

School Health Policy Development: Basic First Steps

Description of the tool:

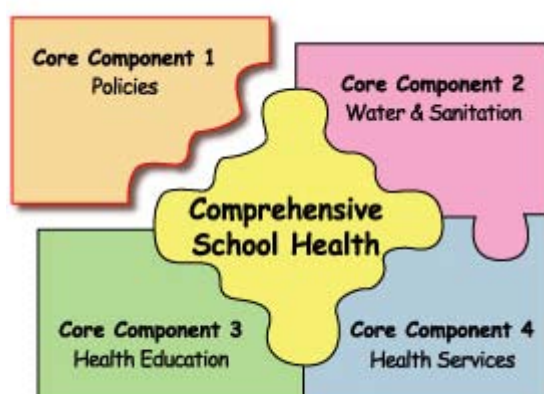
This tool is intended for those participating in efforts to develop health-related school policies. It can be used to identify issues for which policies should be developed to meet the established needs of a given school (or district), and to guide the process of obtaining expert advice and developing appropriate content. Originally developed to provide information for paediatricians participating in school health programmes, it reminds us that health care specialists are essential and valuable partners not only for their ability to provide specific health services, but also as advisors in the areas of health policy and health education. This tool is particularly useful when made available to policy-makers in conjunction with the results of a recently conducted (or updated) community needs assessment and copies of existing school policies.

The information in this tool was adapted by UNESCO from the following publication:

American Academy of Pediatrics, 1997. *School Health: Train the Trainers*. Available on the organization's school health website (<http://www.schoolhealth.org>) at <http://www.schoolhealth.org/trnthtrn/trainmn.html>

Description of the document:

A product of the *School Health Leadership Training Conference* organized by the American Academy of Pediatrics in 1997, this document aims to motivate and assist paediatricians to provide support for local school health programmes.



This information supports Core Component #1 of the FRESH framework for effective school health: **school health policies**. It will have a greater impact if it is reinforced by activities in the other three components of the framework.

School Health Policy Development: Basic First Steps¹

Policies provide an essential framework for achieving the goals and objectives of a school's overall school health programme. They should cover all issues identified through a community needs assessment as having an impact on the health (physical and psychosocial) of students and school staff. If a good mix of individuals works together to determine the content of policies, including school personnel, students, parents, community leaders and experts, the process itself helps to build consensus and support for the school's health programme activities. Use the information that follows to assess the adequacy of existing policies at your school, and to decide how those policies should be improved.

Step 1: Determining what will be included in school health policies

Policies may cover any or all of the following issues:

(✓✓✓ Check each item that needs to be addressed in policies at your school. Circle those issues that are not currently adequately addressed.)

- Rights, discrimination and gender issues, e.g.:
 - discrimination related to differences in religion, caste or ethnic origin
 - sexual harassment and abuse
 - continued education for pregnant and parenting students
 - continued employment of staff and education of students infected or affected by HIV or AIDS
- Inclusive practices for students with special needs, e.g.:
 - special education services
 - education and services (such as speech, occupational and physical therapy, counselling, etc.) for students with disabilities
 - continuing education for pregnant or parenting teens
- Environmental concerns, e.g.:
 - water and sanitation facilities
 - food service conditions
 - the safety of school buildings and grounds
 - elimination of toxins (asbestos, lead, etc.)
 - accessibility for students with disabilities
- Health education programmes, e.g.:
 - requirements for classes
 - teacher training and credentialing
 - curricula content
- School-wide/community-wide efforts to address significant health problems, e.g.:
 - to decrease drug, alcohol and tobacco use
 - to increase physical activity
 - to decrease the spread of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections and reduce AIDS-related discrimination
 - unintended injuries and violence
- School feeding programmes

- ❑ Health services, e.g.:
 - immunization requirements
 - health screening
 - health records
 - exclusion for and prevention of communicable disease
 - medical treatment for helminth infections, nutritional deficiencies and other illnesses
 - HIV infection
 - credentials for health service providers

- ❑ Emergency procedures and responsibilities

Coordinated school health programmes most often include the following eight components:

(In the space provided, comment on what policies at your school should guarantee or mandate in each of the following issue areas.)

1. Health education (a planned, sequential, program that addresses the physical, mental, emotional, and social dimensions of health)

Comment: _____

2. Physical education (a planned, sequential, program that promotes physical fitness and includes activities students can pursue throughout their lifetime)

Comment: _____

3. School health services (prevention and early intervention, emergency care, referral to community health services, and management of chronic health conditions)

Comment: _____

4. Nutrition services (nutritious and appealing meals, an environment that promotes healthful food choices, and support for nutrition instruction)

Comment: _____

5. Healthy school environment (both the physical and psychosocial climate of the school)

Comment: _____

6. Counselling, psychological, and social services (connections with individuals, groups, and systems using school-based interventions and referrals to community health care professionals)

Comment: _____

7. Health promotion for staff (health assessments, education, and fitness activities for faculty and staff to allow staff to demonstrate a commitment to health and to serve as positive role models)

Comment: _____

8. Parent and community involvement (a wide range of resources and support that enhance the health and well-being of students)

Comment: _____

School health policies often address such things as:

- Proof of immunizations
- Health screening and periodic physical assessments with referrals and follow-up (including physical examinations for sports participation)
- Exclusion for and prevention of communicable disease
- Administration of prescription-only and over-the-counter medications
- School health records
- Staffing of health services
- Environmental health and safety
- Emergency health procedures and responsibilities

Health services issues that may require policy development or revision include:

- Qualifications of staff providing health care and the supervision and monitoring of such care.
- Confidentiality of health information and access to records.
- Referral to care, especially for students with medically complex needs.

What else needs to be addressed in health-related policies in your school?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

Step 2: Determining how policies will be developed

Review school health policies currently in force.

- Copies should be available from the school administrator, board of education or other local education authorities.
- Request policies from other providers of health services for children and young people in the community.

Make a list of the roles and responsibilities of the persons involved in implementing and enforcing school health policies. For example:

- The school board or other education authorities
Role/responsibilities: _____

- A school medical advisor or physician
Role/responsibilities: _____

- Specific school personnel
Who: _____
Role/responsibilities: _____

Who: _____
Role/responsibilities: _____

- Other significant people _____
Who: _____
Role/responsibilities: _____

Who: _____
Role/responsibilities: _____

Make a list of other key people to work with to draft or revise school health policy. For example:

- A school nurse supervisor or coordinator for health services.
- Chair of the school health council (if available).
- Other school personnel (e.g., school administrators, the teacher(s) responsible for health education, physical education or special education; school staff responsible for facilities maintenance or security).
- Parents.
- Students.

- Community providers of health services needed by young people.
- Area resource persons with experience in developing health policy (e.g., district or regional education authorities, school board legal advisors, teachers' union representatives, local health department personnel, or the school physician, nurse or health services coordinator from a nearby school district).
- State resources may include a state school nurse consultant; state agencies of education and health; and state associations of school boards, school administrators, school nurses, school teachers or directors of special education services.

Obtain information about the standards established or recommended by legal authorities, professional institutes and associations, expert and advocacy groups and social science researchers.

- National, state, and local laws exist that affect school health policy (e.g., state education laws, state licensure or certification of persons providing health care, laws regulating medication administration in schools, laws related to persons with disabilities, etc.)
- National, state and local standards or best practices for coordinated school health programs cover a broad and varied spectrum of knowledge and skills in the areas of:
 - Health education: curriculum components, qualification of staff.
 - Health services: differentiated roles and qualifications, serving individual needs of students with health conditions, levels of care (assessment, intervention, referral, and follow-up).
 - Safe and healthy school environment: physical and socio-emotional climate.
 - Physical education and sports participation: promoting physical fitness.
 - Nutrition: access to nutritious meals and classroom instruction on food choices.
 - Health promotion for staff: promote positive role models.
 - Counselling, psychological, and social services: assessment, intervention, and referral.
 - Parent and community involvement: resources to enhance the well-being of students.
- Local guidelines developed for specific issues or concerns.

Summary

In general, school health **practices** are only as good as the **policies** that guide them. Sound policies, conscientiously enforced, are the foundation on which health promoting and child-friendly learning environments are built. They ensure that health education outcomes are in line with health education goals and objectives, and that the school's limited resources are used to their best advantage to reduce the most significant health problems interfering with learning within a specific school population. So it is well worth investing the time to get good policies in place. Above all, this requires ensuring a balance of input from all those who will be governed by the policies—including school staff, students and families—so that fulfilling their needs is clearly the goal of the policies; and from education, health and other acknowledged experts, so that the standards agreed upon are those that research and experience have shown to produce the best results.

¹ Adapted from American Academy of Pediatrics, 1997. *School Health: Train the Trainers*.
<http://www.schoolhealth.org/trnthtrn/trainmn.html>