

Exclusive content for
SHAPE America members



Et Cetera

Plus



Technology in Health Education

How to Maximize Tech
Use for Student Success

Technology in Health Education

How to Maximize Tech Use for Student Success

Understanding technology and its use in the classroom can be one of the most confusing subjects out there for teachers. How do you determine what is appropriate and what will build skills in your students?

Whether you seek guidance from colleagues, news stories or other sources, it can be difficult to differentiate fact from rumor. Furthermore, students are quite resourceful and frequently use new apps that teachers aren't yet familiar with.

There is definitely a generational gap when it comes to technology use — and in some schools there may be an accessibility gap as well. This can affect students' access to and experience with a variety of tech devices and apps. Combine all these factors with students' desire for more screen time and you have an issue that just isn't going away.

To better understand the benefits and challenges of using technology in the classroom, we recommend looking to relevant resources and research findings.

DECISION MAKING: How can tech help teens make positive decisions?

Video games can be used as a classroom tool to increase student engagement and improve decision-making skills.

In New Haven, CT, the play2PREVENT Lab at the Yale Center for Health & Learning Games has created [smokeSCREEN](#), an interactive app in which students “travel” through life, facing the range of challenges that young teens face — with a focus on strategies for both smoking prevention and cessation.

A grant from CVS Health Foundation will allow this program to reach more students across the country. Teachers of students ages 10-16 can [request free access](#) to the smokeSCREEN game for use in their classroom.

HEALTH ADVOCACY: How can we help teens use and improve digital advocacy?

The National Health Education Standard 8 talks about a student's ability to advocate for personal, family and community health. Advocacy is the public support or recommendation for a policy or cause.

So, how do students advocate in today's world? They "like," #retweet, put their ideas and thoughts into pictures. Students use digital advocacy because it meets many of their needs: It is relatively inexpensive (or even free), it allows for personal expression, it unites them with others who are like-minded, and it can be done anytime, anywhere.

However, successful digital advocacy requires a plan. Who is the intended audience? Which social media channels should be used? Health educators must teach students to consider these questions — as well as relevant business principles — to help students create advocacy campaigns.

The Pew Research Center has done extensive research into the demographics of who uses different social media platforms. [This research](#) may be a worthwhile item to consider as students plan how they will expand their reach to selected target audiences.

Often advocacy campaigns are the "go-to" project for service-learning students. Health educators who are looking for relevant resources may want to access a guide from the Maryland State Department of Education Office of Service Learning. The document includes a [unit plan with several advocacy projects](#) related to reducing the use of heroin and opioids in the community.

Combining resources like the Maryland unit and the Pew Institute research into social media will help students increase their ability to advocate for causes that are meaningful to them and their community.

GOAL SETTING: Should we advocate for students to use fitness trackers?

We can't talk about tech in health education without talking about the wearables. You know them: Fitbit, Apple Watch, Garmin, Samsung Gear and many more.

Intuition and sales brochures tell us that data is our friend when it comes to goal setting. If we have data about what we are doing, what we want to do, and what we need to do, then we will do better!

Research, however, is telling us that it doesn't exactly work that way. [A study commissioned to examine the effectiveness of fitness trackers](#) clearly showed that even when participants received free fitness trackers, they did not use them without additional incentives such as cash or prizes for moving. Increases in activity were seen only among those participants who were being compensated to increase movement.

A Stanford University research study found that while trackers were accurate at measuring heart rate during physical activity, they were not accurate in measuring calories burned by the user. Additionally, research from the National Institutes of Health showed that using trackers could not be determined to be effective and that innovative strategies (e.g., gamification, incentives) were necessary to see a change in physical activity.

Trackers don't do harm, but just putting one on your wrist will not substitute for creating a specific plan that can be put into action. Goal setting with check ins and refinements is still a successful strategy.

PERSONAL HEALTH: Can tech use negatively impact students' health?

When it comes to the use of cellphones, tablets, laptops and other tech devices, parental rules and school policies aim to protect young people but can be a source of endless frustration and arguments — especially at home.

Health educators can play an important role by teaching students about the potential negative effects of technology use, particularly with regard to sleep deprivation. [PBS News Hour has highlighted multiple studies](#) that examine the negative effect that technology has had on sleep.

This research is probably not a huge shock to many, but what is important to note is the link between sleep deprivation and mental health issues such as teen depression and anxiety, which have increased sharply in recent years.

So how can we combat the reduction in sleep? The answer lies in building skills and acknowledging other factors that affect sleep. GENYouth and Sleep Number have recently released [a study that reveals healthy habits and skills](#) students can use to increase the amount of sleep they get each night, such as maintaining a consistent bedtime, following a nightly routine that limits tech use before going to bed, and agreeing with friends to stop communicating at a set time each evening.

Tech Tips for Your Classroom

DO:

- Use tech to support instruction (e.g., use health games to teach skills).
- Maximize how tech is used by students to research and advocate.
- Teach students effective skills for managing their tech time to increase sleep.

DON'T:

- Feel the need to have every gadget, or the latest version. More tech doesn't always mean more effective outcomes.
- Assume students use the same type of technology that adults use.
- Be afraid to learn from students or innovate by using new technology in your classroom.

If you have any great tech tips and resources, please follow up in our [mySHAPEAmerica](#) forum to share your stories and ideas with the larger SHAPE America community.