

Appendix 7: Understanding Health Education Assessment

For schools to be successful in achieving expected health education outcomes, it is essential to assess student learning, the instructional environment, and instructional programs. Assessment provides evidence reflecting students' individual growth toward acquiring the knowledge and skills that contribute to healthy behavioral outcomes. Assessment also helps teachers plan and deliver instruction and learning strategies to contribute to students' achievement of health education standards.

Traditionally, health education assessment has focused on testing student knowledge through written examination. While this has been useful in helping assess what a student knows, it has served as a poor indicator of the student's level of understanding of health-related concepts, their ability to demonstrate health skills, and their ability to apply conceptual learning and skills in ways that improve their personal health.

In today's approach to health education assessment, choosing the appropriate measures requires careful consideration of academic standards, or learning targets, student learning styles and preferences, the teacher's comfort level, and space, facilities, and instructional time. With this approach, the student's goal is not to compete with and "beat" other students, but rather, to reach proficiency in meeting the target standards and expectations. The teacher's goal is not to sort and rank, but to assess student work over time and provide descriptive feedback so students have the opportunity to improve and succeed.

Key questions to guide development and selection of student assessment strategies in health education include:

- Does the task or measure match the instructional intent?
- Does the task or measure adequately represent the content and skills you expect students to attain?
- Does the task or measure enable students to demonstrate their progress and capabilities?
- Does the task or measure involve authentic, real-world applications?

- Does the task or measure lend itself to an interdisciplinary approach?
- Can more than one goal/standard be met using this task or measure?

It is the ongoing assessment of student learning, related to meeting the standards that provides the teacher, student, and parent with the necessary information to move the student toward proficiency. An effective classroom assessment process occurs over time, includes a variety of methods, offers a personalized record of student achievement, and provides timely and descriptive feedback to the student. It is essential that the student know the learning targets (standards) and the assessment criteria (e.g., a rubric or performance checklist), and have continuous access to evidence of progress. The student can then partner with the teacher to work toward proficiency. Students will have the information they need to take responsibility for their learning and teachers will have the information necessary to improve their instruction.

At the national level, there are eight *National Health Education Standards*¹ and each is aligned with a set of performance indicators pre-K through 12th grade. Health education curricula should include two important aspects: 1) multiple strategies for assessing student performance in meeting the standard (knowledge and skill expectations) and 2) instructional and learning activities developed to help the student meet the standard (knowledge and skill expectations)—all aligned to promote maximum student learning. It is important to consider the depth and extent to which student assessment is included when appraising a health education curriculum.

¹ The Joint Committee on National Health Education Standards. *National Health Education Standards: Achieving Excellence* (2nd Edition). Atlanta: American Cancer Society; 2007.

For more information about health education assessment:

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Herman JL, Aschbachner PR, Winters L. *A Practical Guide to Alternative Assessment*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development; 1992: 80–94.

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