

# Road to Results

ACHIEVING SUCCESS STEP BY STEP

## Healthy Schools Curriculum Encourages Healthier Lifestyles for Students, Teachers and Parents in the Kyrgyz Republic

November 2003

The groundbreaking Healthy Schools Program is well-underway again in its second year in Bishkek, becoming an accepted and formally recognized part of the school curriculum in the Kyrgyz Republic. With support from the USAID-funded ZdravPlus Project, the World Bank, World Health Organization (WHO), and Open Society Institute (OSI), the Healthy Schools Program was successfully launched last year—a milestone in an environment where health education in schools has been very basic and not a priority. As the program expands, a total of 41 schools—selected based on need and largely located in rural areas—will eventually cover the health education curriculum at each grade level and is part of a broader reform effort to improve the overall education in Kyrgyzstan's schools. The program was designed based on the WHO Healthy Schools model, with the goal of introducing health education courses into all grades and raising student awareness and understanding of healthy lifestyle behaviors.

Dr. Beishekan Kalieva heads the Healthy Schools Program from an office located within Pilot School #70 and is responsible for the program's overall success. As a doctor and former Deputy Minister of Health, she has helped create a good alliance between doctors and teachers and has worked with representatives from the Ministry of Health (MOH) and Ministry of Education (MOE) to receive official approval to teach the health curriculum. In addition to teaching students healthy behaviors, Kalieva states that her overall goal includes making school children socially responsible individuals.

When Olga Anufrieva, a psychology teacher in her second year of teaching this curriculum at School #70 asks her fifth graders, "Who's responsible for your health?" the answer in unison is a resounding, "WE ARE!" Students now know the importance of leading a healthy lifestyle. "These children are sick less often" as a result of this program, remarks Anufrieva. She herself is learning a lot about healthy lifestyles and says the

program helps teachers to understand the dilemmas facing today's youth and how to communicate with them better.

### **Teacher Training and Curriculum Development**

Teachers such as those at Pilot School #70 received ten days of interactive training in healthy lifestyle methodologies sponsored by the World Bank. To date, 78 teachers have been trained through local trainers educated under the Culture and Health Program funded by OSI. While training has been preliminary and materials limited, prior to initiation of this program, domestic resources for teaching health education were essentially non-existent.



*Students participate in health education lessons by drawing pictures that tell stories about related themes*

The Healthy Schools curriculum materials provide information on which subject areas are to be covered, depending on grade. The projected plan is for each of the 41 pilot schools to incorporate the healthy lifestyle curriculum at a pace of two grade levels per year. In tune with this systematic approach, the four pilot schools in Bishkek that introduced health education in grades one and five last year are currently incorporating new second and sixth grade curricula. Nine additional pilot schools have been added to the program for the 2003-2004 academic school year, teaching first and fifth grades only. Last year, Pilot School #70 taught approximately 600 students in the first and fifth grades—this year, the program has expanded to

  
**ZdravPlus**  
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The USAID-funded ZdravPlus Program provides technical assistance and training to improve the health of Central Asian populations by improving health delivery systems

include over 1,300 students in the first, second, fifth and sixth grades.

Health education lessons are being offered 1-2 times per week for approximately 44 hours per year in the pilot schools and students are periodically tested on their knowledge. Overarching themes for first and fifth grade curricula include:

- Hygiene, Nutrition and Communicable Diseases
- Addictive Behaviors and their Prevention
- Movement is Life: Physical Activity

Program coordinators and teachers are making the most of available resources; however, there are concerns regarding expansion of the program and limited funding creates difficulties in accessing appropriate materials. One teacher's solution was to conduct lessons in the form of games and artwork. Students drew pictures on themes including the dangers of smoking and talking to strangers.

### **Parent Education**

The importance of health education lessons for parents has also been recognized, as program administrators are learning that it is not enough to simply provide health education classes in schools. Parents need to reinforce these messages at home by monitoring their children's behaviors. However, parents themselves are not always well-educated on health topics. In response to this need, pilot schools have begun establishing communities of parents to facilitate discussion of these topics and the MOE has begun a program intended to provide health education to adults. Children have even begun teaching their parents healthy behaviors by informing them about healthy eating habits, such as the dangers of eating unwashed foods.

### **Knowledge Gained**

An analysis of a total of 847 students from the four pilot schools and from four control schools

showed on average a higher awareness level of healthy behaviors in students from the pilots, reinforcing the importance of introducing this discipline into the school curriculum. Pilot school students excelled in areas including consequences of drug use and knowledge about the methods of AIDS transmission. However, their scores were low in the area of prevention of infectious diseases, which will be addressed in future curriculum planning. Students also indicated that they receive the majority of their health information from parents and teachers, reinforcing the importance of health education in the schools and at home.

### **Future Program Implementation**

The Healthy Schools Program is clearly having an impact and its recent approval by the MOE as an accredited curriculum helps to ensure the program's continuity in the face of financial instability. School administrators, teachers, students, and parents are also very enthusiastic about bringing health education into the school system, making it imperative for teachers to gain the necessary knowledge and training in order to effectively teach the curricula. With leadership from Dr. Kalieva, those involved in the program are working together to establish an NGO called "Association of Teachers, Parents, and School Children." It is hoped that through this association, future curricula will be developed and fine-tuned and additional funding will be secured to ensure the sustainability of this program.

Without the Healthy Schools Program, children would not be offered the opportunity to learn about healthy lifestyles and the effort is bringing the entire community together to focus on resolving a need in the education system. Changes in student knowledge and behavior will take time, but the continued involvement from every level—from the combined efforts of the MOH and MOE down to school administrators, teachers, parents and students—is definitely progress in the right direction.

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