

The Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition Report

As always, the past year has been an extremely busy one for our Healthy Schools Workgroup that, as of April 2003, is now referred to as the Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition [OHSC]. This resolves any confusion that the two titles may have caused. We are exceedingly grateful that the Ontario Public Health Association [OPHA] will continue in the capacity of Secretariat for our coalition.

Our Operational Plan for the past year included (1) continuing to encourage Health and Education representatives of the three political parties to incorporate Comprehensive School Health [CSH] / Health Promoting Schools [HPS] concepts in their election platforms prior to the fall Ontario election, (2) examining strategies to promote CSH/HPS, (3) continuing to build linkages with Ontario organizations that have an interest in the health and learning of the children and youth in Ontario, and (4) building an inventory of case studies that illustrate the CSH/HPS approaches. The following were highlights of our year:

The Education Equality Task Force incorporated into their final report the input we and other organizations had provided via September 2002 deputations. Recommendation 13 states: "I recommend that the government establish a Cabinet-level advisory council on integrated services for children and families, composed of representatives from the Ministries of Community, Family and Children's Services, Education, Health and Long-Term Care, Public Safety and Security, and Tourism and Recreation, to meet on a regular basis to align the work and the funding mechanisms of the ministries that serve families, children and youth."

We had several meetings with representatives of the Ministries of Health, Education, and Recreation, and we produced several documents: two proposals, a background paper/jurisdictional review, a status update of healthy schools support in Ontario, and a collection of Healthy Schools Success Stories. Coalition members maintained communication with the other two parties as well, and advocated for Healthy Schools approaches whenever possible, and the NDP Education Critic, Rosario Marchese, attended our March OHSC meeting.

Several coalition members secured significant grants to pursue healthy school efforts:

- the Ontario Physical and Health Education Association (Ophea) received \$2 million for an "Active Healthy School Communities" three-year initiative to promote physical activity and nutrition to prevent diabetes;
- York University's LaMarsh Centre for Research on Violence and Conflict Resolution received \$600,000 from the Government of Canada's National Crime Prevention Strategy for a three-year project to create a national strategy on bullying based on research evidence;
- the University Health Network (lead investigator Gail McVey) received \$543,000 from the Ontario Women's Health Council for 2000-2003 to implement and evaluate a comprehensive school-based health promotion program designed to prevent disordered eating, and \$270,000 from Canadian Institute for Health Research (CIHR) to develop and evaluate a web-based program to disseminate best practices to teachers regarding healthy eating;
- the Ontario Public Health Association received \$10,000 from Ophea to conduct a literature review and discussion paper on models for Active Healthy School Communities from around the world;
- Andy Anderson was commissioned to consult in the West Indies on health promoting schools;
- Irving Rootman, Doug McCall and a national team of researchers have been given seed money from CIHR to develop a national research program on school health; and
- Irv Rootman and Barbara Ronson were commissioned to produce a paper on literacy and health research for an International Think Tank on Reducing Health Disparities and Promoting Equity for Vulnerable Populations, sponsored by the Canadian Institute for Health Research.

The OHSC continued to raise awareness regarding CSH/HPS via conference presentations (Ophea, OPHA, People for Education, Canadian Nurses Association Nursing Leadership Conference); publications (Ontario Health Promotion Email Bulletin #280.1 & .2 and #321.1 & .2; Canadian Association for Health, Physical

Education, Recreation and Dance Journal vol. 68; the Canadian Nurse Sept. 2003 edition; Andy Anderson's "Better Health~Better Schools~Better Futures"); informal feedback re public health Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines; and participation in the Pan-Canadian Healthy Living Strategy consultations.



The SARS outbreak resulted in the Canadian Association for School Health and the OHSC coordinating a "SARS School Policy" debriefing session, with Toronto and York Region school boards and public health units, for a representative from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools/ U.S. Department of Education.

The Coalition also coordinated a week-long visit by Jack Jones, a leading School Health expert from the World Health Organization. He addressed over 217 individuals (including coalition members, nurses, academics, government officials, educators and public health staff) throughout the week at a number of venues including the University of Toronto's Health Promotion Summer School, Queen's Park and a full day forum on June 27th. He also joined core Coalition members when they met with Minister Witmer's Chief of Staff Jeff Mainland, Assistant Deputy Minister Norbert Hartmann, Peter Rzdaki of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and Michael Thomas, policy advisor to Minister Witmer. The visit was co-sponsored by many coalition members.

We now have a "Healthy Schools" graphic identifier (*see above*), available for health units or school boards to adapt for local use, courtesy of Toronto Public Health. The aim is to raise awareness for the need for healthy schools province-wide via a recognizable image.

In the past year, the OHSC had 5 meetings, with up to 56 attendees. Our email distribution has increased from approximately 160 to 212 (including representatives from 32 of 37 health units), and the number of active members has increased from 45 to 65. We look forward to another busy and productive year and continue to welcome any interested individuals or organizations to join our efforts.

Respectfully submitted,

Carol MacDougall and Barbara Ronson
Co-Chairs, Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition