



The Honorable Phil Murphy  
Office of the Governor  
P.O. Box 001  
Trenton, NJ 08625

April 27, 2022

Dear Governor Murphy,

The League of Women Voters of New Jersey is reaching out to express our concern with the movement to push back the implementation of the new Sex Education Curriculum Standards. We believe that every student in New Jersey deserves to receive an education in a safe environment, free from discrimination, harassment and abuse. Studies repeatedly show that quality sex education can reduce bullying and harassment, prevent abuse, and make it easier for young people to report if someone does try to harm them. We know how vulnerable young kids can be to bullying, abuse, and adult predators. That's exactly why we support New Jersey's Student Learning Standards, which the state created to promote the health and well-being of all students.

Thank you for your recent statement affirming the importance of sex education and the strength of the NJ Student Learning Standards.

“At a time when we must prioritize student mental health and academic recovery in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is paramount that our standards also promote inclusivity and respect for every child, including LGBTQ youth.”

Sex education is education. It teaches critical skills like healthy communication, boundary setting, and emotional literacy. It gives young people developmentally appropriate, medically accurate information and provides answers to their questions about their bodies and their relationships, without shaming or judging them for their experiences or feelings.

Sexual health education is already voluntary in New Jersey— any parent can opt their child out for any reason. The vast majority of parents recognize the importance of sex ed and support it being taught in schools.

Research shows that kids understand gender at a very early age. The Mayo Clinic and the American Academy of Pediatrics among many leading medical organizations say that most children have a sense of their gender identity by age four. In every classroom there are students who have questions about gender and gender identity. Teaching about gender identity doesn't change young people's gender or cause harm to their well-being. In fact, teaching that trans kids and their families exist and are worthy of respect helps protect all

students' mental health. Studies have repeatedly shown that in schools where LGBTQ students are acknowledged and supported, bullying goes down for all children.

Quality sexual health education in our schools has proven to reduce teen pregnancy and STI rates. Thirty years of public health research also shows that when students have access to comprehensive sexual health education, they are less vulnerable to adult predators trying to exploit their youth and insecurity. They are less vulnerable to intimate partner violence (and less likely to perpetrate it) if they understand the concepts of boundaries and respect. They are less likely to experience depression or to attempt suicide. They are safer.

We thank you, Governor Murphy, for considering the science, the medical research, and the mental and physical health of our children, and for standing in strong support of the SLS-CHPE that were adopted by the State Board of Education in 2020. We know that your administration understands that the standards are age- and developmentally appropriate and will have a positive impact on our state's young people. We applaud your efforts to ensure that the new Standards remain as approved. Our kids need comprehensive sexual health education, and they need you to be their champion.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jesse Burns". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jesse Burns, Executive Director  
League of Women Voters of New Jersey