

Philosophies of Health Education

Mount Laurel Township Schools

The Mount Laurel Township School District is deeply committed to implementing a planned, sequential, comprehensive K-8 curriculum, guided by the New Jersey Core Content Curriculum Standards, addressing the physical, mental, emotional and social dimensions of health.

In support of these concerns, the Mount Laurel Health Curriculum integrates across the curriculum through a variety of approaches, strategies, and concepts.

We live in a time of extraordinary and accelerating changes in health issues. It is the combined responsibility of the school, community, and family to provide students with the knowledge, attitudes, and life skills needed to understand and successfully meet these challenges in the twenty-first century.

The American Association for Health Education (AAHE)

Health education is a unique and separate academic discipline. It influences individual, family and societal development, knowledge, attitudes and behavior. It seeks the improvement of individual, family and community health. Because the emphasis is upon health, both the process and the program may be said to originate in an understanding of the nature of health as it relates to humans as individuals or in groups.

The contemporary concept of health embraces the entire being. The individual is not a composite of separate entities, such as body, mind and spirit, arranged in presumed ascending order of importance. The individual is a multi-dimensional entity, with each component - chemical, physical, spiritual, intellectual or emotional - existing as an element within a complex of interrelationships. The individual is not a passive participant in the wellness process. Good health requires positive efforts directed toward total wellbeing. These efforts have larger potential for success when operating in a socio-political system that values individual, family and societal wellbeing.

Individual attempts to enhance one's own wellbeing should be joined by a commitment to enhance societal wellbeing. Conversely, society as well bears a responsibility to promote the wellbeing of all individuals. Education in health helps individuals seek that which moves them toward optimal stages of wellness. It means also to aid individuals and families in overcoming the debilitating effects of economic deprivation, the lack of balance, disease and accidents of life.

The ultimate goal of health education is to enable individuals to use knowledge in ways that transform unhealthy habits into healthy habits. It is difficult to expect that individuals can accomplish this end in a societal framework that provides confusing and mixed messages. It thus is an objective for health education to provide learners with the skills to judge messages received in terms of their potential benefit to self and society. It is also an objective to provide criticism of such mixed messages in public forums.

Paradoxically, educators in general or health educators in particular must teach individuals to look beyond health as an end or goal and to utilize health enhancing skills as a means for achieving life's goals. Though health itself may be quantitatively evaluated bio-chemically, health status can only be used as a qualitative measure of functional ability. Wellness is, in this functional sense, a means, not an end. Thus, the end should involve greater societal wellbeing.

The New Jersey Department of Education

Schools have enormous potential for helping students develop the knowledge and skills they need to be healthy and to achieve academically. As rapidly changing and evolving disciplines, health education and physical education must look and be different than the old "hygiene and gym class." Health education and physical education are separate disciplines each with a distinct body of knowledge and skills; however, the two disciplines clearly complement and reinforce each other to support "wellness".