

**CCSSO Health Education Assessment Project**  
**A Proposal for Funding**  
**Design and Development of a National Health Literacy Test**

### **Why Develop a National Health Literacy Test?**

Nearly half of all American adults—90 million people—have difficulty obtaining, understanding and acting upon health information. The effects of limited health literacy can result in poor individual and family health outcomes which also affect the health care system through ever increasing health care costs.

The issue of limited health literacy has received much attention in recent years.

- 2004: The Institutes of Medicine (IOM) released a report, *Health Literacy: A Prescription to End Confusion*. In this report the education system was identified as one of three potential points of intervention for developing a health literate population. In many schools today there are current structures in place that can address the recommendations of this report to improved health literacy, either directly or indirectly. <http://iom.edu/Reports/2004/Health-Literacy-A-Prescription-to-End-Confusion.aspx>
- 2006: The Surgeon General's Workshop on Improving Health Literacy was convened. Recommendations from this workshop suggested that health literacy be examined in the context of large systems – social systems, education systems, and the public health system. There was a call for more research on this topic. <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/topics/healthliteracy/toc.html>
- 2009: The National Education Association (NEA) Health Information Network (HIN) convened national leaders to a symposium, *Health Literacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Setting an Educational Agenda*. This generated a foundational alignment around key themes as well as provocative ideas for advancing health literacy within today's school environment. Participants strongly advocated continuing the dialogue and, especially, pursuing broader engagement of additional stakeholders. <http://www.neahin.org/healthliteracy/index.html>
- 2010: The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) published a *National Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy* which outlined seven broad goals for action. Of particular relevance to the school system was a call for standards-based health and science curricula in pre-K-20 education settings, as well as an increase in research on practices and interventions to improve health literacy. <http://www.health.gov/communication/hlactionplan>

Health literacy has been defined by the 1995 Joint Committee tasked to develop the National Health Education Standards (NHES) as *the capacity of individuals to obtain, interpret, and understand basic health information and services and the competence to use such information and services in ways which enhance health*. This definition formed the foundation to develop the skill standards of the NHES that assumed would lead to improved health literacy.

## **Why Fund CCSSO's Health Education Assessment Project to develop a National Health Literacy Test?**

The Health Education Assessment Project (HEAP), sponsored by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), is a collaborative of approximately 20 states and education agencies that have pooled human and financial resources to develop educational products and services to improve student health literacy. The HEAP has been developing resources that address the education recommendations from the IOM report. The HEAP is in a key position to address the recommendations from the National Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy (2010) through the creation of a test of health literacy that can be used nationally in schools and districts across all states. A test that shows the effectiveness of teachers in making students more health literate would provide valuable data to researchers and give educators critical feedback on how well important health concepts and skills related to health literacy are being learned. This test could be adapted to other settings.

- The HEAP has been in existence since 1993 and has a national network of health educators who can help develop, field test, and use a national health literacy test.
- All products and services developed by the HEAP are based on the National Health Education Standards (NHES). An operational definition for the assessment of health literacy skills will be based on the mega-skills of the NHES – accessing and analyzing valid sources of information, decision making, interpersonal communication, and self management.
- The HEAP has an item bank of over 2000 assessment items from which to draw from in creating such a test. These items are in a searchable web-based system that supports online testing as well as efficient data collection for analysis.
- Should additional assessment items be needed the project has created a web-based item development tool. This tool provides the users with the ability to review, edit, and refine items, as well as categorize, store, and retrieve them for use in the administration of the test.
- The test as envisioned will be designed to be completed within one class period (approximately 50 minutes). It can also be adapted for other education and health care settings.
- The HEAP members and CCSSO are in full support of creating such a test.
- The HEAP has already developed a health and reading initiative based on the recommendations of the IOM report. This web-based searchable system provides educators with book templates on health topics to improve both reading and health literacy. These templates contain discussion questions on health topics and skills, assessments, reading levels, vocabulary, and teacher resources. This initiative will be expanded to use informational texts for middle and high school students that address analyzing and accessing the health care system, medical procedures, consent forms, and communicating with health care professionals.

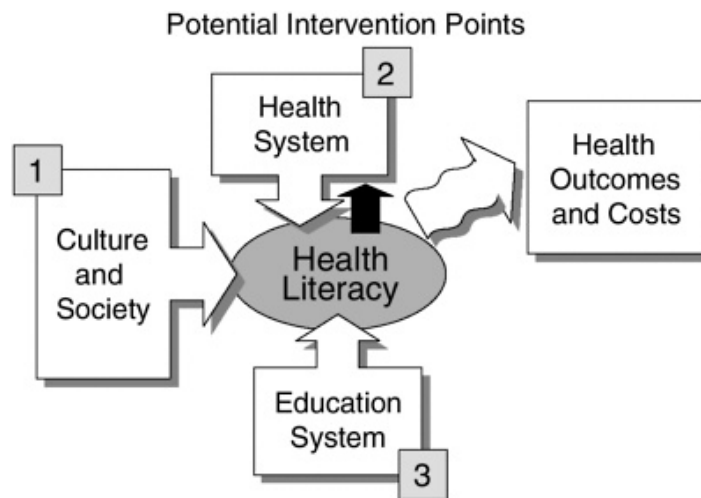
## Expected Results

A health literacy test is the foundation for developing research that documents effective ways to improve health literacy. It can also be the catalyst for policy and system changes. Educating to this test could provide the target population with educational activities and program interventions that improve the skills necessary to be empowered health care consumers who more effectively access and use the health care system to promote life-long health and reduce health care costs.

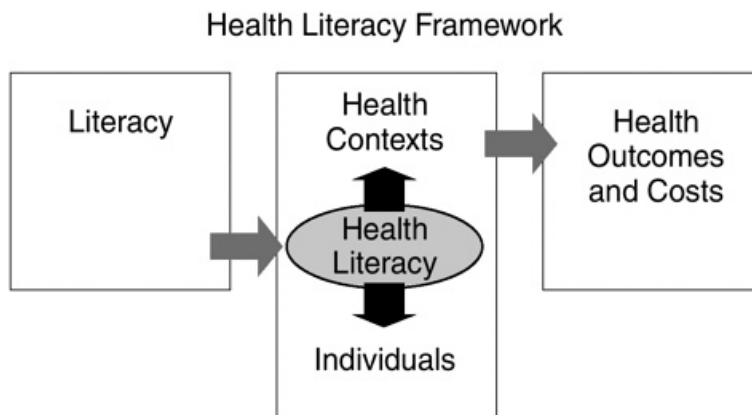
For more information contact Nancy Hudson, [nancyh@ccsso.org](mailto:nancyh@ccsso.org).

Click the link below to access the full copy of the concept paper with the suggested parameters and considerations in test design with possible adaptations.

[http://scassheap.org/Concept\\_Paper\\_for\\_NHLS\\_Test\\_v2\\_10-22-10.pdf](http://scassheap.org/Concept_Paper_for_NHLS_Test_v2_10-22-10.pdf)



**FIGURE ES-1** Potential points for intervention in the health literacy framework.



**FIGURE 2-1** Health literacy framework.