



Planned Parenthood Action Fund of New Jersey

Fact Sheet: New Jersey's Student Learning Standards for Comprehensive Health and Physical Education

No matter our gender, race, or zip code, we can all agree that every New Jersey student deserves to go to a school that helps them shine. For that, they need sex education - because sex education *is* education. It teaches critical skills like healthy communication, boundary setting, and emotional literacy. It gives young people developmentally appropriate, medically accurate information and provides answers to their questions about their bodies and their relationships, without shaming or judging them for their experiences or feelings. And we can all agree that every student in New Jersey deserves to receive an education in a safe environment, free from discrimination, harassment and abuse. Studies repeatedly show that quality sex education can reduce bullying and harassment, prevent abuse, and make it easier for young people to report if someone does try to harm them.



The Standards

In New Jersey, we have a set of standards for all content areas that guide educators regarding what students must learn by what grade level. They are reviewed and revised every five years. There is a specific set of standards for each content area, including health and physical education. Sex education topics are included in this content area.

2014 SLS-CHPE are the current standards effective through the end of the 2021-22 school year. They are strong compared to other states' standards, but there was room for improvement; for example, the standards did not cover all of the topics outlined in the National Sexuality Education Standards, which provide a model template for sex education content areas. 2020 SLS-CHPE are the recently adopted standards that take effect at the start of the 2022-2023 school year. They are new, improved, and more comprehensive, including more topics relating to LGBTQ+ identities and consent.

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The 2020 SLS-CHPE support student safety with medically accurate, age-appropriate information. In the Personal Growth and Development section approved by the NJ State Board of Education:

- By 2nd grade, students will discuss the range of ways people express their gender and how gender-role stereotypes may limit behavior.
- By 5th grade, students will demonstrate ways to promote dignity and respect for all people (e.g. sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, differing ability, immigration status, family configuration).
- By 8th grade, kids should be able to differentiate between gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation.

Terminology

Standards are what students need to learn by the end of a certain grade. They are written by the State Department of Education, adopted by the State Board of Education, and apply to all schools districts in the state.

Curricula are the materials used in schools to teach the standards. Each school district selects their own curricula to use that meets the standards, and the State DOE provides recommendations.

Lessons are what happen in the classroom and are the individual “doses” of education. Lessons are the building blocks of a curriculum.

All school districts across the state must comply with the Standards. However, each district can select the curricula they use in order for their students to meet the Standards. The State DOE provides recommendations of curricula, but districts can also find and use their own as long as they meet the Standards.

Support for Sex Ed

Parents absolutely have a critical role to play as the primary sexual health educator for their children – and **the vast majority of parents support sex education in schools.** [Study](#) after [study](#) has shown that more than 90 percent of Americans support comprehensive sex education in public schools, across geography, political persuasion, race/ethnicity, income, and age. In New Jersey, [a 2019 survey](#) showed that Garden State parents want their children to learn about a wide range of age-appropriate, accurate sex education topics.

Should a parent not want their child to participate in sex education, New Jersey allows parents or guardians to remove their children from any part of the health, family life, or sex education classes if it conflicts with their beliefs. This is referred to as an [“opt-out” policy](#).