



Assess >>>>

Finding Policies & Programs

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Understanding your district’s policies on sexual health education (sometimes called human sexuality instruction) will help ensure that the curriculum you select meets district criteria. First, it is important to realize that there are two meanings to the term “policy.” In an institutional setting, “policy” may refer to the official, written rules that guide activities within the organization. In public schools, these often fall under the label “Board policy” because the local school board decides what rules to adopt for the district, and publishes these rules for employees and the public to view. However, “policy” may also refer to customary practice within the organization, such as the choice of a specific curriculum for instruction. These two definitions of “policy” are often in agreement, but there are instances where they are not. For example, someone might tell you “Our district has an abstinence-only policy” when it comes to sexual health education. This means that the curriculum they teach is abstinence-only in practice, but the Board policy might not require an abstinence-only curriculum (few districts in Texas have “abstinence-only” Board policies since most follow the state policy outlined in the Texas State Education Code).

Identifying what sexual health curricula are already approved for instruction in your district, and which are being implemented, is also useful information. Knowing your district’s Board policies and practices concerning approved and implemented curricula will help you better understand the social and political context in which you can recommend new policies and curricula for Board approval. Based on existing policies and your district’s needs, your SHAC might want to recommend a change in the district’s Board policy on sexual health education.

This tool will help you accomplish the following goals:

1. Find your district’s Board policy regarding sexual health education;
2. Determine which sexual health curricula or programs are approved for instruction in your district; and
3. Determine what sexual health curricula or programs are implemented in your school(s).



Assess >>>>

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TIPS FOR FINDING YOUR DISTRICT'S POLICY

- **Check your district's website** for official Board policies. A couple of things to search for:
 - Go to the menu link for **School Board**;
 - Look for **Board Policy Online** (or something similar) – this will link you to the Texas Association of School Boards (TASB) Policy On Line website which maintains an online record of policy manuals for all of the school districts in Texas;
 - Several windows are on the left-hand side of the Policy On Line webpage where you can locate the relevant policy on sexual health education:
 - In the “Go to Policy Code” window, you can enter the code for a specific policy if you know it (e.g., “EHAA”) and click “Go” to search for that policy;
 - In the “Browse Sections” window, you can click on the relevant section (“E. Instruction”) and scroll down to the relevant policy;
 - In the “Topic Index” window, you can click on the letter of the topic. Clicking on “S” and scrolling down to “sex education” will reveal the policies for that topic (EFAA and EHAA).
 - **EHAA** policy refers to “Basic Instructional Program: Required Instruction (All Levels),” and outlines the approved content of sexual health instruction for the district. **EFAA** policy refers to “Instructional Materials: Selection and Adoption,” and outlines how the Board may develop or select instructional materials for the district;
 - **Legal** policies refer to state or federal laws, while **Local** policies refer to amendments that the district’s Board has made to Legal policies;
 - If your district does not have a local policy [EHAA (Local)], refer to the **Texas State Education Code** on human sexuality instruction:
 - A detailed explanation of the Texas law related to sexual health education can be found in the **iCHAMPSS Understanding Texas Laws Facts & Tips Sheet**.
- **Key district administrative personnel** who might have this information include:
 - School Health Advisory Council (SHAC) Chairperson;
 - Secondary Science Curriculum Administrator/Coordinator;
 - District Health Services Coordinator.



Assess >>>>

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TIPS FOR DETERMINING WHAT PROGRAMS ARE APPROVED

- **Districts do not always keep a written record** of curricula/programs that are officially approved by the local School Board (other than possibly in Board meeting minutes after a vote). Therefore, you will likely need to approach individuals to identify approved programs.
- **Key district personnel** who might have this information include:
 - School Health Advisory Council (SHAC) Chairperson(s);
 - According to the Texas Education Code, the SHAC recommends sexual health education curricula for implementation, so this would be the first place to start when you are trying to find out which programs have been approved in your district;
 - Teachers: Health, Science, Physical Education;
 - School Principals, Nurses, Counselors, Librarians;
 - School Board Members;
 - District Superintendent.

TIPS FOR DETERMINING WHAT PROGRAMS ARE BEING IMPLEMENTED

- **Finding this information will often depend on the district's organizational structure**, as implementation procedures may vary according to the size of the district:
 - In small districts, district-level administrators will know what is going on in each school. So when you ask about what programs have been approved, they will also be able to tell you what program is being implemented and the details of its implementation;
 - Larger districts in big cities tend to give individual campuses more freedom to implement programs that match their particular neighborhood conditions, so administrators in the district's central office might not know what programs are taught in each school.
- **Since these curricula and programs are implemented at the school**, you should ask personnel (principals, teachers, and nurses) at the middle and high school campuses.
- **Not all programs being implemented may have been recommended by the SHAC** and approved by the Board. This is especially true for larger districts where administrators cannot monitor the implementation of programs on every campus, and not all teachers understand the strict adoption procedures outlined in district policies (i.e., EFAA [Legal]).