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## MEMORANDUM

TO: Vermont Middle and High School Education Community  
FROM: Rebecca Holcombe, Secretary, Agency of Education  
COPY: Jeff Francis, Executive Director, VSA; Ken Page, Executive Director, VPA  
SUBJECT: Middle and High School Guidance on Health Education  
DATE: September 15, 2014

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We know that in order to improve academic achievement, school leaders and teachers must first establish a safe and healthy school climate and culture. Furthermore, in Vermont, we aspire not only to help our students be academically successful, but also to help them develop the social and emotional competence they need to thrive and participate in civil society, in spite of what challenges they encounter. For this reason, it is also our responsibility to ensure that our students have the knowledge and skills they need to access information and analyze factors that influence their choices, so that they can make decisions and set goals to enhance their own health. If students make healthy decisions, they are more likely to be academically successful and to feel positive about themselves and school. And, in schools, high quality health education can help cultivate these skills.

The [Education Quality Standards](#) adopted by the State Board of Education April 5, 2014, Section 2120.5, require all schools to enable students to engage annually in rigorous, relevant and comprehensive learning opportunities that allows them to demonstrate proficiency in (e) physical education and health education as defined in [16 V.S.A. §131, 906, 909](#). Additionally, as required in 16 V.S.A §1692, Section 2121.2 of EQS requires that all professional staff be licensed and properly endorsed for their assignment.

Although, 100% of Vermont high schools and 84% of middle schools require some health education instruction as reported through the 2012 School Health Profiles, only 90% of high schools and 50% of the middle schools indicated that the lead health educator is licensed by the State of Vermont. (Data considering the K-5 levels and health education is not collected in this survey).

In order for students to achieve academic success, they need to be physically and emotionally safe and engaged. According to the 2013 YRBS, students report:

- 20% have been in a physical fight in the past 12 months and 8% report fighting on school property,
- 18% report being bullied in the past 30 days,
- 21% felt sad and hopeless almost every day for 2 weeks and 16% report self-harming themselves,
- Of the 69% who reported dating, 9% reported being physically hurt and 6% report having been physically forced to have sex,
- 1 in 10 students carry a weapon to school while 5% stayed home because they didn't feel safe at school.

Some of these statistics are startling and can have a negative impact on a student's ability to learn. Therefore it is imperative that schools also look at climate and culture within the school and classrooms. Health and physical education classes are good opportunities to do so.

For educators interested in pursuing an endorsement in health education, or seeking additional professional development, the Vermont Higher Education Collaborative (VTHEC) provides graduate level course work to help fulfill the necessary competencies. Information about the program can be found at [VTHEC](#).

The Vermont Agency of Education also provides professional development opportunities which support individuals seeking the health education endorsement and those who are already licensed health educators. The *Vermont Community of Health Educators* (VCHE) is a dynamic network which provides professional development and personal support for health educators. Click [here](#) for more information about VCHE.

Donna McAllister, Health Education Consultant, is also available to answer questions and assist your district on curriculum development and assessment. She can be reached at [donna.mcallister@state.vt.us](mailto:donna.mcallister@state.vt.us) or 802-479-1426