

School-Wide Efforts and Policies That Foster Health, Wellness, and Safety

This We Believe - Successful Schools for Young Adolescents



Developmentally responsive middle level schools promote abundant opportunities for students to develop and maintain healthy minds and bodies and to understand their personal growth. An emphasis on health, wellness, and safety permeates the entire school, with faculty members sharing responsibility for maintaining a positive school environment. The risks associated with tobacco, alcohol, drugs, diets, and sexual activities are addressed in such a school.

A coordinated health program concentrates on those areas of students' personal lives that enhance or interfere with learning. These areas provide opportunities for developing and practicing healthful decision-making, coping, and refusal skills that are purposely reinforced throughout the curriculum. Written policies support and direct a school's efforts to address health and wellness within courses, the school culture, school and community collaborative projects, and parent partnerships. All adults are encouraged to model good health habits. Local health agencies cooperate with school and families in dealing with young adolescent health issues. Schools actively promote a safe and welcoming environment by developing school and community-wide initiatives that identify risks and promote protective conditions through a true home-school-community partnership.

A comprehensive health and wellness program includes student-focused, integrated experiences that are implemented throughout the curriculum, plus daily physical education activities that improve students' cardiovascular fitness, coordination, agility, and strength. The school emphasizes lifelong physical activities such as aerobics, dance, and leisure-time sports and fitness programs. Intramural and extracurricular activities that require physical activity must be developmentally appropriate, be open to the entire student body, and comply with recognized national standards. Schools also recognize students for gains they make toward personal goals based on individual wellness profiles.

A school that fosters physical and psychological safety strives to build resiliency in young people by maintaining an environment in which peaceful and safe interactions are expected and supported by written policies, scheduled professional development, and student-focused activities. These policies are clearly communicated to students, teachers, and families. A strong sense of school community is developed by teaching students how to manage anger, resolve conflicts peacefully, and prevent hateful or violent behaviors.

Schools whose policies, professional development plans, and both formal and informal curricula consistently address the issues mentioned previously will also succeed in fostering health, wellness, and safety. In such schools students have an increased sense of well-being and a greater likelihood of succeeding academically.

Original publication information:

National Middle School Association. (2003) School-wide efforts and policies that foster health, wellness, and safety. In *This we believe — Successful schools for young adolescents* (pp. 31-32). Westerville, OH: Author.