Reviewer's report

Title: Effective Elements of School Health Promotion Across Behavioral Domains: A Systematic Review of Reviews

Version: 1 Date: 9 February 2009

Reviewer: Nancy Murray

Reviewer's report:

Discretionary Revisions

1. The question posed for this review was well-defined: which elements of school health education are effective across and similar across the behavioral domains of substance abuse, tobacco, alcohol, sexuality, and nutrition. It is confusing that, in the abstract, four domains are mentioned, while in the tables, the five domains above are listed as headings along with ‘multiple behaviors’. The authors do discuss the issue of substance abuse reviews incorporating tobacco and/or alcohol along with marijuana and other drugs. They also discuss the difficulty of evaluating reviews that are broader in their inclusion of substance abuse against those that are specific to alcohol or tobacco. However, inclusion of substance abuse, alcohol, and tobacco in separate columns in the tables may give extra weight to their evidence compared to sexuality and nutrition. How would the evidence appear in the tables if substance abuse, alcohol, and tobacco were in a single category to be contrasted with sexuality and nutrition? I agree that it would be difficult to disentangle the substance abuse categories but believe that the reader should be forewarned in the abstract regarding the number of categories (columns) in the tables.

The methods are appropriate and well-described. Table 1 provides a thorough listing of the search terms used by database that will be useful for future reviews. The data consist of an analysis of reviews using a quality assessment tool for which criteria are described. The quality ratings appear to be useful to the analysts and to the reader. However, the inclusion of the quality ratings in parentheses after the citation in the tables may not give the reader sufficient information to understand the tables. It might be helpful for the reader if the notes section of the table included an explanation of the ratings – e.g., Higher (6-7); Lower (0-3). Will the Quality Assessment Tool for Reviewers be available for retrieval through the web?

The discussion and conclusions are well balanced, supported by the data, and the authors both acknowledge the work of others in their analysis of reviews as well as their acknowledgement of similar reviews of reviews.

The article is very well-written, with a thorough discussion of limitations due to the review of reviews approach.

The title accurately reflects the findings. My concern regarding the abstract is expressed above.
Minor Essential Revisions

2. The periods in Tables 3-8 in the cells are very confusing to the eye. For instance, in Table 3, the cell for Substance abuse/focus on 1 substance 24(7):+.33(7):+/0/-. What do the . mean? In the same table, what does ‘country’ mean?

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I have no competing interests