Wellness Education

Philosophy and Rationale

What Is Wellness Education?
The Kindergarten to Grade 12 health and physical education (HPE) model for wellness education uses a strengths-based focus to support the development of the whole child and plays an essential role in nurturing students in their pursuit of a healthy, joyful and active life. HPE supports the notion that mind and body are inseparable, intertwined and interconnected, and that physical activity combined with health-related experiences enrich the lives of students. HPE embodies a holistic focus by including the five dimensions of wellness to allow for interdisciplinary learning experiences.

The five dimensions of wellness are outlined below.

- Emotional wellness is acknowledging, understanding, managing and expressing thoughts and feelings in a constructive manner.
- Intellectual wellness is the development and the critical and creative use of the mind to its fullest potential.
- Physical wellness is the ability, motivation and confidence to move effectively and efficiently in a variety of situations and the healthy growth, development, nutrition and care of the body.
- Social wellness is relating positively to others and is influenced by many factors, including how individuals communicate, establish and maintain relationships, are treated by others, and interpret that treatment.
- Spiritual wellness is an understanding of one’s own values and beliefs, leading to a sense of meaning or purpose and a relationship to the community.

Physical literacy, health literacy, and social and emotional learning are at the heart of HPE.

Physical literacy is having the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life. Physically literate students develop movement competence, personal skills, social skills and an appreciation for active living while participating in a wide range of physical activities.

Health literacy is the ability to access, comprehend, evaluate and communicate information as a way to promote, maintain and improve health in a variety of settings throughout a lifetime. Becoming health literate allows students as they grow and develop, make healthy choices, and connections for healthy living. In doing so, students learn about topics such as mental health, human sexuality, career development and financial well-being.
Social and emotional learning is a process through which students acquire and effectively apply the knowledge and understanding necessary to develop self-awareness, self-management, relationship skills, social awareness and responsible decision making.

Why Is Wellness Education Important?
Promoting the healthy development of all students, as well as enabling all students to reach their potential, is a priority for educators across Alberta. Students’ health and well-being contribute to their ability to learn in all disciplines, including health and physical education, and that learning, in turn, contributes to their overall well-being.

By addressing HPE through a comprehensive school health model, the entire school community can be empowered to be proactive in promoting wellness as students move between school, home and their communities. Adopting this approach can allow school health to be addressed in a planned, integrated and holistic way.

Comprehensive school health consists of four distinct but interrelated components: Social and Physical Environments, Teaching and Learning, Healthy School Policy, and Partnerships and Services. Healthy students tend to have better school attendance, better concentration, participate fully in learning, perform better in school and become lifelong learners. Current research suggests that healthy and physically educated students are sick less often, lead healthier lifestyles, become proactive about health, become healthier role models and enjoy an enhanced quality of life.

The importance of adopting an HPE model is to engage students on a journey to achieve optimal health and well-being. Providing students with the skills to research and analyze knowledge is key to making healthy choices and informed decisions for self, others and their communities. As a result, students recognize and change behaviours as they become critical consumers of health information.

Physical activity is a powerful medium for learning through which students can practise and refine personal, behavioural, social and cognitive skills through diverse experiences and environments. As a result, students develop an appreciation of the significance and value of physical activity and outdoor pursuits.

Through a holistic focus, students develop their confidence and ability to make sense of their world and, with it, establish a sense of ownership over their motivation, behaviour and social environment. As contributing members of a diverse society, students understand and value what it means to live well. Both the individual and society benefit when citizens are happy and healthy.
High School Life Planning Model
Building on their experiences from Kindergarten to Grade 9, high school life planning provides students with opportunities to further develop their skills, knowledge and understanding of career exploration and development, and personal finances. Students begin to understand the lifelong process of managing learning, personal resources, work, leisure and transitions in order to move toward a personally determined and evolving preferred future. Paramount to a student’s personal success is a willingness and capacity to engage with related information and make it personally relevant and meaningful. When students are encouraged to see and to reflect on the relationships between learning activities and their capacity to establish and work towards achieving their personal life goals, learning will be enhanced.

Inclusive Education

Wellness education is necessary for all learners. Wellness education seeks to empower all learners, respecting the diversity of each student’s unique strengths and individual goals. Wellness builds student capacity using a strengths-based approach that recognizes and develops talents so that students can positively engage with their peers and community. All students can develop self-awareness by learning skills for self-regulation, self-efficacy and how to advocate for self and others in collaborative environments.

Wellness education promotes ways of knowing and being to help cultivate an appreciation of others and healthy communities. Wellness learning experiences ensure that all students are meaningfully engaged and supported. With healthy minds, bodies, and spirits, students are empowered to experience success at school, with their families and in their communities.

First Nations, Métis and Inuit Experiences and Perspectives

Wellness education reflects the importance of maintaining a holistic balance between the emotional, mental, physical and spiritual aspects of self and community. Embracing a holistic paradigm of wellness respects and honours traditional ways of knowing and being for First Nations, Métis and Inuit. Shared oral stories and teachings from Elders and Knowledge Keepers help support the building of healthy and supported individuals who have a sense of identity and belonging and value their place in communities. Wellness education provides opportunities for students to develop and experience connections to the land and to the universe by honouring ancestors and their contributions and encourages students to value resiliency to persevere and advance reconciliation.

Francophone Cultures and Perspectives

The nature of wellness education embodies a holistic approach to learning and living. This approach impacts the social, intellectual, physical, emotional and spiritual development of the
student. The wellness of an individual and community is greatly enhanced when well-being, communication and a sense of belonging are fostered. By incorporating Francophone perspectives into wellness education, students recognize the role that resiliency, culture and community play in healthy communities. When addressing Francophone perspectives, all students benefit from a deeper understanding and appreciation of each other’s identity and culture. Furthermore, students gain knowledge and appreciation of the diverse contributions that Francophones continue to make to the Alberta society and a bilingual country.

**Literacy**

Wellness education provides a context for the development of literacy, which enhances students’ understanding of the subject. When the literacy concepts specific to wellness education are made explicit, students see how they can use their literacy skills, strategies and knowledge in purposeful ways. Literacy supports understanding the relationship among cultures, languages and societies, including family and community. Students use literacy to develop skills that empower them to be critical consumers who are able to access, interpret, analyze, evaluate and challenge information from the fields of health, finance, careers and physical education. They use vocabulary pertinent to wellness education in context to comprehend and craft texts related to wellness. This includes communicating wellness-related issues to different audiences, articulating ideas and opinions, evaluating the viewpoints of others, and appropriately expressing emotions in a range of social and physical activities. Literacy awareness, knowledge and understanding in wellness education enhance students’ ability to learn about, engage in and promote healthy living.

**Numeracy**

Numeracy in wellness education enriches the study of the subject and provides students with authentic opportunities and reasons to engage in numeracy. In wellness education, students use numeracy skills, strategies and knowledge when they make informed, healthy choices. Students use quantitative information such as calculating, estimating, measuring and collecting data related to nutrition, fitness or physical performance. When developing concepts and strategies in movement activities, students use spatial information and reasoning. Numeracy supports students as they interpret health information and practices. In wellness education, students use a variety of methods or tools to record information by identifying patterns and relationships in data to consider trends. Numeracy awareness, knowledge and understanding reinforce the concepts that students learn while developing an appreciation for and a better understanding of themselves, their relationship with the environment and how they make well-informed life choices.

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1 Literacy is the ability, confidence and willingness to engage with language to acquire, construct and communicate meaning.
2 Numeracy is the ability, confidence and willingness to engage with quantitative and spatial information to make informed decisions.
Competencies

Competencies are combinations of attitudes, skills and knowledge that students apply for successful learning, living and working. They are aspects of learning that apply within and across all subjects. Alberta’s Kindergarten to Grade 12 learning outcomes in wellness education provide contexts for students to apply and develop the following competencies:

- Critical Thinking
- Problem Solving
- Managing Information
- Creativity and Innovation
- Communication
- Collaboration
- Cultural and Global Citizenship
- Personal Growth and Well-being

For more information, go to Competencies in Wellness Education.