



Association of Aquatic Professionals
The Association **for** Aquatic Professionals
by Aquatic Professionals

Association of Aquatic Professionals

Position Paper: Water Safety Education Mandates

Executive Summary

The Association of Aquatic Professionals (AOAP) strongly supports the implementation of universal, accessible, and subsidized basic learn-to-swim and water competency programs across all communities. This position paper outlines the rationale, evidence, and policy recommendations for mandating water safety education as a public health imperative.

Introduction: The Case for Water Safety Education Mandates

Drowning is a leading cause of accidental death worldwide, especially among children. In the United States alone, drowning is the leading cause of unintentional injury death for children aged 1-4, and the second leading cause for children under 14. Despite these alarming statistics, access to water safety education remains inconsistent, often hindered by socioeconomic and geographic barriers. The AOAP believes that every individual, regardless of background, deserves the opportunity to acquire essential water safety and swimming skills.

Official Stances

1. **Universal Access:** Every child and adult should have the opportunity to participate in basic learn-to-swim and water competency programs, regardless of income, race, ethnicity, or location.
2. **Accessibility:** Programs must be physically and culturally accessible, incorporating adaptive instruction for individuals with disabilities and linguistically appropriate materials.

3. **Subsidization:** Federal, state, and local governments should subsidize water safety education, ensuring affordability for all families and removing financial barriers to participation.

Rationale and Supporting Evidence

1. Public Health and Safety

- **Drowning Prevention:** Evidence demonstrates that formal swim lessons can reduce drowning risk by up to 88% among young children.
- **Lifespan Safety:** Water competency is a critical life skill, reducing risks not only for children but for adults, including teens and seniors.

2. Equity and Social Justice

- **Disparities in Drowning Rates:** Marginalized communities, particularly Black, Hispanic, and Native American populations, face disproportionately higher drowning rates, often due to historical and systemic barriers to swimming access.
- **Breaking the Cycle:** Universal and subsidized programs disrupt generational cycles of non-swimming and increase representation in aquatic environments.

3. Economic and Societal Benefits

- **Healthcare Cost Savings:** Preventing drownings and aquatic injuries reduces the economic burden on healthcare systems and families.
- **Community Enrichment:** Broad water competency promotes community engagement in aquatic recreation, fostering health, wellness, and local economic activity.

4. Alignment with National and Global Recommendations

- **CDC and WHO Advocacy:** Both the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization identify swim competency and water safety education as critical drowning prevention strategies.
- **Model Legislation:** States and countries that have mandated water safety education have seen measurable declines in aquatic fatalities.

Policy Recommendations

1. **Mandate Curriculum Integration:** Incorporate water safety and swimming instruction into school curricula at elementary levels, with adaptive options for all abilities.
2. **Fund Community Partnerships:** Allocate public funds to support community pools, recreation centers, and non-profit organizations offering subsidized lessons.
3. **Remove Access Barriers:** Ensure transportation options, flexible scheduling, and culturally sensitive outreach to maximize participation.
4. **Ongoing Evaluation and Research:** Invest in data collection, program evaluation, and research to measure impact and adapt best practices.

Conclusion

Water safety education is not a privilege—it is a fundamental right and a matter of public health. By advocating for universal, accessible, and subsidized water competency programs, the Association of Aquatic Professionals calls on policymakers, educators, and community leaders to take decisive action to protect lives, promote equity, and foster safe aquatic environments for all.

Prepared by:

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