Steps for Designing and Coordinating Health Education Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment

A majority of states set requirements for health education in public schools. School districts and schools can use the steps below, based on best practices in the professional literature, to successfully develop or revise their health education curriculum. Designing and implementing a comprehensive health education curriculum is a complex process. Following the 12 steps minimizes problems and insures that the end product, the curriculum, is comprehensive, sequential, follows best practice and promotes healthy behaviors.

**Step 1: ORGANIZE A HEALTH EDUCATION CURRICULUM COMMITTEE**

The school/community health education curriculum committee is given the responsibility for the overall design of the curriculum and/or selection of textbooks and classroom materials. The committee includes representation from administration, teachers from all grade levels, other school staff, school board, health-related groups, family and community members and students. The committee secures administrative authorization, resources and clear guidelines for its work. The committee becomes knowledgeable about comprehensive school health education and the process for curriculum design.

**Step 2: FRAME THE WORK PLAN**

The committee frames an annual plan for their work utilizing these 12 steps. The committee work plan includes specific tasks, responsibilities, resources needed and timeline. Some elements to include in the plan are strategies to document decisions and recommendations and conduct a process evaluation.

**Step 3: INVESTIGATE LITERATURE, LEGISLATION AND POLICIES**

The committee becomes familiar with up-to-date health education research, issues and trends. Key documents include the National Health Education Standards and CDC’s Health Education Curriculum Analysis Tool (HECAT). Committee members become familiar with federal legislation and programs, state requirements, rules and regulations and local school policies and procedures related to health education.

**Step 4: COMMUNICATE AND ADVOCATE**

At key points throughout the curriculum development process the committee, a) communicates with stakeholders including teachers and administrators, school board members and family and community members, and b) advocates for decision makers to take action to effectively adopt, implement and maintain a quality health education program. The committee develops and implements communication and advocacy strategies that inform stakeholders and promote the benefits of health education. During implementation, special attention is given to generating visibility and highlighting success stories through school newsletters and press releases.

**Step 5: ASSESS COMMUNITY AND STUDENT NEEDS**

The assessment process provides an opportunity for family and community members to identify areas of health perceived as most critical for children and youth. The committee conducts a well-designed needs assessment for family and community members that promotes public relations, provides information and
Steps for Designing and Coordinating Health Education Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment

secures support for the committee’s ongoing efforts. Student ideas are solicited to determine their health needs and interests through surveys and/or discussion groups. Local student health data are analyzed.

Step 6: ASSESS THE HEALTH EDUCATION PROGRAM

Assessing the effectiveness of the current health education program is important. Conducting a survey or focus groups with teachers will identify specific topics and/or programs currently being taught, the amount of time allotted to each, teaching methods used and the process used to assess student achievement. Teachers reflect on the effectiveness of their current instructional practices and indicate which health education concepts and skills they think should be emphasized based on the needs of their students. The committee considers how health education links with other health-related school initiatives such as school meals, the before and after school program and the employee wellness program.

Step 7: DEVELOP A VISION AND MISSION

The committee develops a vision for health education that incorporates input from school staff, students, family members and community. They develop a mission statement for the committee that reflects the beliefs of the school and community while supporting the overall school vision and mission.

Step 8: REVIEW RESOURCES

The committee reviews existing resources prior to writing or selecting a curriculum, program or textbook series. Many excellent health education resources, both comprehensive and categorical, are available. A number of effective programs and materials can be acquired from state and national health-related agencies and organizations including those that promote healthy eating and physical activity. Utilizing the Health Education Curriculum Analysis Tool ensures that critical health concepts and skills are included in the curriculum. Healthy Schools Program Network members can use the HSP Resource Database to find free and low-cost resources.

Step 9: DESIGN THE CURRICULUM

The curriculum developed by the committee is sequential and comprehensive. The curriculum details what students should know and be able to do at each grade. Data gathered from previous steps are used to inform the development of the curriculum. The process involves adopting, adapting or compiling components of existing health education programs or selecting a textbook series. Diversity of the student population is reflected in the curriculum and instructional strategies. Curriculum, instructional strategies and student assessments are aligned to State and/or National Health Education Standards. For schools with an established health education program, it is only necessary to revise and update the existing curriculum. The curriculum links objectives, essential health content and skills, instructional methods and student assessment strategies. Effective instruction engages students and allows time for skill development. Many health issues, such as healthy eating and physical activity, extend across the curriculum; therefore the committee coordinates integration of healthy messages with other subjects.

Step 10: SECURE CURRICULUM APPROVAL

The committee presents the curriculum for consideration to families and the community through a variety of forums, i.e. community meetings, PTA, online notice. Following the review, the committee considers input and makes appropriate revisions. The final curriculum is presented to the school board for approval.
Steps for Designing and Coordinating Health Education Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment

The committee chairperson periodically updates the school board on the status of implementation of the health education curriculum.

**Step 11: CONDUCT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

It is of utmost importance that teachers responsible for implementing the curriculum be knowledgeable and comfortable with the curriculum, classroom resources and student assessments. The committee works with administrators to plan and provide appropriate, quality professional development for teachers and staff to introduce the health education curriculum. Ongoing support is provided based on needs identified by the teachers. Teacher support includes time for attending building or grade-level meetings to share ideas and concerns, plan lessons, identify resources, resolve common issues and learn about specific health content. Annual orientation is provided for new teachers and administrators, teachers who have changed assignments or teachers requiring additional support.

**Step 12: IMPLEMENT, MAINTAIN AND EVALUATE THE CURRICULUM**

Once the curriculum is developed and teachers are prepared, the curriculum is ready for initial implementation. To encourage teachers to initiate the new or revised curriculum, the committee establishes a timeline for field-testing a set of lessons or a unit and develops a feedback process to allow for periodic updates such as discussions at grade level meetings or maintaining a health education blog. The committee establishes a systematic maintenance plan that safeguards the integrity of the curriculum. The plan includes the following strategies, 1) gathering teacher feedback and updating the curriculum, including instructional ideas and classroom materials, on a yearly basis, and 2) initiating a screening process for adding new materials and programs. The committee ensures that there is a process for evaluating and documenting curriculum effectiveness based on teacher observations and feedback as well as student assessment data.