

Messaging on Sex Education

Messaging Basics

Don't repeat misinformation: For example: If someone asks "I heard this curriculum exposes elementary school students to pornographic materials. Is that true?" Don't repeat the talking point of exposing children to pornographic materials. Instead, a sample response may include: "No. Students in elementary school learn basic foundational knowledge such as information about their bodies and the changes they're experiencing, their friendships, and key concepts like privacy and respect."

Transparency is essential: Be as transparent as possible with the curriculum and learning materials. The NJ DOE recommends sharing lessons online for parents to review, if possible. We do not recommend sharing physical documents. We know of situations where documents (including the NJSLs) have been modified to include false information.

Don't speak off the cuff: It's important that everyone from your district knows it is OK to say "I'm not sure about that, let me gather some information and get back to you." The worst thing we can do is offer a response to a question when we don't know the answer.

Highlight outcomes you can agree upon: When speaking with parents, it is important to highlight points that you can both agree upon. For example, we want all students to be safe, happy and healthy and we want all students to learn in a safe and welcoming environment.

Facts

[Polling](#) tells us that most voters support sex education in schools. Letting more parents know that sex ed is taught in your schools, why it's taught, and how kids benefit can be an enormous win.

Talking to sympathetic parents is even more important than trying to change the hearts and minds of the opposition.

Input on the standards was provided by a team of teachers from all levels across over 100 districts, as well as the military and 88% of them had a master's degree or higher.

Teachers need support right now. As administrators, make sure your teachers know you have their backs and support the important work they are doing to help youth succeed. Provide staff with professional development in any areas they feel they could use additional training, whether content or skills-based. Please, avoid sending all teacher questions and comments to them as that can feel overwhelming.

Frequently Asked Questions

The Standards

Are the sex education standards age-appropriate?

Yes. The Standards were created by a panel of experts that used evidence based information to inform their development. Governor Murphy recently ordered a review of the standards and the [Department of Education released a three-page document](#) outlining the evidence and support for the standards.

What evidence exists to support implementing the standards?

[Thirty years of public health research](#) clearly demonstrates that comprehensive sex education can help young people delay sexual initiation while also assisting them to use protection when they do become sexually active. Further studies show that comprehensive sex education can delay the onset of sexual debut and does not increase the frequency of sex for those who are already sexually active.

What is the difference between the LGBTQ mandates and the sex education standards?

[The NJ law](#) that requires students to learn about the societal and historical contributions of LGBTQ figures and people with disabilities in middle and high school was passed in 2019. Young people of all sexual orientations, gender identities and backgrounds have a right to quality sexual health information that reflects their own experiences and is meaningful to them. This requirement is for students in grades six through twelve and does not have a provision to allow parents and caregivers to opt their child out of this instruction.

The sex education standards are part of the [2020 Standards for Comprehensive Health and Physical Education](#). These standards include medically-accurate and age-appropriate lessons about human growth and development in all grades. Parents and caregivers have the right to opt their child out of any of these lessons.

Who decides the appropriate grade level for these standards?

Input on the standards was provided by a team of teachers from all levels across over 100 districts, as well as the military and 88% of them had a master's degree or higher. The standards are categorized into grade bands (e.g. K-2) in which the material must be implemented by the end of that grade level. It is up to the individual schools to decide where within those grades the school will implement that standard.

Why are there so many changes to the standards this year?

Most of the standards are not new and most of the new standards do not contain new content. The changes that have been made reflect the skills and information young people will need to be safe and healthy in a rapidly evolving world.

Teachers

What training have the teachers implementing the curriculum had?

Our educators have teaching certificates for providing health education in the state of New Jersey and sex education has always been part of that training. To address some of the new standards we sought out professional development from experts in the field to make sure our teachers felt comfortable and prepared to implement the new content this upcoming school year.

Who will be teaching the lessons at the elementary level?

Pursuant to NJ Senate Bill 858 any educator providing health instruction in grades K-6 must possess a health endorsement to their instructional certificate. Teachers with elementary instruction who have previously provided health instruction are grandfathered in and will not require additional endorsements to continue providing health education in grades K-6.

- a. All of our teachers providing health education have a health endorsement as part of their instructional certificate.
- b. [Teacher's name] was grandfathered into this bill and has received additional professional development to ensure age-appropriate and medically accurate instruction.

Curriculum

What curriculum will our school be using and will parents have the opportunity to review it?

Our district has decided to use the [name of curriculum]. This curriculum was chosen because it aligns to the standards, is age appropriate and medically accurate.

- a. We will be posting the curriculum to our website this Summer so that parents/guardians can view which topics will be covered in their child's grade level in case they wish to opt out of any topics in the health curriculum.
- b. We will be hosting a parent night to address the curriculum once it is completed by our team of trained health teachers. We will be prepared to answer any questions you might have.

The process we have set up for parental review is...

Is the AMAZE curriculum being used in this school?

[AMAZE](#) is a series of short, animated videos that address sexual health topics for young people ages 10 -14. AMAZE is not a curriculum, but some of the videos are sometimes used as part of school-based sexual health lessons.

- a. Our school does include some of the videos in the [X] grade curriculum. Those videos are [names of videos]. The videos have all been reviewed by [the teachers, administrators, Board, etc.] and have been approved as being medically accurate and age-appropriate for that grade level. All of the AMAZE videos can be reviewed on AMAZE.org.
- b. Our school does not include the videos in our curriculum.

Elementary

Are you talking about gender identity in 2nd grade?

The second grade standard that will be implemented refers to gender roles. This standard is designed to ensure that children understand that everyone has the ability to live their life in the way that suits them, no matter their gender. Gender stereotypes are real and can have negative consequences for children's academic growth, self-worth, and mental health as they get older.

Why do children need to know the correct names for their body parts by the end of 2nd grade?

When young people know the proper names of their genitals it reduces their risk for sexual abuse. Perpetrators are aware that young people who have this language also likely have trusted adults who they will discuss any abuse with and therefore the perpetrator is more likely to get caught. If a child has been abused and needs to testify, it is more likely for the abuser to be found guilty when the child can state exactly what behaviors occurred.

Are you talking about masturbation in 5th grade?

One of the fifth grade standards states that students must be able to "Explain common human sexual development and the role of hormones". Masturbation is provided as an example of a topic that can be taught or that students may bring up during this lesson - it is not mandatory for schools to provide education about masturbation.

Will students be separated by gender?

- a. It has never been our practice to separate students according to their sex assigned at birth or gender identity during our health education lessons. We will continue that practice moving forward.
- b. In our district we used to separate the students for the puberty lessons, but no longer do so based on the largely agreed upon best-practices from experts.
- c. Yes, we still separate students by gender.

Middle School

Are you defining oral, anal and vaginal sex in 8th grade? If so, why?

Ensuring that students understand that they have agency over their own bodies is foundational to keeping them safe and protecting themselves from pressure, dating violence, and assault. It is important to provide students language for, and understanding of, specific acts, empowering them to stay safe, evaluate risks, make informed decisions, and communicate health issues or injuries if necessary. Youth who are unable to appropriately name sexual acts may not be able to accurately report instances of sexual harm or abuse if it occurs. Further, understanding the meaning of these behaviors is foundational to learning about disease and pregnancy prevention. [Recent data from the CDC shows](#) that 53% of new STI cases are among adolescents and young adults ages 15-24, so it is vital that we provide this information to help young people stay safe and healthy.

Values

Why are we focusing on LGBTQ youth?

[Research](#) shows that most LGBTQ students in New Jersey experienced anti-LGBTQ victimization at school and many of these students did not have access to in-school resources and support. Making schools a more inclusive place for LGBTQ youth reduces bullying, depression, suicidal ideations and attempts, marijuana and alcohol consumption, absences and increases GPAs in ALL students.

If my child learns about different genders and sexual orientations won't they just be confused?

No. All content in the standards are provided in an age and developmentally appropriate manner. Youth are encouraged to be respectful of those who are different from them in any aspect of their identity. We also want children to understand that there are many different types of families and not all children come from a home with a mom and a dad.

Are you indoctrinating students into a liberal agenda or grooming them for sexual behaviors?

No. The state standards regarding sexual health are designed to help keep all young people safe and healthy. They are all age and developmentally appropriate, and are supported by research.

If we introduce these topics at such a young age aren't our kids going to want to go out and have sex?

No. Research overwhelmingly proves that providing youth with comprehensive sex education delays their first sexual behaviors. We also know that youth are exposed to sexual content from their peers and the internet. By having our trained professionals provide youth with medically accurate and inclusive information, we can combat myths young people might have already heard.

I don't think the school should be teaching my child about values related to sexuality.

Parents play a vital role in providing young people information they need to protect their health and futures, as well as instilling family values around sex, sexuality, and relationships. The curriculum offers an opportunity and supports families to talk about those values together at home. However, we understand that some families would prefer to have these conversations at home which is why the opt-out policy exists. We also know that there are many parents who do not have the capacity to have these conversations at home due to life commitments, or the fact they never had sex education themselves. This is why it is our responsibility to provide the knowledge and skills that young people need to stay safe and healthy.

Opting Out

Are there consequences to the students' grades if they are opted out?

No. Any student who is opted out will not be penalized by loss of credit or in any other manner. Students will be given an alternate assignment and will be held accountable for the successful completion of that work.

How will you keep my children from hearing this information from other students if they are opted out?

Unfortunately, there is no way we can guarantee that if your child is opted out that they will not hear this information from their peers on the bus or while gathering in or outside of school. We encourage all parents to allow their children to hear the information from a trained teacher as opposed to their peers, but we also support every parents' right to opt-their children out of the lessons.

What if I don't want my kids learning about these topics in school?

The NJDOE recognizes and respects that some families prefer to have these conversations privately. Pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:35-4.7, any child whose parent or guardian presents to the school a signed statement that any part of instruction in health, family life education, or sex education is in conflict with his or her conscience or sincerely held moral or religious beliefs shall be excused from that portion of the course.