

Introduction: Important New Directions in Hawai'i's School Health Education

Beth Pateman and Dan Yahata

What was health education like when you were in school? When asked this question, many adults have to think hard to remember any K-12 school health education at all. When they do remember, they typically respond that it was almost non-existent, boring, embarrassing, not enough, not relevant, a waste of time, or taught on rainy days when the weather was too bad to go out for PE.

Given these experiences, educators, parents, and community members do well to ask whether school health education is important today. Is this a subject that should be included in the curriculum when schools are grappling with the need to improve test scores in subjects such as reading and mathematics? Data from the Hawai'i Youth Risk Behavior Surveys of middle and high school students during the past decade indicate that our students bring other important needs to school, as well (Pateman, Saka, & Lai, 2001). When young people suffer from physical illnesses or injury, mental health problems, hunger, pregnancy, alcohol and drug use, or fear of violence, they are less likely to benefit from school instruction, regardless of efforts to improve educational methods, standards, or organizations (Kolbe, Collins, & Cortese, 1997).

The new Hawai'i Health Education Standards are designed to help young people develop the personal and social skills they must have to deal effectively with the health-risk issues they often encounter during their school years and beyond. The Hawai'i Health Education Standards, adapted from the National Health Education Standards (Joint Committee on National Health Education Standards, 1995), are based on evidence that healthy children learn better and that school efforts can improve child and adolescent health (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2001).

The Hawai'i Health Education Standards were added as a distinct content area to the Hawai'i Content and Performance Standards (HCPS II) (Hawai'i State Department of Education [DOE]) in 1999. The new focus on developing and practicing personal and social skills stands in sharp contrast to traditional methods of having teachers serve primarily as information givers about health content. The Hawai'i Health Education Standards identify the core concepts that students must learn to promote and protect their health, and the skills young people need to help them navigate safe passage to adulthood.

The authors of this issue of *Educational Perspectives* describe partnership efforts throughout Hawai'i to promote

teaching and learning with the Hawai'i Health Education Standards. Beth Pateman, Thomas Sileo, and Ku'ulei Serna provide a fuller explanation of the new standards and their application to important health-risk areas. Douglas Smith describes positive new approaches to school violence prevention, a tremendously important health issue in today's educational settings. Michael Salzman shares the implementation of a new professional development summer institute for teachers, counselors, and administrators in building resiliency to prevent substance abuse and other health problems. Julie Maeda and Scott Shimabukuro explain the critical need to improve nutrition and physical activity for Hawai'i's children and adolescents. Beth Pateman, Rhonda Black, Ku'ulei Serna, Lynn Shoji, and Amy Stone Murai describe a standards-based approach to healthy sexuality education in Hawai'i. Cathy Kawamura shares information about the Hawai'i Peer Education Program, in which students learn and practice advanced health education skills. In summary, Lola Irvin, Virginia Pressler, Alex Santiago, Dan Yahata, and Deanna Helber describe Hawai'i's partnership efforts to support the health of children through the Healthy Hawai'i Initiative, funded with Hawai'i tobacco settlement dollars, and the Hawai'i Partnership for Standards-Based School Health Education, initiated by the American Cancer Society, Hawaii Pacific, Inc.

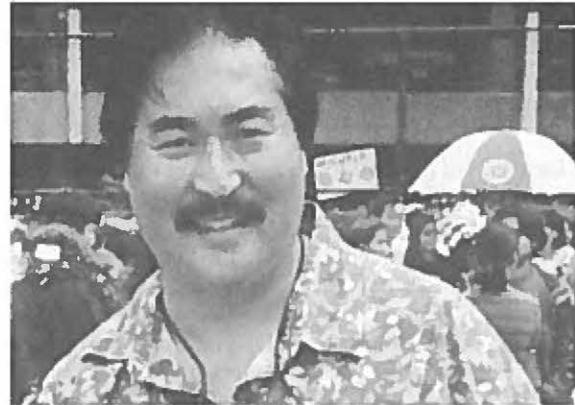
The authors of this issue are pleased to share the results of the partnerships that have been forged to support school health education and coordinated school health programs. These partnership efforts echo the words of Dr. Jeffrey Koplan, Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

School health programs can play a critical role in promoting healthy behaviors while enhancing academic performance. It is critical for public health and education officials to work in partnership with schools and communities to enable schools to implement effective school health programs and help youth develop and maintain healthy lifestyles. Supporting school health programs to improve the health status of our nation's youth has never been more important, and we all must be involved (CDC, 2001, p. 251).

We look forward to continued collaboration to support the academic achievement and health of the young people of Hawai'i and the future parents, community members, and leaders they will become in our state.



Dr. Beth Pateman, guest editor for this issue of the journal, is an Associate Professor in the Department of Teacher Education and Curriculum studies, College of Education, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Her research interests include the assessment of health-risk behaviors among youth over time and the implementation and evaluation of standards-based school health education programs to promote health and reduce risks.



Dan Yahata is an Education Specialist for Health Education and Physical Education, Hawai'i Department of Education, Office of Curriculum, Instruction and Student Support Instructional Services Branch Health and Physical Education Program.

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About the cover: "Little Grass Shack Hula" by artist Alfred Furtado. A working artist, teacher, and lecturer for more than 40 years, Mr. Furtado's fine art work captures vivid memories of the people of the islands of Hawai'i. His work may be seen on the web site at: www.merchanthawaii.com. Contact Mr. Furtado at: 1629 Wilder Avenue, #501 Honolulu, HI 96822; 808/941-9545; leialfurt@aol.com