



Curriculum Review Introduction and Methodology

In June of 2016 a group of eight reviewers were recruited via the Adolescent Sexual Health Work Group (ASHWG) to form an ad-hoc ASHWG sub-committee charged with reviewing a subset of comprehensive sexual health education curricula for alignment and compliance with the California Healthy Youth Act (CHYA). The group formed in response to extensive requests across California for guidance on which curricula meet the requirements of the new law (which went into effect on January 1, 2016). The review process was undertaken without funding but with the commitment of the participating organizations to allow staff to allocate time to the efforts.

The goals of this review were to: (1) provide school district staff, teachers, and community education providers with information about a number of widely available curricula in order to inform local processes for curriculum selection; and (2) provide curriculum publishers and authors input from an outside review group on the alignment of their materials with the CHYA.

These reviews should not replace local reviews by educators. These reviews do not reflect any endorsement from the agencies participating in the review process, including but not limited to the California Department of Education (CDE).

Reviewer Inclusion Criteria

We sought a diverse group of reviewers that represent a number of areas of expertise; have experience working in the field of sexual health education; and who are not linked to the publishing companies of any of the curricula included in the review. We also coordinated the group to include the HIV/STD Prevention Specialist from the CDE in order to provide expertise on the interpretation of the CHYA. During the course of the review, one reviewer left the review group due to conflicting work commitments, so the review group was supplemented with one of the group facilitators.

Curriculum Inclusion Criteria

Curricula were chosen based on anecdotal information about popularity of their use within California. We did not have the capacity to review any curricula intended for English language learners or students with disabilities, and this is noted in the results. Local education agencies (LEAs) will need to make modifications to ensure curricula are appropriate and accessible for their student population as stated in the CHYA.

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Curriculum Assessment Tool

The initial curriculum assessment tool was developed by ETR Associates. We modified their tool to accommodate a more granular level review and included clarification regarding policy interpretation from the CDE.

Review Process

Each reviewer received either a hard copy or electronic version of each curriculum. Reviewers had roughly one week per curriculum to read and grade using the tool. The review group submitted grades, and then discrepancies were discussed via phone conferences and group decisions were made regarding levels of compliance. Final comments and scores were edited, reviewed, and compiled into the final report forms.

Concurrently, medical content was pulled from each curriculum and submitted to clinicians for medical review. Medical reviewers included an infectious disease specialist from the California Prevention Training Center, an OB/GYN clinical fellow placed within the California Department of Public Health, STD Control Branch, and a team of clinical staff from the California Department of Health Care Services, Office of Family Planning. Due to the volume of information and copyright concerns, the completed medical reviews were sent directly back to the publishers and authors.

The final reports released for the public reflect a “gray” ranking for the medical accuracy criterion because all curricula had one or all of the following: medical inaccuracies; outdated information; and information/data that are not cited. The detail of the findings from the medical review was not available in a manner that allowed for group red/yellow/green grading assessments.

Grading System

We used a color-coding system for grading:

Green: Compliant as-is. This meets the base requirements of the education code. This ranking does not imply any assessment about the modality or address the depth of the content. We highly recommend LEAs review materials thoroughly, even when criteria are marked green.

Yellow: Not compliant, needs minor modifications. This criterion is not met entirely but requires only minor modification to become compliant (e.g. including a concept definition, or mentioning an additional birth control method). Occasionally, this grade was used when the facilitation instruction is unclear but can be reasonably modified for clarity. These changes can very often happen at the LEA level.

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Red: Not compliant, needs major modifications. The criterion is not met and the changes that need to be made are substantive, including removal of erroneous information, modification of thematic elements throughout a curriculum (such as heteronormative language), and/or a major topic is missing entirely. These changes may be feasible at the LEA level. Missing components or erroneous sections may be addressed through use of vetted guest speakers. We recommend that these changes be addressed by the curriculum publishers and authors.

The comments in the reports are notes from the review group edited into summaries to reflect the modifications that need to be made, suggestions or problems identified, and highlights of best practices.

Grey: More information is needed. There are a few criteria that are uniformly ranked with gray coloring. Some criteria are marked this way because the review team did not review all the available materials in order to provide a ranking (e.g. curriculum modified for students with disabilities). The “medical accuracy” criterion is marked grey uniformly to indicate that the range of medical review findings is not able to be represented in a green/yellow/red ranking. Publishers and authors have been sent full medical reviews.

Acronyms Used in Review

CHYA – California Healthy Youth Act

EC – education code

LEA – local education agency

LGBTQ – lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning

STD – sexually transmitted disease (interchangeable with STI)

STI – sexually transmitted infection (interchangeable with STD)

Limitations

We acknowledge that this group of reviewers did not include teachers and there are notable limitations in relying solely on those people who had access to the ASHWG application process, the time to review, and the organizational support to participate. Overall the resources to undertake this project were very limited and there may be information that was missed or errors in our assessments as a result. We strongly encourage LEAs to do their own reviews of curriculum and to visit the response pages of each publisher/author to assess any changes that have been made subsequent to this review.

In our review we noted that terminology used in lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning (LGBTQ) communities tends to evolve quickly and may vary across regions. We reviewed using our collective knowledge of best practices; however, these may not reflect the language and practices used by local LGBTQ students and communities. We encourage LEAs to develop relationships with local

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LGBTQ community agencies to provide the most appropriate information based on a current and localized sense of need.

There are a number of curricula that were not included in this review that may be resources for California schools to meet the requirements of CHYA. This review process was unable to fully represent the many curricula, programs, and educational partnerships in the state that provide comprehensive sexual health education to California's youth.

Next Steps

Publishers have space on the ASHWG website (www.ashwg.org) to post a link to their websites to address any changes that have been or will be made to their curriculum.

Currently we do not have the resources to re-review materials once changes are made, but we have tools and systems available for groups that want to take on their own review process. Please email ashwgca@gmail.com for more information.

For curriculum authors and publishers who were not included in this review who would like to be included in the future, please email ashwgca@gmail.com so we can track requests and connect interested parties if resources become available.
