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October 19, 2026

State Board of Education
607 South Drive
Harrisburg, PA 17120

To the State Board of Education:

I welcome the opportunity to comment on the proposed updates to the commonwealth's Health, Safety, and Physical Education academic standards. I also write to thank the Board for including components of sexual health education, including consent and bodily autonomy. This is a meaningful step forward, and the Board deserves credit for it. However, I respectfully urge the Board to build on that progress and broaden the standards to include comprehensive sexual health education.

The evidence supports this approach. Comprehensive sex education is a method of teaching that has been shown to increase students' knowledge and awareness of sexual health, delay sexual activity, and increase contraception use. It has also been shown to reduce rates of STIs and unintended pregnancies. School-based programs on intimate partner violence and healthy relationships have been shown to reduce rates of intimate partner violence, decrease stigma, and increase knowledge of healthy relationships. In an era when young people can be exposed to digital misinformation about sexual health, these programs also build media literacy and skills that support informed decision making for a lifetime.

Pennsylvania is currently one of eighteen states that do not require sex education to be taught in schools. The only related requirement is that curricula address STDs and HIV, with abstinence stressed as a means of preventing transmission. Because there is no statewide requirement, each school board decides whether sex education is offered at all and how it is taught. As a result, students may receive inconsistent information that is not evidence-based, and access to high-quality health information depends on their zip code.

I urge the Board to ensure the updated standards include the following components of comprehensive sexual health education:

- Medically accurate information about bodies, puberty, STIs, pregnancy, contraception, mental health, and overall sexual health
- Education on consent, boundaries, and communication
- Information on healthy relationships and how to identify unhealthy behaviors
- Information on gender identity and sexual orientation
- Tools for goal setting and decision making
- Education on media literacy and digital communication

To help districts meet these standards consistently, I also ask that the standards instruct school districts to select curricula from a menu of options established by a Department of Education advisory group made up of sexual health educators, teachers, and sexual and reproductive healthcare practitioners. In addition, an impartial evaluation process is important to ensure that districts are adhering to the standards.

Pennsylvania's students deserve accurate, consistent, and age-appropriate health information no matter which school district they attend. I appreciate the Board's work on these standards and urge you to strengthen them as described above. If my office can be helpful in this effort, please call us at (717) 705-1875.

Sincerely,



Dan Frankel

State Representative, 23rd District