

Health and Wellness

Accomplished teachers understand that a comprehensive health education program encompasses the many components of wellness, taking into account students' social, physical, emotional, and intellectual well-being. These teachers advocate for and create safe and healthy learning environments, which may include access to water, hand washing before meals, healthy snacks, bully-free zones, and frequent physical activity breaks. Teachers create innovative opportunities for students to develop and practice health-enhancing skills through daily routines such as regular exercise, nutritious eating, conflict management, and the maintenance of positive interpersonal relationships. For example, they may have students move throughout the school environment in creative ways—instead of simply walking, they may hop or skip to use different muscle groups. Teachers may also show students how to manage conflict by using techniques such as “I-messages” to express feelings. They may have students manage their stress by learning strategies such as removing themselves from stressful situations, breathing deeply, taking walks, getting water, or speaking about their conflicts. Teachers also recognize that organizing time and resources can help students manage work-related stress.

Accomplished teachers are aware of the distinction between physical activity and physical education. They recognize that children need breaks from sedentary activities in the classroom. They plan activities that help develop students' motor

skills so that students can enjoy physical activity and move toward health-enhancing levels of physical fitness. For example, teachers may have students move around the learning environment throughout the school day, incorporating frequent activity breaks or transitions such as walking around desks, stretching to music, or running in place. Teachers may also integrate physical activity into subject content, for example, by having students use their bodies to demonstrate shapes or angles. Middle childhood generalists understand that children with physical challenges must work with specialists to address their specific needs. They also recognize that kinesthetic experiences and regular physical activity enhance academic achievement.

Accomplished teachers understand the foundations of good health, including the structure and function of the body and its systems and the importance of physical fitness and healthy eating habits. They know that the amount and type of physical activity that children require daily is critical to the maintenance of a healthy lifestyle. Based on this knowledge, they may have students wear pedometers or heart rate monitors to collect data regarding their physical activity; teachers may then have students record their physical activity minutes and create graphs, charts, or journal entries to track their performance and support discussion during mathematical or scientific activities. Similarly, accomplished teachers may have students talk about the number of fruits and vegetables they eat daily to think critically about whether their diet includes healthy foods. Teachers incorporate an awareness of healthy habits while engaging their students meaningfully in classroom activities across a range of subject areas.

Accomplished teachers help students understand that a healthy lifestyle is affected by the habits they develop and the personal choices they make. They may use children's fiction and nonfiction or other materials, such as stories, pamphlets, or nutritional labels, to discuss health issues such as friendship, bullying, or nutritional choices. Teachers are alert to major health issues affecting children and the social forces that influence them; they are particularly aware of the need to impart this type of information sensitively. Accomplished teachers establish safe learning environments for students to explore these health topics. They address issues in ways that help students understand internal and external influences, recognize potentially dangerous situations, clarify misconceptions, find reliable sources of information, make informed decisions, and set personal goals. Teachers may provide opportunities for positive peer pressure when role playing situations regarding the possible use of tobacco or alcohol—or when exploring the dynamics of bullying. Accomplished teachers present good health practices as an immediate and vital part of building lifelong habits they encourage students to adopt.