



Questions and Answers on the New Comprehensive Health and Physical Education Framework

Q: What are Massachusetts curriculum frameworks?

A: The Massachusetts curriculum frameworks are documents designed to standardize education across Massachusetts public schools so that all Massachusetts students learn substantially similar academic content regardless of the school they attend. According to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), the frameworks “provide teachers, students, and families with clear and shared expectations for what all students should know and be able to do at the end of each year.”¹

The frameworks establish curriculum standards but do not prescribe any specific curriculum.²

Q: Who creates the curriculum frameworks?

A: DESE drafts the curriculum frameworks, and the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) ratifies them.

Q: What features of the new Comprehensive Health and Physical Education Framework are most concerning?

A: The standards within the new Framework bring sensitive topics into the public school classroom beginning with the youngest learners.³ As early as PreK, students are expected to “use medically accurate names for body parts, including genitals” (see p. 19 of the Framework) and “demonstrate awareness of, and ways to show respect for different family structures,” including families with same-sex parents (p. 20).

Direct instruction on gender ideology and sexual function begins as early as 3rd grade, and by 5th grade students are expected to be able to “describe the differences between assigned sex at birth and gender identity, and explain how one’s outward appearance and behavior does not define one’s gender identity or sexual orientation” (p. 27). 5th graders should also be able to “explain the relationship between sexual intercourse and human reproduction” (p. 30).

Gender ideology is a prominent feature of many standards from 5th grade onward. As early as 6th grade, schools will further sexualize students, teaching them to “describe possible short- and long-term consequences (positive and negative) of engaging in sexual activity” (p. 32) and to “access credible sources of information about human sexual and reproductive health” – including information on contraception and abortion (p. 39).

By grade 12, students are expected to actively promote gender ideology and diverse sexualities, as the standards require them to “discuss how to foster empathy, inclusiveness and respect around issues related to sexuality (such as sexual activity, sexual abstinence, sexual orientation), gender expression, and gender identity,” and to “identify and support school and community policies and programs that promote safety, dignity and respect for all sexual orientations and people of all gender identities and gender expressions” (p. 51).

¹ <https://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/>.

² See <https://www.doe.mass.edu/learningstandards.html> (“Learning standards are not classroom curriculum. Curriculum lesson plans, books, materials, and other resources are all selected locally by the school district or by individual teachers.”).

³ The Framework is available at <https://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/current.html>.

Q: Are schools required to follow the curriculum frameworks?

A: For the core subjects of mathematics, science and technology, history and social science, English, foreign languages, and the arts, the frameworks are functionally mandatory for schools. For other subjects, including health and sex education, there is no law requiring that schools follow the frameworks.⁴

BESE evaluates school performance on an annual basis. One of the factors it uses in these evaluations is whether a school has effectively instructed students in core subjects according to BESE's curriculum frameworks. However, schools are not evaluated for their adherence to the frameworks for health or sex education.

Therefore, local school districts are not required to implement BESE's new Comprehensive Health and Physical Education Framework in their health and sex education curricula. There is no law which would impose a legal consequence on a school for choosing not to implement the Framework.⁵ Sex education is also not a required subject in Massachusetts public schools, so school districts can choose not to offer it.⁶ Finally, even in core subjects, local school districts have wide latitude to determine what curricular resources they will use to teach a given subject.⁷

If you have further questions or concerns about the new Comprehensive Health and Physical Education Framework in Massachusetts, contact Massachusetts Family Institute at info@mafamilly.org or (781) 569-0400.

⁴ See Executive Office of Education, *Healey-Driscoll Administration Proposes Comprehensive Health and Physical Education Curriculum Framework*, (June 21, 2023), <https://www.mass.gov/news/healey-driscoll-administration-proposes-comprehensive-health-and-physical-education-curriculum-framework> (describing health framework as "voluntary").

⁵ See M.G.L. c. 69, §§ 1D-1E; 1L-1K.

⁶ See M.G.L. c. 71, § 32A.

⁷ See <https://www.doe.mass.edu/learningstandards.html> ("Learning standards are not classroom curriculum. Curriculum lesson plans, books, materials, and other resources are all selected locally by the school district or by individual teachers.").

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