



Schools: Integrating Health Literacy into the Curriculum Early Childhood through Secondary

Children of all ages have the potential to understand the practices associated with health, as well as how to access health information. ¹ Schools need to improve the curriculum of both language art and health education courses at all levels in order to improve health literacy skills of children and the adults they will become.

Facts

- Language arts is usually taught at every grade level for 50 minutes or more daily, yet by the 12th grade more than half of the students have only achieved partial mastery (or less) of the needed content and skills.
 - » 26% of twelfth grade students scored below basic on the national assessment of language arts in 2009.²
 - » 32% of students scored only at the basic level 5 which means that these students have only “partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work at each grade.”²Given this data, it is not surprising that most students possess little health knowledge and health literacy skills by graduation.
- There is no national assessment of health education knowledge and skills. The National Standards in Health Education (2007)³ call for 80 hours of instruction annually for grades 3 to 12 which translates into a semester of instruction for 55 minutes daily. Only 40 hours annually are recommended for grades K-2. The actual percentage of schools providing the recommended hours of health instruction is dismal:
 - » 7.5% of K-5 schools provide the 360 hours cumulative for health education
 - » 10.3% of 6-8 schools provide the recommended 240 hours grades
 - » 6.5% of high schools provide the recommended 320 cumulative hours.⁴
- Children living in poverty acquire language skills more slowly and are at risk for reading difficulties.⁵⁻⁶ Cognitive ability of low income children is improved by early attention to physical, psychological and development needs of these children. The positive effects of participating in early childhood development programs (such as Head Start) include children who:⁷
 - » Are less likely to be retained in grade and placed in special education,
 - » Receive higher scores on standardized achievement tests,
 - » Improve high school graduation rates,
 - » Decrease teen pregnancy and delinquency, and
 - » Have higher rates of employment and home ownership as adults.

Start today:

Familiarize your self with a healthy literacy curriculum improvement effort. Take a moment right now to visit <http://www.ksheadstart.org/node/90> to learn how one state organized communities to promote early childhood health literacy.

Key Words

Curriculum, Language Arts, National Standards in Health Education



Tips for Health Educators

What You Can Do to Improve Health Literacy Pre K through Grade 12

Health educators can be important advocates in improving health literacy through quality health and language arts education. We can:

- Describe and advocate for the need for health education K-12 and early childhood education.
- Evaluate initiatives and annually identify new objectives for continuous improvement in health education and health literacy for students.
- Organize a Speakers Bureau that advocates for literacy and health literacy resources for families and students.
- Support literacy and health literacy programs by organizing community wide initiatives to improve health literacy (storybook hours, volunteer tutors, fund-raising events).
- Identify/Implement a plan of action to improve K-12 health instruction to meet or surpass the National Standards for health education, including 80 hours or more of health instruction grades 3-12. See:
 - » *The Health Framework for California Public Schools: K-12*: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/documents/healthfw.pdf>
 - » Promotion of adherence to time and content standards articulated by the *National Health Education Standards for K-12*: <http://www.cancer.org/Healthy/MoreWaysACSHelpsYouStayWell/SchoolHealth/national-health-education-standards-2007>
- Advocate for state legislative proposals that:
 - » Coordinate financial and other resources for research-based literacy and health education programs at local levels.
 - » Improve health education teacher quality (e.g. certification, licensure requirements).
 - » Improve professional development for teachers in literacy skills and health education.

Strategy in Action

Kansas Head Start Association Improves Health Literacy of Parents

Beginning in 2004, the Kansas Head Start Association offered a health literacy training program to all Head Start families in Kansas Working with the Health Care Institute (HCI). The program was developed by the University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA) and the Johnson and Johnson Company. The Kansas Head Start programs have provided health literacy training to over 3,600 families, with the following results:

- 86% have continued using the book ("What To Do When Your Child Gets Sick" by Gloria Mayer, R.N. and Ann Kuklierus, R.N.) after participating in the training;
- 82% report increased confidence in their ability to take care of their children's illnesses and injuries;
- 41% fewer parents went to the doctor or clinic and 29% less went to the emergency room first when their child was sick; and
- Parents lost an average of 24% fewer work days, and children, 18% fewer school days after parents participated in the training and follow-up coaching.

Visit <http://www.ksheadstart.org/node/90> for more information.



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Resources

Early Childhood Resources

Parents:

Bonnie B. Armbruster, Fran Lehr, Jean Osborn (2003). *A Child Becomes a Reader Birth through Preschool: The Partnership for Reading*. Portsmouth, New Hampshire: RMC Research Corporation. Available at: http://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/reading_pre.pdf.

Literacy Begins at Home provides suggestions for improving the reading skills of toddlers and preschoolers: http://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/Literacy_Home.pdf.

Kindergartners Learn to Read provides suggestions for engaging the children in discussing what is read to them: http://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/Shining_Stars_Kindergarten.pdf.

A pediatrician's guide to keeping children healthy is a resource for parents of children of all ages and is available at: <http://www.keepkidshealthy.com/>.

Teachers:

Suggestions for teaching digital media skills to pre-school children is available at: <http://www.pbs.org/teachers/digital-media-literacy/>.

See the 10 nationally-recognized quality standards set by NIEER for child care centers at <http://kspreschoolpartners.org/what-ks-preschool-program-model> (On this page hit the link to the 10 nationally recognized standards).

The Reading Rockets Web site focuses on teaching kids to read and helping those who struggle by providing resources for parents and teachers at: <http://www.readingrockets.org/>.

Health Education Specialists:

Evidence for promoting Head Start & Early Head Start is available at: <http://www.ncsheadstart.org/pdfs/Evidence%20Based%20Practice%20-%20HS%20&%20EHS-1.pdf>.

Child care standards for health education and health promotion for students, teachers and family members can be found in *Caring for Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards; Guidelines for Early Care and Education Programs*, 3rd Edition Available at <http://nrckids.org/CFOC3/index.html>.

Fact Sheet on *Why Invest in Early Childhood Education* is available at: <http://kansasschoolreadiness.org/early-education>.



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K-12

Student and Family Health and Literacy

A large variety of health articles written for kids, parents, and teenagers are available. The home page is: www.kidshealth.org.

Almost 2500 resources are available for teens on the Kid's Health web site when a "health literacy" search was initiated. See <http://kidshealth.org/Search01.jsp>.

Web sites for children K-12 with health information separated into pre-teens and teens is available at: http://www.learntobehealthy.org/?wt.srch=1&wt.mc_id=GoogleAdwords&wt.mc_n=Kids_Health_Education&wt.mc_de=Health_Education_For_Kids&gclid=COmMil6v_KoCFZoT2god6BeezA.

Health web site developed for youth by CDC is available: <http://www.bam.gov/>.

Materials for families and children to promote health literacy: <http://www.healthliteracy.worlded.org/docs/family/index.html>.

A pediatrician's guide to keeping children healthy is a resource for parents of children of all ages and is available at: <http://www.keepkidshealthy.com/>.

Teachers:

CDC's School Health Education Resources (SHER) provides user-friendly access to the myriad school health education offerings available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) which is available at: <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/sher/>.

PBS Teacher suggestions for teaching digital media skills to students is separated into five developmental levels: K-2,3-5, 6-8, 9-12. See <http://www.pbs.org/teachers/digital-media-literacy/>.

The Reading Rockets web site focuses on teaching kids to read and helping those who struggle with reading through providing resources for parents, teachers, principals, librarians and other professionals at: <http://www.readingrockets.org/>.

Health Educator:

Goal 3 of the Surgeon General's plan focuses on education from early childhood through secondary school. This CDC resource provides ideas for improving health literacy among youth as well as resources at: <http://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/PlanAct/Goals/goal3.html>.

The complete *National Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy* is available at http://www.health.gov/communication/hlactionplan/pdf/Health_Literacy_Action_Plan.pdf.



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Review a program entitled, *Health literacy for Children and Families from Diverse Backgrounds: Empowering Parents, Benefitting Children, Improving the Health Care System* for ideas to begin a local program at:

http://www.mikogroup.com/2010readinginstitute/documents/845_Herman%20and%20King.pdf.

Encourage local physicians to better communicate with their child patients and families by taking a course sponsored by the American Academy of Pediatrics:

http://www.pedialink.org/cmefinder/videos/health_literacy/index.htm.

Health Literacy fact sheets are available on a variety of topics at the bottom of the following fact sheet: <http://www2.literacy.bc.ca/facts/health.htm>.

The Alliance for Excellent Education (2007) developed *Federal Support for Adolescent Literacy: A Solid Investment* which provides ideas and resources for improving health:

<http://www.all4ed.org/files/FedAdLit.pdf>.

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