

SEX EDUCATION



Comprehensive Sex Education in New Orleans

In 2014 the Louisiana Public Health Institute began assessing school districts and charter operators (referred to as “school operators” in this report) in New Orleans for school readiness and capacity for expanding comprehensive sex education (CSE). The assessment included structured survey questions and key informant interviews with school personnel. This is a summary of CSE in New Orleans public schools as reported by the assessments and LPHI’s work with schools.

2018 Snapshot of Comprehensive Sex Education in Schools

5

Schools are teaching sex education on their own.

34%

of school operators have the required policy in place necessary to teach sex education.

81%

of school operators are ready and want sex education.

Introduction & Assessment Overview



The Adolescent Mapping Project

The Louisiana Public Health Institute (LPHI) developed The Adolescent Mapping Project in the fall of 2014 in order to create a statewide strategy to address the fragmented adolescent reproductive health system that currently exists. The project helped to identify areas of need and system gaps that could be translated into targeted community-oriented health, policy and education solutions.

Readiness assessments are critical to determining whether and how to move ahead with implementing comprehensive sex education in New Orleans Public Schools. It is important to understand how ready a school operator is to implement comprehensive sex education in order to determine where they are on the path to improving comprehensive sex education for students. This allows resources to be focused on school operators that are prepared for institutionalizing comprehensive sex education. The readiness assessment is important to predict the likelihood of meaningful improvement in comprehensive sex education. School operators that are not ready for implementation should work on improving readiness before planning for implementation.

LPHI's Adolescent Mapping Project's Local Education Agency Capacity Assessment Tool was adapted from the Common Core Capacity and Assessment Planning Tool from the Working to Institutionalize Sex Ed (WISE)¹ Initiative Method Toolkit.

This report covers the 35 capacity assessments completed in Orleans Parish as part of the Adolescent Mapping Project between 2014 and 2018.

¹Working to Institutionalize Sex Ed. *The Wise Method Toolkit*. Retrieved April 20, 2015 from <http://wisetoolkit.org/>.



Support for Sex Education

The assessments showed that 84% of school administrations support comprehensive sex education while 3% reported administration opposition. The remainder of respondents perceived the administrations to be divided or neutral on the topic. Thirty-four percent of assessments indicated community support for sex education while the majority of respondents perceived the community to be divided or neutral. No respondents felt the community would be opposed to sex education being taught in their schools.

11

School operators reported some level of community support for comprehensive sex education

(no school operators reported community opposition)

27

School operators reported administrative support for comprehensive sex education

(1 school operator reported administrative opposition)

Capacity and Readiness

The majority of school operators indicated sufficient capacity for sex education and willingness to build more capacity where necessary. Twenty-five percent of assessed school operators in New Orleans were ready to implement comprehensive sex education. Fifty-six percent of school operators were ready to take action toward comprehensive sex education.

While most school operators appeared ready, there were some that do not have the capacity for implementing sex education. Twenty-two percent are getting ready for sex education although they are not yet ready to take action. Three percent are not ready for comprehensive sex education.



Of the assessments completed:

8

School operators are ready to implement comprehensive sex education

Based on the findings of this assessment, “ready for implementation” represents:

- The school operator is planning to use a sex education curricula or already is using one.
- The school operator is planning steps to implement this programming or will do so in the coming weeks.
- The school operator has strong support from the administration.
- The school operator has strong support from the community.
- The school operator has sufficient staff time to devote to this programming and is in the process of building more, if necessary.

18

School operators are ready to take action toward comprehensive sex education

Based on the findings of this assessment, “ready for action” represents:

- The school operator is interested in using sex education curricula.
- The school operator would like to take action steps within one month.
- The school operator has adequate administrative buy-in for this programming.
- The school operator has adequate community buy-in for this programming.
- The school operator has sufficient staff time to devote to this programming, but needs to build more.

7

School operators are getting ready for comprehensive sex education

Based on the findings of this assessment, “getting ready” represents:

- The school operator is considering a sex education program.
- The school operator is interested in establishing programming and would like to take action steps within six months.
- The school operator has some administrative buy-in for sex education curricula.
- The school operator has some community buy-in for sex education.
- The school operator has little to no staff time to devote to implementing this programming.

1

School operator is not ready for comprehensive sex education

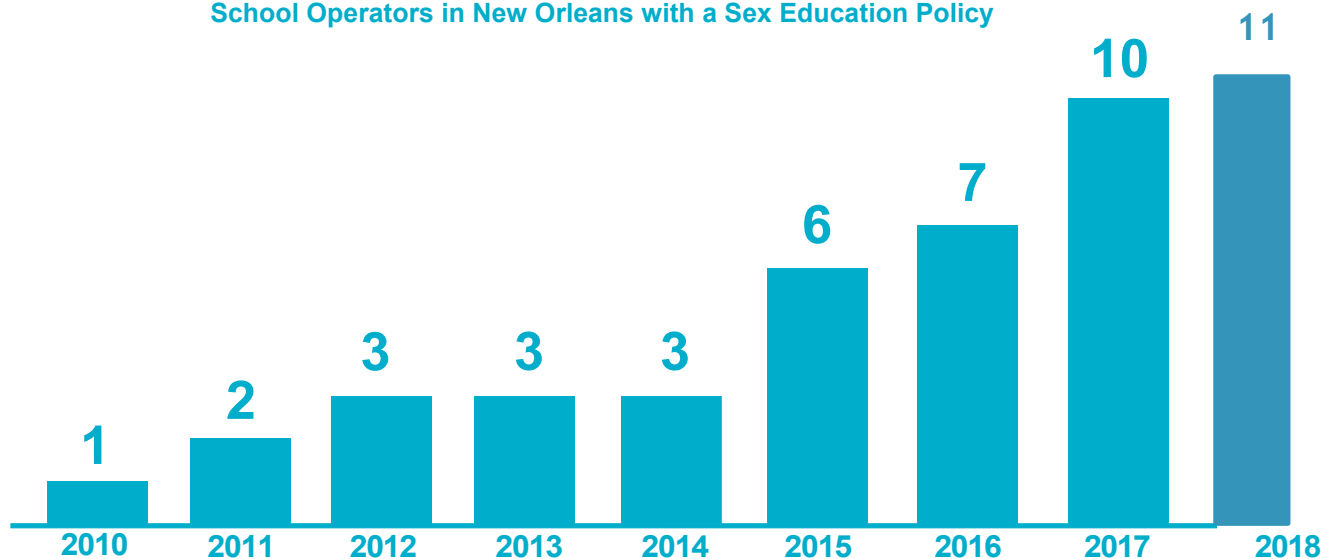
Based on the findings of this assessment, “not ready” represents:

- The school operator is not considering sex education.
- The school operator is not concerned with state or local policies.
- The school operator overall does not support sex education.
- The school operator does not have community support for sex education.
- There is no staff time to commit to implementing sex education.

Sex Education Policy

The Louisiana state sex education law (RS 17:281) requires that local education agencies that choose to teach sex education establish a local policy to “provide procedures for the administration” of sex education. The Orleans Parish School Board has a sex education policy, however as with all instructional policies, it only applies to direct-run schools, not charter operators. The majority of charter operators in New Orleans do not have a sex education policy in place. Initiating this process is a key step in building capacity to institutionalize comprehensive sex education. To assist schools with this process, LPHI has developed a Model Comprehensive Sex Education Policy.

School Operators in New Orleans with a Sex Education Policy



19



Number of schools covered by sex education policies in New Orleans.

Barriers

The primary barrier reported by school operators is lack of training. Many teachers have not received adequate training in this topic and are uncomfortable teaching it with their current level of preparation. There is no health certification for teachers in Louisiana, only a combined certification in physical education (PE) and health. Even teachers who are certified in PE/health education report not receiving adequate training in sexual health during their teacher preparation programs. Another common theme was not having sufficient funding to spend on instructional materials or teacher professional development. In part due to lack of funding, schools also reported not having the instructional materials necessary to teach comprehensive sex education (CSE). Many health textbooks that are commonly used in Louisiana only include information on abstinence without providing comprehensive information. Schools often do not feel that they have the staff time or classtime to devote to sex education, which is not required in Louisiana.

Primary challenges identified by school operators included:



Lack of staff training on CSE and comfort in teaching CSE



Lack of funding to train staff, purchase curriculum and commit staff time to teaching CSE



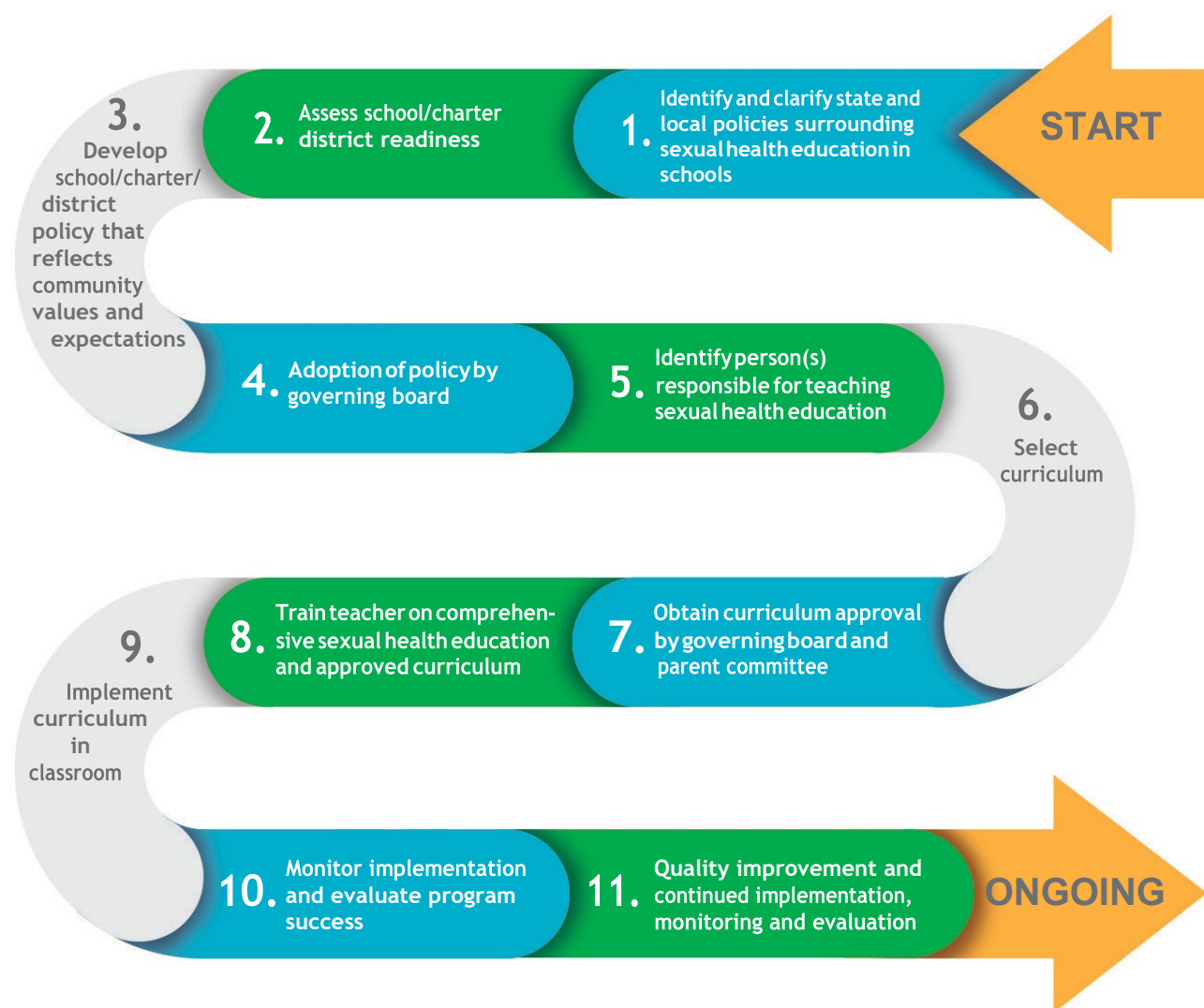
Lack of instructional materials



Limited staff time to devote to CSE

Roadmap for Successful Implementation of Comprehensive Sexual Health Education in Schools

LPHI has developed a Roadmap for Successful Implementation of Comprehensive Sexual Health Education in Schools that describes the concise steps necessary to put comprehensive sex education into practice in Louisiana schools. LPHI has worked with several charter operators to expand their capacity to successfully implement and ultimately institutionalize comprehensive sex education. Through this work, the steps necessary to integrate comprehensive sex education in Louisiana schools were identified and the Roadmap was developed. The Roadmap developed by LPHI mirrors the WISE¹ Method, which is a practice-based approach to implementing sexual health education that emerged from the experiences of the organizations participating in the WISE Initiative. The WISE¹ Method seeks to institutionalize sex education in school settings, which establishes it as a convention or norm within the school community. In order for this to occur, the necessary supports (policy, community, human resources, financial), must exist to sustain sexual health instruction over time. The steps identified for the Roadmap are:



¹Working to Institutionalize Sex Ed. *The Wise Method Toolkit*. Retrieved April 20, 2015 from <http://wisetoolkit.org/>.

Discussion

While progress has been made in New Orleans creating environments in which comprehensive sex education can be implemented successfully, there is much yet to be done. Since 2011, LPHI's work with charter operators to develop sex education policies has resulted in:

- Ten charter operators adopting comprehensive sex education policies, currently covering 17 schools
- Two individual schools adopting comprehensive sex education policies

Context

The decentralized public education system in New Orleans is unlike any other in the country: 98% of public schools in New Orleans are charter schools. This means that the Roadmap process must be fully completed with each charter operator in order to achieve institutionalization across the city.

In 2003, the Louisiana legislature created the Recovery School District (RSD) and began transferring authority of “failing” schools away from traditional school districts to RSD. The Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) retained authority over a few high performing schools in the city. By 2014, all the schools under RSD had been converted to charter schools and OPSB had also authorized several charter schools. The charter system drastically changed the educational system in New Orleans. Schools saw dramatic improvements in academic performance and graduation rates, however there are many challenges as well. In May 2016, the Louisiana legislature signed Act 91 which returned charter school authorization from RSD to OPSB for all RSD charter schools in New Orleans in July 2018. There remain a handful of charter schools authorized by the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) and the state legislature. A charter schools' authorizer determines which district policies the charter operator must follow.

The reunification of New Orleans public schools does not impact the instructional curriculum of each school. Policy and curriculum decisions are made at the charter level and each network retains the autonomy to design their own curriculum. Each charter has a different curriculum that is unique to each network. State law requires that districts have a sex education policy in place in order to teach sex education. Charter operators authorized by OPSB can choose to follow the district sex education policy or adopt a charter-level policy. The assessments show that only 22% of charter operators have a charter-level sex education policy.

The state sex education law has a carveout for OPSB allowing schools in the district to begin sex education in third grade, while schools in the rest of the state (and charters authorized by BESE or the legislature) cannot begin sex education until seventh grade. The OPSB sex education policy reinforces the ability for direct-run and charter schools in the district to begin sex education in third grade.

Assessment Successes

Despite challenges around school decentralization, 67% of all school operators in the city have been assessed and LPHI staff continue to engage the remaining charter operators in New Orleans for completion. Of the 35 completed assessments, 26 school operators are ready to take action or ready to implement sex education.

Assessment Challenges

Challenges faced throughout the assessment process stem from the decentralization of the school system in New Orleans, as well as from stigma around discussing sexual health. Each of the charter operators in New Orleans has a slightly different management structure, making identifying and locating the person with the knowledge to satisfactorily complete the capacity assessment difficult. However, even beyond the organizational difficulties, the stigma around sexual health makes many school staff uninterested and even unwilling to participate in the assessment. Additionally, the state sex education policy, which focuses on abstinence (but allows comprehensive approaches), has caused confusion among educators concerning what types of curricula are possible and legal.

How LPHI can Help

To help schools who are ready for action or implementation address the barriers they identified in the assessments, LPHI has developed a toolkit that will help guide schools through the Roadmap process.

(<https://lphi.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Sex-Education-Toolkit-Full-Version.pdf>) LPHI provides technical assistance and support to schools, districts, and charter operators to develop, adopt, and implement comprehensive sex education policies and programs in alignment with this toolkit. LPHI also offers a variety of trainings for school staff, including training on the state sex education law and core skills for teaching sexual health.



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About the Louisiana Public Health Institute (LPHI)

LPHI, founded in 1997, is a statewide 501(c)(3) nonprofit and public health institute that translates evidence into strategy to optimize health ecosystems. Our work focuses on uncovering complementary connections across sectors to combine the social, economic, and human capital needed to align action for health. We champion health for people, within systems, and throughout communities because we envision a world where everyone has the opportunity to be healthy. For more information, visit www.lphi.org.