

Connecticut State Board of Education
Hartford

**Position Statement on a
Coordinated Approach to School Health**

September 2, 2009

The Connecticut State Board of Education believes that a coordinated approach to school health effectively aligns health and education efforts and leads to improved physical, mental and developmental outcomes for students. Research studies over the past decade have consistently concluded that student health status and student achievement are directly connected and, in fact, that student health is one of the most significant influences on learning and achievement. Additionally, studies have shown that a coordinated approach to school health can reduce absenteeism and classroom behavior problems, improve classroom performance, better prepare students to be productive members of their communities, establish life-long healthy practices, make schools more engaging, as well as address staff wellness needs.

Prominent health concerns such as asthma, injuries, obesity, teen pregnancy and depression are contributing factors to loss of instructional time including absenteeism, dropping out of school and chronic illness. In turn, these lead to significant social and economic issues. The Connecticut School Health Survey data indicate that over the past decade many high school students continue to engage in higher risk behaviors, including sexual intercourse, drug and alcohol use and attempted suicide. Students engaging in higher risk behaviors and those with chronic physical and mental health needs are, in many cases, the same students who face the greatest health and educational disparities.

To address the physical and mental health needs of students, the Board recommends that every school district develop, adopt and implement a comprehensive plan for a well-coordinated approach to school health. A coordinated approach to school health provides the framework for families, community-based partners and schools to work together to improve student achievement. It incorporates eight components: physical education; nutrition; school-family-community partnerships; health services; mental health services; healthy physical and emotional school environment; staff wellness; and comprehensive health education. In developing district plans, data-driven decision making is an essential element to help prioritize efforts that promote health-enhancing behaviors and positive outcomes for youth. A coordinated approach to school health reduces fragmentation, duplication of services and provides a streamlined system for service delivery that is cost effective.

Students must acquire the essential knowledge, skills and attitudes that will guide them to make healthy and responsible choices. Families and schools must work together in providing students with this basic foundation. Therefore, it is imperative that comprehensive health and physical education, including developmentally appropriate comprehensive sexuality education, supported by a school-family-community partnership be offered in prekindergarten through Grade 12. A coordinated approach to school health can be built upon these core principles which are embedded in the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) *Healthy and Balanced Living Curriculum Framework for Comprehensive School Health Education and Comprehensive Physical Education* (2006). Additionally, the CSDE *Guidelines for a Coordinated Approach to School Health* (2007) will assist each local school district in building capacity to implement policies, practices and programs that reduce health and educational disparities for all students. These guidelines are outlined in the corresponding document.

Policy Guidance for the Position Statement on a Coordinated Approach to School Health

The Connecticut State Board of Education, in its 2009 Position Statement on a Coordinated Approach to School Health, calls for a systematic and comprehensive delivery of services, programs and practices to meet the physical and mental health needs of students. This approach will help reduce the health and educational disparities facing Connecticut students and ensure that all students have the opportunity to achieve academically and become healthy productive citizens.

The Board offers the following guidelines to support the implementation of a coordinated approach to school health among various stakeholders.

State Department of Education Responsibilities

- Strengthen and expand partnerships with state and local agencies, higher education, local businesses, health centers, families and schools to address health and educational disparities for all students.
- Develop new and use existing program guidelines, sample policies, resource lists, state and local student physical and mental health data and other information useful for program planning and improvement.
- Provide leadership in identifying and disseminating research and best practice related to coordinated school health to ensure that the physical and mental health needs of all students are addressed, including, but not limited to: those who are at greater risk for chronic disease; Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV); other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs); and teen pregnancy. These students include, but are not limited to: youth of color; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth; youth identified with special needs; incarcerated youth; youth in alternative education programs; and youth who have been sexually abused.
- Augment the alignment of comprehensive school health education and physical education standards, assessments and instruction to the *Healthy and Balanced Living Curriculum Framework*.
- Provide job-embedded professional development opportunities for school and community partners regarding coordinated school health and the health needs of students.
- Provide direct technical assistance to districts, schools and community partners to enhance their ability to implement a coordinated approach to school health.
- Build support among various stakeholders to leverage funding to sustain coordinated school health efforts at the state and local levels.
- Recognize and promote districts and schools that are successfully implementing model coordinated school health approaches.
- Evaluate annual progress made to improve the health and well-being of children at the school, district and state levels.

School District Responsibilities

- Ensure full compliance with all state and federal legislation that supports healthy and safe schools.
- Implement the policies, practices and strategies outlined in the Connecticut State Department of Education *Guidelines for a Coordinated Approach to School Health* (e.g. recommended number of instructional hours in comprehensive health education and physical education).

- Strengthen and expand partnerships with local agencies, businesses, health centers, families, and schools to address health and educational disparities for all students.
- Provide effective leadership for districts and schools to create a climate that supports student achievement and well-being through the implementation of districtwide integrated services and individual student success plans that address physical health, mental health and wellness.
- Assess and utilize current health policies, practices and multiple data sources to ensure that the physical and mental health needs of all students are addressed, including, but not limited to: those who are at greater risk for chronic disease; HIV; STDs; and teen pregnancy. These students include, but are not limited to: youth of color; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth; youth identified with special needs; incarcerated youth; youth in alternative education programs; and youth who have been sexually abused.
- Develop, adopt and implement a data-driven comprehensive plan for a coordinated school health approach that includes all eight components: physical education; nutrition; school-family-community partnerships; health services; mental health services; healthy physical and emotional school environment; staff wellness; and comprehensive health education.
- Utilize guidelines, frameworks and other publications developed by the Connecticut State Department of Education to build and strengthen the coordinated school health approach.
- Establish or build upon an existing district-level school health or wellness council that includes a diverse representation of school staff, families, students and members of the community to oversee and evaluate the coordinated school health approach and make recommendations to the local board of education.
- Designate a district-level director to assist with implementing and evaluating the district's coordinated school health approach.
- Ensure compliance with all state mandates related to school physical and mental health issues (e.g., requirements for proper immunization and physical assessments for all students).
- Ensure that comprehensive school health education and physical education are taught by certified, highly qualified health and physical education teachers.
- Plan, adopt, implement and evaluate a prekindergarten through Grade 12 comprehensive school health education program including a science-based sexuality education component that focuses on abstinence as well as ways to protect oneself from diseases and teen pregnancy.
- Ensure that each program is age, gender, developmentally and culturally appropriate.
- Support on-going job-embedded professional development for school staff regarding coordinated school health and the physical and mental health needs of students.
- Conduct regular evaluation and reporting on the implementation of school health programs including the impact on student health and well-being.
- Make available nutritious meals and snacks and allow opportunities for daily physical activity breaks for students and staff.

School Responsibilities

- Provide effective leadership to create a climate that supports student achievement and well-being.
- Support the implementation of integrated systems and student success plans that address the physical health, mental health and wellness of students.
- Organize building-level school health and wellness teams to provide the structure for coordinating activities. Teams should include a diverse representation of school staff, families, students and members of the community to oversee and evaluate the coordinated school health approach.
- Assign a staff member to serve as the director for the coordinated school health approach to assist with implementing and evaluating the school's coordinated school health efforts.

- Conduct an assessment to determine what services are in place and what gaps exist to address the physical and mental health needs of students.
- Create a coordinated school health action plan that sets priorities, develops implementation strategies and evaluates progress.
- Develop a communication plan that involves school, family, business and community-based partners.
- Ensure that health- and wellness-related messages and actions are integrated into instruction and activities throughout the building.
- Utilize a positive youth development approach that builds resiliency to address student physical and mental health needs.
- Deliver comprehensive school health education and physical education instruction taught by certified, highly qualified health and physical education teachers.
- Implement and evaluate a prekindergarten through Grade 12 comprehensive school health education program which incorporates a science-based sexuality education component that focuses on abstinence as well as ways to protect oneself from diseases and teen pregnancy.

Teachers'/Staff Responsibilities

- Participate in all professional development activities offered to promote health and wellness.
- Communicate with families about health and wellness activities they can do at home with their children.
- Collaborate with peers to improve health outcomes for students.
- Increase awareness of and participate in the implementation of the coordinated school health action plan.
- Utilize timely science-based resources to inform instruction, programs and services.
- Integrate health- and wellness-related messages and actions into instruction and activities throughout the building.
- Deliver high-quality comprehensive school health education and physical education instruction.
- Analyze student work to inform curriculum, instruction and assessment.
- Participate in health enhancing activities with students (e.g., daily physical activity and creating a safe and welcoming classroom environment).

Families' Responsibilities

- Support school policies designed to improve the health and well-being of children including participation on health and wellness committees in schools.
- Take children to community or school-based healthcare providers for yearly health physicals and immunizations.
- Use school and community-based health resources, such as the 211 Infoline, family resource centers, school-based health centers and local health departments for information and services regarding health.
- Promote positive healthy relationships with respect and appreciation for one another.
- Discuss health and wellness issues at home with children and incorporate health and wellness activities into the daily life of children.
- Work with teachers to support children's learning of health-related issues.
- Participate in learning activities at home and in the community including interactive homework and other health-linked enrichment activities.
- Engage in dialogues with children around health-related issues including sexuality education.

- Participate in educational open house opportunities and become familiar with the comprehensive school health education and physical education curriculum.
- Ensure that children are prepared for school by getting adequate sleep, healthy meals and daily physical activity.

Students' Responsibilities (as developmentally appropriate)

- Examine personal health status and assume responsibility for personal health behaviors (e.g., abstaining from sexual activity; refraining from alcohol and tobacco use; protecting oneself from pregnancy, HIV and STDs).
- Make good decisions to enhance health and encourage and support others in making positive health choices.
- Communicate with family members regarding healthier lifestyles.
- Promote positive healthy relationships with respect and appreciation for one another.
- Express opinions about health issues based on accurate health information.
- Analyze how families, school communities, media and peers influence health-related decisions.
- Use effective verbal and nonverbal communication skills as a means of enhancing health and promoting healthy relationships, such as refusal and conflict resolution skills.
- Locate and use resources and services from home, school and local communities that provide valid health information, products and services.
- Plan and engage in school-sponsored wellness activities, including participation on health and wellness committees in school.
- Actively participate in comprehensive school health education and physical education.
- Advocate for the inclusion of personal health goals into Individual Student Success Plans.
- Attend annual check-ups and other important appointments with health care providers.
- Advocate for healthier, more nutritious meal and snack options both at home and at school.
- Accurately complete school health surveys.

References

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