

# The SIECUS State Profiles



## ALABAMA

### ALABAMA'S SEX ED SNAPSHOT

#### THE STATE OF SEX EDUCATION

Advocates across the state have worked tirelessly to advance Alabama's sex education requirements over the past several years. Although legislation mandating comprehensive sex education has yet to be successful, the efforts of dedicated advocates across the state have made progress toward improving Alabama's sex education curriculum requirements. In 2020, the Coronavirus pandemic derailed attempts to pass [House Bill 71](#) and [Senate Bill 168](#), bills that if successful, would have required sex education to be medically accurate and free from discriminatory anti-LGBTQ language.

The coronavirus pandemic has posed numerous, additional barriers to ensuring all young people receive sex education across the state. Advocates report that the pandemic has significantly restricted their ability to provide sex education programming in schools and community organizations, but they are working to adapt curricula to fit a virtual format. They've also identified additional means of advocacy, including creating an sex education advocacy video with statewide partners to send to legislators and adapting educator trainings to an online platform. Due to the current constraints on the state's education system, they've been met with pushback on efforts to advance sex education during this unprecedented time.

Sex education is not currently mandated in Alabama, and schools that do teach sex education must emphasize abstinence. Because Alabama schools are not required to provide sex education to students, school districts are left to decide what type of sex education—if any at all—they provide to youth. Mandating 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 LGBTQ youth, and presents further challenges in ensuring that low income districts have access to the resources needed to implement comprehensive sex education. Black youth in particular face racist, systemic barriers to health care and comprehensive education. This has resulted in disproportionate representation among a variety of adverse health outcomes. For example, [in 2013](#), nearly [80 percent](#) of new HIV diagnoses among people ages 15-29 living in Alabama were reported among Black young youth. Additionally, over [70 percent](#) of new HIV diagnoses among men living in Alabama were reported by men who have had sex with men.

Advocates across the state report that medically accurate, evidence-based, and culturally responsive information are among the biggest factors missing from Alabama's sex education curriculum. In efforts to alleviate these barriers, the George Washington Carver High School in Birmingham has worked closely with health care providers to ensure they provide comprehensive sex education to students. Planned Parenthood South East also facilitates the Teen Advocates for Sexual Health Program (TASH), a peer education group that serves five schools from the Birmingham and Hoover School District. State advocates such as the

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Alabama Campaign for Adolescent Sexual Health have worked to ensure students receive evidence-based and evidence-informed curriculum through providing curricula training to educators, creating sexual health resources, and advocating for improved sexual health policies. In 2020, Human Rights Watch released [“It Wasn’t Really Safety, It Was Shame’: Young People, Sexual Health Education, and HPV in Alabama.”](#) which highlights the stark gaps in access to comprehensive sex education and the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine for Alabama youth.

State advocates in Alabama have reported that educators often lack information concerning the state’s sex education policy and are afraid of implementing the wrong curriculum. As a result, many opt to not provide any sex education at all. To advance sex education, advocates report a need for increased support from the Alabama Department of Education and increased collaboration between current state partners. There is also a need for increased public knowledge regarding the need to advance sex education in addition to heightened ability to address common myths and concerns associated with comprehensive sex education. Increased funding for advanced sex education in addition to teacher training has also been identified as a significant barrier in advancing sex education.

Right now, advocates can take action in their communities to address misinformation about Alabama’s sex education requirements. They can contact their local board of education and determine what topics are missing from existing sex education curricula. Advocates can then vocalize the importance of implementing specific elements of comprehensive sex education, such as trauma informed, culturally responsive curriculum that addresses the needs of youth of color and LGBTQ youth, or medically accurate instruction on contraceptives, healthy relationships, and consent. Further, advocates can contact their representatives to discuss the critical need for a statewide comprehensive sex education mandate. Advocates are encouraged to use the SIECUS [Community Action Toolkit](#) to guide local efforts to advance sex education.

## STATE SEX EDUCATION POLICIES AND REQUIREMENTS AT A GLANCE

- Alabama schools are **not** required to teach sex education. However, students in grades 5-12 are required to receive instruction on HIV/AIDS through a health education program.
  - If a school chooses to teach sex education, curriculum must emphasize abstinence.
- If sex education is offered, curriculum must emphasize that homosexuality is not a lifestyle acceptable to the general public and that homosexual conduct is a criminal offense under the laws of the state.
- HIV/AIDS curriculum, and sex education if offered, is not required to include instruction on consent.
- Parents or guardians can remove their children from sex education instruction if they feel it contradicts their religious beliefs. [This is referred to as an “opt-out” policy.](#)
- Alabama has no standard regarding medically accurate sex education instruction. However, Alabama does require inclusion of the latest medical information when providing instruction on contraceptives.

## STATE HOUSE HIGHLIGHTS

This section highlights 2020 sex education bills that were introduced during the last state legislative session and 2021 sex education bills that have been introduced during the current state legislative session thus far. These proposed bills provide a brief snapshot of both recent and current legislative action taken to advance or restrict sex education. For a more comprehensive look at recent and current legislation concerning sex education and related topics such as reproductive healthcare, efforts to advance or restrict LGBTQ rights, and HIV/AIDS as it relates to young people, continue reading on to the “State Legislative Activity” section of Alabama’s profile.

## 2021 Legislative Session

- [Senate Bill 196](#) (pending): Aims to require sex education be medically accurate, remove language pertaining to self control and ethical behavior related to abstinence and instead require curriculum to emphasize the importance of delaying sexual activity and discourage risky behavior, and remove the requirement to teach that homosexuality is not an acceptable lifestyle.

## 2020 Legislative Session

- [House Bill 71](#) (failed): Sought to require sex ed to be medically accurate and removes teaching that being gay is dangerous, socially unacceptable, and illegal from sex ed standards [An identical companion bill](#) failed in the Alabama Senate.
- [House Bill 321](#) (failed): Sought to require parents and guardians to provide written permission for their children to participate in sex education. A similar, companion bill was introduced in Senate.

## MORE ON SEX ED IN ALABAMA

### STATE LAW

Alabama state law does not require the teaching of sex education. However, a [resolution](#) adopted by the Alabama State Board of Education in 1987 does require that students in grades 5–12 receive instruction about HIV/AIDS through a health education program. Should schools choose to offer additional sex education, [Alabama State Code Section 16-40A-2](#) sets minimum requirements for what must be taught, but specific content is developed locally. Among other things, the code requires “sex education or the human reproductive process” programs or curricula to include and emphasize that:

- 1) abstinence from sexual intercourse is the only completely effective protection against unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and AIDS when transmitted sexually.
- 2) abstinence from sexual intercourse outside of lawful marriage is the expected social standard for unmarried school-age persons.

The code also states that:

- B) course materials and instruction that relate to sexual education or STDs should be age-appropriate;
- C) course materials and instruction that relate to sexual education or STDs should include:
  2. An emphasis on the importance of self-control and ethical conduct pertaining to sexual behavior.
  3. Statistics based on the latest medical information that indicates the degree of reliability and unreliability of various forms of contraception, while also emphasizing the increase in protection against pregnancy and protection against STDs, including HIV and AIDS, afforded by the use of various contraceptive measures ...
  8. An emphasis, in a factual manner and from a public health perspective, that homosexuality is not a lifestyle acceptable to the general public and that homosexual conduct is a criminal offense under the laws of the state.

Parents or guardians may remove their children from instruction pertaining to “disease, its symptoms, development, and treatment” if the content is in conflict with their religious beliefs. [This is referred to as an “opt-out” policy.](#)

## STATE STANDARDS

In addition to this code, [Alabama Course of Study: Health Education](#) provides the foundation for the minimum content requirements for topics such as HIV, STIs, and pregnancy prevention. The sexuality topics covered include: “societal expectations of remaining abstinent until married,” the “physical, social, and emotional effects,” of STIs, disease transmission, responsible decision-making, and refusal skills, among others.

## STATE LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY

State legislative activity related to sex education does not take place in isolation from the broader embroiled political and policy climate. Attacks on the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning (LGBTQ) individuals, and efforts to limit access to abortion care and other reproductive health care services prevent students from receiving comprehensive sex education and accessing sexual and reproductive health care services. Below are highlights of current legislative activity related to these topics. **Alabama's 2021 legislative session convened February 2, 2021.**

TITLE	DESCRIPTION	STATUS
<a href="#">HOUSE BILL 1</a>	PROHIBITS PHYSICIANS FROM PROVIDING GENDER AFFIRMING CARE AND HORMONE TREATMENTS TO MINORS.	REFERRED TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY (2021)
<a href="#">SENATE BILL 10</a>	PROHIBITS PHYSICIANS FROM PROVIDING GENDER AFFIRMING CARE AND HORMONE TREATMENTS TO MINORS.	REFERRED TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTHCARE (2021)
<a href="#">SENATE BILL 196</a>	REQUIRES SEX EDUCATION BE MEDICALLY ACCURATE, REMOVES LANGUAGE PERTAINING TO SELF CONTROL AND ETHICAL BEHAVIOR RELATED TO ABSTINENCE AND INSTEAD REQUIRES CURRICULUM TO EMPHASIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF DELAYING SEXUAL ACTIVITY AND DISCOURAGE RISKY BEHAVIOR, AND REMOVES THE REQUIREMENT TO TEACH THAT HOMOSEXUALITY IS NOT AN ACCEPTABLE LIFESTYLE.	REFERRED TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY (2021)
<a href="#">HOUSE BILL 20</a>	PROHIBITS PUBLIC SCHOOLS FROM PARTICIPATING IN ATHLETIC EVENTS AT WHICH ATHLETES ARE ALLOWED TO PARTICIPATE AGAINST ATHLETES WHO ARE OF A "DIFFERENT BIOLOGICAL GENDER" UNLESS THE EVENT SPECIFICALLY INCLUDES BOTH "GENDERS."	DIED IN THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT (2020)
<a href="#">HOUSE BILL 303</a>	PROHIBITS PHYSICIANS FROM PROVIDING GENDER AFFIRMING CARE AND HORMONE TREATMENTS TO MINORS.	DIED IN THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT (2020)
<a href="#">HOUSE BILL 321</a>	REQUIRES PARENTS AND GUARDIANS TO PROVIDE WRITTEN PERMISSION FOR THEIR CHILDREN TO PARTICIPATE IN SEX EDUCATION.	DIED IN THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION POLICY (2020)
<a href="#">HOUSE BILL 35</a>	PROHIBITS PUBLIC SCHOOLS FROM PARTICIPATING IN ATHLETIC EVENTS AT WHICH ATHLETES ARE ALLOWED TO PARTICIPATE AGAINST ATHLETES WHO ARE OF A "DIFFERENT BIOLOGICAL GENDER" UNLESS THE EVENT SPECIFICALLY INCLUDES BOTH "GENDERS."	DIED IN THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT (2020)

<a href="#">SENATE BILL 168</a>	REQUIRES SEX EDUCATION TO BE MEDICALLY ACCURATE AND REMOVES ANTI-LGBTQ LANGUAGE FROM CURRICULUM INSTRUCTION.	DIED IN THE HOUSE (2020)
<a href="#">SENATE BILL 219</a>	PROHIBITS PHYSICIANS FROM PROVIDING GENDER AFFIRMING CARE AND HORMONE TREATMENTS TO MINORS.	DIED IN THE HOUSE (2020)
<a href="#">HOUSE BILL 71</a>	REQUIRES SEX EDUCATION TO BE MEDICALLY ACCURATE AND REMOVES ANTI-LGBTQ LANGUAGE FROM CURRICULUM INSTRUCTION.	DIED IN THE HOUSE (2020)

## LEGISLATIVE KEY

SEX EDUCATION  
 REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CARE  
 SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND  
 GENDER IDENTITY  
 HIV/AIDS (THAT IMPACTS YOUT

## 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. To learn more about Alabama's Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) results, [click here](#).

## ALABAMA SCHOOL HEALTH PROFILES DATA

In 2019, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released the 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 20 sexual health education topics](#) as critical for ensuring a young person's sexual health. Below are key instruction highlights for secondary schools in Alabama as [reported](#) for the 2017–2018 school year.

### Reported teaching all 20 critical sexual health education topics

- 13.5% of Alabama secondary schools taught students all 20 critical sexual health education topics in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 33.5% of Alabama secondary schools taught students all 20 critical sexual health education topics in a required course in any of grades 9, 10, 11, or 12.

### Reported teaching about the benefits of being sexually abstinent

- 39.5% of Alabama secondary schools taught students about the benefits of being sexually abstinent in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 96.2% of Alabama secondary schools taught students about the benefits of being sexually abstinent in a required course in any of grades 9, 10, 11, or 12.

Reported teaching how to access valid and reliable information, products, and services related to HIV, other STDs, and pregnancy

- 28.4% of Alabama secondary schools taught students how to access valid and reliable information, products, and services related to HIV, other STDs, and pregnancy in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 91.2% of Alabama secondary schools taught students how to access valid and reliable information, products, and services related to HIV, other STDs, and pregnancy in a required course in any of grades 9, 10, 11, or 12.

Reported teaching how to create and sustain healthy and respectful relationships

- 41.5% of Alabama secondary schools taught students how to create and sustain healthy and respectful relationships in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 91.6% of Alabama secondary schools taught students how to create and sustain healthy and respectful relationships in a required course in any of grades 9, 10, 11, or 12.

Reported teaching about preventive care that is necessary to maintain reproductive and sexual health

- 28.7% of Alabama secondary schools taught students about preventive care that is necessary to maintain reproductive and sexual health in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 82.4% of Alabama secondary schools taught students about preventive care that is necessary to maintain reproductive and sexual health in a required course in any of grades 9, 10, 11, or 12.

Reported teaching how to correctly use a condom

- 16.3% of Alabama secondary schools taught students how to correctly use a condom in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 45.6% of Alabama secondary schools taught students how to correctly use a condom in a required course in any of grades 9, 10, 11, or 12.

Reported teaching about methods of contraception other than condoms

- 19.3% of Alabama secondary schools taught students about methods of contraception other than condoms in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 68.9% of Alabama secondary schools taught students about methods of contraception other than condoms in a required course in any of grades 9, 10, 11, or 12.

Reported teaching about sexual orientation

- 17.3% of Alabama secondary schools taught students about sexual orientation in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 48.7% of Alabama secondary schools taught students about sexual orientation in a required course in any of grades 9, 10, 11, or 12.

Reported teaching about gender roles, gender identity, or gender expression

- 21.7% of Alabama secondary schools taught students about gender roles, gender identity, or gender expression in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 54.0% of Alabama secondary schools taught students about gender roles, gender identity, or gender expression in a required course in any of grades 9, 10, 11, or 12.

Reported providing curricula or supplementary materials relevant to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ) youth

- 33.3% of Alabama secondary schools provided students with curricula or supplementary materials that included HIV, STD, or pregnancy prevention information relevant to LGBTQ youth.

Visit the CDC's [\*School Health Profiles\*](#) report 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](#).**