

## **Delaware Department of Education Health Education Clarification Document**

... schools are the only public institutions that can reach nearly all youth and are, therefore, in a unique position to improve both the education and health status of young people throughout the nation.

*Jeffrey P. Koplan, M.D., M.P.H.  
Former Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)  
2001*

Today, American children and youth are confronted with complex health, educational, and social challenges on a scale not experienced by previous generations. The threat of injuries and violence, including homicide and suicide; risks associated with sexual behaviors including unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs); and the consequences of the use and abuse of tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs; have been shown to compromise both short- and long-term health prospects. In addition, research has documented that the negative consequences of poor nutrition and inadequate physical activity have contributed to an obesity epidemic that influences the prevalence of chronic diseases and threatens length of life. Recently, researchers have begun to assert that, for the first time in our history, the increases in life expectancy enjoyed by previous generations of Americans may soon come to an end. As such, the combined effects of such risk behaviors paint a public health picture that is extremely costly in both financial and human terms.

In addition to associated health consequences, a growing body of evidence has documented that health risks exert a simultaneous and negative influence on the academic success of school-age youth. While no one would suggest that schools should assume sole responsibility for addressing the range of health and social problems confronting students, schools employ credentialed resource professionals and provide a critical focal point for health education and promotion programming that can enrich the lives of the majority of America's youth.

In response, the Delaware legislature has passed Health Education Regulation 851. This legislation stipulates that all school districts must provide instruction in health education for all grade levels of students enrolled in the public schools of the state. Importantly, health education courses of study may not be offered as an elective option and must include a focus on increasing knowledge about core concepts in health among all learners. In addition, district curricula must be designed to help students increase their capacity to practice essential health promoting skills. Finally, this critical legislation specifies that children in the state's elementary schools must receive developmentally-appropriate instruction about fire prevention and safety; that a unit of instruction focused on reducing the risks of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use be provided each year during the K-12 experience; and that comprehensive sexuality education including HIV prevention must be included in local school health curricula.

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As guidance for responsive school districts and communities in the state, the Delaware Department of Education has developed state instructional standards in health education. Based on the National Health Education Standards and developed in consultation with local health educators and national education experts, the Delaware Health Education Standards support the efforts of local school districts to promote healthy living and discourage health risk behaviors among all students. In specific, the eight standards include a focus on the following:

- Promoting *understanding of essential health concepts* as a foundation for transferring knowledge into healthy actions for life;
- *Analyzing the influence* of family, peers, culture, media, technology, and other factors on health behaviors;
- *Accessing information*, products, and services to enhance health;
- Using interpersonal *communication skills* to enhance health and avoid or reduce health risks;
- Using *decision-making skills* to enhance health;
- Using *goal-setting skills* to enhance health;
- *Practicing health-enhancing behaviors including self-management* and avoid or reduce health risks; and
- Practicing *advocacy* for personal, family, and community health.

Health education curricula based on these state standards, enable health teachers to plan learning experiences for local students that are far more educationally sound and productive than the more common teacher-centered and content-based instructional approaches.

To provide further support for school districts engaged in planning health education courses of study for local adoption, The Delaware Department of Education has developed the Delaware Health Education Recommended Curriculum. This resource is based on the “Understanding by Design” process, a foundation for increasing the capacity of students to apply health knowledge and skills in a variety of contexts. Also developed in consultation with national education experts and local stakeholders, the Delaware Health Education Recommended Curriculum is based on the State Health Education Standards and is focused on reducing the risks and consequences associated with the six CDC public health priorities for children and youth (alcohol and other drug use, injury and violence including suicide, tobacco use, poor nutrition, inadequate physical activity and sexual risk behaviors).

Importantly, this Delaware resource is grounded in the sound theoretical framework of resilience and youth development. Part of the federal Safe and Drug Free School and Communities Act (Title IV), this theory has been demonstrated to contribute to behavioral risk reduction and improvements in health, social, and academic outcomes among youth. Consistent with tenants of this theory, behavior changes are influenced by the actions of collaborators and advocates who pursue activities that capitalize on internal assets (cooperation, communication, empathy, etc.) and mobilizing those external (school, home, community, and peers) assets to meeting the needs (safety, love, belonging, etc.) of youth. Only when families, schools, and community advocates rank complex student needs in a position of highest priority can complex health and academic obstacles be managed. As confirmed by this theory and so, the Delaware Health

Education Recommended Curriculum, all available energy, resources, and expertise must be mobilized in a cooperative and coordinated manner to address such complex challenges.

A recent evidence-based publication by the CDC entitled *Characteristics of Effective Health Education Curricula* documented the value of health education curricula that specify behavioral outcomes, are research based and theory driven, and provide learning opportunities designed to personalize information and engage learners. The Delaware Health Education Standards and the Delaware Health Education Recommended Curriculum are valuable resources for local school districts in the process of developing or reviewing their health education curricular scope and sequence. These resources provide a starting point for local educators and other stakeholders to begin the process of increasing functional health knowledge and cultivate essential health promoting skills among student of significance to them. In specific, these resources can help school districts confronted with the complex challenge of developing educationally-sound, developmentally-appropriate, and learner-centered health education curricula that meet the needs of the broadest range of learners.

## Health Education Standards Address Priority Risk Behaviors

### Common Health Education Content Areas

- Tobacco, Alcohol and Other Drugs
- Injury Prevention & Safety
- Nutrition & Physical Activity
- Family Life & Sexuality
- Personal Health and Wellness
- Mental Health
- Community & Environmental Health

### Delaware Health Education Standards

1. Students will *understand essential health concepts* in order to transfer knowledge into healthy actions for life.
2. Students will *analyze the influence* of family, peers, culture, media technology and other factors on health behaviors.
3. Students will demonstrate the ability to *access information*, products and services to enhance health.
4. Students will demonstrate the ability to use interpersonal *communication skills* to enhance health and avoid or reduce health risks.
5. Students will demonstrate the ability to use *decision-making skills* to enhance health.
6. Students will demonstrate the ability to use *goal-setting skills* to enhance health.
7. Students will demonstrate the ability to *practice health-enhancing behaviors* and avoid or reduce health risks. (self management)
8. Students will demonstrate the ability to *advocate* for personal, family and community health.

(Modified from the National Health Education Standards)

### Centers for Disease Control & Prevention Adolescent Risk Behaviors

- Alcohol and Other Drug Use
- Injury & Violence (including Suicide)
- Tobacco Use
- Poor Nutrition
- Inadequate Physical Activity
- Sexual Risk Behavior

### Delaware Data

[www.udel.edu/delawaredata/](http://www.udel.edu/delawaredata/)

- Delaware YRBS
- Alcohol, Tobacco & Other Drug Use Among Delaware Students
- Delaware Youth Tobacco Survey