

Adventist teachers see their students as “whole persons.” Because our bodies are the “temples of God,” and God can speak best to healthy individuals, we educate students about the physical as well as the mental, social, and spiritual aspects of their lives. Many public school teachers feel that of these areas, spiritual health is largely ignored

at their schools. Adventist teachers, on the other hand, say that compared to other dimensions, physical health receives very little emphasis in curriculum planning.

It is possible that your school curriculum is a little lopsided? Do you need to re-evaluate your school’s health program? A good place to start is finding out what the community thinks about the present health instruction at the school. Be sure to include responses from students, parents, and staff. In order to gather accurate information, follow these steps:

1. Choose a team to work with you.

When preparing to assess your school health program, you should choose a support team, consisting of an advisory committee, at least one evaluation expert, and clerical help. Advisory committee members can be selected from interested board members, faculty, staff, parents, and students. Ask the committee to help develop questions, collect information, and compile conclusions and recommendations. It is often surprising how much students know, for example, about the real questions that need to be asked about sexual behavior, or about ways to solve budget problems relating to school health and poor health outcomes.

In addition to the advisory committee, you will need at least one knowledgeable person to assist with research-

related issues. You usually don’t need to hire a professional for this. A parent, someone on the school board, or a member of your church or community may have expertise in collecting and evaluating information. This resource person can help with some of the more sophisticated aspects of your study—questionnaire development, data input and analysis, and reporting your findings, for example. Often, such experts will donate

their services at no charge to the school.

Your own staff can handle the typing, printing or duplication of materials, mailing, and telephoning.

2. Define your goals.

By defining your desired outcomes carefully at the beginning of the project, you will ask the right questions of the right people and be able to plan learning activities that address student needs. Good information is more likely to prompt appropriate decision making.

It is easy to forget why you are collecting information, and to ask the wrong questions. Without a clearly defined goal, you may find yourself getting interesting bits of information, but no clear

framework to use in relating it to the bigger issue, your original objective.

For example, your goal might be to reduce teen pregnancy. Instead of asking whether there are enough sex education classes or if more videos should be shown about pregnancy and contraception, you might want to ask about after-school activities, power and prestige in boy-girl relationships, and communication skills. Your survey might reveal that although students know about birth control, they have not been taught assertiveness skills to deal with peer pressure. Instead of bringing a guest speaker to campus to talk about contraception, you might develop peer counseling teams to

A SCHOOL CHECKUP

How Good Is Your Health Program?

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BY GAIL TAYLOR RICE

help fellow students role-play how to effectively “just say no.”

3. Choose information-gathering procedures.

After defining your goals, you need to choose the most effective way to obtain the information. To find out what people think about your health curriculum, use some kind of questionnaire or

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survey form.

You should also consult with knowledgeable persons about the adequacy of your school health facilities and curriculum. For example, you may wonder whether your school has an adequate disaster plan. Find out what other schools are doing. Talk to local officials and community experts. Obtain published guidelines for disaster plans. It won't take long for you to determine whether your school's plan is adequate.

If you want to know whether the nurse's office is stocking appropriate first aid supplies, talk with others in addition to the the school nurse. Ask school health professionals, physicians, and county officials. Not only will you discover your deficiencies, you'll also probably find someone with the resources to help stock your cabinets.

4. Develop your questionnaire or survey form.

Once you have decided who to contact, you can decide on the best method to get the information. A questionnaire will provide some general perceptions. Include items that reflect your overall goals and objectives, and have your advisory committee help you refine it. (See the suggestions in the Questionnaire Design box and the sample instrument at the end of this article.) After you have put together a first draft, ask some people to “test” it. They will be able to tell you which items are confusing, what you have left out, if some questions don't fit with the answer categories, and what they think about the instrument in general. If you are surveying people from a variety of cultures or who have limited proficiency in English, get some expert help to make the survey understandable and acceptable to those whose views it is intended to measure.

Have your research/computer/statistics expert check to be sure that the format will fit easily into the analysis program. Don't make it too long. Be sure it is as attractive as possible, since sharp-looking questionnaires are more likely to be filled out. A creative individual with a desktop-publishing program can make it look good. Use high-quality paper and a good copier. If you plan to mail some of the questionnaires, prepare a good intro-

duction letter. See the box for suggestions to keep in mind as you write the letter.

5. Obtain consent and ensure anonymity of subjects.

In conducting research or planning data collection in schools or churches, it is important that responses be kept strictly confidential and that there is no attempt to identify the subjects by name. Of equal concern to many parents is the issue of consent. Many governments require that institutions involved in research have a review board to scrutinize the procedures used before the research can proceed. It is recommended that schools planning data collection choose a protocol review board consisting of at least one parent and an individual trained in health (ideally health research), along

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with at least one teacher and if possible a person representing the legal community. This review board should consider the ethical perspectives of the project, review the questionnaire, and make sure appropriate parental consent is obtained. In the case of sensitive research measuring sexual behavior or drug use, they

may require that each subject obtain written consent from at least one parent. If the project focuses on less sensitive issues, the board should decide whether student consent will suffice.

6. Collect your information.

Now it is time to collect the data. Try to obtain a high percentage of returns from each of your responding groups. If you want student response, go into the classrooms (not just before recess or lunch) and wait while the students complete the questionnaires. Give teachers the forms at the beginning of faculty meeting. Allow enough time to fill them out and write in some comments. Collect the forms before going on to other things.

Elementary students usually do well in getting their parents to respond to

Sample School Health and Safety Checkup

Instructions: Please share your ideas with us about the quality of our school health program by checking the appropriate box. Write in any comments in the section at the end.

1. Who are you? student parent teacher staff board member
 other (please specify)

How well do you think our school is doing in each of the following categories? (Place a check in **one** blank for each item.)

	Very Good	Adequate	Poor	Don't Know
2. Safety on the school playground	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Safety in school classrooms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Provision of first aid	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. School disaster plan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Vision screening	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Hearing screening	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. General health screening	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Physical education	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Teaching about nutrition	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Teaching about exercise	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Teaching about emotional health	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Teaching about sexuality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Peer counseling about health issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. Teaching about substance abuse	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. HIV/AIDS education	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. Other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

18. What are we doing especially well in health promotion and education at the school?

19. How could we improve our health program at the school?

20. Additional comments:

Thank you very much for your assistance. Please return your questionnaire to the teacher or central office.

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questionnaires. It helps for the teachers to reward students in some way for re-

turning the completed questionnaires. You will probably need to mail questionnaires to parents of secondary students, who are notoriously bad at getting parents to respond to hand-carried materials. See the box for cover letter suggestions.

7. Analyze the information and report your findings and recommendations.

Don't try to hand-tally the responses from completed questionnaires. Computer analysis is really quite simple (much simpler than counting). It provides more accurate results and a lot of information not otherwise available from hand-tallying. Summarize your results in a simple report. Use tables, charts, or graphs where they are helpful. Keep everything as clear and easy to understand as possible. Present both the good and bad news.

Make your recommendations as detailed as possible. The more detail, the more likely that the hard work that has gone into the project will not end up in someone's file drawer. Often, respon-

Questionnaire Design

Some guidelines to designing effective questionnaires include the following:

- **Be clear.** Each question must mean the same thing to all respondents.
- **Use short sentences.** They are easier to understand.
- **Avoid bias or leading questions.** You may not pick up your own biases. Have someone else check for it.
- **Do not use abbreviations or technical words** that may not be understood by all.
- **Avoid negative words if possible.** They may be overlooked by the respondent, resulting in an opposite response from what was intended. If you must use them, bold face them, e.g., "I would **not** like to see . . ."
- **Do not ask two questions at once.** Respondents may want to answer each part of the question differently, e.g., "Was service fast and friendly?"
- **Avoid hypothetical questions.**
- **Group similar answering mechanisms together.** Organize and lay out questions for ease of completion. Group items logically. Begin with interesting and nonthreatening items.
- **Use mutually exclusive response choices.**
- **Put the name and address of the person to whom the questionnaire should be returned** on both the introduction letter and questionnaire.
- **Number questionnaire items and pages.** Check and double-check for accuracy, clarity, and completeness.
- **Make the questionnaire attractive.** The better it looks, the better your chances people will fill it out.
- **Include brief, clear instructions at the beginning.** Include examples of how to respond appropriately.

dents will suggest specific remedies. Share them. One mother, for example, suggested that students participate in the local hospital's health fair. As a result, students and their parents discovered the wealth of services and information available to them, and enrolled in a number of community programs.

Checking up on your school health program can result in life-changing, if not life-saving results. It is well worth the effort. ✍

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Points to Keep in Mind When Drafting a Questionnaire Introduction Letter

Adapt as needed to fit the respondents and the type of data collection. Here are suggestions for the planning introduction letter that will accompany your questionnaire.

1. Make your respondents feel important. Tell them why they are essential to your study.

2. Show that the study is significant. Explain its purposes and possible advantages that could result.

3. Include an assurance of confidentiality. If necessary, explain how that will be done.

4. Tell who is authorizing the study and what will be done with the results.

5. If the questionnaire is to be mailed back, give the date for its return.

6. Make it look attractive.

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