

2 of 79 [Result List](#) | [Refine Search](#)View:  [Citation](#) [HTML Full Text](#) [Print](#) [E-mail](#) [Save](#) [Add to folder](#)**Title:** *Kansas approves 'opt-in' sex ed: State is among only four to do so***Authors:** [and Melodee Hall Blobaum, David Klepper](#)**Source:** [Kansas City Star, The \(MO\)](#); 03/16/2006**Document Type:** Article**Accession Number:** 2W62W62189291873**Persistent link to this record:** [http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?](http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nfh&AN=2W62W62189291873&site=src-live)**Database:** Newspaper Source***Kansas approves 'opt-in' sex ed: State is among only four to do so***

~~~~~

David Klepper and Melodee Hall Blobaum

Mar. 16--TOPEKA -- **Kansas** has now joined a short list of states requiring permission slips for sex education.

The **Kansas** Board of Education voted 6-4 Wednesday to change the state's health education standards to mandate parental consent for the courses. Students whose parents don't sign the form, or forget, or never see the piece of paper, would be excluded from the class.

Arizona, Utah and Nevada have similar policies.

Though seen as a victory for the board's conservative majority, the "opt-in" requirement for sex education may have less practical effect than its backers hope.

Some school districts are certain to adhere to the new standards, officials said, but there's no penalty for districts that ignore them. And the Board of Education has little power to directly control local school boards.

Moreover, a bill in the Legislature could trump the opt-in decision by requiring all public schools to offer sex education as an "opt-out" class. The bill has passed the Senate, but no hearings are scheduled in the House.

Some local educators were disappointed with Wednesday's decision, saying it would be cumbersome to implement.

It's hard enough to get students to return permission slips for field trips that they're looking forward to taking, said Jean Ney, coordinator of fine arts and physical education for the **Kansas** City, Kan., School District.

"It's going to be a challenge to get kids to bring back permission slips saying, 'I want to learn about sex,' " she said.

But state board members who supported opt-in said they were reacting to concerns of parents who objected to the content of the classes. In addition to requiring consent forms, the new guidelines instruct local districts to send parents a list of topics to be discussed.

"This is not about denying education to students," said Board Chairman Steve Abrams of Arkansas City. "It's about empowering parents."

Before Wednesday's decision, most **Kansas** school districts required sex ed unless parents chose to remove their children from the course.

Board members who voted against the new standards said they wanted to leave the opt-in/opt-out decision to local boards.

"We could potentially deliberately deny students education, and I find that very, very troubling," said board member Sue Gamble of Shawnee.

Board member Bill Wagnon of Topeka called the decision misguided.

"I think all this is doing is further eroding the leadership of the state board," he said.

In recent months, the state board has generated controversy by voting to insert criticism of evolution theory into state science standards and hiring an anti-tax advocate, who had no experience as an educator, to lead the **Kansas** Department of Education.

As for sex ed, board member Kathy Martin said Wednesday that she wanted the state to go further and require abstinence-only sex education, with the failure to comply hurting the school's accreditation. Her idea probably will be discussed at a future board meeting.

About a quarter of the state's school districts, including the Olathe district, already offer abstinence-only courses.

The abstinence-only approach means that while contraceptives might be mentioned, the discussion centers on failure rates, the limits of contraceptives in preventing sexually transmitted diseases and their inability to protect teens from the emotional consequences of premarital sex, said Alison Banikowski, Olathe's associate superintendent of teaching and learning.

"We have one of the most conservative human sexuality curricula," Banikowski said.

About 85 parents asked to preview the sex ed curriculum last year, she said, and 15 opted their children out of a particular lesson.

Opponents of the opt-in policy, including some health instructors and reproductive rights groups,

argue that children who need sex education the most -- those engaging in risky sexual activity -- often have parents who are too busy or uninvolved to take the decision seriously. And they say schools already provide material to parents explaining what's covered in the classes.

"When you have an opt-in approach, it can make it harder for kids to access sex education," said Elizabeth Nash, public policy associate with the nonprofit Guttmacher Institute, which researches reproductive health issues.

An opt-out policy allows parents who strongly object to having their child in a sex education class to make that decision, she said, but doesn't block other students from the classes.

"We think comprehensive sex education is a good idea," Nash said.

Research has shown that courses with information about both abstinence and contraception encourage teens to delay sex and encourage those who are sexually active to use contraception, Nash said.

Nevada has had its opt-in policy since 1987, and the state's superintendent of public instruction said the participation rate is fairly high.

Keith Rheault said that's probably because Nevada parents are accustomed to the policy, and instructors provide the necessary information and forms early in the school year.

Rheault said he's had four daughters make their way through local sex education classes. Their health teacher told him that only one out of 120 students failed to return the required permission slip.

Though sex education is required, Rheault said, the state doesn't dictate the content of the courses, and that allows districts to adapt instruction to local needs.

"We have varying types of school districts, from Las Vegas, which is huge, to smaller rural communities like Lincoln County, which is 80 percent Mormon," he said. "(The policy) allows them some leeway as to what's taught."

Arizona doesn't require that schools offer sex education classes, but if they do, students must have parental permission to participate, said Doug Nicks, interim press secretary for the state's department of education. The state does not track participation rates.

What the state suggests

The curriculum standards for health approved by the **Kansas** Board of Education cover more than sex education. Among the expectations related to sex ed:

-- By the end of fourth grade, students should understand the relationship between well-being and health-related behaviors. Teachers might include lessons on stranger danger or resisting peer pressure.

-- By the end of eighth grade, students should understand the physical, emotional, social and physical effects of puberty. Teachers might ask students to identify the benefits of abstinence, have students identify male and female reproductive organs, or research a topic like date rape or sexually transmitted infections.

-- By the end of 12th grade, students should know the consequences of risky teen behaviors. Teachers might lecture on behaviors that increase the risk of various diseases or life-threatening situations, like dating violence.

To reach David Klepper, send e-mail to [dklepper@kcstar.com](mailto:dklepper@kcstar.com) or call 1-(785) 354-1388 .

Copyright (c) 2006, The **Kansas** City Star, Mo. Distributed by Knight Ridder/Tribune Business News. For information on republishing this content, contact us at (800) 661-2511 (U.S.), (213) 237-4914 (worldwide), fax (213) 237-6515, or e-mail [reprints@krtinfo.com](mailto:reprints@krtinfo.com).

Copyright of **Kansas City Star, The (MO)** is the property of Kansas City Star, The (MO). The copyright in an individual article may be maintained by the author in certain cases. Content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.

**Source:** Kansas City Star, The (MO), Mar 16, 2006

**Item:** 2W62W62189291873

View:  [Citation](#)   [HTML Full Text](#)   [Print](#)   [E-mail](#)   [Save](#)   [Add to folder](#)  
2 of 79   [Result List](#) | [Refine Search](#)

[Top of Page](#)

---

The *Student Research Center*™ is designed especially for youth in grades 6-12 - *powered by* EBSCOhost®



[EBSCO Support Site](#)

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Copyright](#)

© 2006 EBSCO Industries, Inc. All rights reserved.