

Human Growth and Development Unit Introduction

Need for Human Growth and Development Instruction in Wisconsin Schools

Sexuality, and expression of one's sexuality, is an important part of each person's identity. Achieving healthy sexuality and learning about this aspect of ourselves begins at birth and continues throughout our lives. This important and multidimensional concept involves anatomy, physiology, and growth and development, including self-esteem, self-care, communication, values, an understanding of satisfying and healthy relationships, decision making, sexual intimacy, responsibilities of parenthood, and a host of other relevant topics.

Although parents are the primary sexuality educators of their children, children also receive messages about various aspects of sexuality from many other sources, including family members, friends, peers, schools, media, faith communities, and other institutions. Schools can be important partners with parents to provide children and adolescents with accurate and developmentally appropriate sexuality education or human growth and development (HGD) instruction.

Based on statewide rates, Wisconsin tends to have lower rates of risky sexual behaviors and negative health outcomes than the national averages. Nevertheless, some rates are unacceptably high. Key outcomes of human growth and development instruction typically include:

- Delaying initiation of sexual activity
- Promoting the use of protection and contraception when sexual activity is initiated
- Decreasing the number of sexual partners throughout the lifespan
- Decreasing substance abuse, specifically as it related to engaging in risky sexual activity
- Increasing positive communication around healthy sexuality throughout the lifespan

These outcomes are reached through the presentation of medically accurate information coupled with practicing communication, decision making and advocacy skills, among others.

Wisconsin statutes support human growth and development (HGD) instruction.

Relevant statutes include:

Wis. Stat. 115.35 Critical health problems education

Wis. Stat. 118.01 Educational goals and expectations, including instruction in physiology, hygiene, and sexually transmitted diseases

Wis. Stat. 118.019 Human growth and development instruction

Key components of the human growth and development statute include the Human Growth and Development Advisory Group. In addition, the law outlines seven topics that are required when human growth and development is taught.

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The HGD Advisory Group: School districts that offer human growth and development (HGD) must have an advisory committee appointed by the school board and composed of parents, teachers, school administrators, pupils, health care professionals, members of the clergy and other residents of the school district to advise the school board on the design and implementation of the human growth and development curriculum and to review the curriculum. Although no longer statutorily mandated, it is still recommended that the district's HGD curriculum be reviewed by the Advisory Group at least every three years. Adoption of this curriculum will include state level review for content and updates every three years.

No one category of member shall constitute more than one-fifth of the membership of this committee, except that parents may comprise more than one-fifth, but no more than one quarter of the members may be made up of employees of the school district.

Mandatory Content: There are topics that must be covered in the same semester that human growth and development is taught. These include:

1. Abstinence from sexual activity as the expectation for youth not in a committed relationship;
2. Abstinence as the only completely effective way to avoid STDs, HIV, and unplanned pregnancy;
3. Parental responsibility and the benefits of marriage for raising children;
4. Pregnancy, prenatal development and childbirth;
5. Adolescent sexual activity statutes and the sex offender registry.

This list is not all-inclusive and other topics may be taught in addition to the above. This curriculum includes skills practice as well as information on development, healthy relationships, sexually transmitted diseases including HIV, condoms and contraception and personal safety.

Copies of the statutory language can be found on the web at <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/lrb/>. Before adopting this curriculum as your Human Growth and Development unit, districts are advised to consult with their legal counsel for interpretation and application of the above statutes for local issues.

Creation of this Unit of Instruction

Using the National Sexuality Education Standards (NSES): The NSES address both the functional knowledge related to sexual health and required by Wisconsin statute, but also the specific skills necessary to adopt healthy behaviors. The skills areas align with both the Wisconsin Health Education Standards and the National Health Education Standards and are not necessarily dependent on content. All of the health education and sexuality education standards are based on research and theories of prevention that are most appropriate for young people. To see a complete copy of the National Sexuality Education Standards, go to www.futureofsexed.org.

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Peer Driven Design: This human growth and development unit of instruction was created with a grant from Advocates for Youth; School Health Equity Project. The grant enabled the Department of Public Instruction to support the formation of a state level cadre of health teachers to offer content and review towards the development of this unit of instruction. The support of the cadre also includes ongoing training and technical assistance as teachers across Wisconsin implement the curriculum. For information on the cadre or to schedule a training for your district or region, contact molly.herrmann@dpi.wi.gov or the Wisconsin Safe and Healthy Schools Project at <http://www.wishschools.org/>.

Effective Sexuality Education-Meeting the Desired Outcomes: It was essential to ground this unit in what the research indicates to be effective in reaching the above desired outcomes for sexual health education. What you will find in teaching these lessons is that each one includes some skill practice. There are many assessments throughout to measure both content knowledge and skill. In addition, most of the lessons are learner focused and involve active participation from students. It is difficult when time is short to focus on skill based instruction without feeling like you are sacrificing content. However students have access to more information than any other generation before them. It is essential that they have the opportunity to practice skills like accessing information and analyzing information for accuracy. Birth control methods may change in the future, but the ability to look up current methods, effectiveness, and where/how to access reproductive health care will serve students throughout their lifetimes.

Answering Difficult Questions Protocol

Many types of questions come up in the classroom. One of the reasons teachers fear teaching HGD is answering questions they get from students. Find out whether your school district supports you in answering all questions that students ask. Many districts do, as long as questions are answered in age appropriate ways. Included with this curriculum is a question answering protocol that could easily be shared with families so they understand how you will answer questions students may have during the teaching of this unit. Typically this will quiet everyone's concerns about whether or not the school is contradicting family or community values.

Literacy in all Subjects

In Wisconsin, disciplinary literacy is defined as the confluence of content knowledge, experiences, and skills merged with the ability to read, write, listen, speak, think critically, and perform in a way that is meaningful within the context of a given field. Resources can be found via this link: <http://dpi.wi.gov/standards/literacy-all-subjects>.

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Active Classrooms

Support the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans physical activity recommendations to increase opportunities for students to meet the recommended 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity every day. Incorporate into the lesson plans more daily physical activity by incorporating classroom activity breaks. Active Classroom ideas can be found via this link: http://sspw.dpi.wi.gov/sspw_physicaled.

References/Resources

- Answering Difficult Questions
- HGD Advisory
- HGD in WI - Laws & Policy