

National Teacher Preparation Standards for Sexuality Education

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Sexuality Information and Education
Council of the United States

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Introduction

The *National Teacher Preparation Standards for Sexuality Education* were created to provide guidance to programs within institutions of higher education in order to better prepare undergraduate pre-service students to deliver sexuality education.

The development of the *Teacher Preparation Standards* are part of the ongoing Future of Sex Education (FoSE) Initiative, which has as its goal that every young person in public school has high quality, comprehensive sexuality education that is developmentally-, culturally- and age-appropriate.

In the United States, sexuality education is most commonly taught within the health and/or physical education (PE) curriculum at the middle and high school levels. In the elementary grades, individual classroom teachers teach health in addition to every other subject area. So while the overall FoSE initiative is focused on instruction in grades K through 12, the *Teacher Preparation Standards* focus specifically on preparation programs that train health and PE teachers most likely to be teaching in middle and high school.

About the Standards

There are seven standards in total:

Standard 1: Professional Disposition

Teacher candidates demonstrate comfort with, commitment to and self-efficacy in teaching sexuality education.

Standard 2: Diversity and Equity

Teacher candidates show respect for individual, family and cultural characteristics and experiences that may influence student learning about sexuality.

Standard 3: Content Knowledge

Teacher candidates have accurate and current knowledge of the biological, emotional, social and legal aspects of human sexuality.

Standard 4: Legal and Professional Ethics

Teacher candidates make decisions based on applicable federal, state and local laws, regulations and policies, as well as professional ethics.

Standard 5: Planning

Teacher candidates plan age- and developmentally-appropriate sexuality education that is aligned with standards, policies and laws and reflects the diversity of the community.

Standard 6: Implementation

Teacher candidates use a variety of effective strategies to teach sexuality education.

Standard 7: Assessment

Teacher candidates implement effective strategies to assess student knowledge, attitudes and skills in order to improve sexuality education instruction.

Each of the Teacher Preparation Standards is presented below along with a rationale, set of indicators and examples.

Teacher Preparation Standards for Sexuality Education

Standard 1: Professional Disposition

Teacher candidates demonstrate comfort with, commitment to and self-efficacy in teaching sexuality education.

Research shows that comfort with and commitment to sexuality education has a direct impact on teaching ability. Well-prepared teachers need to first and foremost appreciate the value of sexuality education and believe it is important for young people to have access to the information and skills they need to make healthy decisions. Research demonstrates that it is imperative that teachers demonstrate comfort with, commitment to and self-efficacy in teaching sexuality education. Teachers without these qualities should not teach this topic.

INDICATORS

Successful teacher candidates will:

- 1.1 Demonstrate the ability to teach in ways that communicate that sexual development is an inherent part of child and adolescent development.
- 1.2 Describe the importance of sexuality education as an integral part of K-12 health education.
- 1.3 Demonstrate awareness of their own personal values, beliefs, biases and experiences related to sexuality education.
- 1.4 Demonstrate how their personal values, beliefs, biases and experiences can influence the way they teach sexuality education.
- 1.5 Model self-efficacy to teach sexuality education in age- and developmentally-appropriate ways.
- 1.6 Select their own continuing professional development needs relating to school-based sexuality education.

EXAMPLES:

In a health class, a teacher is required to cover the topics of condoms and contraception as part of the sexual health unit. He believes that students at this age should not be having sex, but refrains from expressing his personal views to ensure that students receive factual information about condoms and contraception and to fulfill his district's content requirements.

A teacher introduces a puberty lesson to a middle school class. When showing an image of male and female genitals, the classroom erupts in laughter and students shift in their seats, making jokes and blushing. The teacher calmly acknowledges the discomfort and moves on purposefully to teach the rest of the material in the lesson.

Standard 2: Diversity and Equity

Teacher candidates show respect for individual, family and cultural characteristics and experiences that may influence student learning about sexuality.

There is tremendous diversity represented in US classrooms. Often, "diversity" refers to race, culture and ethnicity. Within sexuality education, however, there are other forms of diversity to consider as well, such as family structure (e.g., single parents, step parents, teen parents); religious affiliation; social, emotional and physical developmental level; sexual orientation; gender identity and expression; sexual history; and relationship abuse. These visible and invisible diversities are present in every classroom and affect how students learn. Effective teachers are respectful of multiple dimensions of diversity and tailor instruction appropriately.

INDICATORS

Successful teacher candidates will:

- 2.1 Demonstrate the ability to create a safe and inclusive classroom environment for all students.
- 2.2 Describe how students' diverse backgrounds and experiences may affect students' personal beliefs, values and knowledge about sexuality.
- 2.3 Demonstrate the ability to select or adapt sexuality education materials that both reflect the range of characteristics of the students and community and respect the visible and invisible diversities that exist in every classroom.

EXAMPLES:

For a lesson on HIV, a teacher announces that she has

invited an HIV-positive person from the community to talk to her class about what it is like to live with the virus. The teacher facilitates a discussion about the stigma and shame that can be related to HIV, the various ways in which someone can and cannot become infected with HIV and how stigma and shame can prevent people from getting tested.

A health teacher is teaching about relationship issues. He uses language inclusive of lesbian, gay and bisexual youth and includes scenarios involving same-sex couples for students to read and discuss as part of the lesson.

Standard 3: Content Knowledge

Teacher candidates have accurate knowledge of the biological, emotional and social aspects of human sexuality and the laws relating to sexuality and youth.

Many educators receive little or no professional preparation in sexuality education. This is highly problematic, as human sexuality is a complex topic area. Sufficient and current knowledge of sexual development and the biological, emotional, and social aspects of sexuality is essential for the successful teaching of sexuality education. Effective sexuality education teachers, at a minimum, will have familiarity with all of the topic areas described in the *National Sexuality Education Standards, Core Content and Skills, K-12*.

In addition, effective sexuality education teachers will understand relevant federal and state laws specific to sexuality and youth (e.g., age of consent) and know the sexual health resources available to students in their community.

INDICATORS

Successful teacher candidates will:

- 3.1 Describe accurate and current content, as reflected in the *National Sexuality Education Standards*¹, in the following topic areas:
 - a. anatomy and physiology;
 - b. puberty and adolescent development;
 - c. sexual orientation and gender identity and expression;
 - d. pregnancy and reproduction;
 - e. sexually transmitted diseases and HIV;
 - f. healthy relationships; and
 - g. personal safety.
- 3.2 Explain the stages of child and adolescent sexual development including cognitive, physical and emotional changes.
- 3.3 Describe at least three health behavior theories relevant to sexual health promotion.

¹ Future of Sex Education Initiative. National Sexuality Education Standards: Core Content and Skills, K-12. [A special publication of the Journal of School Health.] Available at www.futureofsexed.org/fosestandards.html.

3.4 Describe current federal and state laws relating to sexuality that have an impact on youth.

3.5 Demonstrate the ability to identify accurate and reliable sources of information to keep their own sexuality-related content knowledge current and relevant.

3.6 Demonstrate the ability to identify valid and reliable sexual health information, health products and community services relevant to students.

EXAMPLES

In a high school health class, some students raise questions about emergency contraception (EC). A few insist that only girls can obtain EC over the counter, and only if they are at least 21 years old. The teacher corrects the misinformation. He also tells students which web sites and other resources will give them medically- and legally- accurate information about EC.

A recent episode of a popular television show depicts a scenario in which a man is charged with statutory rape. The students are arguing about the accuracy of the show and whether or not laws exist that say how old one must be to consent to have sex. The teacher provides information about the law in their state.

Standard 4: Legal And Professional Ethics

Teacher candidates make decisions based on applicable federal, state and local laws, regulations and policies as well as professional ethics.

Teaching sexuality education can pose unique ethical and legal challenges for a teacher. This includes, but is not limited to, student disclosure or teacher suspicion of sexual abuse, incest, relationship abuse or other behaviors that threaten student health and well-being. Students may also disclose sexual activity, sexual orientation, gender identity, pregnancy or STD/HIV status, and more. In all instances, it is important for teachers to understand their professional obligations and adhere to state, federal and district policies that pertain to confidentiality and reporting these types of disclosures.

Teachers also may be presented with situations in which the laws, policies and/or regulations are unclear or lacking. Teachers need to have an ethical framework for decision-making about when to keep information confidential, when to make a referral, when to seek guidance within their school system or when they should report a situation to law enforcement. In every instance, teachers should be knowledgeable about their school district policies and procedures and the resources that are available to them.

Finally, most states have a code of ethics for school professionals that describes how they should conduct themselves professionally in and out of the classroom. Teachers should be familiar with and follow these codes of ethics.

INDICATORS

Successful teacher candidates will:

- 4.1 Explain how to determine relevant state and school district reporting laws and procedures relating to student disclosure regarding sexual abuse, incest, dating violence, and other associated sexual health issues.
- 4.2 Explain the policies and ethics associated with student confidentiality relating to sexuality and sexual health issues.
- 4.3 Describe when and from whom to seek guidance on sexuality-related ethical/legal matters when there is no policy or the policy is unclear.
- 4.4 Differentiate between professional and unprofessional conduct with students, both in and outside of the classroom and school.

EXAMPLES

A student shares with her health teacher that she took a home pregnancy test and it was positive. Her teacher knows that while being pregnant is not something he is legally required to report to the student's parents, he seeks out guidance from his supervisor about how best to proceed.

A middle school health teacher is approached after class by a student who asks, "If I tell you about something that happened to me, will you promise to keep it secret?" The teacher explains that she must report certain kinds of information by law, and the student says "Okay, then never mind," and walks away. The teacher feels unsure how to proceed, and consults with a supervisor, who suggests giving the student the contact information for a confidential adolescent help line.

Standard 5: Planning

Teacher candidates plan age- and developmentally-appropriate sexuality education that is aligned with standards, policies and laws and reflects the diversity of the community.

There are numerous factors to consider when planning instruction in any subject area. Sexuality education, however, poses additional issues to consider given that some states have specific laws regarding what can and cannot be taught, what topics must be emphasized or how instruction should be delivered (e.g., same-gender classrooms). As such, it is especially important for teachers to plan lessons that meet state and local policies and standards, and to understand the process/protocol for getting these lessons approved.

It is also incumbent upon teachers to know what resources are available to them and are approved for use during the planning process. These include, but are not limited to: state and local policies, the Sexual Health Module within the Health

Education Curriculum Analysis Tool (HECAT),² district, state and/or national standards (including the *National Sexuality Education Standards*), and curricula and other materials that have already been approved or adopted by their state or local board of education.

Effective teachers will plan course content that takes into account the available local and state health and education data; developmental stages; physical and cognitive abilities and diversities of the students in the classroom, including family structure; religious affiliation; sexual experience; parenting status (i.e., teen parents); sexual orientation; gender expression and identity; dating violence; sexual abuse and pregnancy/STD history, including HIV status.

Planning for sufficient time for students to practice skills—including analyzing influences, interpersonal communication and decision-making—is essential to effective sexuality education.

INDICATORS

Successful teacher candidates will:

- 5.1 Apply learning and behavioral theories to sexuality education lesson planning.
- 5.2 Apply state and/or district laws, policies and standards to select and adapt curriculum content that is appropriate and permissible for a district.
- 5.3 Identify appropriate resources and policies to guide instructional planning.
- 5.4 Plan effective strategies to teach sexuality education in the cognitive, affective and behavioral learning domains.
- 5.5 Plan age- and developmentally-appropriate sexuality education instruction.

EXAMPLES

A health teacher is planning lessons to address prevention of STDs and unintended pregnancy. Her state law says that if any sexual health topics beyond HIV are taught, the school must "stress abstinence." She is confused about whether she can teach about safer sex practices, so during lesson planning, the teacher verifies that she can still teach about the health benefits of condoms even while emphasizing the benefits of postponing sexual activity.

To teach about pregnancy options, a health teacher shows a video and organizes a panel of teen parents to talk about their experiences. As part of the planning, the teacher reviews school policy about inviting guest presenters, and screens the panel in advance to be sure that their presentations meet school guidelines.

² The Sexual Health Module within the Health Education Curriculum Analysis Tool (HECAT), developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, can help schools conduct an analysis of sexual health education curricula based on the National Health Education Standards and Characteristics of Effective Health Education Curricula. www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/hecat/index.htm.

Standard 6: Implementation

Teacher candidates use a variety of effective strategies to teach sexuality education.

For many students, taking a sexuality education class may be the first time they have had the opportunity to discuss sexuality openly with a trusted adult. Teachers should be prepared for a range of student reactions, which may present unique classroom opportunities and challenges.

Effective teachers create a classroom environment that sets clear classroom ground rules and expectations while acknowledging that there may be reactions to the content material that cannot be addressed via ground rules or expectations. Effective teachers, therefore, also encourage open, honest and respectful communication in the classroom and facilitate discussions that engage learners appropriately.

INDICATORS

Successful teacher candidates will:

- 6.1 Demonstrate strategies for creating a safe, respectful learning environment that fosters open discussion about a wide range of sexuality-related topics.
- 6.2 Demonstrate effective classroom management skills specific to sexuality education.
- 6.3 Convey accurate and developmentally-appropriate information about sexuality.
- 6.4 Engage learners using realistic and relevant situations relating to sexuality education.

EXAMPLES

A middle school health teacher posts some ground rules (also known as a group agreement) to introduce a multi-lesson unit on sexual health. One of the rules is that when students do not agree with someone else's viewpoint, they will express their disagreement respectfully. During a lesson on sexually transmitted diseases, a student ridicules another student who says he believes in abstinence. The teacher refers the class back to the ground rules and facilitates a brainstorm with the class on the pros and cons of choosing abstinence.

During a lesson on communication in healthy relationships, a teacher realizes that an activity in the health textbook uses scenarios in which couples are communicating only in person or by phone. The teacher asks students for examples of how the communication would look if the couples were texting or using a social media site.

Standard 7: Assessment

Teacher candidates implement effective strategies to assess student knowledge, attitudes and skills in order to improve sexuality education instruction.

All effective teachers assess student learning and revise their lesson plans accordingly. Assessing the sexuality education learning in the cognitive, affective and behavioral domains requires a wider repertoire of assessment strategies.

INDICATORS

Successful teacher candidates will:

- 7.1 Use multiple strategies to assess knowledge, skills and attitudes about sexuality that are measurable, observable and aligned with learning objectives.
- 7.2 Analyze assessment results and determine any necessary changes for future sexuality education instruction.
- 7.3 Apply assessment results to the continuous improvement of their sexuality education instruction.

EXAMPLE

A health teacher is deciding how to assess student learning for a unit on sexual health. She creates a variety of assessment and evaluation tools that reflect the learning objectives and take into account the variety of learning styles likely to be found among her students. The tools include pre- and post tests to assess increases in knowledge; portfolios for archiving journal entries or artwork to address student beliefs and attitudes about sexuality issues; and rubrics for role-play activities to allow the teacher to observe students as they demonstrate their mastery of communication and boundary-setting skills.