

# Health Education as a Graduation Requirement in New Mexico

## Q & A

*“Clearly, no knowledge is more critical than knowledge about health. Without it, no other life goal can be successfully achieved.”*

– Boyer, E.L., The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

House Memorial (HM) 127 requested the Public Education Department (PED) to convene a working group to determine whether there is a need to include health education as a requirement for graduation for public schools. In addition, the working group was to consider creative alternatives for the delivery of health education content standards with benchmarks and performance standards (the full report is available at: <http://www.ped.state.nm.us/sfsb/reports/>).

### **The HM 127 Work Group Recommendation**

- **Require health education for graduation by adding one-half (.5) unit in health education and eliminate one-half (.5) elective unit.**

**Question:** Isn't health education already required for graduation?

**Answer:** Health education is NOT currently required as a stand-alone course for graduation. State law requires health education content to be taught in grades one through twelve, but it may be integrated into other subject areas.

**Question:** How do schools integrate health education?

**Answer:** The requirement for health education may be accomplished by integrating health education content in several required class (e.g., teach about drugs in science, nutrition in physical education, etc.) or districts may meet the requirement for health education instruction at the secondary level by offering a stand-alone health education course.

**Question:** Is health education required to be taught by teachers licensed in health education?

**Answer:** When health education is integrated into other subject areas it is not a requirement that it be taught by teachers licensed in health education. If health education is offered as a stand-alone course then it must be taught by a licensed PED teacher with an endorsement in health education.

**Question:** Isn't integrating health education into existing courses an effective way to teach health education?

**Answer:** Research and experts in the field concur that integrating health education into existing courses is not as effective as when it is a stand alone course. “When health education is integrated into existing courses, it is taught sporadically with a focus on health related knowledge with little to no attention given to skills required for the reduction of health risk behaviors. When health education is delivered as a stand-alone course, taught by licensed health educators, it is the most effective way in increasing student knowledge, skills and attitudes and influencing positive health behaviors.” (William Potts-Datema, Chief, Program Development and Services Branch, CDC/DASH).

**Question:** Do other states require health education as a graduation requirement?

**Answer:** Over 50% of states require health education as a criterion for graduation. The requirement for health education in other states ranges from a 3.75 credits to a .5 credit requirement.

**Question:** If health education became a graduation requirement when would it be implemented?

**Answer:** *HB 44: Require Health Education for Graduation*, sponsored by Representative Mary Helen Garcia, would require a delayed implementation. The requirement would start with 9<sup>th</sup> graders beginning in the 2012-2013 school year.

**Question:** In what grade would health education have to be taught?

**Answer:** *HB 44: Require Health Education for Graduation* allows local school districts to determine the high school grade in which health education would be taught.

**Question:** Are there enough teachers with a PED health education endorsement to meet this proposed graduation requirement?

**Answer:** Currently there are **1,600 individuals that hold a PED licensure endorsement in health education** (PED Licensure Bureau report).

**Question:** Isn't this another unfunded or under-funded mandate?

**Answer:** The proposed legislative replaces a required .5 elective unit with a .5 health education unit. This does not increase the total number of units required for graduation. Therefore, there would be no additional cost for implementing this requirement.

**Question:** Wouldn't removing a one-half (.5) unit elective impact student choice?

**Answer:** A one-half (.5) unit of health education would reduce the required elective units from 7.5 units to 7 units, which is not a major impact on student choice. In addition, 34 districts (31 have a .5 unit and 3 require 1 unit) already have a local graduation requirement for health education (see attachment for the list). Adding health education as a statewide graduation requirement will have no impact on the districts currently requiring health education.

- **75.5%** of New Mexico high school students (360 responses) and **96%** of New Mexico post-secondary students (146 respondents) surveyed felt that health education should be a graduation requirement.
- The majority of students surveyed felt the best way to accomplish this was to replace a .5 elective unit with a .5 health education unit.

**Question:** What do parents think about the proposed health education requirement?

**Answer:** 88.5% of New Mexico parents (427 responses) surveyed support health education as a graduation requirement.

**Question:** What do other constituents in the state think about the proposed health education requirement?

**Answer:** **96.9 %** of New Mexico school health providers (405 respondents) felt health education should be a graduation requirement. Thirty (30) district administrators responded to a health education survey. When asked if health education were to become a graduation requirement 25 of the 30 indicated they preferred a .5 unit.

**Question:** What additional support exists for health education as a graduation requirement?

**Answer:** Additional studies conducted during 2008 and 2009 containing a recommendation for health education as a graduation requirement:

1. **Senate Bill 129** (2008 Legislative Session): **Study high-cost medical treatments of chronic disease in New Mexico** sponsored by Senator Feldman.
2. **House Memorial 16** (2009 Regular Legislative Session): **Adolescent Preventative Health and Well-Being**, sponsored by Representative Chasey.
3. **House Memorial 53** (2009 Regular Legislative Session): **Prevention of Teen Dating Violence**, sponsored by Representative Crook.
4. **Senate Memorial 71** (2009 Regular Legislative Session): **Evaluate Drug Policy Approaches**, sponsored by Senator Bernadette Sanchez.
5. **House Joint Memorial 31** (introduced in 2009 did not pass, but the study was still conducted by CYFD, PED and DOH), sponsored by Represent Miera.
6. **The Campaign for Healthy Kids Task Force:** draft action plan for combating obesity and overweight.

**Attachment**  
**District with Health Education Requirement**

Albuquerque Public Schools
Animas Public Schools
Belen Consolidated Schools
Bernalillo Public Schools
Bloomfield Schools
Capitan Municipal Schools
Chama Valley Independent Schools
Cimarron Municipal Schools
Clayton Municipal Schools
Farmington Municipal Schools
Floyd Municipal Schools
Fort Sumner Municipal Schools
Gallup-McKinley Cty Schools
Grady Municipal Schools
Grants-Cibola County Schools
Hondo Valley Public Schools
Jal Public Schools
Jemez Valley Public Schools
Las Cruces Public Schools (pilot)
Las Vegas East Public Schools
Los Alamos Public Schools
Mora Independent Schools
Mountainair Public Schools
Pojoaque Valley Public Schools
Quemado Independent Schools
Questa Independent Schools
Roswell Independent Schools
Ruidoso Municipal Schools
San Jon Municipal Schools
Santa Fe Public Schools
Silver Consolidated Schools.
Tucumcari Public Schools
Vaughn Municipal Schools
Zuni Public Schools