



BEYOND THE CHECK-IN
Empowering Parent-Student
Dialogues About Health

OVERVIEW

[What Works in Schools](#) (WWiS) is a school-based program developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that prevents adolescent health risks and promotes adolescent well-being. The program focuses on three areas: quality health education, health services, and safe and supportive environments.

This document — designed for educators, administrators and school support personnel — highlights the opportunity for schools to lead efforts in proper wellness policies, procedures, and practices that meet the needs of their students. This document gives insight on each area of focus and how it can relate to media literacy.



<https://www.cdc.gov/healthy-youth/what-works-in-schools/index.html>

QUALITY HEALTH EDUCATION

When provided by qualified, trained teachers, health education helps students acquire the knowledge, attitudes and skills they need for making healthy decisions. Teachers play a critical role when it comes to social, mental, and personal health and safety in schools on multiple fronts:

1. Teachers can help destigmatize mental health challenges and build skills in help-seeking and self-care.^[1]
2. Teachers are often trusted adults in a student's life and can identify shifts in student behavior, making teachers a critical point to identify a student in need of support.

Health Education and Media Literacy

Health education empowers students to critically analyze, evaluate and create health-related content across different forms of media and communication. This approach helps students develop essential skills for navigating health information and making informed decisions about their well-being. Here are some ways that health education can do this:

- Create opportunities for teaching media literacy and accessing valid and reliable resources, emphasizing critical analysis and evidence-based evaluation;
- Support opportunities for students to teach each other about media literacy, fostering peer advocacy and collaborative learning about analyzing and creating health messages;
- Help students learn the importance of only putting valid and reliable information out into the world by understanding the responsibility and impact of media creation;
- Guide students in examining how health messages are constructed and how they influence beliefs and behaviors;
- Develop skills for accessing and evaluating health information across multiple formats and platforms;
- Build understanding of how media shapes perceptions of health and wellness through analysis of different perspectives and sources.

^[1] Robert Milin, Stanley Kutcher, Stephen P. Lewis, Selena Walker, Yifeng Wei, Natasha Ferrill, Michael A. Armstrong. Impact of a Mental Health Curriculum on Knowledge and Stigma Among High School Students: A Randomized Controlled Trial, *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, Volume 55, Issue 5, 2016, Pages 383-391.



School Administrator Support

School administrators have a variety of resources available from the CDC, which provides a variety of helpful resources to support effective health education programming:

- For a comprehensive review of the overall school health environment, you can use the [School Health Index \(SHI\): Self-Assessment & Planning Guide 2017](#), an online self-assessment and planning tool that can be used to improve your health and safety policies and programs, including health education programs.
- The [Characteristics of an Effective Health Education Curriculum](#) underscores the importance of a curriculum that builds essential skills that support health-enhancing behaviors such as communication, refusal, decision-making, goal-setting, and self-management.
- The [Health Education Curriculum Analysis Tool](#) (HECAT) provides guidance and tools for curriculum selection and development that can help ensure schools are implementing an effective health education curricula. The HECAT can be used for review of existing health education curriculum and materials, as well as to develop a standards-based health education curriculum (including specific health-topic content and skills analyses).

Administrators can facilitate discussion at the school and district levels regarding health education and ways to support teachers in implementing the following practices:

- Creating a positive and inclusive learning environment that engages students in learning the skills they need to live healthy lives;
- Implementing a sequential, comprehensive curriculum — aligned with the new SHAPE America National Health Education Standards and other relevant frameworks — that is skills-based, with an emphasis on developing health literacy;
- Employing instructional practices that engage students in learning and in developing their health-related skills;
- Using assessments that measure student growth, knowledge and health-related skill development;
- Advocating for a positive school culture toward health and health education;
- Maintaining high standards of practice.



How can health education support neurodivergent students and students with disabilities when teaching social, mental, and personal health and safety?

Health educators can use the [Culturally Responsive Checklist for Health Education](#) from Cairn Guidance as they work to support all learners in the health education classroom, including neurodivergent students and students with disabilities. The document includes considerations for Learning Environment, Instructional Strategies Materials and Resources, Assessments, and Communication and Engagement with Stakeholders and Families.

How does the health education strategy of WWiS connect with health services and safe and supportive environments?

All three strategies within the What Works in Schools framework should work together to support the health and well-being of students and staff. The health education teacher can collaborate with health services staff (the school nurse and/or school-based health center staff) to share what is being taught in the health education classroom. That way, the health services staff are aware of topics being brought up in health education as students visit them.

Health services staff may co-teach a topic with the health education teacher, demonstrating partnership and support to students. Ideally, students will also see the health services staff as a valid and reliable resource.

What is taught around social, mental, and personal health and safety in the classroom should be consistent with any policy, program or practice within the school's safe and supportive environment strategy. Schools may take the time to review the health education scope and sequence to ensure all policies align.

For example, are staff in the hallways during student passing time from class to class to minimize bullying and increase a safe environment for students in the school environment? Are there anti-harassment and sexual violence policies that are clear, posted and accessible for all students to review and understand? Does the school promote healthy social time for students (e.g., recess, lunch, passing in hallways) throughout the school day?

Health Services

Schools have the opportunity to educate, recommend and help navigate students' wellness through multiple levels of health services. Health service professionals such as school nurses, nurse practitioners, and allied health personnel collectively work with educators and parents to meet the needs of students. Services that may be offered through school communities include:

- Direct and Preventative Care
- Health Education
- Health Screenings (Vision, Hearing and Dental Screenings)



- Chronic Health Treatment and Support
- Sexual Health Services
- Mental Health Services
- Behavioral Health Services

School-based health services embrace intentional partnerships and dialogue through referrals among community partners such as hospitals, universities, specialists, and community-based organizations. These health services have shown a decrease in student absenteeism while improving and increasing health care for students who are systematically disadvantaged.

Health Services and Media Literacy

Using media literacy to identify the importance of health services is beneficial for students, families and educators. Having conversations with students that answer questions and beliefs about health services provided for them can lead to positive relationships and interactions with those services. Knowing when and how to get healthy can relieve stress and prevent chronic conditions.

Through media literacy that focuses on health services and outcomes, educators can lead activities that help students:

- Examine their personal health status through critical inquiry and reflection;
- Support stigma-busting by analyzing how media messages shape health perceptions and beliefs;
- Build skills to recognize red flags, evaluate claims about “miracle cures” or “secret treatments” using evidence-based analysis;
- Practice describing, explaining and interpreting health care services, including understanding when and how to access mental health professionals;
- Develop awareness of health care misinformation by examining sources and techniques used to spread false information, as well as strategies to identify credible health content;
- Learn to thoughtfully evaluate and respond to viral health trends and content.

School Administrator Support

School administrators are critical in upholding and continuously supporting/improving their school’s health services. Administrators who navigate the complexity of care for students, staff and families do so by first being aware of their barriers to care and, in return, reflecting on the importance of care for others. School administrators can lead in the structuring and sustainability of wellness councils, trauma-informed evidence-based policies, parent



engagement initiatives, and school wellness campaigns. These intentional actions and responses can establish communication, practices and culture that benefit positive health outcomes for students, staff and families.

Administration can turn to resources and frameworks such as:

- [CDC's Strategies for Promoting Mental Health in Schools](#)
- [CDC's Support Staff Well-Being](#)
- [Multitiered Systems of Support](#)
- [Local School Wellness Policies](#)
- [Health Education Assessment Tool](#)

How can school nurses and school-based health centers support neurodivergent students and students with disabilities when teaching social, mental, and personal health and safety?

School nurses play a valuable role in ensuring that students' health needs are being met within school and outside of school. Nurses and school-based health centers should work closely with educators and families of neurodivergent students and students with disabilities. School health services should be aware of and recognize accommodations, communication styles, and activators that limit a student's potential in school.

Qualified professionals should be well-versed in a student's IEP/504 Plans so they, too, can advocate for the student's needs and help to maintain the student's health profiles. Nurses and school-based health centers may find themselves educating educators on the importance of equitable care for their students. School-based health centers are a connective factor for academic, social and community connectedness.

How does the health services strategy of WWiS connect with health education and safe and supportive environments?

Quality health services should connect with the principles of health education and safe and supportive environments to uphold protocols, practices and culture that benefit the wellness of students. Health service professionals should be integrated with health educators to not only provide support through care, but through education and advocacy.

These connections inform curriculum development and health priorities — and reinforce health education concepts — especially to meet individual needs. Health services can help to identify and address environments and education that meet the needs of students and families they care for, in and out of school. Through the intentionality of providing quality health education, with awareness and modifications of learning environments, health services can uphold curriculum, protocol and culture.



SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

Safe and supportive school environments is one of the strategies used to encourage students and their families to feel more comfortable at school, therefore encouraging increased engagement. The social and emotional climate of a school can impact student engagement in school activities; relationships with other students, staff, family, and community; and academic performance. Connectedness, or a student's feelings of belonging, engagement, safety and support contribute to a positive learning environment and effective teaching and learning. Intentionality to safe and supportive schools reduces stress and burnout in educators and enhances the ability to have effective communication regarding student behavior and wellness. Through safe and supportive environments educators encourage and equip parents to continue conversations regarding adolescent health and well-being, specifically to support students' social, mental, and personal health and safety.

Safe and Supportive Environments and Media Literacy

The integration of media literacy with safe and supportive environments can lead to many opportunities to develop and teach students and families the ability to navigate consistent images, information and language from media sources. Examples of how to integrate media literacy include:

- Practice identifying credible vs. misleading sources and information by examining purpose, authorship and evidence;
- Analyze media messages for bias, reliability or emotional manipulation while considering how they shape beliefs and behaviors;
- Engage parents through workshops on media literacy and online safety that emphasize critical thinking and responsible creation;
- Build awareness of digital citizenship and understanding of digital footprints and privacy through active inquiry and reflection;
- Foster dialogue and awareness about persuasive design of media applications and their influence on user behavior;
- Support students in becoming informed, reflective participants in both online and offline school communities.

School Administrator Support

Administrators can become the advocate and voice for their schools to follow. Administrators who can uplift the value of this strategy should do so with a lens that promotes the culture,



integrity and diversity of their school community. Education leaders who focus resources and time on school connectedness will see a long-lasting effect in student relationships as a growing member of the community. Through resources such as [CDC's restorative practices](#), administration focuses on students' whole being to increase students' wellness and academics within their community. Strategies to intersect with the other two strategies may include:

- Form wellness committee with diverse representatives;
- Establish and create protocol, assessments, surveys and evaluations that assess educator, student and family needs;
- Provide professional development in family engagement strategies.

How can safe and supportive environments support neurodivergent students and students with disabilities?

Neurodivergent students and students with disabilities can benefit from schools that uplift and support the importance of implementing safety and support. Schools can lean into laws such as [The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\) and Section 504](#), which promote and support education services and learning environments for those with disabilities. Through safe and supportive methods, such as professional development for educators in organizational training and classroom management, teacher-led approaches can influence students to take breaks and move around or create changes in environments that do not limit access to development but limit distractions. Paraprofessionals, teacher aides, office administration, custodial staff, and support members can be properly trained to offer tiers of support relating to the student's environment and/or access to needs. These relationships can increase access to safe spaces and build trusting relationships among peers and educators.

How does the safe and supportive environments strategy of WWiS connect with health education and health services?

All three strategies of the What Works in School, should work collectively and actively to increase communication, services and needs of students. To extend our example established in the health education strategy: The health teacher sees that these lessons are valued among students; administrators, supporting staff, and the health service team provide workshops for parents regarding health services for students. Based on school readiness and current connectivity, educators may have community partners or grants to increase intentionality in programming for parents and students. All parties involved with students benefit when those students feel safe to learn. School communities who promote safe learning environments can also extend their practices to the students' extended environment. Educators experience warm handoffs between supporters of students daily. The use of What Works in Schools uses these three strategies to increase the well-being of educators, students and their communities.



Copyright © 2024 by SHAPE America | All rights reserved.

PO Box 225
Annapolis Junction, MD 20701
800-213-9527

SHAPE America – Society of Health and Physical Educators serves as the voice for 200,000+ health and physical education professionals across the United States. The organization’s extensive community includes a diverse membership of health and physical educators, as well as advocates, supporters, and 50+ state affiliate organizations.

Since its founding in 1885, the organization has defined excellence in school-based health education and physical education. For decades, SHAPE America’s [National Physical Education Standards](#) have served as the foundation for well-designed physical education programs across the country, just as the SHAPE America [National Health Education Standards](#) serve as the foundation for effective skills-based health education. Together, these national standards provide a comprehensive framework for educators to deliver high-quality instruction and make a positive difference in the health and well-being of every preK-12 student.

Find additional resources at shapeamerica.org.

