

The concept of Healthy School as new initiative for 21st Century Education: The importance of promoting health through sports and physical activities.

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As early as 1950, the World Health Organization (WHO) noted that “to learn effectively, children need good health”. Health is defined as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease. There is abundant evidence to demonstrate that the health of children and adolescents constitutes a major factor affecting their capacity to learn, and students with health compromising behaviours are more likely to feel alienated from school and to value continued education less than their peers. The school environment has a direct impact on the self-esteem, educational achievement, and health of its pupils and staff.

In many developed countries, the leading causes of mortality and morbidity are cardiovascular disease, cerebrovascular disease and cancer. The main determinants of those diseases are related to risk health behaviour early on in life such as smoking, unhealthy diet, lack of exercise, alcohol consumption. The pattern of illness has changed from a predominance of acute infectious disease to a high level of chronic degenerative disease due to the changing lifestyle of an affluent society as result of urbanization and westernization. Rapid urbanization and economic growth has made Hong Kong people especially the young children facing similar lifestyle changes as in the West.

The concept of Healthy School was first identified at a WHO conference in the early eighties and has been advocated as an effective approach to promote health in schools. It embodies a holistic, whole school approach to personal and community health promotion in which a board health education curriculum is supported by the environment and ethos of the school. The concept of Healthy School as a new initiative in school based management would move beyond individual behavioural change and to consider organizational structure change such as improving the school’s physical and social environment, its curricula, teaching and learning methods. This will enable the school effectiveness to focus on social/affective outcomes such as attitudes and behaviours of students rather than just focusing on academic achievement.

A large-scale surveillance was conducted by the Centre in 1999 on 9,470 primary school students and 16,652 students from the secondary schools aged 10 to 20 from 48 primary and secondary schools. Some of the key findings include:

- ✧ **14%** of students’ normal social activities were interfered by their physical and emotional health most of the time with higher proportion amongst F4-F7 compared to P4-P6.

- ✧ Nearly **50%** of the students did not perform vigorous exercise, again with higher proportion in F4-F7 as compared to P4-P6 (52% vs 42.8%).
- ✧ Less than **40%** of students performed regular exercise
- ✧ **14.3%** of students have seriously thought of considering suicide with higher proportion amongst students in higher forms.

Another study on youth health risk behaviours was conducted in late 2001 on over 7,000 primary and secondary school students. The key findings include:

- About one third of students had depressive symptoms
- Nearly 30% disagreed that they had a satisfactory life
- Those students participating in regular exercise had higher life satisfaction score, and lower prevalence of depressive symptoms and also other health risk behaviours
- Analysis by multiple logistic regression shows that those students having regular exercise had lower odds ratio, 0.74 (95% CI 0.65-0.84) having depressive symptoms.

There is an urgent need to promote healthy lifestyles of students such as physical activities not just improving physical fitness, but also their mental well being. Physical education has an important mission to promote health making exercise as life long activity. Also participation in sports would promote team spirit, and mental well being of the young generation. Therefore it is essential to promote the broad concept of health through physical activity. This is in line with the curriculum reform as one of the aims of school curriculum is to enable our students leading to healthy lifestyles, and develop an interest in and appreciation of aesthetic and physical activities.

The Centre for Health Education and Health Promotion of the Chinese University of Hong Kong launched the Hong Kong Healthy Schools Award Scheme building on the concept of health promoting school to encourage educational achievement, better health and emotional well-being; thereby supporting pupils in improving the quality of their lives.