



FOCUS ON HEALTHY SCHOOLS

Helping Students Learn, Grow and Succeed



About Focus on Healthy Schools

Welcome to the second edition of *Focus on Healthy Schools*. This e-bulletin is part of the Ministry of Education’s Healthy Schools and Student Well-being Support and Monitoring Plan to help school boards implement healthy school activities for students.

Focus on Healthy Schools provides updates on healthy schools policies and programs and shares examples of promising healthy schools and student well-being initiatives underway across Ontario.

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to making schools healthier places for students to learn!

Ottawa Region School Food and Beverage Policy Youth Conference

“We want food that looks good, is fresh, reasonably priced and made in front of us.” – a youth participant.



Youth leaders facilitated discussions on healthy eating with their peers.

This past March, staff from the Ministry of Education (EDU), the Ontario Education Leadership Centre and the Centre for Student Engagement met with youth in the Ottawa Region to discuss the School Food and Beverage Policy (Policy/Program Memorandum 150). The youth represented nine school boards (seven English and two French). The session was intended to inspire school teams to take action within their school communities on healthier eating choices. Youth leaders from the Minister of Education’s Student Advisory Council and Healthy School committees were trained as facilitators for an interactive two-day session.

There was great enthusiasm among youth participants for this issue. One of the most meaningful outcomes of the session was how youth facilitators were able to engage and empower the voices of their peers. EDU collected important data on students’ perspectives on healthy eating and ideas for improving their school communities, with specific attention to cafeterias. By the end of the conference, the students were equipped with ideas for influencing positive change back in their school communities.

EDU is in the process of summarizing the findings and ideas presented during the conference. Early observations indicate that youth are open to healthier eating choices being made available in schools. They recognize the benefits of making healthy choices, and

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are savvy enough to know what good choices should look like and how much they would be willing to pay for them. Almost all of the youth in attendance (97 per cent) reported they had no say in what foods their cafeterias were currently offering. However, the majority agreed that if they could have input into menu choices, they would be more likely to purchase food in their school. The overall message was simple: get youth involved to engage other youth.

Fresh from the Farm: Healthy Fundraising for Ontario Schools Pilot

Some Ontario schools will fundraise in a new and healthier way next school year. A number of school boards in northern and south-western Ontario have been invited to participate in a pilot project called Fresh from the Farm: Healthy Fundraising for Ontario Schools.



The pilot is modeled on the successful Farm to School Manitoba Healthy Choice Fundraiser, in which schools raise funds by selling fresh, provincially grown fruits and vegetables to the community. Ontario's pilot is a collaborative initiative between EDU, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food, the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association, and Dietitians of Canada.

Fresh from the Farm will officially launch this fall, resulting in the delivery of fresh Ontario fruits and vegetables to participating schools. The pilot will promote healthy eating and local foods, offer schools an innovative approach to fundraising aligned with Ontario's School Food and Beverage Policy (PPM 150), and raise awareness about the important role good nutrition plays in the development and well-being of children and youth.

The Fresh from the Farm pilot will be evaluated for its potential to expand to other school boards in Ontario. For further information, please contact Cathy O'Connor at Dietitians of Canada at cathy.oconnor@dietitians.ca.

The Benefits of Physical Activity in Secondary Schools

Secondary schools have the potential to play a significant role in promoting physical activity. In addition to providing quality health and physical education (HPE) courses, many schools offer other

opportunities for students to be active, including intramural and interschool athletics. Participating in physical activities has a positive impact on student achievement and the dimensions of well-being, including:

- **Cognitive** – Physical activity improves brain function in children and adolescents. According to Dr. John Ratey at Harvard Medical School, “The exercise itself doesn't make you smarter, but it puts the brain of the learners in the optimal position for them to learn.”
- **Social** – Physical activity can positively impact a student's self-esteem and self-image, reduce stress, and help them establish and maintain social circles.
- **Emotional** – Physical activity has been found to improve mood, anxiety, stress level, anger, attention and cognitive functioning (McCague & Carney, 2011).
- **Physical** – Physical activity can help secondary students maintain a healthy weight, regular sleep patterns, and overall physical development (muscular and cardiovascular).

The [Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines](#) recommend that youth aged 12-17 accumulate at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity daily. However, in Canada, only 18 per cent of students aged 10-16 accumulate the recommended 60 minutes ([The Health of Canada's Young People: A Mental Health Focus, 2011](#)).

Secondary schools can increase the number of opportunities for physical activity to encourage participation by the entire student body. Consider the following when planning physical activity opportunities:

- Provide activities that are consistent with the philosophy and concepts learned in the HPE curriculum.
- Involve students in the process of determining and implementing activities to empower and engage them.
- Offer a wide range of activities based on student interest, abilities and preference.
- Establish an emotionally and physically safe environment where students feel comfortable trying new activities, and where appropriate safety guidelines are followed.
- Use the [Long-Term Athlete Development model](#) for sport development to provide age-appropriate strategies for physical activity and sport. Focus on the importance of physical literacy and staying active for life.

- Make connections to physical activity opportunities available in the community (e.g., provincial sport organizations or recreation providers).

Healthy Kids Panel Report Released

“Almost one in every three children in Ontario is now an unhealthy weight.” – Healthy Kids Panel Report



The Healthy Kids Panel was created by the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care to provide recommendations to inform the government’s next steps to reduce childhood obesity.

On March 4, 2013, the Healthy Kids Panel released its report, [*No Time to Wait: The Healthy Kids Strategy*](#). The panel’s recommendations focused on:

- **Starting all kids on the path to health** by enhancing pre-natal care for families and promoting breastfeeding.
- **Changing the food environment** by increasing the availability of healthy choices and expanding nutrition programs in schools.
- **Building healthy communities** that encourage healthy eating and active living.

Recognizing the importance of aligning policies and programs across ministries, as a first step the government is creating an inter-ministerial working group to direct its action on implementing the panel’s recommendations. EDU has been identified as a key ministry to participate in government action on reducing childhood obesity, given the important role schools play in creating a healthy learning environment.

Coming Soon: Updated Foundations for a Healthy School Framework



Released in 2006, the [*Foundations for a Healthy School*](#) framework has been helping school boards and schools establish planned,

integrated and holistic approaches to creating ‘healthier schools’.

The framework outlines four interconnected components (instruction and programs, physical

environment, social environment and community partnerships) that together represent a comprehensive approach to creating the best possible environment in which to learn, work and grow. This approach is not about adding more work for schools that are already busy enough. Rather, it is about embedding a “healthy schools” approach into day-to-day learning activities to help improve student achievement and empower students to make healthy choices throughout their lives.

EDU is updating the framework to reflect current research and activities in schools and school boards that promote and enhance students’ cognitive, physical, social and emotional health. We welcome your comments and suggestions on updating the framework. Please email them to healthy.schools@ontario.ca by June 28, 2013.

Managing Anaphylaxis in Schools

Anaphylaxis is a potentially life-threatening allergic reaction that requires immediate treatment with epinephrine, a life-saving medication. There are several brands of epinephrine auto-injectors available in Canada, including EpiPen[®], Twinject[®] and the recently announced Allerject[™] device.

Regularly reviewing anaphylaxis policies and procedures and ongoing communication and training for school staff is particularly important for Ontario schools given the requirements of [*An Act to Protect Anaphylactic Pupils: Sabrina's Law, 2005*](#).

Anaphylaxis Canada provides support to schools to effectively manage anaphylaxis, including a safety checklist for school staff and educational resources for all three auto-injectors. In April 2013, Anaphylaxis Canada posted a new, free webinar on managing allergies at school and steps for administering the auto-injectors, including the new Allerject[™] device.

For more information about anaphylaxis, and to view the webinar, visit [Anaphylaxis Canada](#).

In Focus: Active Playgrounds – Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board

Student well-being is multidimensional – improvements in one area (e.g., physical, social, emotional or cognitive) often have a positive effect on other dimensions. Active playground programs are used by some of Ontario’s school boards to increase physical activity, while also promoting student engagement and leadership.

In the spring of 2012, the Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board (SMCDSB) implemented an active playground program called Playground Activity Leaders in Schools® (P.A.L.S.) in partnership with the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit. The goal of P.A.L.S. is to promote active play among primary school children.

To implement P.A.L.S., public health nurses, school board psychology staff and educators provided a half-day training session to interested teachers from elementary schools. Participating teachers in turn trained grades 7 and 8 students to become student leaders. Each school received a list of playground equipment which included items such as chalk, tennis balls, skipping ropes, marbles, utility balls and soft footballs. Outfitting each participating school cost less than \$200.

In addition to increasing physical activity among its students, SMCDSB has also seen the following benefits:

- Developing student leaders – teaches leadership skills to intermediate students who run the program during recess.
- Bullying prevention – student leaders develop problem solving and communications skills as part of their training.
- Engaging students – the program increases social skill development among students of varying skill levels by using easy-to-play games.
- Improving mental health – physical activity can significantly decrease anxiety, stress and depressive symptoms.

Follow-up surveys with teachers at the end of the first school year of implementation resulted in many positive observations. They saw:

- positive relationships formed between older and younger students;
- impressive leadership skills demonstrated by students;
- great enthusiasm shown by parents;
- a decline in behaviour incidents; and,
- more kids having fun.

P.A.L.S. is now operating for the second year at SMCDSB and further evaluation is ongoing.

For more information on SMCDSB's P.A.L.S.

program, please contact Dr. Patrick Carney at pcarney@smcgsb.on.ca.

Update: Healthy Schools and Student Well-being Support and Monitoring Plan

The Healthy Schools and Student Well-Being Unit (HSSWBU) of EDU was created in 2009 to develop policies and programs that support holistic approaches to student health and well-being by school boards.

To support school boards, HSSWBU created a comprehensive Foundations for a Healthy School Framework as well as initiatives related to physical activity, safety and injury prevention, and healthy eating.

In 2012-13, HSSWBU recognized the need to expand awareness and support for implementation of healthy schools policies and programs in boards by creating the Healthy Schools and Student Well-being Support and Monitoring Plan. In 2012-13, the plan included:

- 12 school board visits across the province;
- three Adobe Connect sessions on injury prevention, healthy eating and physical activity; and
- two editions of the *Focus on Healthy Schools* e-bulletin.

A report outlining the trends observed during the 2012-13 school year will be developed and shared with school boards. Stay tuned for more details about the 2013-14 Plan.

Reference:

McCague, E., & Carney, P.J. (2011). *The 'magic' drug: A research base and how-to-approach in implementing physical activity in clinical and non-clinical populations*. Canadian Psychological Association Annual Convention, Poster Session, Toronto, Canada.

Do you have a story to share?

We always want to hear about promising practices – whether school-based or a board-wide project, a partner-led campaign, or another innovative approach.

If you have an idea for a future *Focus on Healthy Schools* article, please email healthy.schools@ontario.ca