

## Improving Sex Education for Missouri Students

[SB 788](#) Sen. Jamilah Nasheed (D-5, St. Louis) | [HB 2234](#) Rep. Holly Rehder (R-148, Sikeston)

[HB 2285](#) Rep. Crystal Quade (D-132, Springfield)

*These bills have the potential to help empower young people to have safe and healthy relationships throughout their lives. By including consent, sexual harassment, and sexual violence in voluntary sex education programs, these bills are a modest but important improvement to Missouri's sex education laws.*

Sexual assault can happen to anyone, regardless of gender, race, age, sexual orientation, disability, or educational status. To end sexual assault in all communities, young people need high-quality, comprehensive, medically accurate sex education that helps prevent sexual assault – including lessons about communication, gender norms, consent, and healthy relationships. **Lawmakers should strengthen these bills to ensure that all Missouri students receive comprehensive, medically accurate, and inclusive sex education.**

**Sexual harassment and sexual violence are serious issues. Educating young people about the importance of consent can help reduce sexual coercion, harassment, and even assault.**

- Eighty-one percent of students in grades 8-11 report sexual harassment, and 87% say it has a negative effect on them. ([AAUW](#))
- People with intellectual disabilities are sexually assaulted at a rate seven times higher than those without disabilities. ([NPR analysis](#) of Justice Department reports)
- Individuals are at the highest risk for rape and sexual assault between the ages of 12 and 34. Young women are particularly at risk; females between the ages of 16 and 19 are four times more likely than the general population to be victims of rape, attempted rape, and sexual assault. ([RAINN](#))
- Teaching young people about consent, harassment, and assault will empower them to have safe and healthy relationships now and throughout their lifetimes.

**Missouri's sex education needs improvement. The promise of these bills is undermined by Missouri's outdated and restrictive sex education laws.**

- Currently, school districts may choose whether to provide sex education. School districts that opt to provide sex education may teach abstinence-only-until-marriage programs.
- Missouri law denies school districts the right to choose the instructors they want, hampering schools' ability to bring experts into the classroom.

- These bills require voluntary sex education programs to teach students about consent, sexual harassment, and sexual assault – key components of comprehensive sex education.
- All students deserve to learn about their bodies and healthy relationships by being taught comprehensive, medically accurate sex education that includes information on abstinence, the benefits of contraception, and healthy relationships.

### **Abstinence-only-until-marriage programs are dangerous, ineffective, and inaccurate.**

- Researchers who have evaluated abstinence-only-until-marriage programs have found disturbing results: students who receive abstinence-only-until-marriage sex education have increased sexual activity with less use of protection and contraception.
- The Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine recently declared that “abstinence-only programs threaten fundamental human rights to health, information, and life.” ([Advocates for Youth](#))

### **We know comprehensive sex education works.**

- Research has identified highly effective sex education and HIV prevention programs that affect multiple behaviors and/or achieve positive health impacts. Behavioral outcomes have included delaying the initiation of sex, as well as reducing the frequency of sex, the number of new partners, the incidence of unprotected sex, and/or increasing the use of condoms and contraception among sexually active participants. ([Advocates for Youth](#))

### **Medical experts, parents, and the public support comprehensive sex education.**

- Eighty-six percent of Missourians support teaching comprehensive sex education in schools. (Peter D. Hart Research Associates poll)
- Leading public health and medical organizations – the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Association, the American Psychological Association, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the Institute of Medicine Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine, the American Nurses Association, and the American Public Health Association – all stress the need for sex education that includes messages about abstinence and provides young people with information about contraception for the prevention of teen pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

### **Investing in sex education reduces unintended pregnancy AND saves taxpayer dollars.**

- The teen birth rate in Missouri declined 64% between 1991 and 2015, saving taxpayers an estimated \$70 million in 2015 alone compared to the costs they would have incurred had the rates not fallen. ([Power to Decide, the Campaign to Prevent Unplanned Pregnancy](#))
- For every dollar invested in family planning services, taxpayers save approximately \$7. ([Guttmacher](#))