



April 25, 2022

Dear Superintendent Ayala & Members of the Illinois State Board of Education,

My name is Nadeen Israel and I'm the Vice President of Policy & Advocacy at AIDS Foundation Chicago (AFC). On behalf of AFC, I submit to you the below comments regarding the JCAR proposed rule to implement Public Act 102-0522, the Keeping Youth Safe and Healthy Act (KYSHA).

The AIDS Foundation Chicago mobilizes communities to create equity and justice for people living with and vulnerable to HIV or chronic conditions. AFC envisions a future where all people living with HIV or chronic conditions, including our youngest residents, will thrive, and there will be no new HIV cases. **As a leader of Illinois' plan to [Get to Zero](#) new HIV diagnoses and zero people living with HIV not receiving care by 2030, AFC stands in strong support of the Illinois State Board of Education's (ISBE) adoption and implementation of the National Sex Education Standards (NSES).**

Comprehensive sexual health education is critical in giving Illinois' youth the information and skills needed to make responsible decisions and protect themselves. Young people in Illinois confront a barrage of information and situations related to health, safety, identity, sexuality, and personal well-being at different stages of growth and development. Far more adolescents are sexually active now than in recent decades. Rates of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, are on the rise among young people and disproportionately among young people of color (i.e. In 2019, there were 219 young people ages 13-19 living with diagnosed HIV in IL, the majority of whom were Black or Latinx). Providing age-appropriate education early and often gives even our youngest students the language and skills to navigate interactions and relationships, which research has shown increases students' ability to speak to trusted adults and report experiences like bullying and abuse. Guidance from families and schools is critical in fostering healthy sexual development and responsible behavior.

AFC strongly supports the Illinois State Board of Education's adoption of the National Sex Education Standards (NSES). The goal of sexual health education is to help young people navigate development and grow into healthy adults. Quality sexual health education goes beyond delivering information. It provides young people with opportunities to explore their own identities and values. It also allows young people to practice the communication, negotiation, decision-making, and assertiveness skills they need to create healthy relationships, sexual and nonsexual alike, throughout their lives.

During younger years, education that includes identifying body parts and safe versus unsafe touching and discusses reporting child sexual abuse increases self-protective knowledge and skills and makes it more likely for a child to tell someone about abuse. For teenagers, students who receive sexual health education, including sexual negotiations skills, are at lower risk of experiencing sexual assault during college. Further, sexual health education which aligns with the NSES increases acceptance of students who identify as LGBTQIA, many of whom are at disproportionate risk for school absenteeism, dropping out, bullying, and detrimental sexual health outcomes. Additionally, providing all students with education and resources surrounding parenting has been shown to decrease the stigma often faced by pregnant and parenting youth.

We appreciate the opportunity to submit these comments and look forward to the continued work ahead to ensure that all young people in IL are safe and healthy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nadeen Israel". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Nadeen" and last name "Israel" clearly distinguishable.

Nadeen Israel, Vice President, Policy & Advocacy

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