

ADD IT UP!

Fact Sheet 3 | What will make a difference?

What will make a difference in improving school performance?

INTRO

Given that children and youth spend a significant part of their day at school, there are many opportunities for schools to improve health outcomes for students. Schools can promote physical activity and healthy eating as part of a Comprehensive School Health (CSH)** approach.²⁶

Within the context of CSH, at this time, the Nova Scotia Alliance for Healthy Eating and Physical Activity (NSAHEPA) is asking school board members to:

1. Support the implementation of Quality Daily Physical Education in schools
2. Support the implementation of school food policy
3. Create school capacity (dedicated time and leader skills) to support opportunities of physical activity, including active play throughout the school day
4. Encourage walking, biking, and other forms of wheeling to and from school in various ways including building schools in areas that allow for active transportation

SUPPORT FOR NSAHEPA RECOMMENDATIONS

QUALITY DAILY PHYSICAL EDUCATION IS IMPORTANT IN STUDENTS' DEVELOPMENT

- It is estimated that only 22% of Canadian children receive physical education at school every day²⁹
- Providing Quality Daily Physical Education* (QDPE) is recommended by a number of health organizations²⁶
- The Community Preventive Services Task Force recommends implementing programs that increase the length of, or activity levels in, school-based physical education classes based on strong evidence of their effectiveness in improving both physical activity levels and physical fitness among school-aged children and adolescents³⁰

SCHOOL FOOD POLICY

- Schools that permit frequent snacking and the consumption of foods and beverages high in calories and low in nutrients throughout the school day (for example soft drinks and 'junk foods') tend to have more overweight and obese children than schools that discourage these practices¹⁷

- Schools are an ideal setting to establish and promote healthy eating among children and youth. The school environment influences healthy eating in children and youth through the foods that are available, nutrition policies, school nutrition and health curricula, and teacher and peer-modeling^{5,16}

CAPACITY FOR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY OPPORTUNITIES

- Other effective physical activity-related initiatives include incorporating physical activity into lesson plans for subjects other than physical education (e.g., math, science, languages etc.), encouraging physical activity and active play during recess and lunch breaks²⁶
- Making school facilities available during non-school hours is a resourceful way of creating additional opportunities for physical activity and other important programs (e.g. child care, cooking classes etc.) for the whole community. Some of these programs make it possible to engage parents in supporting the healthy development of children²⁶

ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION

- Since 1985, the proportion of Canadian children regularly walking to school has fallen by 50% to just 1 in 3²⁷
- School environments that support and encourage physical activity have been shown to be effective in increasing student activity levels.²⁷

*QDPE is a well-planned and varied physical education program. It is provided on a daily basis by qualified teachers and emphasizes the development of knowledge and skills which can translate to positive attitudes among students towards physical activity.²⁶

**CSH is an internationally recognized framework for supporting improvements in students' educational outcomes while addressing school health in a planned, integrated and holistic way. Comprehensive School Health considers health promotion at school as taking place within all of the four following categories: 1) teaching and learning; 2) social and physical environments; 3) healthy school policy; and 4) partnerships and services.²⁹

Within these categories, schools can implement a variety of specific measures to help children improve their nutrition and levels of physical activity²⁷ – HSF school fact sheet²⁶

REFERENCES

