



## Professional Preparation in Health Education

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### A Position Statement of the American Association of Health Education (AAHE)

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Elementary teachers help to lay the foundation for good health behavior and practices in children. Lack of teacher preparation has been identified as one of the most significant barriers to effective implementation of school health education at the elementary level.<sup>1</sup> In order to be knowledgeable and comfortable with the health education curriculum, elementary teachers should be adequately prepared through appropriate course work and ongoing professional development in health education. Those elementary teachers responsible for health education need additional education to master the content and instructional methodologies necessary to make health education effective.

Due to the complex and dynamic nature of health education and the unique developmental issues of the middle-level child, middle school health education teachers should have a major in health education and participate in ongoing professional development.<sup>2</sup> Complex information and skills are required to educate today's high school students about current health problems and emerging health trends. To ensure that these teachers have met requirements that validate their content knowledge and teaching and assessment skills, only state certified health education specialists should be employed.

All teachers responsible for the delivery of health education to students in pre-kindergarten through grade twelve need to possess the knowledge, professionalism, and skills to effectively prepare students to make healthy choices throughout life. This development needs to occur during the professional preparation of individuals as they seek a teaching credential. Continuing education is needed throughout teachers' careers to enhance their understanding about the most recent research and practices related to improving teaching and learning. AAHE supports advocacy efforts to promote increased health education in professional programs for all teachers working with students in pre-kindergarten through grade twelve.

Both national and state teacher examinations need to include items related to health content and instruction to assess the adequate preparation of teachers in health education. These examinations assess whether these teachers are able to:

- Gather, evaluate, and use resources for health promotion;
- Engage families and communities as partners in the health promotion of youth;
- Explain the role culture and personal beliefs play in health promotion;
- Have basic knowledge about health concepts and skills;
- Have basic knowledge about local, state and federal laws and policies that govern health education;
- Explain the connection between health and learning;

- Explain the eight components of coordinated school health and the teacher's role in a coordinated school health program;
- Demonstrate knowledge and skills about how to maintain and improve health, prevent disease, and avoid or reduce health risk behaviors;
- Screen, assess, and refer students with health problems.

Examinations of elementary teachers also need to include an assessment of the elementary teacher's ability to effectively implement health education, including the application of the national and state health education standards to curricula and student assessment.<sup>3</sup>

## References

1. The Joint Committee of the Association for the Advancement of Health Education and American School Health Association. Health instruction responsibilities and competencies for elementary (K-6) classroom teachers. *J of School Health* 1992; 62(2), 76-77.
2. Breckon DJ, Harvey JR, Lancaster RB. Chapter 11: Working in a School Health Setting, *Community Health Education*. Sudbury: Jones and Bartlett, 1998.
3. The Joint Committee on National Health Education Standards. *National Health Education Standards: Achieving Excellence* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). Atlanta: American Cancer Society, 2007.

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