

Human Growth and Development

Statute explainer

[Wis. Stat. § 118.019](#) describes requirements for school districts about the content of human growth and development instruction in their schools. This explainer document is a short guide that provides some additional information and resources to aid school districts in establishing their own local policies that are state statute compliant and meet the needs of their communities. For additional information, see the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's full Human Growth and Development Guide.

Local school boards can decide

Wis. Stat. § 118.019, the Human Growth and Development (HGD) statute, states that school boards across Wisconsin can decide whether or not to have a Human Growth and Development (HGD) curriculum at their schools. If a school district does decide to have HGD instruction, the statute recommends an instructional program that:



- Presents medically accurate information, when age-appropriate, that covers these topics:
 - The importance of communication about sexuality between students and their parents and guardians
 - Reproductive and sexual anatomy and physiology, including biological, psychosocial, emotional, and intellectual changes that accompany maturation
 - The benefits of and reasons for abstaining from sexual activity. Instruction must stress the value of abstinence as the only reliable way to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections
 - Methods for developing healthy life skills, including setting goals, making responsible decisions, communicating, and managing stress
 - How alcohol and drug use affect responsible decision-making
 - The impact of media and peers on thoughts, feelings, and behaviors related to sexuality
 - Adoption resources, prenatal care, and postnatal supports
 - The nature and treatment of sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- Addresses self-esteem and personal responsibility, positive interpersonal skills, and healthy relationships.
- Identifies counseling, medical and legal resources for survivors of sexual abuse and assault.
- Addresses the positive connection between marriage and parenting.
- Presents information about avoiding stereotypes and bullying.

- [Wis. Stat. § 118.019\(2\)\(a\)](#)

Can include additional topics

While the statute names specific topics that are both required and recommended, the statute does not prohibit the inclusion of additional, unnamed topics. For example, if a district decides to, they could also include lessons about the topic of consent in their HGD curriculum.

Topics required by statute

If a school board provides HGD instruction in any of the topics in Wis. Stat. § 118.019(2)(a), then they are required to also include specific topics, when age appropriate, in the same course and during the same year.



The following eight topics are required to be included in HGD instruction:

- Present abstinence from sexual activity as the preferred choice of behavior for unmarried pupils.
- Emphasize that abstinence from sexual activity is the only reliable way to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV and AIDS.
- Provide instruction in parental responsibility and the socioeconomic benefits of marriage for adults and their children.
- Explain pregnancy, prenatal development, and childbirth.
- Explains the criminal penalties for engaging sexual activities involving a child.
- Explains the sex offender registration requirements.
- Provides medically accurate information about the human papilloma virus (HPV) and the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS).
- Explains the process for relinquishing custody of a child.

- Wis. Stat. § 118.019(2m)

Must inform parents

Per Wis. Stat. §§ 118.019(3), (4), parents must be informed about the content of the HGD instruction and says that parents may opt their students out of participation in all or part of the HGD instruction.

Advisory committee

The statute says that if a district is going to implement HGD instruction, they must form an advisory committee. The role of the committee is to advise the school board on the design and implementation of the HGD curriculum and to review the curriculum.



The statute specifies that individuals representing the following groups shall be represented on the committee:

- (...)parents, teachers, school administrators, pupils, health care professionals, members of the clergy, and other residents of the school district.
- No one category can make up more than one fifth of the committee, except parents who can make up a greater proportion.

- Wis. Stat. 118.019(5)

Hear from those involved

What's it like on an HGD advisory committee?

HGD advisory committees vary by local communities and districts. The following are examples of experiences in Wisconsin districts:



"As a parent representative on the committee and serving in the capacity of a health teacher, I contributed to the discussion during our initial meeting, which focused on explaining skill-based health education.

I emphasized the significant differences between skill-based health education and the experiences of the committee members during their time in school. The community members expressed strong support for the emphasis on skills rather than solely on content."

- Patty Zemke, parent and a health educator for the Wausau School District, NBCT health educator, 2022

"We had our advisory committee this last fall. I was really nervous about the committee and knew there were members with strong views about what schools should and shouldn't address in health class. The committee ended up being a great experience that gave community members insight into the diversity of our student population and what many of them might be dealing with on a day-to-day basis.

The committee was interested to know more about several topics and skills in health class beyond Human Growth and Development. We were able to come up with recommendations for the schoolboard, and I think we all walked away with a better sense of connection between our school and community members. Overall, it was a positive experience that seemed to bring us closer."

- Allisha Blanchette, DC Everest Senior High, Health & PE Teacher, Girls Head Cross Country Coach, WHPE NE District Coordinator, SHAPE America NHES Trainer

What do Wisconsin youth say?

Wisconsin youth were asked about their experiences and what they thought should be included in their school-based sexual health education.



"High school is probably the only time you're ever going to be taught about sexuality. You're expected to know it by the time you leave. We should focus on what to do if you have an STI or if you get pregnant, and how to prevent getting pregnant besides abstinence."

"We should start with the basics: what is sex, what is safe sex, what is a healthy relationship. Schools should extend more opportunities to parents about how to support their child during this time. When you're a teenager you're still figuring things out for yourself, but we need opportunities to learn about our own situations and ask questions."

"I absolutely think how to access health care services should be covered. It is also important to talk about what the process of getting care looks like."

Frequently asked questions

The following are common questions about the statute and related guidance. The purpose of these FAQs is to provide quick answers to common questions and organize useful information.



Is teaching Human Growth and Development required in Wisconsin?

Teaching Human Growth and Development (HGD) is not required in Wisconsin. According to [Wis. Stat. § 118.019](#), “A school board may provide an instructional program in human growth and development in grades kindergarten to 12.” However, if HGD is taught, the same statute outlines recommended and required topics.

What does Wisconsin state statute say about teaching about abstinence?

[Wisconsin Stat. § 118.019](#) provides guidance on teaching about abstinence as a required subject. Where the statute describes required topics if HGD is taught, the statute reads: **(c)** Presents abstinence from sexual activity as the preferred choice of behavior for unmarried pupils. **(d)** Emphasizes that abstinence from sexual activity before marriage is the only reliable way to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, including human immunodeficiency virus and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome. This means abstinence must be talked about and presented as the preferred and most reliable way to prevent pregnancy and STIs. However, Wisconsin state statute is not an abstinence only statute. In other words, it is permissible and encouraged to additionally provide more comprehensive instruction, including, among other important topics, information about safer sex practices, with instruction about birth control methods and how to reduce risk for STIs.

The statute says instruction must be age-appropriate and medically accurate. How are those terms defined? How can we ensure our instruction is both age-appropriate and medically accurate?

[Wisconsin Stat. § 118.019](#) defines age-appropriate as “suitable to a particular age group of pupils based on their developing cognitive and emotional capacity and consistent with adolescent development and community standards.” Districts can refer to the [national sex education standards](#) for guidance on developing their communities’ definition of what is age appropriate. [Wis. Stat. § 118.019](#) defines medically accurate as “information that is scientifically-based and published, where appropriate, in peer-reviewed journals and textbooks.” Districts can meet this requirement by having a school nurse, local public health nurse, or physician review their curriculum. Some curricula written at the state or national level may already have been reviewed for medical accuracy.

What does state statute say about teaching LGBTQ+ topics?

State statutes do not provide guidance on teaching LGBTQ+ topics. There is no language that prohibits or requires teaching about any topic related to gender identity or sexual orientation. Moreover, the HGD statute prohibits discrimination in HGD courses. It reads “(2d) Nondiscrimination. An instructional program under this section shall use instructional methods and materials that, consistent with [Wis. Stat. § 118.13\(1\)](#), do not discriminate against a pupil based upon the pupil’s race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or ethnic or cultural background or against sexually active pupils or children with disabilities.”

Frequently asked questions

The following are common questions about the statute and related guidance. The purpose of these FAQs is to provide quick answers to common questions and organize useful information.



Are there “off the shelf” sexual health curricula that school districts can use to meet Wisconsin statute requirements?

There are many evidence-based and evidence-informed curricula that are medically accurate, age-appropriate, and meet Wisconsin state statute requirements. One curricula that has been used successfully in many places is the [Rights, Respect, Responsibility \(3Rs\) curricula](#), developed by Advocates for Youth. This curriculum includes several stand-alone lessons for grades K-12 that are available **free of charge** that can be grouped together as desired to form a district’s HGD instruction. The Wauwatosa School District developed their HGD plan with the 3Rs curricula, which can be referenced on their [district website](#).

Many other curricula also meet Wisconsin state statute requirements in part or in full and have been used successfully in Wisconsin schools. Costs and training requirements of these curricula vary. Many have content for youth across many grade bands.

Below are some curricula that have been used successfully in schools across Wisconsin:

- [Positive Prevention Plus](#) for upper elementary, middle school, and high school youth. This curriculum also includes a version for special education students in middle and high school.
- [Making Proud Choices](#) for middle school and high school youth.
- [Wyman Teen Outreach Program](#) for middle school and high school youth.
- [Our Whole Lives curriculum](#), which includes programming for grades K-12.

The lessons for each age group for each of these curricula can be used in part or in their entirety to cover the statute-required and statute-suggested HGD topics.

If you would like help selecting a HGD curriculum, reach out to the DHS Adolescent Health Team at DHSAdHealth@dhs.wisconsin.gov or the DPI Student Services Team at dpisspw@dpi.wi.gov.

Resources

Below are various resources to consult when considering Human Growth and Development instruction, including recent Wisconsin survey results and factsheets.



[Human Growth & Development](#): A Resource Guide to Assist School Districts in Policy and Program Development and Implementation from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI). The purpose of this resource guide is to provide school districts with information and resources to develop effective HGD programs in their schools that reflect the values and norms of the local community.

[National sex education standards](#): The National Sex Education Standards (NSE) outline the foundational knowledge and skills students need to navigate sexual development and grow into sexually healthy adults.

[Wisconsin Public Health Association's resolution](#) for comprehensive sexual education for Wisconsin schools.

[Parental Support for Comprehensive Sexual Education in Wisconsin](#), a summary of attitudes and opinions from Wisconsin parents and caregivers based on a statewide survey. Survey respondents live across all five public health regions in Wisconsin and represent a broad range of age, income level, education, and political and religious affiliations.

[Student's Thoughts on Sexual Health Education in Wisconsin](#), a summary of what youth think should be included in their school-based sexual health education. Youth thoughts were gathered at two focus groups conducted with teens ages 14 to 17 from several communities across Wisconsin.

Partnerships

This resource was created through collaboration and teamwork between individuals at the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to support districts and schools in providing human growth and development instruction across Wisconsin.



Wisconsin Adolescent Health team, Wisconsin Department of Health Services

The team supports the wellbeing, growth, and safety of Wisconsin's young people. It promotes this unique stage of life as one where youth find out who they are and want to be. Learn more about our programs on the [Adolescent Health in Wisconsin webpage](#).

Bureau of Teaching and Learning, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

The bureau provides statewide leadership and support to ensure all Wisconsin students have access to rigorous, relevant, and inclusive academic learning opportunities. The bureau also supports a wide range of student services programs that promote whole-child development, wellness, and safety.

If you have any questions about human growth and development instruction, reach out to the DHS Adolescent Health team, DHSAdHealth@dhs.wisconsin.gov or the Student Services team at the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, dpisspw@dpi.wi.gov.

