

How Is Your School Scheduling Health Education?

To help students adopt and maintain healthy behaviors, health education should contribute directly to a student's ability to successfully practice behaviors that protect and promote health and avoid or reduce health risks. Health education may be taught as a stand-alone class or incorporated with other academic disciplines at the elementary level. Integrating healthy messages through other subjects and throughout the school day can reinforce and support health knowledge and skills taught during explicit health instructional time.

Stand-alone Health Class

As a dedicated, stand-alone health class, adequate instructional time is provided. Health education is included in the master schedule at a designated time each week for one or more terms or throughout the entire year. Teachers have a clearly articulated curriculum framework that aligns to health education standards and outlines functional health knowledge and essential skills. Classroom resources are available and effective instructional strategies are used to help students develop the skills necessary to adopt, practice and maintain health-enhancing behaviors. Students are assessed on their progress in learning health education knowledge and skills and student achievement is reported each term health education is taught at the same level as other academic subjects.

Incorporating Health with Other Subjects

In order to incorporate health education with other core subjects, such as science or social studies, or to incorporate other subjects into health education, teachers can choose age-appropriate and relevant topics or themes to build their units of study. Some schools establish thematic instruction as a school-wide practice. Teachers work together to plan and design the units and lesson plans to align to the themes. When deciding on which key concepts and skills to include, teachers make connections that are logical, allow for higher-order thinking and include interdisciplinary performance assessments to measure student achievement.

For example, healthy eating is explored from a healthy practice perspective in health, a cultural perspective in social studies, a literature perspective in English, and a biochemical perspective in science. Health education can be incorporated with other subjects and provide quality instruction when:

- Teachers follow a clearly articulated curriculum aligned to health education standards that includes core health knowledge and essential skills
- The units of study are comprised of a sequence of contiguous health lessons
- Adequate instructional time is designated for teaching the health units of study
- Teaching strategies are interactive and relevant and include practice and reinforcement of health-related skills
- All students receive the instruction

Supporting Healthy Messages through Integration

The effectiveness of health education is enhanced when students see and hear healthy messages throughout the school day. Integrating healthy messages through other subjects can reinforce and

How Is Your School Scheduling Health Education?

support health knowledge and skills. Consequently, the Alliance encourages schools to integrate messages about healthy eating and physical activity in order for students to receive clear and consistent messages about the importance of these behaviors. Ideas for integrating nutrition and physical activity messages into other core subject areas include:

- **Social Studies:** study foods and food customs from around the world, identify community health helpers such as nurses and doctors
- **Science:** plant a garden, recognize plants as food, study how taste and smell affect eating habits, study how food is metabolized
- **Math:** measure ideal body weight; calculate portion sizes, calories, saturated fat, protein and carbohydrates from food labels; graph energy output of specific physical activities
- **Art:** illustrate kids moving in different ways, create a menu collage or edible art
- **Language Arts:** read books that promote healthy eating and physical activity; write letters, essays, ads or PSAs on nutrition topics or school meal policies
- **Music:** write nutrition songs or a script for a puppet show, create a fun dance to go with specific styles of music
- **Physical Education:** participate in an alphabet relay; design, monitor and evaluate a personal fitness plan; discuss connections between physical activity and calories as energy