

SUMMARY DOCUMENT
Environmental Scan of Health Promotion Policies in Champlain District School-based Settings
September 2007

Project Overview

- The purpose of the scan was to identify strengths and areas for improvements in school-based health promotion *policies* (defined as principles which are in place to guide actions towards specific goals) with a specific focus on policies that impact healthy weights.
- Healthy weights' policies are those that relate to physical activity (i.e., physical education classes, recreation opportunities, active transportation opportunities, and organized sports team programs) and nutrition (i.e., school cafeterias, vending machines).
- Questions pertaining to tobacco policy were also included.

Rationale

- The school setting has been identified many times as an important influencing environment with respect to promoting healthy weights among school-aged children.
- Policies developed at the level of government, boards of education, and schools can play an important role in shaping that environment.

Methodology

- Interviews conducted with Champlain School Boards (n = 9)
- Interviews conducted with Champlain Public Health Units (n = 4)
- Online survey made available to all Champlain schools, exempting special education and adult learning schools (n = 478)

County Area	School Boards
Ottawa	Conseil des écoles catholiques de langue française du Centre-Est Conseil des écoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario Ottawa-Carleton District School Board Ottawa-Carleton Catholic School Board
Renfrew County	Conseil des écoles catholiques de langue française du Centre-Est Conseil des écoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario Renfrew County Catholic District School Board Renfrew County District School Board
Eastern Counties (Stormont, Dundas, Glengarry and Prescott & Russell)	Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario Conseil des écoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario Conseil scolaire de district catholique de l'est de l'Ontario Upper Canada District School Board
Counties of Lanark, Leeds & Grenville	Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario Conseil des écoles catholiques de langue française du Centre-Est Conseil des écoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario Upper Canada District School Board

Response Rate

- Data collected on a total of 203 schools:
 - 71 survey respondents; remaining data collected via alternative sources (i.e. “Healthy Schools Challenge”)
 - Elementary schools (n = 151)
 - Secondary schools (n = 52)

Key Findings

School Setting

- Existing policies are created at the Board level and are typically developed in relation to a Ministry of Education (MOE) direction/directive.
- Most commonly identified policies:
 - Elementary: Daily Physical Activity (DPA), followed by Healthy Food Choices in Vending Machines.
 - Secondary: Healthy eating options in cafeterias are encouraged, and one mandatory credit of physical education is required. A number of secondary schools identified the public health “Eat Smart” cafeteria certification program.
- Many schools appear to have informal school rules or goals in place – but these are identified as “just things that we do” in recognition of the importance of healthy living.

Trends Across Boards of Education

- Most Boards have adopted the MOE directives regarding DPA and Healthy Food Choices in Vending Machines as board policies or administrative procedures.
 - A small number of Boards have established policies and/or administrative procedures that echo existing MOE policies noted
 - One Board has established their own policy in relation to DPA, identifying a goal of Quality Daily Physical Education
- All Boards have policies and/or administrative procedures in place for:
 - Community use of facilities
 - Creation of School Councils
- Some Boards have policies and/or administrative procedures in place for:
 - Playground equipment and cost-sharing with schools for upgrading
 - Fundraising
 - Supporting community partnerships
- No Board has an active transportation policy or administrative procedure in place. *Active transportation* refers to promoting the use of active and efficient transportation for the daily trip to school, addressing health and traffic safety issues while taking action on air pollution and climate change.

Priority Policy Development Areas

Scope

- Sixty-nine (69) priority policy developments were identified by Board of Education, Public Health Unit and School survey respondents.

Most Frequently Cited Needs

- More general guidelines relating to nutrition (e.g. building on Eat Smart certification; policies related to healthy snacks, ban on fast food, ban on trans-fat, breakfast programs)
- Alternatives to fundraising initiatives with unhealthy foods
- Expanded compulsory physical education credits in secondary schools
- Use of a broader approach to promote healthy living (i.e. Comprehensive School Health)
- Closer and more integrated relationships across the Ministries of Education and Health Promotion and, more locally, between Boards and schools with Public Health Units
- Funding support to promote operationalization of healthy weights policies

Other Commonly Cited Policy Directions

- Evaluation frameworks for existing policies
- Investigation of different approaches to facilitate operationalization of healthy weights policies (e.g. Balanced Day and longer school days)
- Formalizing existing practices into policies

Final Thoughts from Project Participants

- “Implementation of Memos 135 and 138 really demonstrated the value in having directive from Ministry, resources attached, and then operationalizing at Board and school level.”
- “We need a policy that sets out guidelines for following up, monitoring and supervision of roll-out of existing policies.”
- “We need to take a systematic approach (i.e. Comprehensive School Health) to really impact children's health - it's really about physical environments and policies.”
- “We recognize the importance of how nutrition, sleep, rest affect student behaviour in the classroom – there's a logical connection there.”
- “Please do not forget the role parents and families need to play in this. While I understand schools must have a role in educating children, the 'weight' of this responsibility should not be downgraded to the schools.”