

Characteristics of an Effective Health Education Curriculum

Audio Descriptive Text

Title: 2. Chapter 2: Health Education; Characteristics of an Effective Health Education Curriculum. Icons for HECAT topic areas. Images of youth and teachers in and around schools. List of characteristics of an effective curriculum.

Video Summary

- Health education provides young people with the knowledge and skills needed to become successful learners as well as healthy and productive adults.
- The health education curriculum clarifies what health content is important and what students should be able to do as a result of participating in learning experiences.
- There are 15 key characteristics of an effective health education curriculum.

Audio Script

Health education is a fundamental part of an overall school health program. Health education provides young people with the knowledge and skills needed to become successful learners as well as healthy and productive adults.

The health education curriculum is the primary means through which schools deliver health education. The curriculum clarifies what health content is important and what students should be able to do as a result of participating in health education learning experiences.

Reviews of effective programs and curricula have identified the following key characteristics of an effective health education curriculum.

An effective curriculum:

1. Focuses on clear health goals and related behavioral outcomes. Teachers should show how learning activities directly relate to health behaviors of interest to their students. Activities should not be selected merely because students find them fun or because an activity is a teacher's favorite.

An effective curriculum:

2. Is research-based and theory-driven. There is a purpose why learning is designed and delivered as described in effective curricula. It is because there is a justification for their design, often based on theory and credible research evidence.

An effective curriculum:

3. Addresses individual values, attitudes, and beliefs. Lessons expose students to positive prevention attitudes and beliefs of others and reinforces their own healthy beliefs with examples and other evidence.

An effective curriculum:

4. Addresses individual and group norms that support health-enhancing behaviors. Instruction provides opportunities to emphasize norms that promote the health of oneself and others. For example, sharing sexual risk data from the National Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System can

show 9th grade health education students that most of their peers are not sexually active. This counters the inaccurate belief by many youth that most students their age are sexually active.

An effective curriculum:

5. Focuses on reinforcing protective factors and increasing awareness of personal risk and the harmfulness of engaging in unhealthy practices and behaviors. Lessons in an effective curriculum allow students to see and experience the positive outcomes of healthy practices and the negative outcomes of unhealthy practices.

An effective curriculum:

6. Addresses social pressures and influences. Students are engaged in discussing and practicing strategies for dealing with the realities of pressures to participate in risky behaviors, such as drinking and driving, unprotected sex, or violence against others.

An effective curriculum:

7. Builds personal competence, social competence, and self-efficacy by teaching skills. Teachers create lessons where students can practice these skills, giving them confidence and options for avoiding real risk situations, talking through conflicts, using accurate information to inform decisions, and knowing how to get help when needed.

An effective curriculum:

8. Provides functional health knowledge that is basic, accurate, and directly contributes to health-promoting decisions and behaviors. The curriculum emphasizes information that students can use to assess risk, correct misperceptions, and make decisions relevant to their behaviors. For example, students do not need to know statistics on diseases, names of drugs, lists of nutrients, or ingredients of tobacco products in order to understand what to avoid. They need to know and practice the skills to avoid risky behaviors in their lives.

An effective curriculum:

9. Uses strategies designed to personalize information and engage students. Many ineffective curricula present learning examples to reach all students in a general and vague way. Effective lessons present health decisions and actions using situations that are directly relevant to a student's daily life, culture, and circumstances.

An effective curriculum:

10. Provides age-appropriate and developmentally appropriate information, learning strategies, teaching methods, and materials. A sign of an ineffective curriculum is when it relies on teachers lecturing outdated and often repeated information or using technical jargon. This rarely engages students and is not applicable or relevant to their daily lives.

An effective curriculum:

11. Incorporates learning strategies, teaching methods, and materials that are culturally inclusive. Teaching materials are free from culturally biased information and are inclusive of diverse cultures and lifestyles such as gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age, physical or mental ability, appearance, and sexual orientation.

An effective curriculum:

12. Provides adequate time for instruction and learning. A high quality curriculum spends less time on teaching factual information and more time on practicing skills. Often, too much time is

spent in health education providing “nice-to-know” information that has little influence on student health. The more practice students can get learning the skills they need to protect and improve their health and the health of others, the more effective is their health education.

An effective curriculum:

13. Provides opportunities to reinforce skills and positive health behaviors. Instruction builds on previously learned concepts. Teachers reinforce—but do not repeat—past information of importance and use higher order learning methods (such as inquiry) to build on that prior learning.

An effective curriculum:

14. Provides opportunities for students to make positive connections with influential others. Lessons require students to learn healthy habits from influential others (like their parents or other positive adult role models) who affirm and reinforce health-promoting norms, attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors.

An effective curriculum:

15. Includes teacher information and plans for professional development that enhances effectiveness of instruction and student learning. Effective curricula are taught by effective teachers. Skillful teaching is not easy and requires that teachers continue to receive training, coaching, and support from others, including school leaders.