

HB 177 (2nd Sub.) - Health Education Amendments

Sponsor: Rep. Carol Spackman Moss

This bill would enhance education for middle school and high school students in Utah to learn about consent including what does not constitute consent; sexual violence behavior prevention education; and information about resources for sexual assault survivors.

Background:

School based healthy relationships education provides information and resources for students so they can make decisions to navigate this component of health. Students in Utah experience teen dating violence at a high rate, and adults experience high levels of sexual assault. Utah updated the core curriculum standards for middle school and high school health education in 2019 and affirmative consent is included in high school standards. Building prevention skills and resources in middle school and high school prepares students to protect themselves and each other and to communicate with the trusted adults in their lives.

Talking Points

- **Health education in schools opens the door for parents to share their values.** Utah is one of five states that require “opt-in” permission where parents must affirmatively give consent for students to participate. School-based consent education allows parents to be the primary educator of their child on issues of bodily autonomy and consent.
- Consent education for younger students is focused on **body safety, boundaries, and communication**. This is an important steppingstone that can give them language for conversations they may have about dating and relationships later in life, including through adulthood.
- One in 11 Utah teens will experience dating violence. One in three women and one in six men in Utah experiences sexual violence in their lifetime.
- Sexual assault resources for survivors includes information about mental and physical health care that help individuals return to optimal health. Support for students can improve school attendance and academic success.
- Marginalized young people, including young people of color, LGBTQ young people, and adolescents with differing abilities, face barriers created by the lack of systemic support for their sexual health. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual high school students, for example, are more than twice as likely as their heterosexual peers to experience partner violence, be sexually assaulted by a partner, or be forced to have sex.
- Recent polling data shows that **65% of Utahns think students should be getting more information** about healthy relationships, Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), and birth control.