



## Health Standards Talking Points for *Community Advocates*

### WHY IMPLEMENT HEALTH STANDARDS

- Effective health education helps young people navigate sexual development and become healthy adults. It builds on a foundation of knowledge and skills relating to human development, decision-making, abstinence, contraception and disease prevention.
- According to the Centers for Disease Control, effective health education provides materials that are free of cultural bias but includes information, activities and examples that are inclusive of diverse cultures and identities (such as gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age, physical/mental ability, appearance and sexual orientation).
- The Health Education standards released by the Nebraska Department of Education were created and reviewed by teachers, medical professionals, school psychologists, sexual health professionals, community health educators, researchers and parents/caregivers. They were written to be in alignment with the Nebraska Board of Education's Non-Discrimination and Equitable Educational Opportunities Position Statement to ensure all Nebraskans, across all backgrounds and circumstances, have equitable access and opportunities for success.
- In Nebraska, 57% of students have sex by the time they graduate high school, and yet only 8% of students have ever been tested for an STD. We need advocate for students to have access to shame-free information so they can care for their health and well-being.

### NEED FOR EFFECTIVE HEALTH EDUCATION

- Most school districts in Nebraska do not have sexual orientation and gender identity written into their standards as key scientific concepts. Standards that reflect all students' identities create affirming and protective school environments that are linked to emotional well-being and academic success.
- Health education that is age-appropriate, complete and honest should be the standard for all students in Nebraska. Early conversations on gender identity and expression protect students' well-being and their ability to make informed decisions about relationships in their lives.
- According to the Academy of Pediatrics, children have a stable understanding of their gender identity by age four, including the gender-role stereotypes that can be harmful. Basic health education includes these developmentally appropriate conversations in order to protect their futures.
- Decades of rigorous research is conclusive—comprehensive health education supports students' well-being while abstinence-only education is not only ineffective, but scientifically and ethically problematic.
- Comprehensive sex education helps young people by delaying the age of first sexual intercourse, reducing unprotected sex and reducing unintended pregnancy. It also improves mental health outcomes and reduces dating violence.