

“Healthy Schools Ontario”

Supportive Schools for Learning and Living

Healthy students learn better.
Health promotion is school improvement.

Based on the internationally endorsed Comprehensive School Health and Health Promoting Schools models.

A Comprehensive School Health program will complement the existing Comprehensive School Guidance program to ensure the best possible outcomes for all students.

Key Elements:

- 1) **Overarching Policy Statement**
Joint policy statement from relevant provincial Ministries (Health; Education; Community, Family and Children’s Services; Recreation; Public Safety and Security) recognizing the essential leadership role of provincial ministries in overcoming the barriers created by operating in silos. A strong commitment to collaboration is required in order to support the optimal development and education of the children of Ontario. This element will include guidelines and processes in the respective policy documents to direct and support front-line staff in carrying out this work.
- 2) **Coordinating Office**
A steering committee of provincial representatives (provincial infrastructure) to identify the elements needed to make the vision of “Healthy Schools Ontario” a reality. This would include determining the key resources that need to be in place, development of an educational package, in-servicing of decision-makers and staff in all relevant sectors, and provision of ongoing support to assist school boards and schools in creating “Healthy Schools.”
- 3) **Healthy Schools Coordinating Staff in every School Board**
School boards will identify an appropriate staff person or persons to coordinate resources board-wide to promote the Healthy Schools initiative. This may involve a Health and Physical Education Coordinator, a Guidance Program Coordinator, or other relevant department coordinators (Family Life, Social Studies, etc.). Great efficiencies can be gained by rallying local resources at a board-wide level for the benefit of all schools or families of schools.
- 4) **Healthy School Profile**
Tools to identify the health-related strengths and needs of a school community and create a healthy school profile. Health Canada has already supported the Canadian Association for School Health and the Canadian Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance in developing a tool to survey adolescents’ health issues (“Voices and Choices: A School Health Model”). A tool could also be developed for younger school-age children. The information collected with these tools would complement the Comprehensive School Guidance Program Plan that is already required in each school and will focus on the total development of all students in the school (physical, mental, social, etc.). The healthy school profile will be evaluated using a section of the Guidance Program Effectiveness Survey that must be conducted every three years, in order to determine progress towards becoming a “Healthy School.”
- 5) **Healthy School Team and Coordinator in Every School**
In every school, an infrastructure will be put in place to address health-related issues on an ongoing basis. A staff member (ideally a guidance counsellor, but could be a designated teacher or youth worker) in every school will be funded at an appropriate level to coordinate initiatives within a Healthy School Team. Teams will include representation from students, parents, teachers, administration, and community agencies. Schools will have the flexibility to utilize already-existing committees such as School Councils, School Improvement Committees, Safe

School Committees, or Guidance Program Advisory Teams (already required by the Guidance and Career Education Program Policy) or form a specific Healthy School Committee. This collaborative Team would identify health-related areas of need, plan action, ensure the implementation of the plan, and evaluate the success of the action.

6) **Adequate Public Health Staff to Support the “Healthy Schools” Initiative**

All schools will have a designated public health nurse or public health staff person connected to an appropriate number of schools, who would collaborate with the Healthy School Coordinator to coordinate public health and other services to address the health issues of the school. Nurses and/or a multi-disciplinary team of public health staff deliver a variety of health promotion and disease prevention school health programs and services. The public health role in relation to schools consists mainly of supporting teachers in educating students about health, contributing to the creation of a healthy social and physical environment, and improving access to health and other services. Public health is mandated to work within the areas of tobacco-free living, healthy eating, healthy weights and regular physical activity, reducing exposure to UV radiation, reducing misuse of alcohol and other substances, reducing disability, morbidity and mortality from injuries, and promoting healthy sexual relationships. Public health units also provide services in the areas of Communicable Disease Control (e.g. immunizations, outbreak control), Dental and Oral Health, and some clinical services, case management, and inspections.

7) **Adequate Access to Social and Other Support Services**

All schools will have adequate access to school or community-based supportive services such as social work, psychology, mental health, special needs, child protection, clinical nursing or medical care, and recreation, child care, and other services.

8) **Full Implementation of the Health and Physical Education Curriculum**

Ontario can be proud of a leading-edge comprehensive health and physical education curriculum, and extensive province-wide curriculum resource documents. These were generated through an impressive collaborative process. School boards and schools will now determine how to ensure that well-prepared teaching staff throughout the province deliver the content. Faculties of education, health units, and other agency partners may identify how they can contribute to this process. School boards and schools will also ensure that health and physical education are given a high priority within schools.

9) **Full implementation of *Choices into Action***

Choices into Action, Guidance and Career Education Program Policy Grades 1 to 12, was introduced in Ontario schools in 1999. It is a Comprehensive Guidance and Career Education Program that includes a requirement for a Program Advisory Team consisting of students, staff, parents, and community partners, a Program Effectiveness Survey to be carried out every three years, and a comprehensive Guidance Program Plan that clearly outlines through which components the various student competencies would be achieved. These features could easily be expanded to include the concepts of a Comprehensive School Health Program thus ensuring that the personal, interpersonal, career and health needs of all students could be addressed in a community school setting.

“Healthy Schools Ontario” is a flexible, supportive approach that allows school jurisdictions to customize their plans to their specific issues.

The strategies outlined in this document are only the beginning of a long-term plan that will expand to include many disciplines and curriculum areas.

Above all, it puts young people at the centre of all our efforts, so they will have the greatest opportunity for learning and healthy and productive adult lives.