

Appendix 6: Using the HECAT to Analyze Curricula for Early Childhood Programs

The *National Health Education Standards* address student learning outcomes in pre-kindergarten through grade 12. However, some education agencies serve younger children at school sites, and others are working with community-based organizations and private early childhood care providers to establish a foundation for early healthy child development and learning.

The American Academy of Pediatrics, in partnership with the American Public Health Association; National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care; and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau¹ have produced standards that guide quality health and safety practices and policies in today's early care and education settings. These standards acknowledge that health education is not typically structured around a curriculum but is integrated into the overall early childhood education program. Critical health topics include:

- Body awareness
- Family relationships
- Personal social skills
- Expression of feelings
- Self-esteem and self-awareness
- Food and nutrition
- Personal and dental hygiene
- Safety
- Conflict management, violence prevention, and bullying prevention
- Basic first aid
- Physical activity and fitness

- Outdoor learning and play
- Healthy sleep habits
- Health risks of secondhand smoke
- Taking medications
- Dialing 911 for emergencies
- Signs and symptoms of common chronic conditions (e.g., food allergy, seizure disorders, asthma)

Many of these topics are addressed in the pre-K–2 sections of the HECAT. However, schools may wish to make some modifications to the HECAT knowledge and skill expectations to accommodate the developmental and learning differences of younger children. Figure 1 identifies example knowledge and skill expectations for early childhood education for children ages 3- to 5-years, consistent with the early childhood national health and safety performance standards and aligned with the *National Health Education Standards*. This list of expectations can guide the analysis of a health education curriculum to be used in an early childhood or preschool program. The examples have been selected from the relevant HECAT topic modules, grades pre-K–2.

Some state and local education agencies have expanded their school health education standards to address all ages of children served in school, including those enrolled in early childhood programs. Some state education agencies have worked with state partners to promote state-level early learning standards, guidelines, and professional competencies that include content related to early childhood health education. The HECAT can be modified to incorporate both types of standards if desired.

¹ American Academy of Pediatrics, American Public Health Association, National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education. *Caring for Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards; Guidelines for Early Care and Education Programs*, 4th ed. Itasca, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2019. <http://nrckids.org/files/CFOC4%20pdf-%20FINAL.pdf> <http://nrckids.org/files/CFOC4 pdf- FINAL.pdf>

Figure 1: Example HECAT Health Education Knowledge and Skill Expectations for Early Childhood (Ages 3- to 5-years) aligned with the National Health Education Standards²

National Health Education Standard #1: Students will comprehend concepts related to health promotion and disease prevention to enhance health. Preschool students should be able to:

- State the steps for proper hand washing.
- Explain why sleep and rest are important for proper growth and good health.
- Identify ways to prevent the spread of germs that cause common infectious diseases.
- Identify foods and non-food triggers that are common causes of allergic reactions.
- Identify how injuries can be prevented.
- Identify people who can help when someone is injured or suddenly ill.
- Explain ways to be active every day.
- Identify a variety of healthy snacks.
- Explain why it is wrong to tease or bully others.
- Identify appropriate ways to express and deal with feelings.

National Health Education Standard #2: Students will analyze the influence of family, peers, culture, media, technology and other factors on health behaviors. Preschool students should be able to:

- Identify relevant influences of family on safety and injury prevention practices and behaviors.
- Identify relevant influences of media and technology on personal health and wellness practices and behaviors.

National Health Education Standard #3: Students will demonstrate the ability to access valid information and products and services to enhance health. Preschool students should be able to:

- Identify trusted adults at home who can help promote personal health and wellness.
- Demonstrate how to locate school or community health helpers who can help reduce or avoid violence (e.g., police officer, 911).

National Health Education Standard #4: Students will demonstrate the ability to use interpersonal communication skills to enhance health and avoid or reduce health risks. Preschool students should be able to:

- Demonstrate how to effectively communicate needs, wants, and feelings in healthy ways.
- Demonstrate effective active listening skills including paying attention, and verbal and nonverbal feedback.
- Demonstrate how to effectively tell a trusted adult when feeling threatened or harmed.

National Health Education Standard #5: Students will demonstrate the ability to use decision-making skills to enhance health. Preschool students should be able to:

- Identify situations which need a decision related to personal health and wellness (e.g., washing hands before eating; wearing sun protection; brushing teeth daily).
- Describe when help is needed and when it is not needed to make a personal health or wellness-related decision.

National Health Education Standard #6: Students will demonstrate the ability to use goal-setting and skills to enhance health. Preschool students should be able to:

- Identify a realistic short-term goal to improve a personal health and wellness practice.
- Identify people who can help achieve a personal health and wellness goal.

National Health Education Standard #7: Students will demonstrate the ability to practice health-enhancing behaviors and avoid or reduce health risks. Preschool students should be able to:

- Demonstrate positive personal health and wellness practices (such as brushing and flossing teeth, washing hands, covering mouth and nose when sneezing, getting proper rest and sleep).
- Identify health practices that reduce or prevent health risks (such as wearing seatbelts, washing hands, drinking plenty of water).
- Demonstrate safety and injury prevention practices.

National Health Education Standard #8: Students will demonstrate the ability to advocate for personal, family, and community health. Preschool students should be able to:

- Make requests to others to promote positive personal health and wellness practices.

² The Joint Committee on National Health Education Standards. National Health Education Standards: Achieving Excellence (2nd Edition). Atlanta: American Cancer Society; 2007.