



Coalition Advocating Responsible Education for Youth

An Act Providing Health Education in Schools

Sponsored by Representative Wolf and Senator Augustus

Goal:

An Act to Provide Health Education in Schools would insert health education, as defined by the Massachusetts Comprehensive Health Curriculum Frameworks and as required by the Supreme Judicial Court, into the core curriculum for public schools. School districts would be required to teach age-appropriate health education in grades K-12.

The Current Status of Health Education:

Some school districts have excellent health education programs. Other school districts have little or no health education as part of their curriculum.

In 1993, the Supreme Judicial Court required that the Commonwealth provide an adequate education for those enrolled in the public schools. It further defined “adequacy” by requiring that students possess specific capabilities including, “sufficient self-knowledge and knowledge of his or her mental and physical wellness”.¹

The Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE) created a science-based health education framework in response to the Supreme Judicial Court decision. However, the DOE has no mechanism to enforce the compliance of school districts unless health education is part of the core curriculum.

Why is this necessary?

Adding health education to the core curriculum affords students the opportunity to learn about a wide range of important topics such as nutrition, physical activity, mental health, safety and injury prevention, reproduction and sexuality, substance abuse prevention, violence prevention, consumer health, growth and development, family life, interpersonal relationships, disease prevention, ecological health and community health.

Results of the 2005 Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey² demonstrate that young people are very much in need of health education. Among Massachusetts youth:

- 51% had tried smoking cigarettes at least once in their lifetime.
- 27% engaged in at least one episode of binge drinking in the month prior to the survey.
- 13% had seriously considered suicide.
- Among sexually active students, only 65% used a condom the last time they had sex.
- 45% have had sexual intercourse in their lifetimes
- 29% were in a physical fight in the 12 months before the survey.
- 27% are overweight or at risk for being overweight.

¹ *McDuffy v. Secretary of the Executive Office of Education* (415 Mass. 545, p. 618)

² The Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey is conducted among high school students, grades 9-12.

The survey also found that risky behaviors are associated with lower academic achievement, and that health education can raise school attendance, graduation rates, and increase cognitive development and decision-making skills.

What is CARE for Youth?

CARE for Youth is a broad, statewide coalition of organizations and individuals that has formed to advocate for comprehensive health education in the public schools.

Who has joined CARE for Youth?

- Action for Boston Community Development, Inc.
- All Kinds of Girls (AKOG)
- American Federation of Teachers-Massachusetts
- AIDS Action Committee of Massachusetts
- American Association of University Women of Massachusetts
- American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts
- American Diabetes Association
- Asian Task Force Against Domestic Violence
- Big Sister Association of Greater Boston
- Boston College Women's Health Initiative
- Boston Public Health Commission
- Boston Teachers Union
- Boston University VOX
- Boston University Women's Center
- Boston Urban Asthma Coalition
- Cambridge Women's Commission
- Caribbean U-Turn
- Central Massachusetts Center for Healthy Communities
- Child Welfare League of America – New England Region
- Citizens for Public Schools
- Clark University VOX
- Coalition Organized for Health Education in Schools
- College Democrats of Massachusetts
- Community Coalition for Teens
- Comprehensive School-Age Parenting Program
- Deana's Fund
- Dimock Community Health Center
- Drug Policy Forum of Massachusetts
- Erna Yaffe Foundation
- Families First Parenting Programs
- Families for Depression Awareness
- FoodPlay Productions
- Framingham State College Women's Empowerment
- Girls' Coalition of Greater Boston
- Girls Incorporated of Holyoke
- Gloucester High School Health Center
- Greater Boston Diabetes Society
- Greater Boston PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays)
- Harvard Students for Choice
- Health Care For All
- Health Care of Southeastern Massachusetts, Inc.
- Health Quarters
- IMPACT
- Jane Doe Inc., The MA Coalition Against Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence
- Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action
- Jewish Community Relations Council
- Jewish Family & Children's Service
- Keshet, Inc.
- Lower/Outer Cape Community Coalition
- Massachusetts Adolescent Health Council – Appointed Members
- Massachusetts Alliance on Teen Pregnancy
- Massachusetts Asian & Pacific Islanders for Health
- Massachusetts Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance

- Massachusetts Democratic Future – Young Democrats of MA
- MEDA – Massachusetts Eating Disorder Association
- Massachusetts Family Planning Association
- Massachusetts Federation of Business & Professional Women
- Massachusetts Gay & Lesbian Political Caucus
- Massachusetts Health Council
- Massachusetts Nurses Association
- Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
- Massachusetts Teachers Association
- NARAL Pro-Choice Massachusetts
- National Alliance for the Mentally Ill – Massachusetts
- National Association of Social Workers-MA Chapter
- National Organization for Women – Massachusetts Chapter
- North Shore Health Project
- Northeastern Students for Choice
- Northeastern University Bouvé College of Health Sciences
- Northeastern University Feminist Student Organization
- Oiste, The Massachusetts Latino Political Organization
- Our Bodies Ourselves
- Pathfinder International
- Pathways to Wellness
- Peace Games Boston
- Physicians for Reproductive Choice & Health
- Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts
- Prevention First Coalition
- Promise the Children (Unitarian Universalist organization)
- Rape Crisis Center of Central MA
- REACH Beyond Domestic Violence
- Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
- School Age Child Care (SACC)
- Somerville Commission for Women
- South End Community Health Center
- Tapestry Health
- Teen Empowerment
- Teens Against Dating Abuse (TADA!)
- The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts, Inc.
- The Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women
- Triangle Inc.
- Tufts VOX
- UMass Dartmouth Women’s Resource Center
- WalkBoston
- Wellesley Women for Choice
- Women’s Bar Association of Massachusetts
- Women’s Health Institute
- Women’s Initiative, Central MA
- Women’s Sports Foundation
- Worcester County Chapter ACLU of Massachusetts
- Worcester Department of Public Health
- YWCA, Central Massachusetts
- YWCA, Western Massachusetts

Health education saves lives. Young people need access to comprehensive health education in order to make responsible decisions, prevent disease, reduce risky behaviors, and lead healthy lives.