

Comprehensive Sexual Health Education Legislation: Frequently Asked Questions

Does proposed legislation take away local flexibility?

No. School districts will still work with parents, families, and the community to select or create a curriculum that best meets the needs of their communities.

Will the legislation require one curriculum for the whole state to use?

No. The proposed legislation maintains districts' ability to choose from several curricula that meets requirements or to create their own.

Can parents opt their child out of sexual health instruction?

Yes, parents and guardians will still be able to opt their children out of sexual health instruction.

How will parents be involved and informed about the sexual health education being provided by their child's school?

Parents and guardians will still be allowed to review their district's curriculum at any time. In addition, parents and guardians are critical partners in their children's sexual health education, and several comprehensive curricula include family homework assignments for every lesson to encourage and foster family-based values discussions as they pertain to sexual health.

What is meant by "comprehensive" sexual health education?

Comprehensive sexual health education is instruction on a wide variety of important sexual health topics that is provided over time, as reflected in the Health & Physical Education K–12 Learning Standards. It is medically accurate, evidence-informed, age-appropriate, and appropriate for all students, regardless of protected class.

Is elementary school too early to provide sexual health education?

No. Washington's Health & Physical Education K–12 Learning Standards are age-appropriate and are consistent with recommendations from national experts on child development. The standards for grades K–5 focus on helping students understand and respect personal boundaries, develop healthy friendships, and gain a basic understanding of medically accurate terms for body parts – which experts agree is a critical component of child sexual abuse prevention.

Isn't sexual abuse prevention education already required in schools?

No. The Washington State Legislature passed "Erin's Law" (House Bill 1539) in 2018. It directed OSPI to review sexual abuse curricula and to develop recommendations for schools wishing to provide sexual abuse prevention instruction, but did not require schools to provide such instruction.



What is “affirmative consent” and why is it included in this legislation?

Affirmative consent is an approach to giving and receiving consent that includes clear and voluntary permission to engage in sexual activity. It is not just the absence of “no.” In earlier grades it might focus on hugs or horseplay, and in older grades on hugs or sexual contact. It is included in this legislation as a way for schools to combat the high rates of unwanted sexual contact experienced by youth in our state. According to the 2018 Healthy Youth Survey, 12.3% of 8th graders, 18.9% of 10th graders, and 25.2% of 12th graders had been forced into kissing, sexual touch, or intercourse when they did not want to.ⁱ

How does comprehensive sexual health education improve the safety of students?

Research on sexual abuse shows comprehensive sexual health education is an important and effective prevention strategy.ⁱⁱ When students learn about and develop skills related to affirmative consent, they are more able to set personal boundaries and respect the boundaries of others.

ⁱ Washington State Department of Health. (2018). 2018 Healthy Youth Survey. Retrieved from <https://www.doh.wa.gov/DataandStatisticalReports/DataSystems/HealthyYouthSurvey>

ⁱⁱ Schneider, M., & Hirsch, J. S. (2018). Comprehensive sexuality education as a primary prevention strategy for sexual violence perpetration. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838018772855>