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## SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

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# Health Education K-12 Learning Standards Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

## What is the purpose of Health Education instruction?

The purpose of Health Education instruction is to provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary to make decisions that positively impact health throughout their lifetime, including treating others with respect, reducing incidences of bullying and suicide, increasing health-enhancing behaviors, and decreasing risk behaviors.

## What are learning standards?

Learning standards are required and define what all students should know and be able to do. Standards are worded broadly to allow flexibility with district and classroom implementation. (See [Definitions and Requirements](#) for more information.)

## What are the new Health Education K-12 Learning Standards?

**Standard 1:** Students will comprehend concepts related to health promotion and disease prevention to enhance health.

**Standard 2:** Students will analyze the influence of family, peers, culture, media, technology, and other factors on health behaviors.

**Standard 3:** Students will demonstrate the ability to access valid information and products and services to enhance health.

**Standard 4:** Students will demonstrate the ability to use interpersonal communication skills to enhance health and avoid or reduce health risks.

**Standard 5:** Students will demonstrate the ability to use decision-making skills to enhance health.

**Standard 6:** Students will demonstrate the ability to use goal-setting skills to enhance health.

**Standard 7:** Students will demonstrate the ability to practice health-enhancing behaviors and avoid or reduce health risks.

**Standard 8:** Students will demonstrate the ability to advocate for personal, family, and community health.

Joint Committee on National Health Education Standards. (2007). *National Health Education Standards, Second Edition: Achieving Excellence*. Washington, D.C.: The American Cancer Society. Access at the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

## Are schools required to adopt the new standards? When will the new standards be implemented?

Yes. The Washington state learning standards listed above are the required elements of instruction. Other content in the standards document (e.g. grade-level outcomes, core ideas, topics) is not required. The new standards will be implemented starting in the 2017-18 school year.

## Why were the Health Education K-12 Student Learning Standards revised?

Learning standards are usually revised every 6-8 years to meet new legislative requirements and to reflect new knowledge in the field. Washington's Health Education standards were last revised in 2007 and adopted in 2008.

## Who revised the Health Education K-12 Student Learning Standards?

A team of 13 teachers, all leaders in their areas of instruction, drafted the 2016 Health Education K-12 Learning Standards. They represented diversity in grade level, district size, and region of the state. The standards were also reviewed by a committee of K-12 administrators, professionals in the field of health education, and a bias and sensitivity committee before being released for public comment.

## Does the law require a particular process for standards revision and adoption?

No.

## Did parents have an opportunity to provide input on the standards before they were adopted?

Yes. OSPI provided a 30-day public comment period for the general public. Notice of the public comment period was given through an official OSPI Bulletin, email distribution lists, and sent directly to the Washington Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), Educational Service Districts (ESDs), and posted on the OSPI Facebook page and website.

## Who makes decisions about what curriculum to use in public schools and when are decisions made?

Curriculum decisions are the responsibility of each school district and each district has its own curriculum adoption process.

## Who can teach the new health standards in schools?

Any teacher or other qualified staff, such as a school nurse, can teach the standards in schools, as assigned by a district. Best practices suggest a certified health and physical education specialist is a strong choice to teach the new Health standards in school.

## Who decides whether a student meets a health standard?

Each district, and typically each teacher, decides how assignments and courses will be graded.

## Can parents opt their children out of health education?

Yes and no. Students in Washington must complete a half-credit of health education in order to graduate. However, each district establishes policies and procedures related to opting students out of specific areas of instruction.

## Are any health education topics required to be taught?

Yes. Schools are required by law to teach four health topics:

- HIV/AIDS (Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome) prevention education is required per the AIDS Omnibus Act ([RCW 28A.230.070](#)).
- CPR and AED instruction (cardio-pulmonary resuscitation and use of automated external defibrillators) are required per HB 1556, passed in 2013 ([RCW 28A.230.179](#)).

- Prevention of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) is required to be taught per the Common School Provisions ([RCW 28A.230.020](#)).
- Mental health and suicide prevention (RCW 28A.230.095)

## Are districts required to teach sexual health education?

Other than providing HIV/AIDS & STD prevention education (see above), districts may choose whether or not to provide sexual health education. All sexual health education, including HIV/AIDS and STD prevention, must comply with the [2007 Healthy Youth Act](#) and [RCW 28A.300.145](#) related to the legal elements of sexual offenses where a minor is a victim.

The Healthy Youth Act requires that when teaching sexual health education, schools **must assure that the instruction:**

- Is medically and scientifically accurate.
- Is age-appropriate.
- Is appropriate for students regardless of gender, race, disability status, or sexual orientation.
- Includes information about abstinence **and** other methods of preventing unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, neither to the exclusion of the other.
- Is consistent with the 2005 [Guidelines for Sexual Health Information and Disease Prevention](#).

## Are schools required to teach students about self-identity or transgender?

No. Districts around the state are grappling with questions related to gender identity, same-sex marriage, bullying related to sexual orientation and other related topics. If provided, age-appropriate instruction about these topics, with a focus on empathy and understanding, serves to significantly reduce stigma in the learning environment and thereby supports each student's ability to learn and feel safe at school. The [National PTA recently adopted a resolution](#) that supports this kind of instruction.

## For more information

- The 2016 [Washington State K–12 Learning Standards for Health Education](#)
- OSPI's [HIV/Sexual Health Education Site](#)

