

Health Education Core Guides

Purpose: The intent of this document is to address concerns regarding health education core guides. The following provides background information, the process followed to develop and review the health education core guides, and the associated laws and policies.

Creation of Health Education Core Standards. The Utah State Board of Education adopted new Health Education Core Standards in April 2019. These standards went through a 12-step process for revision. The process includes a Standards Review Committee made up of 10 parents and 7 content experts, regular updates to the Board, a writing committee comprised of community experts and health educators, a 90-day public review, and final Board approval.

The community experts were from the following agencies and organizations: American Heart Association, Huntsman Cancer Institute, Intermountain Primary Children's Hospital, University of Utah Center for Community Nutrition, Utah Department of Health, Utah Division of Substance Abuse Prevention and Mental Health, Utah State University Department of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation, and Utah Valley University Department of Health Education.

Health Education Core Guides. To support implementation of the recently adopted Health Education Standards, USBE staff facilitated the development of Health Education Core Guides. The Health Education Core Guides were developed by teachers, staff, community organizations and prevention personnel across the state. The content to support educators in advancing their professional knowledge was provided by the same community organizations and state agencies that assisted in the development of the standards. The content was reviewed by teachers and USBE staff. Initially, adjustments to the first draft included removing soft links that had the potential of leading educators to other content not applicable to the standards.

Concerns Raised. In September 2019, concerns about the Health Education Core Guides were brought to the Board. The concerns include: inappropriate content, advocating for certain groups, or including resources that violate Utah law. Concerns have also been voiced that the resources are not age-appropriate or too advanced for lower grades.

Health Education Core Guide Purpose. All resources are intended to support content knowledge development for professional learning. Such support is essential as health is a constantly changing subject. New information, science, and products are always evolving. Health educators must remain current on health issues, data, and trends. Teachers take this content knowledge and couple it with their LEA's approved curriculum to develop the classroom instruction for students. Additionally, sometimes particular topics are difficult to research, such as the harmful effects of pornography. For example, if a teacher attempts to search a topic with the term "pornography", they are likely to be blocked or may even be found in violating policy and administration may be notified. By providing quality resources to address this expected area of instruction, the resources support teachers in their knowledge without putting them at risk.

Finally, there are concerns that the standards, resources, or curriculum is being chosen by or influenced by outside entities. This is inaccurate. The Health Education Core Guides were compiled with Utah State Board of Education's four-step review process:

- Step 1: A need for the guides was identified by multiple LEAs.
- Step 2: The guides were developed by USBE staff and community experts as previously listed.
- Step 3: The guides were reviewed by USBE staff, teachers, and community experts as previously listed.
- Step 4: The guides were reviewed by stakeholders prior to release.

Utah Law and Policy. Utah Code 53G-10-403 allows each parent in Utah to decide exactly what topics their student will learn in Health Education. The human development strand, which includes sex education for middle school and high school, is an opt in section of a health course. Parents can allow their student to participate in all lessons and activities, or they can select which portions of the human development strand their student will participate. Parents are further empowered by this section of Utah Code to review all materials, texts, worksheets, guest speakers, etc. before making the decision of which portions, if any, they will allow their student to attend. Or, a parent can opt out completely of the entire human development strand.

If the parent opts their student out of some or all of the human development strand, their student will not be tested or asked to complete any assignments they are opted out from. The student will instead be given an alternative assignment from a different area of the core (e.g., nutrition, substance abuse prevention, safety, disease prevention). Any student that does not return the signed parent consent form (opt-in) will not participate in the instruction of this human development strand. Again, Utah Code ensures that the parents are empowered with the choice and options they feel are personally best for their student. Finally, Utah Code 53G-10-402 requires that all Utah health teachers are trained in the laws and policies governing health instruction. Teachers are required to attend a law and policy course their first year of teaching health and teachers must renew this training every three years. Teachers understand they are required to follow the curriculum selected by their LEA and at no time can they provide instruction that violates Utah law. LEAs are responsible for tracking the training of teachers and report this back to USBE annually in the Sex Education Law and Policy Assurance form. We are proud to say that in the past two years we have a nearly 100% return rate of this form and all forms indicate adherence with Utah Code.

We are continually grateful to be in a state that honors and supports the rights of parents to make informed and empowered decisions regarding their student's education. The core subject of health is an important subject that involves content that must be vetted at all levels to make sure these rights are fully accessible and accurately executed. We are confident this is being accomplished through the rigorous requirements set forth by the legislature through the Utah Code, reinforced by USBE through administrative rule, and further refined by the continuous engagement of all invested stakeholders of the educational system in this the great state of Utah.