



## Health Standards Talking Points for *Community Advocates*

### WHY IMPLEMENT HEALTH STANDARDS

- Effective health education helps young people navigate sexual development and become healthy adults. It builds on a foundation of knowledge and skills relating to human development, decision-making, abstinence, contraception and disease prevention.
- According to the Centers for Disease Control, effective health education provides materials that are free of cultural bias but includes information, activities and examples that are inclusive of diverse cultures and identities (such as gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age, physical/mental ability, appearance and sexual orientation).
- The Health Education standards released by the Nebraska Department of Education were created and reviewed by teachers, medical professionals, school psychologists, sexual health professionals, community health educators, researchers and parents/caregivers. They were written to be in alignment with the Nebraska Board of Education's Non-Discrimination and Equitable Educational Opportunities Position Statement to ensure all Nebraskans, across all backgrounds and circumstances, have equitable access and opportunities for success.
- In Nebraska, 57% of students have sex by the time they graduate high school, and yet only 8% of students have ever been tested for an STD. We need advocate for students to have access to shame-free information so they can care for their health and well-being.

### NEED FOR EFFECTIVE HEALTH EDUCATION

- Most school districts in Nebraska do not have sexual orientation and gender identity written into their standards as key scientific concepts. Standards that reflect all students' identities create affirming and protective school environments that are linked to emotional well-being and academic success.
- Health education that is age-appropriate, complete and honest should be the standard for all students in Nebraska. Early conversations on gender identity and expression protect students' well-being and their ability to make informed decisions about relationships in their lives.
- According to the Academy of Pediatrics, children have a stable understanding of their gender identity by age four, including the gender-role stereotypes that can be harmful. Basic health education includes these developmentally appropriate conversations in order to protect their futures.
- Decades of rigorous research is conclusive—comprehensive health education supports students' well-being while abstinence-only education is not only ineffective, but scientifically and ethically problematic.
- Comprehensive sex education helps young people by delaying the age of first sexual intercourse, reducing unprotected sex and reducing unintended pregnancy. It also improves mental health outcomes and reduces dating violence.

# FACTS FOR COMMUNITY ADVOCATES

**Young people need access to age-appropriate, honest and complete health information to protect their health and plan for their futures.**

Effective health education helps young people navigate sexual development and become healthy adults. It builds on a foundation of knowledge and skills relating to human development, relationships, decision-making, abstinence, contraception and disease prevention. The Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) is leading a group of educators and experts in developing the [Nebraska Health Education Standards](#), creating a framework for K-12 health education in our state. NDE is led by an elected board, who will ultimately vote on these health standards in fall of 2021.

**Effective health education helps young people navigate sexual development and become healthy adults.** The new health standards:

- Provide a framework for **students to develop skills** and knowledge for **healthy outcomes**;
- Include **essential, age-appropriate** introductions to the concepts of **gender identity** and **expression** and **sexual orientation**;
- Connect important **safety lessons of consent and safe touch to minimize sexual abuse** of young people;
- **Align with the [Non-Discrimination and Equitable Educational Opportunities Position Statement](#)** of the Nebraska Board of Education to “ensure **all Nebraskans, across all backgrounds and circumstances, have equitable access and opportunities for success.**”

Complete, honest and **inclusive health education promotes** social and emotional learning that contributes to **academic achievement, fewer truancies, reduced risk-taking** and **healthy relationships**.

It's past time for schools in Nebraska to update their health standards to reflect the lived realities of **all young people**, including LGBTQ youth and youth of color. This will **create school environments where young people feel seen, heard and respected**.

## YOUR VOICE MATTERS!

How do you show up to support young people in your community? These new health standards will positively impact all young people and your support can help set the standard for health education in our state. **The Nebraska Board of Education needs to hear from you!**

### Take Action!

Contact [your Nebraska State Board of Education member](#) to let them know that **you support inclusive, complete, honest and equitable health education standards**. Share your expertise or personal experience regarding access to effective health education. Additional talking points are on the next page.

The State Board of Education meets on the first Friday of every month, except in July. The vote on the health standards is tentatively scheduled for fall 2021. Your consistent support for this process is needed to ensure that all young people have access to effective health education in Nebraska.

## YOUNG PEOPLE NEED EFFECTIVE HEALTH EDUCATION



**1 in 3**

high school students experiences dating violence by the time they turn 18.



**17.7%**

of all Nebraska high school students seriously consider attempting suicide with

**60.1%**

of these students identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual and questioning (LGBQ).



LGBTQ youth who report having at least one accepting adult were

**40%**

less likely to report a suicide attempt.



**57%**

of Nebraska high school students have sex by the time they graduate high school.