

Vermont Public Health Association

Policy Statement

School Health

Adopted August 2022

Readopted October 2024

Description: The VtPHA acknowledges that schools have numerous opportunities for promoting health and preventing illness in youth, while setting the stage for lifelong health. Schools act as integral partners in ensuring widespread community health. Academic and emotional learning also stands to be more successful when students, faculty and staff are healthy.

The intersection of healthy school environments, health education and health promotion in schools is integral to child and adolescent development (Vermont Department of Health 2022; Beattie et al 2021). The VtPHA encourages utilization of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention and ASCD's Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) model. The WSCC model maps out essential elements of school health that will improve population health in tandem with academic achievement (Vermont Department of Health 2019). Health educators and school professionals can employ the WSCC and similar models as guidance for the construction of healthy, productive and safe school environments.

Policy Statement: The VtPHA recognizes that the public health and healthcare systems in Vermont must be fully mobilized in collaboration to mitigate K -12 school health issues, in terms of healthy environments, health education and health promotion in schools.

Supported Actions: The VtPHA supports these evidence-informed strategies to promote school health:

- Comprehensive, research-based health education curriculum; emphasis on areas relevant to student life, such as comprehensive sexual education and smoking/vaping education (Blaisdell and Olson 2019; Damian and Boyd 2021).
- Using data to inform decisions made about how to improve school health.
- Implementation of and support for highly trained school nurses in every school (AAP Council on School Health 2016).
- Physical education that accommodates all children and encourages lifelong physical fitness (AAP Council on School Health 2013; APHA 2022).
- Essential health services with linkages to community providers (AAP Council on School Health 2012).
- Nutrition services and policies that support healthy and safe food choices; universal free breakfast and lunch that will nourish children throughout the day (Seguin 2017).

- Counseling and social services that promote student, faculty, and staff mental wellbeing (AAP News 2021; Lacomba-Trejo et al 2022).
- Safe and supportive school environments that encourage both academic success and acceptance and inclusion of all students.
- Thorough accommodation and support for children with disabilities and adverse child experiences, often abbreviated as ACEs (Kasehagen 2018; AAP Council on Children with Disabilities 2015).
- Reduction and elimination of exposures to environmental toxins in the school environment (Previous policy: Act 125 (May 17, 2000) and Envision Program, Vermont Department of Health)
- Vaccination requirements that support the health of all school children and adolescents
- Family and community involvement in school atmosphere
- Promotion of diversity in the school health workforce
- Increased budgets (where necessary) that can accommodate resources for promoting health that maximize student capacity for learning

Potential Barriers:

- Lack of funding and resources allotted to public schools
- Shortage of health professionals in schools/ having school nurses, mental health counselors, and social workers present in every school (AAP Council on School Health 2016).
- Contemporary mental health challenges among children and adolescents (AAP News 2021)
- Mental health challenges that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 global pandemic (Lacomba-Trejo et al 2022).
- Environmental toxins in schools that impact the physical health of students (Vermont Department of Health 2022).
- Persistent school violence threats (APHA 2022; AAP Council on School Health 2020).
- Gun violence in schools and inadequate gun regulations (APHA 2021).

Related Policies:

- APHA Policy 20211: Supporting Physical Activity in Schools for All Youth
<https://www.apha.org/Policies-and-Advocacy/Public-Health-Policy-Statements/Policy-Database/2022/01/07/Supporting-Physical-Education-in-Schools-for-All-Youth>.
- APHA Policy 20214: Advancing Public Health and Equity through Prevention and Reengagement of Disconnected (Opportunity) Youth.
- <https://www.apha.org/Policies-and-Advocacy/Public-Health-Policy-Statements/Policy-Database/2022/01/07/Advancing-Public-Health-and-Equity-through-Prevention-and-Reengagement-of-Disconnected-Youth>

- AAP Council on School Health. Participation of Children and Adolescents in Live Crisis Drills and Exercises. *Pediatrics* (2020) 146 (3): e2020015503. doi:10.1542/peds.2020-015503.
- AAP Council on School Health. School-Based Health Centers and Pediatric Practice. *Pediatrics* (2012) 129 (2): 387–393. Doi: 10.1542/peds.2011-3443
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- AAP Council on School Health. The Link Between Good Attendance and School Health. *Pediatrics* (2019) 143 (2): e20183648. Doi: 10.1542/peds.2018-3648
- AAP Council on School Health. Role of the School Nurse in Providing School Health Services. *Pediatrics* (2016) 137(6): e20160852. Doi: 10.1542/peds.2016-0852

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