

# Global standards to embed health and wellbeing into education system

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The first global standards to embed health and wellbeing into the education system have been created amid a rise in mental health problems during the COVID-19 pandemic. Credit: Kuanish Reymbaev

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education system have been created amid a rise in mental health problems during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Researchers at the Centre for Adolescent Health at the Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI) led the two-year project at the invitation of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The two reports, to be launched this week in Geneva, provide a benchmarking framework to support the implementation of 'health promoting schools,' which aim to equally foster health and learning in all aspects of [school](#) life.

MCRI Professor Susan Sawyer said that profound links between children's health, wellbeing and learning have been demonstrated through the impact of COVID-19 on [school closures](#).

"In addition to the disruptive effects on student engagement, learning outcomes and educational transitions, there is growing global evidence of the impact of school lockdowns on children's and adolescents' [emotional distress](#) and mental health," she said.

"There are concerns that students with major [mental health](#) disorders are at greater risk of permanently disengaging from education. While negatively affecting their future career prospects, early school leaving becomes a risk factor for poor health in adulthood.

"Never before has there been such appreciation of the value of schools as sites for academic and [social learning](#), but also as settings which can enhance student health and wellbeing."

MCRI's Dr. Monika Raniti said 'health promoting schools' was about strengthening the capacity of the education system to be a health setting for learning and working.

"This whole-school approach has been shown to benefit several aspects of learning, health and wellbeing," she said. Yet there are huge gaps between the ideal of health promoting schools and current practices. Too often, schools lack adequate resources or must rely on the efforts of a small number of motivated staff who are already at capacity."

The researchers have developed eight 'health promoting schools' standards to direct government and school leadership efforts, which cover improving policy and increasing commitment, investment, resources and stakeholder engagement.

University of Melbourne's Dr. Ruth Aston said the guidelines recognised the value of quality teaching and leadership practice that extended the vision for schools beyond their traditional focus on reading, writing and arithmetic.

Professor Sawyer said the health and education sectors would need to collaborate closely to implement these guidelines.

"This is arguably the greatest challenge facing health promoting schools as health and education sectors have historically been built from different DNA. Investment in a new workforce that can straddle both sectors is urgently needed," she said.

The standards cover both school and government policies and resources, school governance, leadership and community partnerships, a curriculum that supports health and wellbeing such as nutrition and safety, a social-emotional environment fostering equity and diversity and delivering school-linked health services.

**More information:** To review the guideline documents visit [www.who.int](http://www.who.int)

Provided by Murdoch Children's Research Institute

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