a statewide comprehensive sex education mandate that emphasizes medical accuracy and also requires instruction on methods of pregnancy prevention beyond abstinence. 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 South Carolina...

State Law: A Closer Look

[Section 59-32-30 \(A\)\(1\)](#) requires local school districts in South Carolina to implement a ‘comprehensive health education program’ that for grades kindergarten through five, instruction in comprehensive health education must include the following subjects: community health, consumer health, environmental health, growth and development,

nutritional health, personal health, prevention and control of diseases and disorders, safety and accident prevention, substance use and abuse, dental health, and mental and emotional health. However, sexually transmitted diseases must be **excluded** from instruction on prevention of and control of diseases and disorders before 6th grade. Additionally, local school boards may provide instruction in family life education or pregnancy prevention education but are not allowed to discuss methods of contraception before 6th grade. Beginning in 6th grade, public schools in South Carolina are **required** to provide sexually transmitted disease (STD) education. Yet, schools are not required to teach about human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) or acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). State law allows age-appropriate reproductive health education in grades K–5. STDs and reproductive health must be included as part of comprehensive health education in grades 6–8, and pregnancy prevention may be addressed. Students **must also** receive at least 750 minutes of reproductive health education and pregnancy prevention education at least once over grades 9 through 12. Pregnancy prevention education must be presented in gender segregated settings. Beginning in the 2016-2017 school year, for grades 6 through 8, comprehensive health education instruction must also include domestic violence.

According to [South Carolina Code Annotated §§ 59-32-10](#), “Reproductive health education’ means instruction in human physiology, conception, prenatal care and development, childbirth, and postnatal care. Still, it does not include instruction concerning sexual practices outside marriage or practices unrelated to reproduction except within the context of the risk of disease. Abstinence and the risks associated with sexual activity outside of marriage must be strongly emphasized.” The law explains, “contraceptive information must be given in the context of future family planning.” In addition, no school may distribute contraceptives. Abortion may only be discussed in the context of the complications that it may cause and “must not be mentioned as a method of birth control.” Section 59-32-80 states that any public school educator who violates the chapter's provisions or fails to comply with the curriculum established by the school board is subject to dismissal. Private schools are not required to comply with South Carolina’s sex education requirements established under the state’s comprehensive health education program.

In 2020, the U.S. District Court for South Carolina [declared S.C. Code § 59-32-30\(A\)\(5\)](#) unconstitutional. This statute previously prohibited districts from including any “discussion of alternate sexual lifestyles from heterosexual relationships including, but not limited to, homosexual relationships except in the context of instruction concerning sexually transmitted diseases” in their health education. This was found to violate the Fourteenth Amendment and required the statute to include an editor’s note for validity stating *‘Pursuant to the consent decree from Gender and Sexuality Alliance v. Spearman, 2020 WL 1227345 (D.S.C. Mar. 11, 2020), the Superintendent and the Superintendent’s officers, assigns, successors, agents, employees, attorneys, and other persons who are acting in concert or in participation with each or any of them, are permanently enjoined from enforcing, applying, or relying on S.C. Code. Section 59-32-30(A)(5), as it violates the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.’*

Additionally, parents must be informed in advance of any sexuality-specific instruction and [are allowed](#) to remove their children from any part of the health education classes. [This is called an “opt-out” policy.](#)

State Standard

The state does not require or suggest a specific curriculum. However, the [South Carolina Standards for Health and Safety Education](#) guide curriculum development. The standards stress abstinence but allow students to be taught “effective methods for the prevention of [sexually transmitted infections] (STIs)/STDs, HIV, and AIDS ... [as well as] unintended pregnancy.” The standards also suggest discussion of dating violence, domestic violence, sexual harassment, rape, sexual assault, sexual abuse, and consent, and teach “refusal and negotiation skills to promote abstinence.”

To develop its curriculum, each local school board [must](#) “appoint a [13]-member local advisory committee consisting of two parents, three clergy, two health professionals, two teachers, two students (one being the president of the student body of a high school), and two other persons not employed by the local school district.” South Carolina also states that the State Department of Education and local school boards must provide “staff development activities” for educators participating in the comprehensive health program.

In summary, while state statute requires certain topics to be taught in South Carolina, local school districts decide most instructional topics, leading to wide variations in the sex education 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. Students have [reported](#) that they struggle to receive affirming instruction in the classroom and that their questions about non-heterosexual relationships often go unanswered.

Youth Sexual Health Data

The CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) tracks [adolescent health behaviors](#), including sexual health behaviors. **To learn more about South 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. **South Carolina's 2024 School Health Profiles response rate was not high enough to be representative and thus is excluded from the 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](#).