

Commentary: A review of K-12 health education instructional technology careers

Introduction

K-12 education, especially health and wellness education, is ripe with the need for instructional designers to help facilitate technology-based learning, usually through the use of some sort of Internet-based service or hardware. These needs have been amplified as technology becomes more pervasive in general society, and as that matriculates into education, properly researched and developed instructional design systems need to be in place to ensure proper educational outcomes. Career opportunities for those in instructional design are plentiful, but the market is becoming increasingly more competitive, so one has to understand the nature of the application process and how to stand out. One way is to focus on a specific type of design and that could potentially be in K-12 health education.

In the realm of health education, a course or the use of technology must be properly researched and analyzed for functionality, specifically with how the learners will be able to better understand their own personal health and how their decisions affect others. One of the key standards of health education is to make sure all learners have a fundamental understanding of their own health, as well as the health of others and the impact each person has on each other ([SHAPE America, 2018](#)). Therefore, instructional design jobs in K-12 health education must keep in mind the individual and community aspects of health education when developing tools for learning. Instructional design jobs are generally broad and all-encompassing with regard to public schools, but there can be options for health-specific designers to improve a K-12 health department.

Range of jobs available

An instructional designer for K-12 education may have a limited scope to their job, but chances are that they will be working with teachers and students to develop technology-based tools that will enhance both teaching and learning ([Instructional designer job description, 2023](#)). With that, though, it is possible that a school district may want an instructional designer solely for developing tools or training programs for teachers or a district may just want a designer for developing learning tools for students for particular reasons. If a designer is hired for the purposes of helping teachers, that instructional designer will work with district and building administrators to better understand the needs of the faculty and will develop tools that the teachers can use to enhance their classrooms. They may also be required to help teachers troubleshoot those programs if problems arise. The designers may also be tasked with creating professional development projects on days that teachers are required to go through district-mandated trainings ([Peck, 2024c](#)). If the designer is tasked with working directly with the students, they may be given certain grade-level projects or projects by course and will develop learning modules for the students. Another potential job could be to develop or manage an online learning management system, which would be used for both students and teachers ([Daum, 2020](#)). All of these jobs would most likely be full-time and in-house. There are options for freelance or remote work, and those jobs may be more in line with health education instructional designers.

Instructional design in health education would most likely not be a full-time in-house position, unless the K-12 school district is large and has the resources to house an individual that specific. Therefore, work would most likely be on a freelance basis or while working for a consulting firm. The latter is more viable because a school district would want to work with a



reputable agency that has recognition in health education, so the jobs available may be within that organization. These jobs could range from media developers to project managers and upwards in higher management and corporate positions. Instructional designers in health education will be required to develop appropriate materials for a school district based on their school policies and state and federal health standards (Killian, Kinder, & Woods, 2019). There are many controversial issues in health education, so the development of these learning tools will need to be thoroughly vetted. The upside is that school districts may be more comfortable hiring out for health education design so that they can get approval from their school board and community for approved programs and not have to manage any problems internally. These jobs in instructional design, whether broad in nature or specifically in health education, are becoming harder to acquire.

Status of the job market

According to the [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics \(2024\)](#), there is an 11% growth in instructional design jobs across the country, which is much higher than average. Given that many teachers are leaving the profession and some are transitioning to instructional designers, the market may be saturated, but a highly qualified and prepared prospective designer can stand out. In fact, from 2020 to 2022, over 300,000 teachers left the field due to various stressors of the job, with many transitioning to instructional design because of what it can offer (Peck, 2024b). Jobs in K-12 instructional design may be limited in scope because a school district may not have the funds for more than one or two technology specialists, and those individuals may have multiple roles within the district, not just designing curriculum. Therefore, if one is to be a full-time employee in K-12, they may also need skills in computer technology troubleshooting or media management. That may give some prospective individuals pause and warrant them to look at a private company that works with school districts or as a freelancer, which can also give some flexibility in project decisions. Either way, individuals entering the field or already in it will need significant educational qualifications, as well as the ability to showcase their talents, usually through a lengthy interview process or possibly through a digital portfolio. The latter will be beneficial when displaying K-12 or health-related projects.

Required qualifications

At a basic level, most K-12 school districts will want an instructional designer with a master's degree, but it's certainly possible to attain a job with a bachelor's degree. Equivalent degrees could be in technology, educational design, communications or simply education (Instructional Designer Job Description, 2023). Having a master's degree will help set up a prospective designer far more than one who only holds a bachelor's degree, especially with a competitive job market. Other items that set designers apart are previous work experience and a portfolio. One is much more likely to be hired if they have previous work experience, especially previous work in education. Additionally, whether one is a newer instructional designer or not, having a digital portfolio of examples of content created for learning will greatly benefit a prospective employee (Peck, 2024c). As for what skills a designer needs, there are many, and they are varied.

Given that a designer is working with technology and media, they must have experience in graphic design and web development, even at a basic level. They should be able to more easily take to developmental software and be able to troubleshoot technology and media issues easily, as those are their primary tools of use. Additionally, it is beneficial for them to have teaching and training skills, along with interpersonal skills to help with facilitating learning. Given that this is K-12, those skills should be for both adults and students, since both will be using the developed tools (Instructional Designer Job Description, 2023). For those in health education design, they should also know what resources are available that are age-appropriate and from

valid sources. The school district should have approved resources, and the designer should only be using those to avoid conflicts regarding what is being taught. A designer in the health and wellness field should also have the communication skills needed to promote the core foundations related to wellness, healthcare and health education.

Typical compensation

Compensation in instructional design can depend on a few factors, namely if the individual is a full-time employee of the school district or if they are contracted out and are self-employed. Additionally, components such as the number of years of prior experience, level of education and an available portfolio at the time of applying for the job all play into the potential salary of a K-12 instructional designer. Average salaries range from \$58,920 per year to \$68,474, depending on the source of the data collected (Peck, 2024b; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024). Working as an instructional designer in education generally pays less than in the corporate world, but that is also dependent on if it is an internal or consultant hire. A self-employed designer may be able to charge more per hour for their services, but those services may be more limited when compared to a full-time employee in a school district.

A self-employed instructional designer that emphasizes in health education may be able to leverage their independence by working with multiple school districts at once. Even if those hours are limited per district, with a high hourly rate and a proven record of improving health education within a district, there could be considerable upward movement in the salary department. Additionally, someone working independently in health education may also be able to develop design projects for other entities within the health or wellness community. This could range anywhere from public schools to community centers to doctor's offices to retirement homes or anything involving health education. Investing in designers for health education can bolster those specific health and wellness operations, which will in turn positively influence the general public, thus providing a tremendous return on investment. Investing in human wellness benefits everyone. The responsibilities and duties of the individual will be general in any of these scenarios but specific for K-12.

Typical duties or responsibilities

An instructional designer in the K-12 environment serves to analyze the current learning environment, specifically as it relates to technology and develop positive connections where there may be a gap in the needs of the district (Jordan, 2022). The intent is to integrate useful tools that will enhance learning and improve the outcomes or performances of the students. Technology integration should have meaning and improve learning and should not be used just for the sake of it. An instructional designer will understand this and go through the proper steps and procedures to integrate technology in the best way possible. If this individual is a full-time employee, they will analyze how technology is integrated throughout the school district and work with building leaders, along with higher administration, to best serve each grade level in a way that is appropriate. This will continue throughout the school year, and then when tools have been implemented, the designer will use evaluation techniques to determine what worked best and what needs to change for future improvement (Jordan, 2022). This may also be the focus of a consultant or designer-for-hire, but their role could be on a limited basis, and they may be needed for just a limited time to help sort out a perceived problem within the district (Peck, 2024c). The role of the designer, whether full-time or as a consultant, can be narrowed for health education.

Health education in the K-12 learning environment is very different depending on the part of the country and the school district. It is a point of controversy for some school districts because of items like sex education, but it has been proven that a comprehensive health education program is beneficial to the students and can help prevent things like communicable diseases and unwanted pregnancies (Killian *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, if an instructional

designer is needed to improve the health curriculum, that individual will have to analyze the current program, work with state and local standards to determine gaps, create age-appropriate instructional materials that align with the school standards and develop the media tools to be used to facilitate learning. As with any instructional designer, this person will then have to evaluate the effectiveness of the instruction and work towards improving it in the future, if need be.

How one learns of job openings

As with most careers, there are general websites that can be used to find job openings in instructional design. Currently, popular websites used to find job openings are Indeed, ZipRecruiter, Monster and LinkedIn. The latter can be beneficial because a prospective designer can tailor their profile page to highlight accomplishments and projects in instructional design, which could help separate them from other candidates that just have general information and are lacking substance. There are specific websites and services that focus solely on instructional design and can be used to filter through job openings and towards K-12 careers. Typically, universities with graduate listservs related to instructional design can also be a bountiful resource for job openings.

The website Instructional Design Central is a hub for those in the field looking to learn more about the industry, as well as careers in instructional design (Jordan, 2022). They have a job board section of their website that users can access to find jobs around the United States. Individuals can use this to find K-12-specific jobs or even tangentially related jobs in health and wellness, which could then be used to target education. Other resources specific to instructional design and K-12 education can be found directly through a school district's job website or through a consulting firm's website. Directly applying may be more beneficial than going through a third-party service, such as Indeed. Lastly, there may be groups on social media applications, such as Facebook, that collect job openings or allow prospective designers to connect with others in the field and get a direct line to those that may be hiring. Like with all industries, knowing someone in the field can help you get your foot in the door.

Nature of the application and interview process

The application process will almost be guaranteed to be done online, typically through a common web portal that schools and businesses use, such as the ones listed previously, like Indeed. Depending on the institution, the applications may not even reach a human and could be vetted via a computer or AI to look for or reject certain applicants based on the content of their resume. This may also be true if there is not a viable portfolio, as some job openings may require one. Additionally, at some point during this process, background and reference checks will be conducted to weed out potential candidates that may not be suited for K-12 work. Once a certain number of applications are approved, they will then go to a human resources specialist within the school district, who will then narrow the applications down even further, typically to five or less. From there, an applicant will receive a notification for an interview, either in person or remotely, to begin the next step of the process.

An initial interview will be conducted to learn more about the applicant and specifically to better understand their previous work in instructional design and why they are interested in K-12 education. The applicant will discuss various projects they have previously completed with the intent to either showcase their work in education or to connect what they have previously done to how it could be implemented into a K-12 environment. If these individuals are specifically applying for a job in health education, they must show that they have an understanding of health topics and can create appropriate content for various age groups. As the process proceeds to the next step and possibly down to two or three candidates, the applicant may be tasked with providing a specific design project requested by the school district or even coming in person and partially teaching how to use a project, much like a

teacher teaching a mock lesson. This would most likely be the final step before being hired or not (Peck, 2024a).

Likely future of the subfield

There is no sign of technology integration in education slowing down, so the need for instructional designers to properly integrate technology into the classroom will be more needed than ever as education progresses. Coming out of COVID-19, there was considerable backlash against online learning and the use of technology in the classroom because schools had to switch to emergency online learning, which is different than a properly structured and vetted design program (Killian *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, instructional designers may be highly sought after in the K-12 environment to help school districts establish a well-rounded technology presence that will benefit the learners and give teachers more tools to help with their instruction. Given that the job market is growing, the field is likely to continue to be more competitive, so those interested in becoming instructional designers will have to increase the quality of their work to remain viable. This can help school districts because there will be more highly qualified individuals to choose from, while also hopefully bolstering the notion of using instructional designers within the school system if they are able to prove beneficial to learning.

Showing worth is important in instructional design, especially related to K-12 and health education. In any instructional design field, there must be proven positive outcomes to the work, and the designers must be able to show that their work can improve the entity in question. Given that many school districts became jaded over online learning through COVID-19, it is important that there be tangible benefits towards the work that instructional designers do in K-12 education (Daum, 2020). For health education, the designers must be able to show that their tools can positively affect the physical, mental, emotional or social aspects of students and enable them to be healthy throughout their lifetime. This is a key tenet of health education and must be reflected in the design process. The quality of health education is very dependent upon the region and desires of a school district, so a prepared and excellent health instructional designer can be highly marketable in this regard. Additionally, whether it is a general K-12 instructional designer or one specific to health education, with so many teachers leaving the profession and some entering instructional design, there is a chance for tremendous growth in the field, albeit competitive growth.

Summary

Coming out of COVID-19, K-12 school systems generally rejected online learning and the constant use of technology to facilitate learning, but technology is still ever-present in classrooms and school districts need to know how to properly implement and evaluate using such tools. Instructional designers have the knowledge and skills to plan and analyze a potential problem within a school system and then develop tools to help serve those that need it in order to generate a positive net outcome. Instructional technology and design is an increasingly competitive field, both in education and elsewhere, mainly because many teachers are leaving the field and entering into instructional design. While there are opportunities for individuals in the field to work in a slew of places, namely educational institutions, it is very competitive and applicants must show that they can stand out in order to attain a potentially coveted job. There are opportunities, though, and one must understand the process to get a job in the field.

Those looking to get into the field will most likely need some sort of graduate degree or certification, along with extensive experience and a portfolio. While it is certainly possible to land a job with some or none of these qualifications, it may be difficult or one's salary might be affected. Salaries can be considerably varied depending on the institution and level of experience of the applicant, along with factors like whether it is a full-time contract or freelance. Those getting into the field should understand these items before applying for jobs

and should do their due diligence to prepare for a possible interview. With proper preparation and an understanding of what truly makes instructional design work for the K-12 environment, there is potential for positive change within the educational system for someone in the instructional design field.

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Further reading

- Instructions for Authors (n.d.). Submit to American journal of health education. Available from: <https://www.tandfonline.com/action/authorSubmission?show=instructions&journalCode=ujhe20#word-limits>
- What is a health education specialist? (n.d.). Available from: <https://www.utep.edu/chs/phs/academic-programs/undergraduate/what-is-a-health-ed-specialist.pdf>