

# What is Comprehensive School Health?

Comprehensive school health is an internationally recognized approach to supporting improvements in students' educational outcomes while addressing school health in a planned, integrated and holistic way.

This whole-school model builds capacity to incorporate well-being as an essential aspect of student achievement. Actions address four distinct but inter-related components that comprise a comprehensive school health approach:

- social and physical environment
- teaching and learning
- policy
- partnerships and services.

When actions in all four components are harmonized, students are supported to realize their full potential as learners – and as healthy, productive members of society.



## Why Do We Need Comprehensive School Health?

Health and education are interdependent: healthy students are better learners, and better-educated individuals are healthier. Research has shown that comprehensive school health is an effective way to enhance that linkage, improving both health<sup>1</sup> and educational outcomes<sup>2</sup> and encouraging healthy behaviours that last a lifetime.

In the classroom, comprehensive school health facilitates improved academic achievement and can lead to fewer behavioural problems<sup>3</sup>. In the broader school environment, it helps students develop the skills they need to be physically and emotionally healthy for life.

## Comprehensive School Health:

- Recognizes that healthy students learn better and achieve more
- Understands that schools can directly influence students' health and behaviours
- Encourages healthy lifestyle choices, and promotes students' health and wellbeing
- Incorporates health into all aspects of school and learning
- Links health and education issues and systems
- Needs the participation and support of families and the community at large.

<sup>1</sup> Stewart-Brown, S. (2006). *What is the evidence on school health promotion in improving health or preventing disease and, specifically, what is the effectiveness of the health promoting schools approach?* Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe (Health Evidence Network report; <http://www.euro.who.int/document/e88185.pdf>, accessed 16 Sep. 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Murray, N.D., Low, B.J., Hollis, C., Cross, A. Davis, S. (2007). Coordinated school health programs and academic achievement: a systematic review of the literature. *Journal of School Health*, 77 (9), 589-599.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

## Comprehensive School Health in Canada

Effective, sustainable progress in comprehensive school health depends on a common vision, shared responsibilities, and harmonized actions among health, education, and other sectors. The challenge is to coordinate these efforts so that partners pool resources and develop action plans together, with, and in support of schools.

In Canada, the Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health models, supports, and encourages the partnerships between health and education that are essential to comprehensive school health.

When We Say	We Mean
<i>Social and Physical Environment</i>	The social environment is <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The quality of the relationships among and between staff and students in the school</li> <li>• The emotional well-being of students</li> <li>• Influenced by relationships with families and the wider community</li> <li>• Supportive of the school community in making healthy choices by building competence, autonomy, and connectedness.</li> </ul>
	The physical environment is <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The buildings, grounds, play space, and equipment in and surrounding the school</li> <li>• Basic amenities such as sanitation, air cleanliness, and healthy foods</li> <li>• Spaces designed to promote student safety and connectedness and minimize injury</li> <li>• Safe, accessible, and supportive of healthy choices for all members of the school community.</li> </ul>
<i>Teaching and Learning</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal and informal provincial / territorial curriculum, resources, and associated activities</li> <li>• Knowledge, understanding, and skills for students to improve their health and well-being and enhance their learning outcomes</li> <li>• Professional development opportunities for staff related to health and well-being.</li> </ul>
<i>Policy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policies, guidelines, and practices that promote and support student well-being and achievement and shape a respectful, welcoming, and caring school environment for all members of the school community.</li> </ul>
<i>Partnerships and Services</i>	Partnerships are <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The connections between the school and students' families</li> <li>• Supportive working relationships among schools, and among schools and other community organizations and representative groups</li> <li>• Health, education, and other sectors working together to advance school health.</li> </ul>
	Services are <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community and school-based services that support and promote student and staff health and well-being.</li> </ul>

## Different Terminology, Same Ideas

The term comprehensive school health is widely used in Canada. In other jurisdictions, the approach may be known as health promoting school and its components may be expressed in different ways. However, the underlying concepts are the same; they are all based on the World Health Organization's Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (1986).

For more information on comprehensive school health in Canada, contact JCSH at [inquiry@jcsh-cces.ca](mailto:inquiry@jcsh-cces.ca), or visit [www.jcsh-cces.ca](http://www.jcsh-cces.ca).