How much sex education a student gets in the public schools depends pretty much on where he or she lives. The state of Louisiana allows school systems to offer sex ed, but doesn’t mandate it.

In Lafayette Parish, sex education could begin in some classes as early as this fall. School officials have been working on incorporating sex education for three and one-half years, says Paul Long, math and science supervisor for Lafayette system and the chairman of the system’s sex education task force. Strangely, AIDS education is already a part of the curriculum.

“Actually, this probably should have been addressed years ago, but it just wasn’t,” says Long. The task force is trying to incorporate sex education into several classes without buying new textbooks. A parental review committee is also going over each element of the curriculum before it’s presented to the School Board for approval.

Rather than a separate section of a particular class on sex education, the subject will be addressed in several classes, such as science, physical education, health and even home economics. Long says sex education should begin in some classes as early as this fall, but most of the curriculum will be in place for the second semester.

Under state law, sex education must be approved by local school boards and parental permission is needed for each student. The law prohibits the teaching of sex education below the seventh grade, which many educators believe is far too late.

Here is how neighboring parishes are addressing the subject:

- **IBERIA.** “We’ve had sex education for nine or 10 years now,” says Ralph Barras, math and science supervisor for Iberia Parish schools. “We started within a couple of years of the law being passed.”

  The subject is taught in seventh grade life science classes, 10th grade biology and associated courses such as physical education and home ec. In the last year, half a dozen other Louisiana systems have contacted Barras and asked for information on Iberia Parish’s program.

- **VERMILION.** Some sex education units are taught in home economics courses such as parenting. Math and science supervisor M.C. Trahan says the staff has made some presentations to the School Board on expanding sex education in the system, and board members are thinking about it. “I guess you could say that we are in the talking stages now,” Trahan says.

- **ST. LANDRY.** About 10 years ago, recalls Superintendent Raymond Fontenot, a sex ed program was begun in one of the schools and became so controversial that it was dropped. “There was a big hullabaloo about it,” he says. The incident gave people “a bad taste,” and since then nothing has been done, says Fontenot.

- **ST. MARTIN.** “We have a committee that’s anxious to get started on that,” says School Board president Jackie Theriot. “The big discussion is at what grade level we need to put it in.”

  Another committee discussed the idea two or three years ago, but nothing resulted, says Theriot. Some recent incidents have made it clear, however, that sex education is needed, he says. In those cases, students were molested at home, and when teachers and principals became suspicious and started asking questions, they realized the students didn’t understand what had happened.

  The committee should begin working on a sex ed curriculum this fall. Theriot hopes something will be in place by the 1992-93 school year.

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