

OVERVIEW

# Trailhead Institute's Youth Sexual Health Program







# Comprehensive Sex Education (CSE)

## WHAT

Comprehensive Sex Education (CSE) is education based on inclusivity that creates critical thinkers for the future and allows people of all ages to assert bodily autonomy and gain confidence in determining what is best for their physical and mental health.\*

Through medically-accurate, age-appropriate, inclusive education taught by trained educators, schools support young people in feeling comfortable and safe in the classroom and equip students with the skills and information they need to plan for their futures and live healthier, happier lives.

## WHY

Decades of public health research demonstrates that CSE programs help youth by:

- Improving academic success.
- Preventing sexual abuse, dating violence, and bullying.
- Helping young people develop healthier relationships.
- Promoting appreciation of sexual diversity.
- Preventing child sexual abuse.
- Improving media literacy.
- Increasing young people's ability to decide when they're ready to have sex.
- Increasing communication between youth and their parents/guardians.

## Comprehensive Sex Education Covers a Range of Topics Including:

- Consent and healthy relationships.
- Anatomy and physiology.
- Puberty and adolescent sexual development.
- Gender identity and expression.
- Sexual orientation and identity.
- Sexual health, including information on condoms, contraception, and abstinence.
- Interpersonal communication.
- Exploration of personal values and goals
- Interpersonal violence.

\*CSE definition, outcomes, and topics referenced from [SIECUS](#) and [Research Review: School-based Health Interventions and Academic Achievement](#)

# Trailhead Institute's Youth Sexual Health Program

Trailhead Institute acts as a strategic resource for the public and environmental health community. Through our Youth Sexual Health program, we support organizations, collaboratives, communities and school districts in increasing access to comprehensive sexual health education for young people using an approach that is collaborative and community-driven. Central to our work is a commitment to operating and implementing programming based on the belief that every young person has the right to receive medically accurate information so they are empowered to make informed decisions about their own sexual health.

## Our Youth Sexual Health Programming



All youth sexual health programming at Trailhead Institute aligns with our three organizational drivers: **Capacity**, **Collaboration** and **Justice**.

### CAPACITY

We believe that community leaders are best suited to identify and address their own public health needs. It is essential to offer services that build their capacity to focus on solving community challenges, and improve the places where we live, work and play. The Working to Institutionalize Sexuality Education (WISE) initiative is community-driven every step of the way. Through WISE, Trailhead supports school districts and communities in adopting, implementing, and institutionalizing comprehensive sex education programs using an approach that emphasizes sustainability.

### COLLABORATION

We believe that collaboration is the only way to address the problems we face because no one partner or industry can solve them alone. To this end, we host the Youth Sexual Health Alliance, a coalition created for youth serving professionals to coordinate efforts and build statewide partnerships.

### JUSTICE

We believe that for communities to thrive, there must be a recognition of the inequities that they face, and an awareness of our role in contributing to these systemic barriers. With this awareness, we support the creation of just and equitable practices that allow communities to be at the forefront of decision-making and resource distribution. We engage in public health research-based projects, such as the State of Adolescent Sexual Health Report (SASH), which historically has used data to highlight inequities and barriers that prevent young people from accessing sexual health education. In the past, this report has provided a summary of up-to-date statistics on the sexual health of young people and a brief snapshot of how Colorado's progress compares to national trends over time.



## Reimagining the State of Adolescent Sexual Health (SASH) Report

For over a decade, the State of Adolescent Sexual Health (SASH) Report has provided a summary of up-to-date statistics on the sexual health of young people and a brief snapshot of how Colorado's progress compares to national trends over time. While this quantitative data has value and can inform policies and programs that support the health and well-being of Colorado youth, it is also limited in its expression and depth, and fails to capture a nuanced, intersectional understanding of what young people experience and need from their sexual health education.

In 2021, Trailhead embarked on a process to reimagine the SASH by recruiting a Youth Sexual Health Program Board (YSHPB) comprised of young people and adults who represent a variety of identities made vulnerable by oppressive systems that have been historically excluded in conversations about youth sexual health.

Under the vision and leadership of Trailhead's Youth Sexual Health Program and the YSHPB, the release of the 2023 SASH report exclusively focuses on the systems that govern and influence the experiences that young people have with sexual health. This approach recognizes that sexual health outcomes and personal development improve when the systems responsible for delivering care, access, and education reflect the humanity and diversity of young people.

Developed using an anti-oppressive process that engaged community members with lived experience, the [2023 SASH report](#) identifies the roles that partners within the **education system, governmental agencies, community-based organizations, funding and philanthropic entities** and **those working with data** play in the youth sexual health field and presents an accountable path forward for transforming young people's experiences with sexual health through clear, anti-oppressive action.



# A Deeper Dive: The Colorado WISE Initiative

## What is WISE?

Working to Institutionalize Sex Education (WISE) started in 2009 as a nationwide effort dedicated to institutionalizing sex education so that sex education becomes part of a school district's core curricula, such as math, reading, and history. Colorado has been a part of WISE since its inception. WISE supports school districts by creating effective and sustainable rollout plans for the implementation of Comprehensive Sex Education (CSE).

## The Goals of WISE Are To:

- Advance school-based sex education programs by supporting targeted implementation efforts
- Expand the professional body of knowledge related to best practices for institutionalizing sex education

## What is the Colorado WISE Approach to Partnership?

The Colorado WISE approach to partnership places the needs and well-being of young people at the center, ensuring that they have all the practical and necessary tools to live healthy lives. Trailhead accomplishes this goal through engaging the community in a process of true collaboration, where people with diverse backgrounds and beliefs are invited to be a part of the decision making process. While individual values may vary, communities can come together around the shared value that all young people deserve information to make healthy, informed decisions.

We recognize that no two communities in our state are alike, so there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Trailhead goes into communities listening to what they need and how we can support them and their young people. Together, we create customized plans for effective implementation, which are also informed by lessons learned and best practices gathered through our work with other local districts, community-based organizations, state partners and national WISE Initiative partners in other states. This process can take years to implement, but ensures that schools have the time they need to include their community in the process and create a sustainable plan.





## All Public Schools in Colorado Are Eligible to Become a WISE Partner

All Colorado public school districts are eligible to participate in the WISE initiative, as long as your school district is not already a Legacy partner (see definition below). In addition, we will consider partnership with community-based organizations or public health departments depending on the capacity and readiness of local school districts to implement this programming.

## How Do You Get Started?

The process usually begins with an initial conversation with someone from Trailhead's Youth Sexual Health Program team. This conversation evaluates the level of district readiness to partner. Once a level of readiness is established, the next step is to identify a primary contact who will move the process along in their community. Additionally, we help school district leaders identify other stakeholders and champions in the community who will support the process.

If you are interested in connecting with Trailhead's Youth Sexual Health program to learn more about WISE partnership, connect with us at [YSH@trailhead.institute](mailto:YSH@trailhead.institute).

## What Is the Difference Between an Active and Legacy Partnership?

### ACTIVE PARTNER:

School district that is in the process of planning, implementing, and rolling out their sex education implementation plan to reach the goals they outlined to achieve. During an active partnership, the school district has access to all the Trailhead resources. Support can include:

- Training for their staff to teach sex education
- Curriculum selection
- Acquiring curriculum and other educational resources
- Direct technical assistance

### LEGACY PARTNER:

School district has reached their sex education goals or feels confident to continue the process to achieve their goals without ongoing support. When an Active partner transitions to a Legacy partner, they still have access to resources at Trailhead to support the sustainability of their sex education plan.

Legacy partners may continue to access WISE services on a fee-for-service basis, including professional development training for teachers.





## What's In It for Your District or Community?

Under the WISE Initiative, we increase the capacity of schools, districts, and teachers to select, implement, evaluate, and sustain comprehensive sexual health education (CSE) programs and policies in schools.

Trailhead believes that cost should not be barrier to participating in the WISE initiative and will work to meet ready prospective partners where they are at in their financial capacity to participate in WISE. If the district has funds for sex education programming, a fee based on collaborative conversations with the school district will be determined. Regardless of a partner's financial capacity, all Active partners receive access to WISE services and technical assistance.

## Capacity Building Strategies Can Include:

- Guide schools and districts through an assessment of available resources and creation of attainable longer-term implementation plans
- Assist in developing a customized district strategy for adopting policy and practices that support comprehensive sex education and lead to implementation of quality programs
- Develop and build upon district- community partnerships and networks to foster support for sex education programming
- Provide education and training for county, district and school staff on best approaches to teaching comprehensive sex education, program alignment with state sexual health education laws and educational standards, and elements of effective sex education programs
- Procurement and selection of comprehensive sexual health curriculum and other necessary educational materials for classroom implementation



# What is the WISE Method?

The WISE method is a flexible approach to implementing sexuality education that is based on years of best practice research. Using this method, Trailhead works with active WISE sites to select and implement the best curriculum for that school and the students they serve. **The WISE approach includes four major steps.**

## 1. Scan

We translate the Colorado Comprehensive Sexual Health Education Law and the Colorado Department of Education Comprehensive Health Standards and help outline what these laws and requirements look like in classroom implementation. We can also review local school board health education policies, and support revising policies or implementing new policies.

## 2. Engage

Trailhead starts with the most motivated groups and individuals who want to use the WISE method, and we also know that sustainable change in education happens at the local district level. We commonly engage new school districts through partnerships we have cultivated with various organizations that include, Colorado Department of Education, Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment, universities, and legacy/active WISE school districts.

Once introductions are made, we have preliminary conversations with school districts about assistance, funding, and how we can support the community by improving or starting a sex education program.

## 3. Design

Once a district becomes active, we start the process of designing a rollout and implementation plan. Every plan looks different for each district, and it is informed and based on what the community stakeholders identify as the core needs for their young people.

We also identify stakeholders who are champions of their schools and communities, who are committed to making this work happen. These champions can be district level professionals, a health advisory committee (if one is already active) and parents, youth or community members. Once identified, these key stakeholders are engaged throughout the process often through participation in Health Advisory Boards that guide decision-making related to program selection, implementation and evaluation.

## 4. Implement

This stage puts all the planning into action. Depending on the needs of each WISE site, Trailhead supports the execution of a plan that may include curriculum training and developing staff competencies through identified supplemental training. During this stage, we also support schools in creating an evaluation and sustainability plan, which helps support the continuation of programming after our partnership ends

# Custom Trainings to Fit the Needs of School District and Communities

Trailhead is among several organizations that offer professional development and trainings on youth sexual health-related topics. Utilizing a community-led approach, Trailhead's Youth Sexual Health Program Team works collaboratively with school districts and partners to create custom trainings that serve the unique needs of communities across Colorado. Training topics include, but are not limited to:

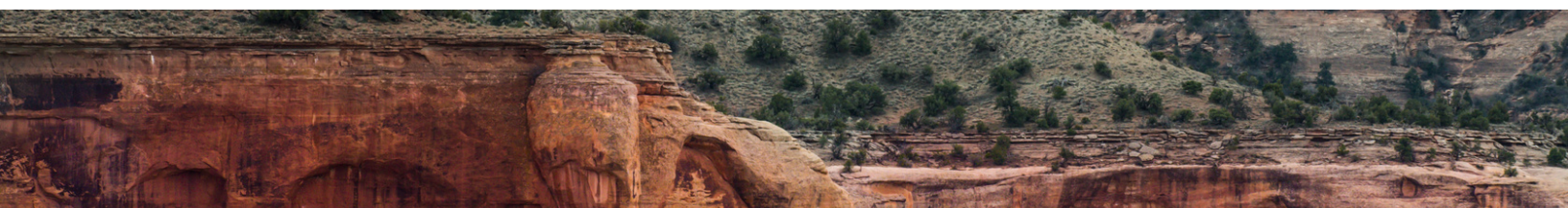
- Comprehensive Sex Education Overview
- Creating a Positive Learning Environment
- Answering Challenging Questions
- Value-Expansive Facilitation
- Healing-Centered and Trauma-Informed Education
- Power 101: How To Talk About It And How To Share It
- LGBTQ+ Inclusion
- Consent Education

These trainings are designed to benefit school administrators, teachers, facilitators, trusted adults, parents and caregivers, after school leaders, community-based organizations, school board members, clinicians, nurses, healthcare workers, and legislators. To learn more about training opportunities with Trailhead and our flexible pricing model, email [YSH@trailhead.institute](mailto:YSH@trailhead.institute).

## Building Community Capacity

By providing mentorship, resources, training, and assistance through the WISE initiative, we are building the capacity of communities to sustain comprehensive sex education initiatives across Colorado. Since the WISE initiative began in Colorado in 2009, over 65,000 students have been taught new or improved comprehensive sex education and a total of 26 school districts have met their sex education institutionalization goals, becoming Legacy partners of the WISE initiative. With capacity building as an organizational driver of Trailhead, we strive to support Active WISE partners in meeting their sex education institutionalization goals with the aim of nurturing a growing network of Legacy partners who are continuing their comprehensive sex education implementation without ongoing support from WISE Colorado staff.

Increased, sustained, multi-year funding amplifies Trailhead's ability to expand the WISE initiative to new school districts across the state. If you are interested in discussing funding opportunities with Trailhead, please reach out to us at [YSH@trailhead.institute](mailto:YSH@trailhead.institute).







## About Trailhead Institute

Founded in 1993, Trailhead Institute is a nonprofit 501 (c) (3) public health institute built on the vision that everyone should have the opportunity to be healthy and live in a healthy environment. With the mission of advancing innovation and collaboration in public health, Trailhead works alongside communities, state and local public health agencies, community-based organizations, and cross-sector partners to improve health for all people living in Colorado.

Through administrative partnership, community engagement, and strategic program development, we support and lead initiatives that address fundamental health needs, advance health equity, center communities as experts and advocate for policies and funding that enable public health entities and communities across Colorado to thrive.

### Our Drivers:



#### COLLABORATION:

We believe that collaboration is the only way to address the public health problems we face because no one partner or industry can solve them alone.

#### CAPACITY:

We believe that it is essential to offer a space for community leaders to focus on delivering their mission to address community health challenges, and improve the places we live, work and play.

#### JUSTICE:

We believe that for communities to thrive, there must be a recognition of the inequities that they face, and an awareness of our role in contributing to these systemic barriers. With this awareness, we believe that we must support the creation of equitable practices that allow communities to be at the forefront of decision-making and resource distribution.



# CONNECT WITH US

To learn more about Trailhead's Youth Sexual Health Program,  
contact us at [YSH@trailhead.institute](mailto:YSH@trailhead.institute) or visit our website at  
[www.trailhead.institute/youth-sexual-health](http://www.trailhead.institute/youth-sexual-health)

