

Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition

Annual Report for the Ontario Public Health Association

April 1, 2008-March 31, 2009

The **Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition** remains a strong province-wide network of public health units, school boards and other organizations and individuals committed to promoting the health and learning of school-age children and youth. Our listserv has over 300 members, and an average of 61 people participated in our four teleconferences this year, from 35 sites across the province! We greatly appreciate the support we receive from the Ministry of Health Promotion and OPHA that enables this valuable knowledge exchange.

Approximately 89 people attended the OHSC 7th Annual Forum hosted by Toronto Public Health on May 29th, 2008, “Energizing School Communities for Health.” Dr. Blake Poland presented on “The School as a Setting for Health Promotion: New Frontiers in Understanding and Working with the Context of Practice.” In addition to four workgroup discussions on Capacity-building, Indicators and Evaluation, Service Delivery Models, and Physical Environment of Schools, a highlight of the conference was the presentation by Brenda Juby and Robert Coughlin on their project, “An Evaluation of an Assets-Based Comprehensive Youth Pilot Project in Four Toronto Schools.”

The OHSC made significant inroads on the four priority areas of action from our Strategic Planning. We are now part of an effective 3-way partnership with the Ontario Physical and Health Education Association (Ophea) and the Ontario Association for the Supervision of Physical and Health Education (OASPHE), and collaborated on the production of the document “Healthy Schools Matter: A Discussion Paper on Making Healthy Schools a Reality in Ontario.”

We have a more sustainable structure with the contracting of a membership coordinator and administrative coordinator to support communication and knowledge exchange. In fact, we have embarked on a membership drive to increase participation of school boards and other education-related organizations.

We were able to provide important input into the Health and Physical Education and Social Sciences and Humanities Curriculum Review processes, which will strengthen the contribution of these curricula to Healthy Schools.

In November, we were delighted with the release of the new Ontario Public Health Standards that clearly articulate the need for health units to work with school boards and school staff on various health issues using a comprehensive health promotion approach. Several of our members will be on the School Health Guidance Document workgroup to clarify best practices in achieving this. As well, several OHSC members will be involved with OPHA’s project, “Youth Engagement to Foster Protective Factors Against Illicit Drug Use Through Health Promoting Schools.”

Our Co-Chair, Carol MacDougall was honoured to receive the Ophea Award of Distinction for her contribution as a leader in the successful advancement of active, healthy living opportunities for children and youth in Ontario school communities. Margaret Good and Carol also participated in a TVO Panel on “Your Voice” December 16, 2008 re “Healthy Schools, Healthy Minds” (<http://feeds.tvo.org/tvoyourvoice>). As always, the OHSC looks forward to welcoming new members as we expand our support to Ontario’s children and youth through Healthy Schools.