

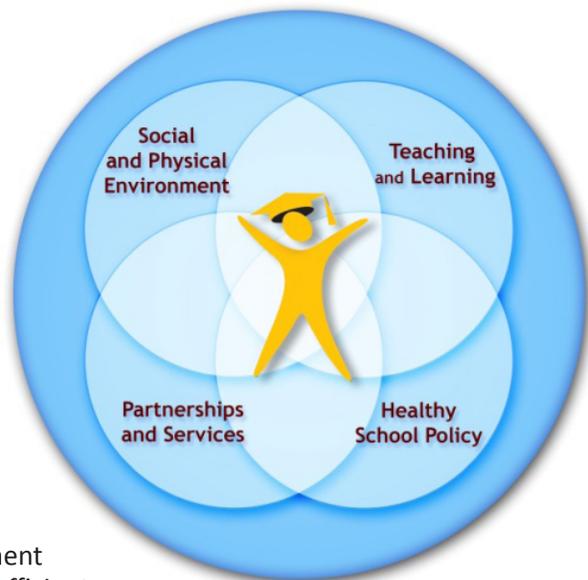
Physical Activity within a Comprehensive School Health Model

THE RATIONALE FOR SCHOOL AS A SETTING FOR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Comprehensive School Health is an internationally recognized framework for supporting improvements in students' educational outcomes while addressing school health in a planned, integrated and holistic way. It is not just about what happens in the classroom. Rather, it encompasses the whole school environment with actions addressing four distinct but inter-related pillars that provide a strong foundation for Comprehensive School Health:

- social and physical environment
- teaching and learning
- healthy school policy
- partnerships and services

Schools are positioned to play a significant role in the promotion of physical activity as they have the ability to reach almost every child and by extension every family regardless of a child's age, ability, gender, culture or socio-economic background¹. In addition, youth spend more time within the school setting than any other context; therefore, schools play a critical role in the development of youth². Schools may provide the most efficient and cost-effective means of improving the health and physical activity levels of Canadian children³.



A number of national and international organizations that have advocated the importance of physical activity have recognized the provision of physical education as well as other opportunities to be physically active within schools as critical. This provision is linked to the Comprehensive School Approach in that it encompasses a major portion of the teaching and learning construct of the model.

- The World Health Organization (WHO) (2000) stressed the importance of the use of physical education programs in school to enhance physical activity among school-aged children and youth.
- The World Summit on Physical Education (2001) called upon the international community to recognize the fundamental right of all children to have access to quality physical education programs taught by qualified teachers to ensure that all children receive and develop the necessary skills to lead healthy lives.

- The United States Surgeon General’s Report on Physical Activity and Health (1996) recommended that:
- schools provide quality, preferably daily, physical education classes and hire specialists to teach them; and
- schools create opportunities for physical activities that are enjoyable and promote confidence.

“Ensure that every student attending primary and secondary school across Canada receives a quality physical education program on a regular basis (i.e., 150 minutes per week) from a teacher qualified to teach in physical education.”

CAPHERD & CCUPEKA, 2005

Schools can provide physical and health education classes and access to facilities, equipment and an outdoor environment for physical activity engagement based on mandated and/or recommendations from provincial and territorial governments.

Schools also have the potential to hire personnel who have the knowledge and skills to positively influence physical activity knowledge, attitudes, values and physical literacy among students. More specifically, schools can increase awareness, set guidelines, develop skills and enhance confidence related to physical activity for youth of all ages.

The physical education curriculum along with opportunities to be physically active both in and outside of the classroom appears to be the ideal combination for educating Canadian students on the importance of physical activity.

If schools are to increase physical activity levels in students, and therefore enhance students’ health and well-being, they must provide students with the opportunity to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes that will help them to be active now and into the future. A Comprehensive School Health approach should seek to supplement the curriculum (teaching and learning) with other initiatives rather than implement physical activity interventions in lieu of teaching and learning.

REFERENCES

- 1 Sallis, J.F., & McKenzie, T.L. (1991). Physical education’s role in public health. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 62, 124-137.
- 2 Raphael, D., Anderson, A., & McMall, D. (1999). Partners for health: schools, communities and young people working together. *Canadian Association for Physical Education Recreation and Dance Journal*, Spring 16-19.
- 3 Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute. (2006). *Opportunities for physical activity in Canadian schools: trends from 2001-2006*. 2006 Physical Activity and Sport Monitor.