

# Human Sexuality Curriculum in Connecticut and California

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January 29, 2021 | 2021-R-0047

## Issue

Compare Connecticut's human sexuality curriculum with California's curriculum established by state law in the California Healthy Youth Act.

## Summary

In Connecticut, state law does not require public school districts to offer human sexuality as part of their health classes, while California's Healthy Youth Act does. Generally, Connecticut law allows school districts to decide whether to include human sexuality in their health curriculum. However, Connecticut law does require schools to offer some elements found in the California act: AIDS instruction, sexual abuse and assault instruction, and parental waivers for student participation in such instruction and in human sexuality instruction generally. Additionally, many other elements required by the California act are mirrored in the optional curriculum frameworks approved by the Connecticut State Board of Education (SBE) for public school health programs.

## General Requirements in State Law

### *California*

The California Healthy Youth Act, enacted on January 1, 2016, integrated the instruction of comprehensive sexual health education and HIV prevention education and required all school districts to offer it to students in grades 7-12 ([Cal. Educ. Code §§ 51930-51939](#)).

Under the law, “comprehensive sexual health education” refers to education about human development and sexuality, including education on pregnancy, contraception, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) ([Cal. Educ. Code § 51931](#)). “HIV prevention education” is defined as instruction on the nature of HIV and AIDS, methods of transmission, strategies to reduce the risk of HIV infection, and social and public health issues related to HIV and AIDS ([Cal. Educ. Code § 51931](#)).

## ***Connecticut***

Connecticut law requires public schools to include health and safety as part of their program of study, but it does not require human sexuality to be a topic in the health curriculum. The law instructs SBE to develop curriculum guides that boards of education may use if they wish to develop “family life education programs” in their respective school districts. This curriculum includes the topic of family planning and human sexuality, among others ([CGS § 10-16c](#)). Connecticut law explicitly states that family life education programs are optional, not required, programs of study for districts to implement ([CGS § 10-16d](#)).

SBE has developed the “Healthy and Balanced Living Curriculum Framework,” which it makes available to districts as an optional health and safety program. The [January 2020 draft curriculum framework](#) contains various content standards for grades Pre-K through 12, including content on sexual health. ([PA 19-91](#), Section 7 required the State Department of Education to update the 2006 comprehensive school health education component of the Healthy and Balanced Living Curriculum Framework by January 1, 2020, to include sexual harassment and assault, adolescent relationship abuse and intimate partner violence, and human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation.)

## **Comparison of Specific State Requirements**

Table 1 compares elements of the California Healthy Youth Act with Connecticut law governing human sexuality and HIV/AIDS Education. Where Connecticut law is silent, the table identifies relevant curriculum frameworks (focusing on grades 6-8 and 9-12) that districts have the option to use.

**Table 1: Human Sexuality and HIV/AIDS Curriculum Delivery and Topics in California and Connecticut**

| Elements            | California Law                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Connecticut Law or Curriculum Framework                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Delivery</b>     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Frequency           | <p>Requires both comprehensive sexual health and HIV prevention education to be taught at least once in middle school and once in high school using instructors trained in the appropriate courses (<a href="#">Cal. Educ. Code § 51934(a)</a>)</p> <p>Allows either subject to be taught earlier than grade 7 using trained instructors and age-appropriate, medically accurate information on certain topics listed in the law (<a href="#">Cal. Educ. Code § 51934(c)</a>)</p> | <p>Specifies that no board of education is required to develop or institute a family life education program for its school district (<a href="#">CGS § 10-16d</a>)</p> <p>Draft curriculum guide recommends 12 hours of sexual health education per grade sequence (generally two-year blocks) (<a href="#">page 45</a>)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Instructor training | <p>Requires school districts to periodically conduct in-service training for all personnel who provide HIV prevention education (<a href="#">Cal. Educ. Code § 51935(a)-(c)</a>)</p> <p>Allows districts to expand required HIV in-service training for instructors to also cover comprehensive sexual health education (<a href="#">Cal. Educ. Code § 51935(d)</a>)</p>                                                                                                          | <p>No specific periodic in-service training requirement in state law for human sexuality educators</p> <p>Generally requires school districts to provide in-service training for all certified teachers, administrators, and pupil personnel on health and mental health risk reduction education that includes the prevention of risk-taking behavior by children and the relationship of such behavior to substance abuse, pregnancy, and STIs (including HIV and AIDS), among other things (<a href="#">CGS § 10-220a(a)(2)</a>), as amended by <a href="#">PA 19-100</a>)</p> |

Table 1 (continued)

| Elements                           | California Law                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Connecticut Law or Curriculum Framework                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Consultants and guest speakers     | Allows school districts to contract with outside consultants or guest speakers with the appropriate expertise to (1) deliver comprehensive sexual health and HIV prevention education or (2) train district personnel ( <a href="#">Cal. Educ. Code § 51936</a> )                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Not addressed in state law or draft curriculum guide                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Parent/guardian notice and consent | <p>Allows parents or guardians to excuse their child from all or part of the comprehensive sexual health and HIV prevention education and related assessments through an opt-out process; prohibits districts from requiring active consent through an opt-in process (<a href="#">Cal. Educ. Code §§ 51938(a) &amp; 51939</a>)</p> <p>Requires districts to notify parents or guardians at the beginning of the school year (or at the time of new student enrollment) about the planned instruction for that year, including (1) instruction materials available for inspection, (2) whether the instructors will be district personnel or outside consultants and guest speakers, and (3) the opt-out option for their children (<a href="#">Cal. Educ. Code § 51938(b)</a>)</p> <p>Allows anonymous, voluntary, confidential surveys to be administered to students in grades 7-12 to measure their health behaviors and risks; parents or guardians may excuse their child through an opt-out process (<a href="#">Cal. Educ. Code § 51938(c)</a>)</p> | <p>Allows parents or guardians to exempt their children from participating in family life education programs; allows partial or complete exemption through written notice from the parent or guardian to the school board (<a href="#">CGS § 10-16e</a>)</p> <p>Allows parents or guardians to exempt their children from participating in AIDS education programs upon written request (<a href="#">CGS § 10-19(b)</a>)</p> |

Table 1 (continued)

| Elements                    | California Law                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Connecticut Law or Curriculum Framework                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Topics</b>               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| HIV and other STIs          | <p>Must teach about their nature, effects on the human body, manner of transmission, infection risk according to specific behaviors, and infection prevention and treatment methods (<a href="#">Cal. Educ. Code § 51934(a)(1)-(2), (4)-(6)</a>)</p> <p>Must discuss social views, stereotypes, and myths about HIV/AIDS and those living with them (<a href="#">Cal. Educ. Code § 51934(a)(7)</a>)</p> | <p>Requires all boards of education to offer planned, ongoing, systemic instruction about AIDS; content and scheduling is at the boards' discretion (<a href="#">CGS § 10-19(b)</a>)</p> <p>Addressed in draft curriculum guide for grades 6-8 (<a href="#">Standards Sexual Health (SH) 1.2.8-1.11.8</a>, pages 17-18) and grades 9-12 (<a href="#">Standards SH 1.5.12-1.11-12</a>, page 25)</p> |
| Local resources             | <p>Must provide information about local resources students have a legal right to access for (1) sexual and reproductive health care and (2) sexual assault and intimate partner violence (<a href="#">Cal. Educ. Code § 51934(a)(8)</a>)</p>                                                                                                                                                            | <p>Not addressed in state law</p> <p>Addressed in draft curriculum guide for grades 6-8 (<a href="#">Standard SH 1.1.8</a>, page 17) and grades 9-12 (<a href="#">Standard Sexual Assault/Abuse Education and Prevention (SAAP) 1.6.12</a>, page 26)</p>                                                                                                                                           |
| Pregnancy and contraception | <p>Must provide information about effectiveness and safety of contraceptive methods in preventing pregnancy, including an objective discussion of all available pregnancy outcomes, including parenting, adoption, and abortion (<a href="#">Cal. Educ. Code § 51934(a)(9)</a>)</p>                                                                                                                     | <p>Prohibits the state-developed family life education program curriculum guide from including information pertaining to abortion as an alternative to family planning (<a href="#">CGS § 10-16c</a>)</p> <p>Addressed in draft curriculum guide for grades 9-12 (<a href="#">Standards SH 1.1.12-1.13.12</a>, pages 27-28)</p>                                                                    |

Table 1 (continued)

| Elements                                                        | California Law                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Connecticut Law or Curriculum Framework                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Sexual harassment, assault, and abuse; human trafficking        | Must provide information on these topics; human trafficking information must include (1) risk-reduction strategies and (2) role of social media and mobile devices to facilitate ( <a href="#">Cal. Educ. Code § 51934(a)(10)</a> ) | Requires school districts to implement a program developed by the Department of Children and Families in grades K-12 that includes the skills to recognize child abuse and assault, boundary violations and unwanted forms of touching and contact; does not have to be part of the health and safety education program ( <a href="#">CGS § 17a-101q(a)(2)</a> )<br><br>Addressed in draft curriculum guide for grades 6-8 ( <a href="#">Standards SAAP 1.1.8-1.12.8</a> , pages 18-19) and grades 9-12 ( <a href="#">Standards SAAP 1.1.12-1.13.12</a> , pages 26-27) |
| Adolescent relationship abuse and intimate partner violence     | Must provide information, including early warning signs ( <a href="#">Cal. Educ. Code § 51934(a)(11)</a> )                                                                                                                          | Not addressed in state law as part of a required curriculum topic<br><br>Addressed in draft curriculum guide for grades 9-12 ( <a href="#">Standards Healthy Relationships (HR) 1.10.12 &amp; 1.11.12</a> , page 23)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Electronic sharing of sexually suggestive or explicit materials | May be addressed in the curriculum, with a focus on risks and consequences of creating and sharing the material using various electronic methods ( <a href="#">Cal. Educ. Code § 51934(b)</a> )                                     | Not addressed in state law as part of a required curriculum topic<br><br>Addressed in draft curriculum guide for grades 6-8 ( <a href="#">Standard HR 1.11.8</a> , page 16) and grades 9-12 ( <a href="#">Standard HR 1.4.12 &amp; 1.7.12</a> , pages 22-23)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |

Table 1 (continued)

| Elements                                               | California Law                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Connecticut Law or Curriculum Framework                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|--------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Abstinence from sexual activity and injection drug use | Must be taught within the context of comprehensive sexual health and HIV prevention education as the only certain way to prevent infections and pregnancy ( <a href="#">Cal. Educ. Code § 51934(a)(3)</a> )                                                | Not addressed in state law as part of a required curriculum topic<br><br>Addressed in draft curriculum guide for grades 9-12 ( <a href="#">Standards HR 1.8.12</a> , page 23 & <a href="#">SH 1.6.12 &amp; 1.7.12</a> , page 25)                                |
| Sexual orientation and gender identity                 | Must be taught using instruction and materials that affirmatively recognize different sexual orientations, including same-sex relationships, and teach students about gender expression and identity ( <a href="#">Cal. Educ. Code § 51933(d)(5)-(6)</a> ) | Not addressed in state law as part of a required curriculum topic<br><br>Addressed in draft curriculum guide for grades 6-8 ( <a href="#">Standard HR 1.1.8</a> , page 16) and grades 9-12 ( <a href="#">Standard HR 1.8.12</a> , page 23)                      |
| Committed relationships                                | Must be taught using instruction and materials to address the value of, and prepare students to have and maintain, committed relationships such as marriage ( <a href="#">Cal. Educ. Code § 51933(f)</a> )                                                 | Not addressed in state law or draft curriculum guide                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Healthy relationships                                  | Requires instruction and materials to provide knowledge and skills students need to form healthy relationships free from violence and coercion and to make healthy decisions about sexuality ( <a href="#">Cal. Educ. Code § 51933(g)-(h)</a> )            | Not addressed in state law as part of a required curriculum topic<br><br>Addressed in draft curriculum guide for grades 6-8 ( <a href="#">Standards HR 1.1.8-1.11.8</a> , page 16) and grades 9-12 ( <a href="#">Standards HR 1.1.12-1.12.12</a> , pages 22-23) |

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