

# Health Education



## DEFINITION OF COMPONENT

**Health Education** is a sequential classroom-based instructional program that teaches and assesses functional health knowledge, basic health concepts, and essential life skills. It addresses physical, mental, emotional, and social dimensions of health. In order to promote health and avoid or reduce health risks, students should demonstrate and apply responsible decision-making strategies that lead to overall well being. (8)

Health education content areas typically include: community health, consumer health, environmental health, family life, mental and emotional health, injury prevention and safety, nutrition, personal health, prevention and control of disease, and substance use or abuse. The National Health Education Standards emphasize core concepts and skills that align with these content areas. The standards include understanding health promotion and disease prevention concepts, internal and external influences on health behaviors, accessing health information and services, interpersonal communication, decision-making, goal setting, and advocacy skills. (9, 10)

## IMPACT ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

When schools provide students with a purposeful and relevant health education instructional program, the students gain essential knowledge and skills to make health-promoting decisions as well as the strategies to practice daily health behaviors. Therefore, school health education becomes the cornerstone for promoting immediate and lifelong healthy behaviors.

Studies show that health education can result in improved nutritional choices, delay of sexual debut, lower rates of alcohol and other drug use, enhanced stress management, or reduced bullying behaviors. These results give reason to believe that students who choose healthful behaviors and avoid harmful ones make better grades, achieve more in school, and are less likely to drop out. For example, according to the CDC-DASH 2009 National

Youth Risk Behavior Study, there is a strong correlation between involvement in health risk behaviors and grades. The less likely the involvement in health risk behaviors, the higher the grades, and vice versa. (3)



## STORIES FROM THE FIELD

### Maine

Windham High School in Windham, Maine, has a full-year graduation requirement for health education and physical education. In addition, students can choose electives in both disciplines to round out their high school experience.

### Hawaii

Students enrolled in Positive Action, an elementary-age social and emotional learning curriculum with brief lessons on responsible self-management, relationship skills, and making healthy choices, were found to improve their standardized test scores. A three-year study of 20 ethnically and economically diverse schools in Hawaii reported participants outperformed the control group by 8.8% in reading and 9.8% in math on such tests, had 70% fewer suspensions, and a 15% lower absentee rate. (13)

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BEST PRACTICE

### National Health Education Standards

The National Health Education Standards are written expectations for what students should know and be able to do to promote personal, family, and community health. Benchmarks are set for grades 2, 5, 8, and 12. The standards can provide a framework for curriculum development and selection, instruction, and assessment. (9, 10)

### Time

The 2007 National Health Education Standards recommend that students Pre-K–2 receive a minimum of 40 hours, and students grades 3–12 receive a minimum of 80 hours of health education instruction per academic year. (9)

### Conditions

Effective health education aligns with national and/or state standards for instruction; has an established Pre-K–high school curriculum with a scope and sequence; is taught by trained health education teachers; and occurs in an organized and structured classroom environment. (9)

### Curriculum Analysis Tool

The Health Education Curriculum Analysis Tool (HECAT) is recommended for conducting an analysis of a school or district's health education curricula. It can be accessed at <http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/hecat/index.htm>.

### Assessment

A continuum of student assessment allows for formative and summative evaluation of functional health knowledge, essential health skills, and application of core health concepts to real-world scenarios at every grade and cognitive level of learning. (9)

### Family and Community Linkages

Extension opportunities engage students in conversations about health with their parents or guardians and empower them to become advocates for health within their homes, schools, and communities. (9)

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