

Quality Health Education Is Linked to Healthier Students

A Guide for New York City Educators and School Leaders



“I feel good about health class because it helps us learn about our bodies, and how they’re functioning, and how we can keep them healthy, and maintain a healthy life throughout our lives.”

—NYC Middle school student

Today’s young people are facing unprecedented physical and mental health challenges.^{1,2,3} Making sure students receive quality Health Education can help address these health needs. A recent study by New York City Public Schools showed that middle and high schools that focus on these four aspects of Health Education tend to have healthier students:

Training Health Teachers

New York City Public Schools offers training for health teachers throughout the city. Schools where at least one teacher went to a recent Health Education training tend to have healthier students.

Teaching Health Skills

A quality curriculum covers a range of health skills, like communication, decision-making, managing stress, and finding reliable health resources. The more skills taught in health class, the healthier students tend to be.

Health Teacher Consistency

In some schools, the health teachers change from year to year. In schools where the same people teach health class for at least 2 years in a row, students generally report healthier behaviors.

School Wellness Council Funding

A School Wellness Council is a group of parents, students, staff, and community members who work with the school administration to support health policies in schools. Students in schools that requested and received funding for their School Wellness Council generally reported healthier behaviors.

“I think [health class] is really important because it actually touches on topics that happen in your real life, like when you grow up, and it’s not just stuff that you won’t ever see again in your life. I think it’s really important because it teaches you how to handle situations when you’re an adult.”

—NYC Middle school student

“[In health class], I learned what’s a healthy relationship. In my family we don’t really talk about our emotions, so for me healthy relationships weren’t something that I was used to.”

—NYC High school student





“During the drug prevention unit, our teacher, she taught us about how other students peer pressure you into doing drugs and stuff, and how you can use more positive ways you can say no.”

—NYC Middle school student

“[In our School Wellness Council], we also have focused on the health and wellness of the school community as a whole. Particularly on students, but on teachers as well.”

—NYC Middle school teacher

Here's how you can ensure your students benefit from Health Education:

Review Health Education Policies in New York City

- [Health Education requirements](#)
- [New York City Public Schools Citywide Wellness Policy](#)

Designate a Consistent Health Teacher

- Talk with your teachers to gauge their interest in teaching Health Education.
- Assign a dedicated health teacher at your school and notify them in advance so they have enough time to prepare for instruction.
- Ensure the same teacher is scheduled for Health Education each year. Teachers reported that teaching health multiple years in a row not only benefits relationships and increases students' trust but also saves time with lesson preparation and planning.

Encourage Your Teacher(s) to Attend Training

- Share the Office of School Wellness Programs [Professional Learning Catalog](#) with your teachers.
- Approve your teachers' time requests and provide coverage for their classes.

Provide Skills-Based Curricula

- Order recommended curricula through Core Curriculum or ShopDOE.
- Share links to the New York City Health Education Scope and Sequence and Health Education pacing guides on [WeTeachNYC](#) with your teachers.

Establish a School Wellness Council

- Encourage and support your staff to create a School Wellness Council.
- Subscribe to [School Wellness Weekly](#) to learn about funding and professional learning opportunities throughout the year.

Read a Report About This Study: [Quality Health Education Is Linked to Healthier Students](#) Questions? Email your [Office of School Wellness Programs Borough Team](#)

From 2021–2023, New York City Public Schools' Office of School Wellness Programs studied the impact of its Health Education practices on student outcomes. The evaluation used statistics and personal experiences from students, teachers, and administrators to explore effective Health Education practices and their impact on health risk behaviors among middle and high school students. The findings presented in this document are based on all of these data. For more information about the methods used, please refer to the report linked above.

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¹Radhakrishnan L, Leeb RT, Bitsko RH, et al. Pediatric Emergency Department Visits Associated with Mental Health Conditions Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic—United States, January 2019–January 2022. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2022;71:319–324. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7108e2>

²Office of the Surgeon General (OSG), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Protecting youth mental health: The U.S. Surgeon General's advisory. 2021. <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-youth-mental-health-advisory.pdf>

³American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). Health organizations urge the Biden administration to declare a federal national emergency in children's mental health. 2022. <https://www.aap.org/en/news-room/news-releases/aap/2022/health-organizations-urge-the-biden-administration-to-declare-a-federal-national-emergency-in-childrens-mental-health/>