
Testimony to House Human Services: Sex Education and Access to Contraception

Given By:

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The Vermont Agency of Education is pleased to provide the following answers in response to the questions of the committee:

What is required under the standards and what is best practice (if any)?

State standards

The State Board of Education adopted the [National Health Education Standards \(NHES\)](#) to guide health education in Vermont. The NHES include eight standards. Standard 1 requires teaching of knowledge of core health concepts and underlying principles of health promotion and disease prevention – including sex education. Standards 2 to 8 identify key processes and skills that are applicable to healthy living and reflect on the tenets of social learning theory, which recognizes that learning occurs not merely within the learner but also in a particular social context. These include identifying the impact of family, peers, culture, media, and technology on health behaviors; knowing how to access valid health information; using interpersonal communication, decision-making, goal-setting, and advocacy skills; and enacting personal health-enhancing practices.

Best practice

Many health educators use the National Sexuality Education Standards (NSES) to further ground teaching sex education. These standards provide clear, consistent, and straightforward guidance on the essential minimum, core content of sexuality education that is age-appropriate for students in grades K-12. Several key concepts addressed within the NSES are personalization, susceptibility, self-efficacy, social norms – all of which are blended in the development of NHES health skills.

At what age do schools teach sex education?

Health education is required PK- grade 12. Sex education should begin in a developmentally appropriate way in Kindergarten and continues through grade 12. Research-based grade level benchmarks are identified in the NSES to help guide curriculum development and instructional practices.

What happens in middle school, high school, younger?

Depth and breadth of sex education core concepts and health skill development expands as students move up in grade level. Information about NSES can be found on the agency's the [Sexual Health webpage](#), as well as infographics and grant summaries of 2013-2018 Promoting Adolescent Health Through School-Based HIV/STD Prevention grant awardees.

What are the expectations outlined in law, rule, guidelines, etc., re: sex education and health?

Statute:

There are two relevant statutes:

1. [16 V.S.A. Subchapter 7 §131](#): Comprehensive health education means a systematic and extensive elementary and secondary educational program designed to provide a variety of learning experiences based upon knowledge of the human organism as it functions within its environment. This term includes, but is not limited to:
 - family health and mental health, including instruction that promotes the development of responsible personal behavior involving decision making about sexual activity including abstinence; skills that strengthen existing families involving communication, cooperation, and interaction between parents and students.
 - Information regarding the possible outcomes of premature sexual activity, contraceptives, adolescent pregnancy, childbirth, adoption and abortion.
 - How to recognize and prevent sexual abuse and sexual violence, including developmentally appropriate instruction about promoting health and respectful relationship, developing and maintaining effective communication with trusted adults, recognizing sexually offending behaviors, and gaining awareness of available school and community resources.
2. [Act 1 of 2009](#) (Brooke Bennet Law) Section 3— curriculum requirement – comprehensive health education includes recognizing and preventing sexual abuse and sexual violence.

Rule:

1. [Education Quality Standard 2120.5](#) Each supervisory union board shall ensure the written and delivered curriculum within their supervisory union is aligned with the standards approved by the State Board of Education. Each school shall enable students to engage annually in rigorous, relevant and comprehensive learning opportunities that allows them to demonstrate proficiency in physical education and health education as defined in 16 V.S.A. §131;

Do any high schools give out condoms?

Yes – but it is not clear how many. Typically, the school nurse has them available for students. The AOE does not collect data related to condom distribution at schools. The Vermont Department of Health or Planned Parenthood may have data that better answer this question. Or, the VSBA may have information related to school board policies concerning the distribution of condoms at high schools.