

STRENGTHENING HEALTH EDUCATION AMID RISING YOUTH HEALTH CONCERNS

by:

Crezell F. Vistan

Teacher II, Justice Emilio Angeles Gancayco Memorial High School

In recent years, youth health concerns have become more pressing, with rising rates of obesity, mental health challenges, and sedentary lifestyles among adolescents. As educators, it is our responsibility to address these issues through comprehensive and proactive health education programs. Strengthening health education in schools can provide students with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to make informed decisions about their health, ultimately contributing to better physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

The health of today's youth is facing unprecedented challenges. Studies indicate an alarming rise in lifestyle-related health problems, such as obesity, poor nutrition, and lack of physical activity. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), adolescent obesity is one of the most pressing global health concerns. Furthermore, mental health issues among youth are on the rise, with depression, anxiety, and stress becoming increasingly common among teenagers. These health problems not only affect academic performance but also hinder social development and overall life satisfaction.

These health concerns are compounded by the increasing use of technology. Many young people spend a significant portion of their day engaged in sedentary activities such as playing video games, using social media, and watching television. While technology has its benefits, it has contributed to a lack of physical activity, which is a crucial factor in maintaining overall health. Without proper intervention, these trends may lead to long-term health problems that will affect not only individuals but also society as a whole.

Health education plays a vital role in addressing these challenges by empowering students with the knowledge and skills they need to make healthier choices. Schools are uniquely positioned to promote positive behaviors and habits that can improve youth health in both the short and long term.

A well-rounded health education program covers a broad range of topics, including nutrition, physical activity, mental health, substance abuse, sexual health, and overall well-being. By addressing these areas, health education programs can provide students with practical information that can help them navigate complex health issues. Furthermore, students can learn how to access resources and support when needed, which is essential in promoting long-term health.

One of the key aspects of health education is teaching students about the consequences of poor health choices. For example, educating them on the long-term effects of an unhealthy diet, such as increased risk for chronic diseases like diabetes, heart disease, and certain cancers, can be a powerful motivator for healthier eating habits. Similarly, discussing the mental health impact of social media use and the importance of self-care can help students make informed decisions about their emotional well-being.

Strengthening health education offers numerous benefits, not only for the students but also for the entire school community and society at large.

1 Improved Physical Health: Comprehensive health education programs that emphasize physical activity and healthy eating habits can help combat rising obesity rates and reduce the risk of chronic diseases. By learning about the benefits of exercise and nutritious foods, students are more likely to adopt healthier lifestyles.

2. Better Mental Health Awareness: Mental health education can reduce stigma and promote open conversations about mental well-being. This is essential, as mental health issues are often underreported and misunderstood. Students who are educated

about mental health are more likely to seek help when needed and support their peers in times of crisis.

3. Increased Academic Performance: Students who engage in healthy behaviors are more likely to perform better academically. Proper nutrition, regular physical activity, and good mental health have been shown to improve concentration, memory, and overall cognitive function. In turn, this leads to improved academic outcomes.

4. Building Healthy Habits for Life: By instilling healthy habits at a young age, students are more likely to carry those habits into adulthood. Health education teaches students the importance of self-care, balanced living, and maintaining long-term well-being, which can reduce the likelihood of lifestyle-related diseases in the future.

To strengthen health education in schools, a multi-faceted approach is needed. Here are some strategies that can be employed:

1. Integrating Health Education into the Curriculum: Health education should be a core component of the curriculum rather than an optional subject. Schools can integrate health topics into subjects like science, physical education, and even language arts. This holistic approach ensures that students are learning about health in a variety of contexts and making connections to their everyday lives.

2. Teacher Training and Professional Development: Teachers need ongoing training in health education to ensure they are well-equipped to address the health issues facing students. Workshops, seminars, and collaboration with health professionals can provide teachers with the knowledge and tools they need to deliver effective health education lessons.

3. Parental and Community Engagement: Involving parents and the community in health education is crucial for reinforcing healthy behaviors outside of school. Schools

can organize workshops for parents on nutrition, mental health, and active living, and engage local healthcare providers to offer resources and support.

4. Promoting a Healthy School Environment: Schools should aim to create environments that support healthy behaviors. This includes offering nutritious food options, providing opportunities for physical activity, and ensuring mental health services are accessible to students. A healthy school environment encourages students to practice the behaviors they are learning about in the classroom.

In conclusion, strengthening health education is critical in addressing the rising health concerns among youth. Through comprehensive and well-structured health education programs, schools can provide students with the tools they need to make informed decisions about their health and well-being. By empowering the next generation with knowledge, we can create a healthier, more resilient society for the future.

The Official Website of DepED Division of Bataan

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