

Comprehensive Health Education

Act 157 of 2020, Section 10

REPORT

April 15, 2021

**Report to the House Committees on
Human Services and on Education and
Senate Committees on Health and Welfare
and on Education**

Daniel M. French, Ed.D., Secretary of Education

and

Mark Levine, M.D., Commissioner of Health



Legislation

This report is submitted pursuant to [Act 157 of 2020, Sec. 10](#). This legislation requires the Vermont Agency of Education (AOE) and the Vermont Department of Health (Health Department) to report regarding “their continued efforts to support schools and school districts in providing comprehensive health education to Vermont students,” pursuant to [16 V.S.A. § 906\(b\)\(3\)](#) and [16 V.S.A. § 131](#).

Introduction

The AOE and the Health Department have been working collaboratively for the last two years to improve sexual health education in Vermont, and to frame sexual health education within the broader context of comprehensive health and wellness education for sustainability. This report details activity and work completed during fiscal year 2020 to promote sexual health education, as well as a timeline of fiscal year 2021 activity (some of which has been completed).

Sexual Health Education Workgroups

The AOE and the Health Department agreed, and consistent with recommendations several of the committees to whom this report is addressed, that a coordinated approach informed by diverse stakeholders and providers in the health education community was important to ensure a holistic and sustainable approach to sexual health education in Vermont. For this reason, a number of stakeholders were brought together to examine and develop recommendations and professional learning for Vermont educators, school systems and education providers. A summary of these groups and their activities follows.

The Sexual Health State Leadership Team

The Health Department and Agency of Education staff conducted stakeholder meetings and developed state guidance in response to the legislature’s request to consider developing a state sexual health education curriculum. This group meets regularly to review community and PreK-12 sexual health education activities across the state. This workgroup collaborated to develop the following publications:

- [Implementing Comprehensive Health Education: Laws and Regulation](#) (1/30/20)
Agency of Education Memo, Secretary Daniel French
- [Comprehensive Sexual Health Education and Condom Availability Programs](#) (1/30/20) Joint Memo, Agency of Education, Secretary Daniel French and Dr. Mark Levine, Vermont Department of Health
- [Sexual Health Education Resource Guide](#) 1/30/20
Joint guidance developed by the Agency of Education and the Vermont Department of Health

The Sexual Health Education Advisory Group

This group includes representation from several organizations that directly provide, or support organizations that provide, sexual health education to their constituents. Members represent AOE, the Health Department, Planned Parenthood of Northern New England (PPNNE), Outright VT, VT Cares, VT Network, PreK – 12 health educators, and a pediatrician who

specializes in Adolescent Medicine and sexual and reproductive health. The group is dedicated to identifying priority topics in sexual health education and delivering professional learning and resources that support high-quality sexual health education.

The group was planning a Sexual Health Education Summit for the spring of 2021 but planning was interrupted by the pandemic. [Appendix C](#) contains a table of members and their organizations.

Fiscal Year 2020 Sexual Health Education Support Activities

The Agency of Education and Vermont Department of Health undertook the following activities in FY20 to support sexual health education:

- **Society of Health and Physical Educators, [SHAPE Vermont](#):** Hosted four sexual health education sessions on priority topics identified by the stakeholder group during the two-day fall conference in October 2020.
- **Sexual Health Education Professional Learning Community:** The Agency of Education is hosting a four-session professional learning community for PreK-12 health educators to receive needs-based professional learning, network, collaborate and problem-solve issues related to teaching sexual health education in a comprehensive health education program.
- **Vermont Department of Health, Division of Maternal and Child Health:** Several grants to community partners support access to reproductive and sexual health services, quality sexual health education programs, and broader outreach and education efforts related to sexual and reproductive health. Grants include:
 - University of Vermont Medical Center’s Dr. Erica Gibson, a pediatrician, to carry out activities related to providing training and technical assistance to both community-based and school-based program facilitators and health educators.
 - PPNNE-to ensure access to clinical services and for outreach and education.
 - Personal Responsibility and Education Program (PREP) grants to youth serving community organizations to support the implementation of evidence based sexual health curricula.
- **Leadership Exchange for Adolescent Health Promotion (LEAHP):** LEAHP is a new initiative that brings together leaders in health and education across the country to improve student health and academic outcomes through policy and practice. LEAHP is funded by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Division of Adolescent and School Health (DASH). It focuses on three key approach areas: sexual health education, sexual health services, and safe and supportive environments. Vermont has been accepted to participate in a spring 2021 cohort. The Vermont LEAHP Team will include members of the Sexual Health Education Stakeholder group. Members of the Vermont Team participated in their first Cross State Collaboration and Listening session on February 18, 2021.

Fiscal Year 2021 Sexual Health Education Support Activities

The Agency of Education and the Health Department undertook the following activities in FY21 to support sexual health education:

- **LEAHP:** Members of the Vermont Sexual Health Education Stakeholder group began their work in February 2021. The cohort includes AOE and Health Department representation as well as members of the Sexual Health Education Stakeholder group.
- **The State Sexual Health Education Leadership Team** will:
 - Continue to collaborate with members of the Sexual Health Education Stakeholder Workgroup to identify strategies and develop a plan to support the implementation of [Act 157](#) pertaining to the development of policies and practices related to condom availability in secondary schools;
 - Monitor [Senate Bill S.32](#) now [H.115](#), feminine hygiene support in schools bill – and prepare for possible implementation needs;
 - Continue to build out a webspace for easy access to support and reference materials.
- **Sexual Health Education Professional Learning Community:** The Agency of Education is hosting a four-session professional learning community for PreK-12 health educators to receive needs-based professional learning, network, collaborate and problem-solve issues related to teaching sexual health education in a comprehensive health education program.
- The Health Department is exploring options to host a training offered by [Elevatus: A 3-day sexual health educators training](#) for anyone who works with people with I/DD and wants to lead sexuality education classes, staff training, or parent workshops.

Conclusion

Both the AOE and the Health Department recommend that further activity in the space of comprehensive sexual health education, and health and wellness education generally, be focused on effective implementation and support. The State of Vermont and the General Assembly have been forward thinking and proactive in identifying issues of equity and access, and subsequently have developed a policy framework sufficient in defining desired educational outcomes. The next years present an opportunity to allow systems and stakeholders to engage in the professional learning, systemic organization and change, and partnership development necessary to implement existing statute and rules.

APPENDIX A: AOE Testimony: H.663, An act relating to expanding access to contraceptives

([original testimony](#) on Vermont General Assembly website)

Testimony To: *House Committee on Human Services*

Respectfully Submitted by: *Ted Fisher, Director of Communications and Legislative Affairs*

Date: *February 5, 2020*

Status Update on AOE / VDH Sexual Health Education Collaboration

The Vermont Agency of Education (AOE) and the Vermont Department of Health have been working together since Summer 2019 to coordinate outreach and resource development on sexual health education.

Resources Delivered to the Field

Both agencies developed the following resources for distribution to Vermont school districts and supervisory unions (SU/SDs):

- [Implementing a Comprehensive Health Education: Law and Regulation](#), a memo from Secretary French to Vermont superintendents reiterating the requirements in statute for implementing a comprehensive health education, requirements in rule and education standards. The memo outlines the importance of strong sexual health education and support policies and refers superintendents to the two memos below.
- [Comprehensive Sexual Health Education and Condom Availability Programs](#), a memo from Secretary French and Commissioner Levine to superintendents, principals, headmasters and health educators, stressing the importance of Sexual Health Education and giving guidance and recommendations for making condoms and other barrier methods available to students.
- [Sexual Health Education Resource Guide](#), intended for educators, curriculum coordinators, and other central office leadership, outlining resources for implementing strong sexual health education programs, and providing planning and professional development resources.

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

([original testimony](#) on Vermont General Assembly website)

Given By: Ted Fisher, Director of Communications and Legislative Affairs, Vermont Agency of Education

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:

3. [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. Or, the VSBA may have information related to school board policies concerning the distribution of condoms at high schools.

APPENDIX C: Table 1 Members of the Sexual Health Education Advisory Workgroup

Organization	Contact	Description
VT Cares	Kelly Arbor	VT CARES creates resources for youth and community members about HIV prevention and harm reduction.
VT Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence	Chani Waterhouse	The Vermont Network supports a statewide learning community of child and youth advocates to share ideas and resources for connecting with youth and delivering healthy relationships and consent programming using in person and digital platforms. With the Health Department, the Vermont Network administers the CDC Rape Prevention and Education grant program which funds two local organizations to partner with youth leaders in strategies that promote healthy sexuality culture and education in their school communities. This work also includes the Askable Adults Campaign and related tools and resources, and training in the WholeSomeBodies curriculum.
Planned Parenthood of Northern New England (PPNNE)	Andrea Nicoletta	PPNNE operates a peer educators’ program, which transitioned to be fully remote in March of 2020, just before schools also went remote. On the plus side, peer educators are now able to access the program no matter where they live in Vermont. On the negative side, their face-to-face interactions are limited, and they can feel disconnected. They face barriers to presenting in health classes, interacting with peers in school, etc. Young people and teachers are reporting that with the time crunch due to remote learning that time dedicated to sexual health

		<p>education is reduced. Youth through this program report that that they aren't getting much for sexual health education and the pandemic has only made it worse.</p> <p>PPNNE also provides policy assistance by partnering with schools, state entities, and community partners to support policies that improve youth sexual and reproductive health through systemic change, such as school policies for safe sex supplies and youth referrals to care.</p>
Outright VT	Mara Iverson	<p>Outright Vermont has focused this year on assessing and addressing LGBTQ+ youth wellness, and within those assessments have asked about access to learning technology. Outright has learned that LGBTQ+ youth are under-resourced in terms of internet and device access. As such, they are developing a plan to get some technological resources out to youth so that they can participate more reliably in sex ed and other learning that is taught as part of their formal schooling as well as sex ed and other social support offerings Outright makes available. In addition, Outright collaborates with PPNNE and other VT sexual health education stakeholders to provide LGBTQ+-inclusiveness training and technical assistance to relevant educators.</p>
Dr. Erica Gibson. University of Vermont Medical Center (UVMMMC)	Dr. Erica Gibson, pediatrician and Adolescent Medicine specialist	<p>Dr. Gibson participates in this group as a subject matter expert and as part of a Health Department grant that supports her efforts related to improving sexual health education in community and</p>

		school-based settings through training and technical assistance.
Health Promotion Program Coordinator Castleton University	Dr. Katy Culpo	Dr. Culpo manages Vermont's only Health Education Teacher Preparation program at Castleton University and is a strong proponent for delivering quality Comprehensive Health Education in Vermont schools.
Health Educators	Sarah Chap teaches at Spaulding HS in the Barre Supervisory Union Meaghan Falby teaches at U-32 in the Washington Central Supervisory Union	Health educators with in-depth knowledge and expertise related to sexual health education are critical to informing this group about what is feasible in school settings and to identify professional development needs.
Consider including representation from the list below on the Sexual Health Education Stakeholder group		
Prevent Child Abuse Vermont		Implement curricula on sexual abuse prevention and healthy relationships in schools
School nurse		Support implementation of Act 157 and Comprehensive Health Education in Vermont Schools
PREP program facilitator		Implement sexual health education curricula in community-based settings