



## Identifying and Engaging Community Partners

Missouri school communities are fortunate to have local and statewide child abuse prevention and advocacy agencies with whom to collaborate and seek assistance in this important effort. Statewide and community-based agencies and allies are key partners in school-based child sexual abuse prevention education and have a wealth of knowledge and expertise. It is recommended that schools and local agencies develop relationships with each other. Forging partnerships can build on existing collaborations. Such efforts create opportunities to expand and maximize existing resources and build good working relationships. **Appendix A: National, State and Local Agencies and Organizations contains a list of partners for consideration.**

Schools and community partners should engage in a thorough planning process before deciding on an approach or providing a program. Several resources are available to support the planning process. For example, ASCD, which created the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child model provides a free school improvement tool to assist schools in assessing their performance on the components of the whole child approach (ASCD, 2020).

## The Importance of Health Education

Health education is integral to the primary mission of schools and vital for providing students with the functional knowledge and essential skills to be successful learners and adopt, practice and maintain health-enhancing behaviors.

Educational institutions are in a unique position to improve health outcomes of children and youth. Schools have access to a critical mass of our population in their formative years, at a time when positive and thorough content coverage may instill knowledge and assist in developing behavioral skills that form the basis of a healthy lifestyle. Providing sound and validated information in a sequential manner is essential to teaching the goal setting and decision-making knowledge and behavioral skills on which healthy lifestyles are built.

In addition to its potential to promote health-enhancing behavior outcomes, health education can contribute to cost containment. Estimates suggest that for every dollar spent on quality health education, society saves more than \$13 in direct costs (medical treatment, addiction counseling, alcohol-related motor-vehicle injuries and drug-related crime) and indirect costs, such as lost productivity associated with premature death and social welfare expenses related to teen pregnancy.

By increasing the capacity of schools to provide state-of-the-art developmentally appropriate health education, the critical need to improve the health of the nation can be addressed more effectively and efficiently. In support of this assertion, a groundbreaking joint position statement was released by the American Cancer Society, the American Heart Association and the American Diabetes Association.



The statement includes a call for states to create and implement health education that examines the protective factors and risk factors associated with each of the critical health outcomes for all health risk areas (2008).

To be effective in minimizing risks for a variety of conditions such as sexual abuse, it is critically important that a well-defined comprehensive health education curriculum be in place at all levels of education providing the knowledge and behavioral skills that will be protective. In the school setting, health knowledge and behaviors are reinforced through appropriate role modeling, school health policies and practice, and educators academically prepared to provide developmentally appropriate learning experiences to empower children. Documents that provide a solid needs assessment and curriculum review process that can be implemented by districts include the School Health Index (SHI), the Health Education Curriculum Analysis Tool (HECAT) and the Physical Education Curriculum Analysis Tool (PECAT).

A comprehensive approach to health and wellness looks beyond what is happening in an individual classroom and encourages the support of the whole school, families and extended community. It provides the emphasis, coordination and support from both in and out of school environments to assist students with their health and wellness needs and in developing health and wellness literacy. Such a framework is designed to not only engage students with the issues and decisions that they presently might face, but also to support them in ensuring that they can maintain and improve their health and wellness throughout their lives. It aids students in developing and demonstrating increasingly sophisticated health and wellness related knowledge, skills and attitudes.

Recently, the important role of schools in addressing health issues has been recognized by leading educational professional organizations and policymakers. For example, policies or guidelines have been identified or proposed by the National Association of State Boards of Education (n.d.), National School Boards Association (n.d.), Council of Chief State School Officers (2008), Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (n.d.) and their “New Compact to Educate the Whole Child,” American Academy of Pediatrics and National Association of School Nurses (n.d.), and A Broader, Bolder Approach to Education (n.d.), and by leading governmental agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.