



The Health Promoting Schools approach and food safety

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HPS approach

INTRODUCTION

Learning that occurs through the formal curriculum in schools is an important way of bringing issues of health promotion to the attention of staff and students. It gives students the opportunity to discuss and develop individual and group actions to ensure their health and the health of others.

The curriculum, however, has to be complemented and supported by discussions and actions that affect the whole school community. It is not enough just for students to understand and enact food safety procedures. This information must be supported by the actions of families and school canteen staff, and by the safety procedures in place in the school environment. The school has a 'duty of care' to ensure food produced and consumed within the school is safe. By taking a whole school perspective to food safety, schools will be sure that they are providing due diligence.

The Health Promoting Schools approach can be used to expand the concept of food safety to embrace not just the curriculum, but the school environment, and the policies and partnerships that will effect food safety action in the school community. *Food safety matters* can be used as a stimulus to look at food safety from a whole school perspective.

THE HEALTH PROMOTING SCHOOLS APPROACH

As a result of a World Health Organisation global health promotion and education initiative, schools in Australia and around the world have adopted a Health Promoting Schools (HPS) approach, based on the guiding principle that good health supports lifelong learning. The World Health Organisation (1996) states that a Health Promoting School:

strives to provide a healthy environment, school health education and school health services, along with school community projects, health

promotion programs for staff, nutrition and food safety programs, opportunities for physical education and recreation, and programs for counselling, social support and mental health promotion.

This whole school process is dependent upon forming active partnerships, and requires coordinated action by all members of the school and local community.

The Health Promoting Schools framework

HPS communities make a positive contribution to health and learning outcomes through the interrelationship of three important components, as shown in Figure 1.

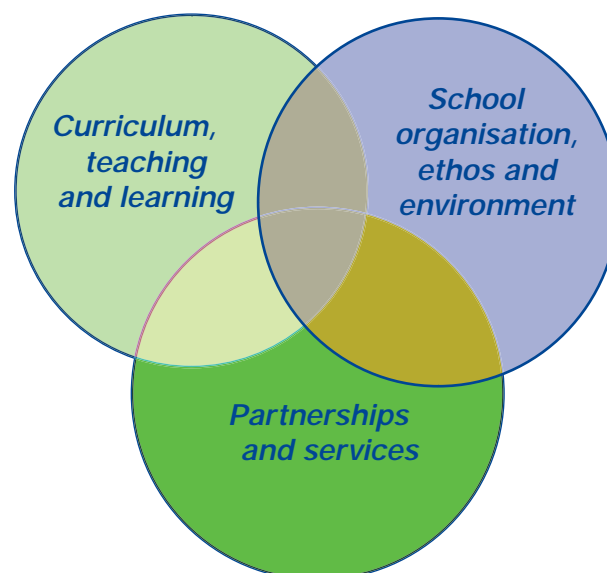


Figure 1: The Health Promoting Schools framework (Source: *A toolbox for creating healthy places to learn, work and play*, Central Public Health Unit Network, Queensland Health, Brisbane, 2001.)

The component 'Curriculum, teaching and learning' includes the planned teaching and learning that occurs in schools. The HPS approach encourages:

- an emphasis on student centred learning

HPS approach continued

- collaborative planning across learning areas to develop a sequential and integrated health education curriculum
- the involvement of students and other members of the school community in planning the school curriculum
- pre-service and in-service training and professional development for school staff.

The component 'School organisation, ethos and environment' includes the social and physical learning environments of the school. The HPS approach encourages:

- a sense of belonging, including caring and supportive teachers
- opportunities and skills for meaningful and valued contribution to school life
- a sense of security in a safe and pleasant environment
- the availability of close and positive relationships
- a school environment in which students feel that they are treated fairly and feel that they are part of the school.

The component 'Partnerships and services' includes the involvement of school community members in initiation, development and implementation of school health and safety policies and programs. The HPS approach encourages:

- recognising the central role of families in supporting learning
- alliances formed with health, welfare and local community agencies
- the contribution of local health services through expert advice
- community use of school facilities
- mutually supportive relationships between schools and business, government and non-government agencies.

To create a health promoting school, policy makers, community leaders, teachers, parents and students need to be committed to the relevance of health promotion to the overall goals and purposes of the school. Responding to a food safety issue may be a good entry point to the HPS approach.

The HPS approach and food safety

Curriculum, teaching and learning

The concepts and strategies outlined in *Food safety matters* can contribute to the demonstration of learning outcomes in the curriculum areas of home economics and life skills, and the Health and Physical Education, Studies of Society and Environment, Science, and Technology key learning areas. The use of the resource across the curriculum provides multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate a range of learning outcomes.

The resource also provides an effective starting point for in-service education for teaching and non-teaching staff to inform them of current information and research in the area of food safety.

School organisation, ethos and environment

The dangers associated with incorrect storage and preparation of food, including those associated with storage of lunches brought from home, are well known. Other environmental issues related to food safety include those related to the delivery of food and to ensuring that there are safe places for students and staff to eat at school. All personnel involved in food preparation in the classroom, in the canteen or tuckshop, and at school events where food is prepared or sold should follow the guidelines of the national Food Safety Standards (see Part D of this manual).

Partnerships and services

The support of the wider school community is essential in implementing a food safety policy. Schools need to be able to access current and relevant information concerning food safety from both government and non-government agencies.

Engaging parents and families

ENGAGING PARENTS AND FAMILIES IN ISSUES OF FOOD SAFETY

The most important influences in shaping young people's attitudes and behaviours towards health are their families and the communities to which they belong. The issue of food safety has become much more widely recognised at a family and community level in recent years as a result of media reports of food poisoning that has resulted in illness and, in some cases, death.

Food safety matters can act as a reminder to parents and the wider community that ensuring the safety of food prepared and served in the school, at home or in restaurants and fast-food outlets is a constant concern. Involving parents and families in this process helps to reinforce the food safety concepts presented through the school curriculum, and through the processes put in place by the school to ensure the safety of food prepared and eaten at school.

Ideas for engaging parents

Students could take home the various resource sheets provided in *Food safety matters* to complete with their families — for example, Student resource 6: Where to store the food? and Student resource 11: Soaps, foodies and safety. The message to parents should be that the resource sheets reinforce basic concepts students have learnt at school and are not a criticism of family food safety processes.

Food forums could be run for parents, for example:

- Practical demonstrations of, for example, the preparation of healthy teenage snacks, could incorporate food safety concepts and procedures, and participants could take home copies of the recipes and details of food safety processes.
- Workshops based on the content in *Food safety matters* could be held for parents and other members of the school community

such as canteen staff and convenors of food stalls at the school fete. A local government environmental health officer could be invited as a guest speaker.

School open days could include student demonstrations of food preparation as part of the school curriculum and linked to food safety. In addition, the food safety checklists developed in Design challenge A: Food safety checklist (see Part A of this manual) could be displayed.

A food fair could include community stakeholders who are involved in preparing and providing food — for example, students, the school canteen, local supermarkets, restaurants and 'take aways'. They could set up stalls to advertise their foods or businesses and demonstrate food safety procedures in the preparation and presentation of foods. Students could display the posters from *Food safety matters*.

Food Safety Week could provide the impetus for food safety activities. The week is coordinated by the Food Safety Information Council and is typically held in the second week of November each year. Visit the Food Safety Information Council web site www.foodsafety.asn.au for further information.

The school newsletter could include tips on food safety, timed to link with student class activities or linked to a theme such as back-to-school, buying a lunch box, packing a safe school lunch in the heat of summer or Food Safety Week.

Suggestion

- When planning the food requirements for a school camp or outdoor education experience, involve environmental food officers, the camp operator, food wholesalers and the tuckshop staff to ensure safe, nutritious foods are provided.

Further suggestion

- Organise a representative from the public health unit or local council to facilitate food safety training courses for tuckshop staff and others involved in food preparation in the school.

School policy

SCHOOL POLICY

Developing a school-based policy

There are numerous examples of ways in which policies are developed, and schools may choose either an overarching HPS policy or an issues-based policy.

HPS policies

For schools adopting the HPS approach, there is value in having an overarching policy that provides a context for all those issues seen as priorities for schools in promoting the health and safety of the school community. The three components of HPS — Curriculum, teaching and learning; School organisation, ethos and environment; and Partnerships and services — provide a useful framework for the inclusion of school-specific health and safety issues. A clearly articulated policy facilitates the process of planning, and converting that planning into action with practical solutions to school-based health promotion issues or problems.

A Health Promoting Schools policy serves as a framework for the school's vision concerning health and safety in the school, and outlines the purposes, philosophy and values of the school. Embedded in policies such as these are goals and objectives that state more specifically the actions that the school will take to ensure that its visions and purposes are achieved. These actions may include the writing of issues-based statements or sets of rules that clearly articulate the school community's expectations of, for example, health and safety learning outcomes, safety behaviours in the school environment and how the school and the wider community can support the actions. These purposes, values and actions are clearly outlined within the three components of the HPS framework.

Issues-based policies

Many schools choose to write issues-based policies that address particular priorities identified by the school community, or in response to a system mandate. Schools in most states and territories are required to develop a drug education policy or a sun safety policy. Legislative requirements can act as a catalyst for developing issues-based policies. The Food Safety Standards could be the impetus for the development of a whole school community food safety policy.

Steps for developing a school-based policy

There are two important aspects of policy development. One is the **process** used for policy development and the second is the **content** of the policy.

Process

Briefly, the **process** follows a number of stages:

- Policy development — clarifying the issue and formulating the policy
- Implementation — sharing, activating and advertising the policy
- Resourcing — providing adequate funding and support including in-service and professional development
- Monitoring and evaluation — evaluating the impact of the policy on the health of the school community, and developing processes for sustaining the implementation.

Content

A policy document may be brief and simple, including, for example, an introduction, aims, strategies and outcomes, or it may be more elaborate with, for example, a rationale, principles, implementation process, evaluation, and dissemination strategy.

Examples of school policies can be found in Appendix 2.

Sources of information

HEALTH PROMOTING SCHOOLS: SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Web sites

Australian Health Promoting Schools Association. www.hlth.qut.edu.au/ph/ahpsa

South Australian Department of Education, Training and Employment. Search under 'Health promoting schools'. www.dete.sa.gov.au

Western Australia Department of Education. Search under 'Health promoting schools'. www.eddept.wa.edu.au

Tasmanian Department of Education. Search under 'Health promoting schools'. www2.education.tas.gov.au

Resources

Australian Health Promoting Schools Association, *A national framework for Health Promoting Schools* (2000 – 2003), Australian Health Promoting Schools Association, Sydney.

Central Public Health Unit Network 2001, *A toolbox for creating healthy places to learn, work and play*, Queensland Health, Brisbane.

Deakin University 2000, *Health Promoting Schools project – An evaluation*, Faculty of Health and Behavioural Sciences, Deakin University, Melbourne.

St Leger, L. & Nutbeam, D. 2000, 'A model for mapping linkages between health and education agencies to improve school health', *Journal of School Health*, 70(2).

Stewart, D., Parker, E., & Gillespie, A. 1998, *An analysis of policy, planning and support documents related to Health Promoting Schools*, Australian Health Promoting Schools Association, Sydney.

World Health Organisation 1996, *Promoting Health Through Schools – The World Health Organisation's Global School Health Initiative*, WHO, Geneva.