

New Mexico

Strengthening Health Education Through State Graduation Requirements

Problem Overview

In 2009, New Mexico did not have a state-level health education (HE) graduation requirement, and only 34 of 89 school districts were teaching HE as a stand-alone class. School districts integrated HE into a variety of other classes, did not require an HE class to graduate from high school, or did not require that the course be taught by a state-licensed health educator. The state Senate Education Committee recommended a study to determine the level of need and public support for an HE graduation requirement.

Program/Activity Description

The New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) convened a workgroup—with representatives from NMPED including the CDC-supported coordinator for the HIV Prevention Education Program, the Department of Health, higher education institutions, school superintendents, educators, community organizations, and the legislative education study committee—to address the committee's directive. The workgroup researched best practices for delivering HE and conducted surveys to determine support for making HE a graduation requirement. Finding strong evidence and support for including a stand-alone HE course among the state's high school graduation requirements, the workgroup presented that recommendation to the Senate Education Committee.

Program/Activity Outcomes

In 2010, New Mexico passed a new law, effective during the 2012–2013 school year, that

- Requires a course in HE for graduation from a public school.
- Allows districts to determine if the class will be taught in middle school or high school.
- Requires that HE be taught in a stand-alone class by a licensed health educator.

Requiring HE as a graduation requirement is a major step toward ensuring that New Mexico's youth receive

- Evidence-based health information to guide their decision making.
- More opportunities to learn about and practice healthy lifestyle habits.
- More skills-based instruction focused on reducing health risk behaviors.

A CDC-supported program coordinator is helping to train curriculum directors, school administrators, and health educators to implement the new requirement and ensure compliance with state HE standards. The NMPED will use CDC's School Health Profiles, a survey that can be used to assess school health policies and practices, to monitor the effect of the new requirement.