High School Health and Physical Education: Reinforcing the 3 Rs

Survey after survey shows that education reform is a high priority with the American public. Quality education also has bipartisan support with our local, state, and nationally elected officials. It is critical that we blend the art and science of teaching into a meaningful educational experience for our students. The ultimate goal of the education process should be to improve instruction and increase student learning. To effectively accomplish this would truly result in education reform. Therefore, the first step in bringing about education reform is to provide academic rigor, vocational relevance and curricular relationships in programs that students see as real.

A health and physical education program is uniquely positioned to be both a catalyst for education reform and a catalyst for student success. Health and physical education very personal, relevant, and effective and safe. This holistic approach becomes operational when teachers are able to teach academic rigor, vocational relevance and address the larger issue of vocational relevance.

The second program component of relevance addresses the larger issue of lifestyle management and makes health and physical education very personal, therefore more meaningful for each student. Through the use of instructional technology in the computer lab, students are empowered to make informed decisions while considering actions and consequences. Their learning includes class discussions and written assignments about physical activity and its correlation with physical, mental and emotional health as well as physical inactivity and its association with obesity, Type II diabetes and related health care costs.

An electronic file, including data from a nutrition appraisal and fitness test, is established for each student, and this baseline information is shared confidentially with each student and interpreted individually to ensure understanding. Indices such as blood pressure, body composition, flexibility, muscular strength and heart rate are monitored and recorded regularly, providing students with a personal profile complete with physical fitness and nutrition information. This approach motivates students because all comparisons are made to the individual student, providing relevance and a rationale for regular physical activity and a balanced diet.

Another aspect of relevance is the realm of developing effective life skills such as communication, decision-making and coping skills. In order to attain any level of competency or mastery, students must be given the opportunity to practice these life skills in a realistic and dynamic setting and the program provides just such an environment. Students can choose to participate in a variety of individual, dual and team activities, as well as utilize the computer lab to complete weekly written assignments and participate in class discussions. Ultimately, the hallmark of a relevant program is demonstrated in the transfer of learning from one environment to another (school, home, work), and by making these critical thinking skills part of every student’s decision-making process.

Relationships

The final program component of relationships has two distinct dimensions. The first applies to curricula linkages. Literacy, math and science do not happen in a vacuum and this program relies on these core curricula and integrates them into daily lessons. Literacy is critical in the computer lab and an essential skill in accessing the Healthy Schools Network and completing health-related worksheets. Math is utilized in the computation of heart rate data, the interpretation of graphical summary information as well as completing daily exercise logs. Science is a recurring theme with constant references to anatomy, physiology and biomechanics.

High school health and physical education gets real for students at DATA through this integrated approach by illustrating to students the “why” of a comprehensive curriculum and just how closely programs are related.

The second dimension of relationships applies to interpersonal relationships between students and teachers. Teachers should strive to create a learning environment in which each child has a sense of worth in that class—a sense of belonging and a sense of competence (Goleman, 1998). It is at this time that teachers step out of the role of a content specialist and step into a broader role of resource teacher, mentor, “go-to-person” and student adviser.

This holistic approach becomes operational when teachers are able to teach children rather than just teach subject matter, and when they can effectively demonstrate to students that all learning is related.

Getting Real Results

Effective contemporary programs are those that utilize cutting-edge technologies, integrate research-based instructional strategies, evolve to meet student needs, and address current market trends. This program goes beyond the rhetoric when it comes to promoting student success and the value of academic rigor, vocational relevance and curricular relationships. Empirical evidence in the areas of student attendance, postsecondary education and employment opportunities indicate how DATA has prepared students to explore and pursue fulfilling career pathways in health science.

Attendance is a major factor in schools attaining adequate yearly progress. At DATA the attendance rate in health and physical education is at 98 percent. There is also growth in the number of students pursuing postsecondary education; six percent of the graduation class of 2007 and 10 percent of the graduation class of 2008 are currently pursuing postsecondary specialized training in pharmacology, dental hygiene and personal fitness.

According to New Mexico Department of Labor stats, the number of jobs in health care was 38,247 in 2002 and it is expected to grow to 50,507 by the year 2012, with a projected entry salary of $37,340, an estimated median salary of $54,650 and $70,000 for experienced workers. Employment in the health sciences can be a viable and rewarding career pathway. Students are primed for postsecondary success because DATA engages them with a unique, innovative and effective health and physical education curriculum that will serve them well long after they leave the program.