

ORGAN AND TISSUE AWARENESS EDUCATION **Breathing New Life into Pennsylvania's Academic Standards**

The decision each of us makes about organ and tissue donation is both personal and far-reaching. It is a decision best made after discussion with family and loved ones. And it is a decision that might or might not be based on factual information. Young high school students anxious to get behind the wheel of a car face this decision for the first time. Hopefully, these same students will have many more opportunities throughout life to reflect upon their initial decision about organ and tissue donation.

High School students often question the relevance of curricula to “life”. Why must we learn this? Why do we have to know that? Effective teachers encourage and respect these questions. They also recognize that Pennsylvania has strong academic standards that determine what students need to know and be able to do in the twenty-first century. The challenge for educators today is to address these standards through ongoing curriculum development, to make learning relevant for students of all ages, and to create an educational environment where students learn how to learn.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education has stated the following:

Standards define what each student should know in a core set of subjects. They give students a solid foundation in the basics and provide consistent targets for students, teachers and parents. Standards allow schools to measure student achievement. They help parents, teachers, schools and school districts follow the progress that students make from year to year. The standards are a baseline from which school districts should develop their own standards that contain local goals and objectives. It is still the responsibility of the local school district to design and implement its own curriculum based on the state academic standards and its own locally developed standards, goals and objectives. The standards are what a student should know and be able to do by the completion of a certain grade. How and when those standards are taught remains in control of the local school district.

Organ and tissue donation awareness education (OTDA) crosses academic disciplines, addresses the Pennsylvania Academic Standards, and is relevant to all students. OTDA Official Implementation Sites, supported through mini grant funding from the Pennsylvania Department of Education, report that students are highly motivated to learn about organ and tissue donation and, once exposed to this content area, are eager to share their knowledge with others. Teachers in all content areas agree that OTDA helps them link learning to life AND meet Pennsylvania's Academic Standards. Together, teachers and students have developed lessons, units and activities that are challenging, creative, informative and, above all, relevant. Students have repeatedly demonstrated they are eager to share this information with their fellow students and their families.

Organ and Tissue Donation is an act of giving, of sharing, and of sustaining life. Regardless of a student's personal decision about organ and tissue donation, this content area allows learners to explore a multitude of academic areas, including: Health; Consumer Science; Science; Bioethics, Social Studies; English; Technology; Drama; and Contemporary Issues. At some high schools, OTDA has even found its way into debates, school newspapers, health and science fairs, Senior Projects and student-run associations, student videos and assembly programs. Teams of teachers are working across disciplines to create standards-based lessons and activities that are meaningful for secondary students. Their work is supported by Pennsylvania's organ procurement organizations (Gift of Life, in Philadelphia, and CORE – Center for Organ Recovery and Education, in Pittsburgh). Both organizations have gone out of their way to support the education of young adults and to ensure that educators have the information and resources necessary to bring this content to the classroom.

The OTDA Curriculum Classroom Toolkit (https://www.iu13.org/aded_otda_main.shtml) is an excellent tool for helping curriculum coordinators and classroom teachers get started with organ and tissue donation awareness education. The 157-page toolkit breaks the content into manageable chunks and provides a meaningful context for reading, writing, speaking, listening, math, science, health, research, etc. It also includes more than 13 activities and lesson plans (including necessary materials) to teach in a variety of ways about transplantation. It's one thing for today's students to learn how to do research as an academic exercise; it's quite another for them to learn how to do research that could, ultimately, result in saving the life of a fellow human being. Learning to do research helps a student meet Pennsylvania's Academic Standards. Learning to do research related to Organ and Tissue Donation helps a student meet Pennsylvania's Academic Standards and also makes the world a better place in which to live. Students recognize and respond to this difference with an enthusiasm that breathes new life into Pennsylvania's Academic Standards. Organ and tissue donation awareness education is education at its very best.

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