

WHAT IS QUALITY SCHOOL HEALTH EDUCATION?

A comprehensive, quality school health education program uses the National Health Education Standards to guide curriculum development.⁷ The Standards focus on increasing functional health knowledge and identifying key skills that are applicable to all aspects of healthy living. These skills include identifying the influence of family, peers, culture, media, and technology on health behavior; knowing how to access and use valid health information; and using communication, decision-making, goal-setting, and advocacy skills to engage in health-enhancing behaviors.

In the World Health Organization's Information Series on School Health, a decade of evaluation research indicates three important findings regarding quality school health education programs⁸:

- Health education that concentrates on developing health-related skills and imparting health-related knowledge and attitudes is more likely to help youth practice health enhancing behaviors.
- Skill development is more likely to result in the desired healthy behavior when practicing the skill is tied to the content of a specific health behavior or health decision.
- The most effective method of skill development is learning by doing – involving students in active, participatory experiences, rather than passive ones.

ADEQUATE INSTRUCTIONAL TIME

The effectiveness and quality of health education programs have been linked to adequate instructional time devoted to health education in the classroom⁷. The Joint Committee on National Health Education Standards recommends that students in Pre-K to grade 2 receive a minimum of 40 hours and students in grades 3 to 12 receive a minimum of 80 hours of instruction in health education per academic year.

ACTION PLAN FOR HEALTH EDUCATION

Strategies that support quality health education include:

- Develop and implement a planned Pre K-12 Health Education curriculum that adheres to national and state standards for health education.
- Employ highly qualified and effective health educators to teach health education.

- Ensure recommended health education instruction time at the elementary and secondary levels.
- Provide adequate time for skill-based instruction and learning every year kindergarten through high school.
- Assess student achievement in health education and report results.
- Advocate for a national plan and budget to support school health education.

References

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