



SUMMARY OF RHODE ISLAND'S LINDSAY ANN BURKE ACT

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LINDSAY ANN BURKE ACT

The Rhode Island General Assembly passed this act in 2007 in memory of Lindsay Ann Burke, who died at age 23 at the hands of an abusive boyfriend. The act requires all public middle and high schools to teach students about how to recognize and avoid dating violence, defined as "a pattern of behavior where one person uses threats of, or actually uses, physical, sexual, verbal or emotional abuse to control his or her dating partner." It also requires schools to establish a dating violence response policy.

QUESTION

Summarize Rhode Island's Lindsay Ann Burke Act, and describe Connecticut programs that educate students about dating violence and healthy relationships.

SUMMARY

The 2007 Lindsay Ann Burke Act (R.I. Gen. Laws Ann. §§ 16-85-1 and 16-85-2) requires Rhode Island school districts to establish a policy for responding to dating violence and educating staff and students on recognizing and addressing such violence.

Unlike Rhode Island, Connecticut does not require school districts to develop dating violence policies or teach about dating violence specifically in health class; however, Connecticut does require school boards to

conduct teacher and staff training on recognizing teen dating violence. Additionally, the State Department of Education (SDE) and the Department of Public Health (DPH) are undertaking initiatives to prevent teen dating violence and promote healthy relationships. SDE is providing curriculum guidelines for health education teachers to use in the classroom, and DPH is leading the development of a strategic plan to address sexual violence in Connecticut, which includes teen dating violence.

SUMMARY OF THE ACT

The Lindsay Ann Burke Act requires each district to develop a dating violence response policy and dating violence education program (R.I. Gen. Laws Ann. §§ 16-85-1, 16-85-2, 16-21-30 and 16-22-24).

Dating Violence Response Policy

The act required Rhode Island 's Department of Education to develop a model dating violence policy for school districts by April 1, 2008. Subsequently, school districts had to develop their own policies to address student dating violence by December 1, 2008. Each policy had to include the following elements:

1. a statement that dating violence will not be tolerated,
2. procedures for reporting dating violence,
3. guidelines for responding to dating violence incidents that occur at school, and
4. procedures for disciplining students who commit acts of dating violence.

School districts must publish the policy in their student handbooks, inform parents and guardians of the policy, and provide them with copies of the policy upon request. Districts also must verify compliance with the act in the annual school health report submitted to the Department of Education.

In addition, each school district must train all of its administrators, teachers, nurses, and mental health staff on how to address dating violence. (Other staff may voluntarily attend the training, or an administrator may direct staff to attend.) The training must include (1) understanding basic principles of dating violence, (2) recognizing warning signs of dating violence, and (3) complying with the district's dating violence policy.

The law also strongly recommends, but does not require, that districts provide parent awareness training.

Dating Violence Education Program

The act also requires school districts to incorporate an age-appropriate dating violence education program in their grade-seven-through-12 health curriculum that includes (1) a definition of dating violence and (2) instruction on how to recognize the warning signs of such violence and characteristics of healthy relationships. The Department of Education must assist school districts by reviewing and approving grade-level dating violence and healthy relationship topics in the Rhode Island health education curriculum framework.

Upon written request, districts must allow parents or legal guardians of students under age 18 to view the program's instruction materials at the school their child attends.

CONNECTICUT LAW AND COMPARABLE INITIATIVES

School-Based Professional Development Requirement

State law requires local and regional boards of education to provide in-service training programs for their teachers, administrators, and staff on teen dating violence and domestic violence programs ([CGS § 10-220a](#)). It also directs the

State Board of Education (SBE), within available appropriations, to assist and encourage boards to include teen dating violence and domestic violence in their in-service training programs. SBE has developed a [webpage](#) and webinar that provides resources needed to comply with this law.

Guidelines for Sexual Health Education

State law requires schools' health and safety curriculum to address the broad topics of physical, mental, and emotional health, but it does not specifically require school districts to include dating violence in the health curriculum ([CGS § 10-16b\(a\)](#)). SBE encourages districts to address this gap.

In 2006, SBE approved the [Healthy and Balanced Living Curriculum Framework](#), which outlines standards for health class instruction. These standards do not address dating violence awareness instruction, but SBE encourages the inclusion of dating violence as part of the health and safety curriculum in its [Guidelines for the Sexual Health Education Component of Comprehensive Health Education](#), a companion document to the curriculum framework. *Guidelines* helps school districts develop policies, programs, curriculum, and instruction in sexual health education and covers healthy relationships and teen dating violence.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE PREVENTION

DPH addresses teen dating violence within a broader initiative aimed at preventing sexual violence. It leads a Sexual Violence Prevention Planning Committee, created in 2007 with key partners from around the state to develop an eight-year sexual violence prevention plan that includes school-based prevention and intervention strategies. This initiative is supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention under a cooperative agreement to strengthen and expand the state's capacity to effectively prevent first-time perpetration and victimization. The [Sexual Violence Prevention Plan](#) and [Toolkit and Resource Guide](#) are available as resources to school communities.

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