

## Health Education and Learning

Health Literacy is as important as literacy in any other subject. It informs students about making the right choices, to be healthy and ready to learn. It also teaches students to avoid behaviors that may damage their health and well-being.

Health Literacy connects intellectual learning experiences with practical health activities in the school. At its best, health instruction, educates students on essential health concepts, shapes personal values and norms and allows students to practice and maintain healthy living habits. As a result, students may be more likely to be engaged in school, have fewer health issues which keeps them out of school, and may be more likely to achieve academic proficiency and to graduate from high school.



## Why Schools?

The school years are important years for influencing or modifying behaviors. This is a time to safeguard against risky behaviors through health promotion.

A solid health education class may include the following topics:

- \* Mental and emotional health
- \* Violence prevention
- \* Healthy eating
- \* Sexual Health
- \* Physical Activity
- \* Personal health and wellness
- \* Tobacco
- \* Alcohol or drugs
- \* Unintentional injuries, including helmets or seat belts.
- \* Obesity or weight related issues

## For further information

National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion - Healthy Youth! - Characteristics of an Effective Health Education Curriculum -

<http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/SHER/characteristics/index.htm>

The World Health Organization's - Skills based health education -

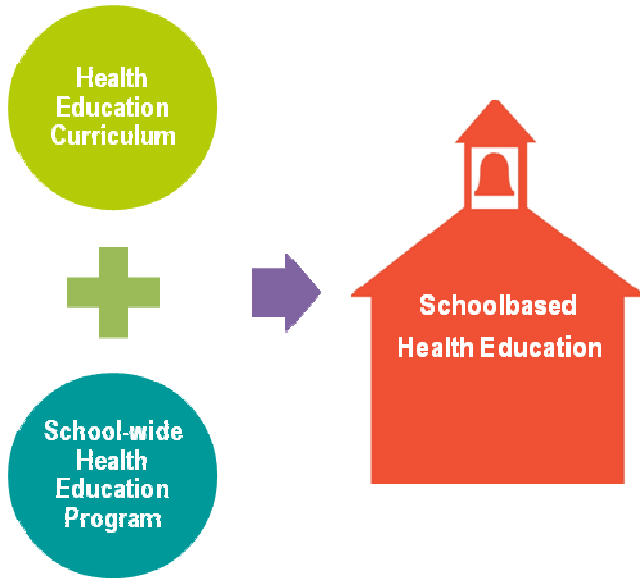
[http://www.who.int/school\\_youth\\_health/media/en/sch\\_skills4health\\_03.pdf](http://www.who.int/school_youth_health/media/en/sch_skills4health_03.pdf)

## Did you know?

- In their report **The Health Literacy of America's Adults – Sept. 2006** the National Center for Education Statistics writes “White and Asian/Pacific Islander adults had higher average health literacy than Black, Hispanic, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Multiracial adults. Hispanic adults had lower average health literacy than adults in any other racial/ethnic group”.
- In the school health profiles, a survey developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, they report that the Percentage of schools requiring students to take two or more health education courses averages **50.6** nationwide. In Colorado, that percentage is much lower at only **29.6**.

## Comprehensive Health Education

Your school can offer a wide variety of services designed to meet the multiple and changing needs of children and their families. A comprehensive, interconnected school-wide program will make health education an integral part of your school's culture. A fully integrated program contains each of the following categories.



### Health Education Curriculum

All students are required to take and pass at least one health education course. The health education curriculum is sequential and consistent with state or national standards for health education.

The curriculum has been proven to be effective at changing the attitudes and behaviors of students participating in the program. Lessons address relevant health and social issues.

The school's health teaching methods include **active learning strategies**, or class discussions, brainstorming, cooperative learning, case studies, debates and visualizations.

The school includes **life skills** as part of its K-12 health curriculum to help students develop skills in the areas of communication, problem solving, conflict resolution, decision making, critical thinking, building healthy relationships and other important areas.

As a result, students should be able to:

- Master concepts related to health promotion and disease prevention based on these standards.

- Analyze the influence of family, peers, culture, media, technology and other factors on their health behaviors.
- Demonstrate the ability to access valid information, products and services to enhance health.
- Demonstrate the ability to use decision-making skills to enhance health and set goals.

### School-wide Health Education Initiatives

The school has an explicit plan for providing a health-promoting environment for all students. The plan covers topics ranging from mental health, to nutrition, physical activity and health services. It may also include age-appropriate specialized topics such as pregnancy prevention, anti-gang education and bullying prevention. Health education is integrated into other school subjects. Staff, parents and students are actively involved in the development, implementation and review of the plan. The school offers school-wide strategies to promote a safe, drug free, tobacco free and alcohol free environment.

### Jump start your health education program

Start small and grow from there with some simple activities like integrating a health education topic into a science class, integrating communication and problem solving skills into school-wide activities, or putting up posters that promote a drug free environment.

### Long term success

Each of these categories can involve a multitude of strategies to help ensure long term success. To identify the ones that most appropriately meet the needs of your school, please contact Cathy Schmelter at Get Smart Schools – [cathy@getsmartschools.org](mailto:cathy@getsmartschools.org).