

NORTH CAROLINA ESSENTIAL STANDARDS

HEALTHFUL LIVING

Introduction to the Standards

Achieving and maintaining good health are prerequisite to quality of life. Health is multi-dimensional (in that it includes one's physical, mental, social, and emotional well-being) as well as dynamic (i.e., always changing). Health is often viewed as an instrumental value: one recognizes that having health helps him or her achieve other life goals (academic success, career achievement, healthy relationships, life satisfaction). Having high-level health is a positive state; it is more than not being sick.

Centuries ago, a person's health was most likely negatively influenced by communicable diseases and lack of public health. Today, the decisions and behaviors of the individual are more likely to impair health. The leading causes of death are chronic illnesses (sometimes referred to as diseases of lifestyle) and unintentional injuries, both of which are often preventable. The main emphasis of the *Healthful Living Essential Standards* is the prevention of the serious health risks for children and youth: unintentional and intentional injuries (which include violence and suicide), physical inactivity, unhealthy dietary behaviors, tobacco use, sexual risk behaviors, and alcohol and other drug use behaviors.

The research is clear that health and fitness are positively associated with academic success. Students are better able to perform at an optimal level if they are healthy and physically active. The reverse is also well documented:

Health-related factors such as hunger, physical and emotional abuse, and chronic illness can lead to poor school performance. Health-risk behaviors such as substance use, violence, and physical inactivity are consistently linked to academic failure and often affect students' school attendance, grades, test scores, and ability to pay attention in class. [*Student Health and Academic Achievement*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention]

Specific health problems are associated with school dropout: unintended pregnancy, tobacco use, and alcohol and drug use. Students are more likely to be absent from school if they feel threatened or bullied. [National Institutes of Health]

The National Health Education Standards are written standards to enable students to achieve health literacy and indicate what students should know and be able to do to promote personal, family, and community health. They include Standard 1, which is the expectation that students will