

Sex Education in Iowa Public Schools Guidelines & Resources

Summary

Iowa Code section 279.50 requires public schools to provide age-appropriate and research-based instruction in human growth and development including instruction about human sexuality, self-esteem, stress management, interpersonal relationships, domestic abuse, HPV (Human Papilloma Virus) and the availability of a vaccine to prevent HPV, and AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome), in grades one through twelve.

Definitions

Iowa Code section 279.50 provides the following definitions to assist school districts in assessing curricular materials.

Age-appropriate means topics, messages, and teaching methods suitable to particular ages or age groups of children and adolescents, based on developing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral capacity typical for the age or age group.

Research-based means all of the following:

- 1) Complete information that is verified or supported by the weight of research conducted in compliance with accepted scientific methods; recognized as medically accurate and objective by leading professional organizations and agencies with relevant expertise in the field, such as the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the American Public Health Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the National Association of School Nurses; and, published in peer-reviewed journals where appropriate.
- 2) Information that is free of racial, ethnic, sexual orientation, and gender biases.

Required Topics

For grades 7 and 8, the regulations of the Iowa Department of Education, as stated in Iowa Administrative Code 281—12.5, require health instruction that includes the following topics:

- human sexuality
- self-esteem
- stress management
- interpersonal relationships
- emotional and social health
- health resources
- prevention and control of disease, and
- characteristics of communicable diseases, including STDs (Sexually Transmitted Diseases) and AIDS.

For grades 9–12, the same regulations require health instruction that includes:

- human growth and development
- substance abuse and nonuse
- emotional and social health
- health resources,

- prevention and control of disease, including STDs and AIDS,
- current crucial health issues
- human sexuality
- self-esteem
- stress management, and
- interpersonal relationships.

According to Iowa Code section 279.50, schools are not prohibited from developing and making available abstinence-based or abstinence-only materials or from offering an abstinence-based or abstinence-only curriculum in meeting the human sexuality component of the human growth and development requirements. However, the content of these materials must be age-appropriate and research-based as defined above.

Provisions to Parents and Guardians

As stated in Iowa Code section 279.50, school districts are required to provide to the parent or guardian of any student enrolled in the school district annual information about the human growth and development curriculum to be taught that year and how parents/guardians may review the materials prior to their use in the classroom. In addition, schools must notify parents or guardians that they may file a written request with the appropriate principal to excuse their child from any instruction to which they object.

Public Access to Curriculum

Iowa Code section 279.50 requires schools to comply with requests from any agency or organization that asks for information about the human growth and development curriculum used in each grade level and the procedure used by the district for inspecting and updating the instructional materials.

Resources

As mandated in Iowa Code section 256.9(49), the Iowa Department of Education provides an annually updated list of resources and curricula intended to assist school districts in developing and selecting materials that comply with the human growth and development mandates of Iowa Code. To access a copy, go to the Iowa Department of Education's website at www.iowa.gov/educate and go to the Health Education page. You may also obtain a copy by contacting EyesOpenIowa.