



◉ Coalition ontarienne des écoles en santé ◉

◉ Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition ◉

Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition

Open Submission: Education in Ontario

December 13, 2018

The [Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition](#) (OHSC) is a broad-based coalition working to advance the health and learning of Ontario’s children and youth by promoting and supporting healthy schools. With members from school boards, public health units, mental health organizations, hospitals, universities, and parent and student organizations, the OHSC has a vision for every child and young person in Ontario to be educated in a healthy school environment.

“A healthy school promotes the physical, mental, social and spiritual health of the whole school community and constantly strengthens its capacity as a healthy setting for living, learning and working.”

Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition, adapted from the World Health Organization

The OHSC played a key role in the development of the 2006 Ontario Foundations for a Healthy School Framework – based on the Comprehensive School Health (CSH) framework that is consistent with international standards – and its subsequent update in 2014 as a resource document. This resource encourages schools to address Curriculum, Teaching & Learning; School & Classroom Leadership; Student Engagement; Social & Physical Environments; and Home, School & Community Partnerships, in order support the development of a healthier school. Healthy schools optimize student success, both academically and socially, and contribute significantly to society’s efforts to develop productive citizens.

The OHSC is pleased that the Ontario government has chosen to engage in a province-wide consultation on education. As many of our member organizations will be submitting detailed responses, our OHSC submission will emphasize key overarching points. For more information, please contact our OHSC Administrative Coordinator at onthsc@gmail.com.

This submission will focus on the Health and Physical Education curriculum, but we will add some input into a few other questions.

How should we improve student performance in the disciplines of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM)?

- The Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition believes that engaging the whole child (physical, cognitive and social/emotional) should be taken into account in the teaching of STEM disciplines and other academic subjects. Separating the physical and social/emotional from academic achievement is a mindset that needs shifting. Research shows both physical activity and social/emotional learning are linked to academic achievement.
- Educators should not only be seen as deliverers of curriculum but also as curators of healthy, positive and inclusive environments for effective learning to take place.
- Educator support for effective integration is beneficial to both learning and achievement as well as the overall health and well-being of our students.

Physical Activity and Academic Achievement:

- A growing body of research shows that physical activity and cognition are powerfully connected. Movement allows students to focus, stay engaged and create new pathways in the brain. And when we can actually connect movement to the learning itself (for example exploring math concepts like patterning, geometry, fractions, etc, kinesthetically), students understand concepts on a deeper level having embodied the concepts experientially.
- Students are not learning when they are disengaged and unfocused. With shorter attention spans than ever before, and a diverse range of learners in classrooms, movement is proven to be an effective tool for learning and student engagement with the added benefits to overall health and well-being.
- Educators need support and tools to effectively and easily integrate movement into STEM disciplines and academic subjects.

Social Emotional Learning and Academic Achievement:

- Research shows that students are not learning when they feel anxious, unconfident, unsafe and disconnected from themselves and their community. And these feelings are becoming more and more common amongst today's students.
- Educators need support and tools to effectively and easily integrate social/emotional learning methods, creativity and imagination into their classroom culture, creating the most effective learning environment for academic achievement.

References

ParticipACTION 2018 Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth
https://participaction.cdn.prismic.io/participaction%2F38570bed-b325-4fc8-8855-f15c9aebac12_2018_participaction_report_card_-_full_report_0.pdf

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). SEL Research <https://casel.org/research/>

Physically Active Math and Language Lessons Improve Academic Achievement: A Cluster Randomized Controlled Trial
http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/137/3/e20152743?sso=1&Bssso_redirect_count=1&Bnfstatus=401&Bnftoken=00000000-0000-0000-0000-000000000000&Bnfstatusdescription=ERROR%3A%20No%20local%20token

Movement and Learning:
<http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/104013/chapters/Movement-and-Learning.aspx>

What measures can be taken to improve provincial standardized testing?

- The Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition is concerned that the focus on standardized testing has resulted in movement of resources away from developing the “whole child” (promoting physical, mental, social and spiritual health).
- The link between health and academic achievement is well-documented. Health measures should be included in broad assessments of schools, to ensure equitable deployment of resources (some schools may require more resources than others).
- See “The Core Indicators Model (CIM) for relevant areas of assessment that bring together school environment, health and education indicators:
http://www.icsh-cces.ca/images/Core_Indicators_Model_2016.pdf

What more can be done to ensure students graduate high school with important life skills, including financial literacy?

- The Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition wants to emphasize the importance of **social and emotional learning** as crucial life skills.
 - The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning [CASEL] defines social and emotional learning (SEL) as “the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.” See <https://casel.org/what-is-sel/>
 - There is an entire body of knowledge available on how to foster social and emotional learning, as well as research findings on its long-term benefits in terms of education and society, including an 11:1 return on investment. “These benefits include reduced juvenile crime, higher lifetime earnings, and better mental and physical health” --see <https://casel.org/research/>

- The Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition also wants to emphasize the importance of **physical literacy** and developing positive attitudes towards physical activity, as crucial life skills.
 - “Canadian kids need to move more to boost their brain health” is the key message in the 2018 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth—“The Brain + Body Equation”—see <https://www.participaction.com/en-ca/resources/report-card>
 - Although parents play a primary role in children and youth development, the education sector is in a unique position to help alter the trend of decreased levels of physical activity with age. Schools need additional support to confidently and competently provide opportunities to increase physical activity, decrease sedentary behaviour, and develop physical literacy among children and youth.
 - "**Physical literacy** can be described as the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge, and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life." - The International Physical Literacy Association, 2017. See <https://www.physical-literacy.org.uk/> and <http://sportforlife.ca/physical-literacy/>
 - Developing physical literacy can foster lifelong positive attitudes towards daily physical activity.
- In terms of financial literacy, the Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition recognizes the value of developing financial literacy among students. Aspects of financial literacy could be taught within a Health and Physical Education curriculum, for example,
 - financial considerations in relation to healthy eating: food budgeting, including the cost of making one’s own meals vs eating out; economical and healthy food selections; impact of food-related media messaging on financial decision-making
 - impact of financial decision-making on one’s physical and mental health and well-being

How can we build a new age-appropriate Health and Physical Education curriculum that includes subjects like mental health, sexual health education and the legalization of cannabis?

The Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition wants to emphasize the following:

- The 2015 updated Health and Physical Education curriculum involved extensive consultation, to which the OHSC contributed, as well as extensive review of research and best practices across jurisdictions at that time.
- The foundation for a lifetime of health-promoting knowledge, skills and behaviours is built in childhood and adolescence. Schools are crucial settings to equip young people with these health competencies to enable optimal academic, social, coping and employment success.
- Several key topics have emerged since 1998, or now have heightened importance, and must be included or enhanced in a new HPE curriculum:

mental health promotion; healthy relationships and consent; sexual orientation and gender identity; diversity, equity and inclusion; respect for visible and invisible differences; positive body image to promote good self-care; bullying prevention; online safety; cannabis; physical literacy; food literacy; sleep; injury prevention, especially re concussions.

- Aspects of each of these topics should be introduced in the earliest grades possible, in age-appropriate ways.
- It is essential that the curriculum for Ontario’s students meets international standards, national guidelines, and Ontario Human Rights legislation (see reference list below).
- Educator preparation is critical to ensure consistent delivery of curriculum expectations.
- Public health has a mandate to support school boards and schools with implementation of health-related curricula (see http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/oph_standards/docs/protocols_guidelines/Ontario_Public_Health_Standards_2018_en.pdf). Enhanced collaboration between school boards and public health units should be encouraged.
- The learning of health-related messages requires family, school and community environments that reinforce the messages. A new curriculum should emphasize partnerships of students, parents/caregivers, educators, school administration and community partners to work towards creating pro-social environments that support well-being. This “Comprehensive School Health” or “Healthy Schools” approach is internationally-supported.
- Several highly credible references should be consulted for curriculum review purposes, e.g.:
 - Sex Information and Education Council of Canada (2018). *Draft Core Principles of Sexual Health Education for Canadians*. <http://sieccan.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/SIECCAN-DRAFT-Core-Principles-of-Comprehensive-Sexual-Health-Education.pdf>
 - UNESCO (2018). *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education: An Evidence-Informed Approach* <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0026/002607/260770e.pdf>
 - World Health Organization (2018). *WHO Recommendations on Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights* <http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/adolescent-srhr-who-recommendations/en/>
 - World Health Organization *What is a health promoting school?* http://www.who.int/school_youth_health/gshi/hps/en/
 - International Union for Health Promotion and Education [IUHPE] (2009). *Achieving Health Promoting Schools: Guidelines for Promoting Health in Schools* https://www.iuhpe.org/images/PUBLICATIONS/THEMATIC/HPS/HPSGuidelines_ENG.pdf
 - Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health <http://www.icsh-cces.ca/>
 - The Ontario Human Rights Code <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/ontario-human-rights-code>

- PrevNet <https://www.prevnet.ca/>
- School Mental Health-ASSIST <https://smh-assist.ca/>
- Ontario Public Health Standards
http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/oph_standards/docs/protocols_guidelines/Ontario_Public_Health_Standards_2018_en.pdf and
School Health Guideline
http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/oph_standards/docs/protocols_guidelines/School_Health_Guideline_2018.pdf
- Health Canada – Cannabis. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-medication/cannabis.html>

What elements should be included in a Ministry of Education Parents' Bill of Rights?

- The Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition views parents/caregivers as crucial partners in contributing to the healthy growth and development and learning of children and youth.
- A Parents' Bill of Rights should include the following elements:
 - Schools should endeavour to inform parents of key learning messages that are delivered in schools and the rationale for these messages, so that parents can have an opportunity to reinforce the message and/or clarify their family values in relation to the message.
 - Schools should undertake to include parents' perspectives of a school's strengths and needs when conducting a school needs assessment.
 - Schools should include parents on a "Healthy Schools" or "School Improvement" committee.
 - Schools should acknowledge that "parent engagement" includes the contribution of parents to their child's success through everyday measures, such as when they: 1) Have high (but reasonable) expectations, 2) Talk about school, 3) Help students develop a positive attitude towards learning and good work habits (including providing space and positive home conditions for learning), and 4) Read together (in any language). See <https://peopleforeducation.ca/research/parents-can-make-a-difference-in-their-childrens-success/>
 - Schools should engage parents by "by providing a variety of activities and frequent occasions to fully involve parents including providing parenting support, increasing communicat[ion] with parents, creating volunteer opportunities, supporting learning at home, encouraging parents to be part of decision making in schools and collaborating with the community." See <https://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/programs/safe-supportive/parental-engagement/default.aspx> and https://www.fhdschools.org/UserFiles/Servers/Server_995699/File/2015-16/Parents/Epstein%20-%20Six%20Keys.pdf

- Schools should share new resources and learning opportunities (including conferences) with parents, for example, the Council of Ontario Directors of Education [CODE] Parent Engagement resources (see http://www.ontariodirectors.ca/parent_engagement.html) and Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition “Healthy Schools Toolkit” (see http://www.ontariohealthyschools.com/uploads/2/1/7/6/21766954/ohsc_health_y_schools_toolkit_final.pdf)
- Schools should ensure parents are made aware of and have access to local community resources, such as public health, mental health, recreation, etc.

Do you have any other feedback or ideas?

- The Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition emphasizes that if a child’s basic health needs are unmet, they will have difficulty learning, no matter how effective the instructional material/curriculum. The OHSC encourages the Government of Ontario to ensure all students have access to key support personnel onsite in schools, i.e., social workers, guidance counsellors, mental health workers, school public health nurses, etc.
- The Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition encourages the Government of Ontario to maintain funding for several initiatives that have been instrumental in enhancing coordination and collaboration amongst health, education and other sectors, as well as disseminating the most current research for use in classrooms. The goal of these initiatives is to positively impact the learning and development of Ontario’s students. Some of these include:
 - School Mental Health ASSIST
 - The Healthy Schools Working Table [consider adding Public Health as a Co-Chair with Education, to optimize coordination and efficient use of resources]
 - The Knowledge Network for Applied Education Research and the Knowledge Network for Student Well-Being
- Establish an advisory group of key stakeholders in the area of school health and well-being, including the Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition, to be consulted during curriculum development.
- Develop a centralized communication infrastructure amongst schools, school boards and the Ministry of Education to provide timely feedback regarding policy implementation and evaluation (e.g., what is working and what isn’t with regards to policy implementation—what hurdles are arising).