

271 HEALTHY SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

Background

A healthy school community is one that supports the wellness of all its members (e.g., students, teachers, staff, parents, administrators, community partners) and continuously strengthens its capacity as a healthy setting for living, learning and working.^{1,2}

Healthy students are better learners and better educated students are healthier. Comprehensive School Health (CSH) is an internationally recognized, evidence-based approach for building healthy school communities. Addressing the four components of CSH through coordinated planning, can improve health and education outcomes and help students to be healthy, lifelong learners.³ The four components of CSH include:³⁻⁵

- **Social and Physical Environments** - includes the quality of the relationships between school community stakeholders, the emotional well-being of students and the buildings, grounds, play spaces and equipment in and around the school.
- **Teaching and Learning** - includes resources, activities and curriculum where students gain skills and knowledge related to health and wellness.
- **Policy** - includes management practices, decision-making processes, policies and procedures that promote and support health and wellness.
- **Partnerships and Services** - includes connections between schools, families, community organizations, the health sector and other sectors that support student health.

Wellness is a balanced state of emotional, intellectual, physical, social, and spiritual well-being that enables students and staff to reach their full potential in the school community. The five dimensions of wellness include:⁶

- **Emotional wellness** is acknowledging, understanding, managing and expressing thoughts and feelings in a constructive manner.
- **Intellectual wellness** is the development and the critical and creative use of the mind to its fullest potential.
- **Physical wellness** is the ability, motivation and confidence to move effectively and efficiently in a variety of situations, and the healthy growth, development, nutrition and care of the body.
- **Social wellness** is relating positively to others and is influenced by many factors including how individuals communicate, establish and maintain relationships, are treated by others and interpret that treatment.
- **Spiritual wellness** is an understanding of one's own values and beliefs leading to a sense of meaning or purpose and a relationship to the community.

CSH can be used to address a variety of health issues (e.g. nutrition, physical activity, mental health) and can improve health and education outcomes for children and youth.^{3,4} CRPS supports a CSH approach to building healthy school communities with a focus on the areas of mental well-being (mental health and healthy relationships), healthy eating, and active living.

Definitions

Positive Mental Health

Is the capacity of each and all of us to feel, think, and act in ways that enhance our ability to enjoy life and deal with the challenges we face. It is a positive sense of emotional and spiritual well-being that respects the importance of culture, equity, social justice, interconnections and personal dignity.⁷

Healthy Eating

Is more than the foods a person eats. It is about where, when, why and how they eat. Food choices are influenced by the aspects of the social and physical environments that affect the types of foods available, the affordability and accessibility of food, and exposure to nutrition information and food marketing.^{8,9}

Physical Activity

Is any movement of the body that results in increased use of energy and increases heart rate and breathing.¹⁰ Being active at school is not just about physical education, it's about finding ways to move more and sit less throughout the school day and beyond.

Procedures

CRPS will work towards creating and maintaining a culture of wellness by:

1. Recognizing that mental well-being, healthy eating, and active living play significant roles in the overall health and wellness of students and staff.
2. Creating a healthy school environment through the support, modelling, promotion and integration of mental well-being, healthy eating, and active living.
3. Creating and maintaining learning and working environments that support a culture of health and wellness using a CSH approach.
4. Promoting healthy attitudes toward mental well-being, healthy eating, and active living.
5. Identifying at least one staff member at each school site to assume the role of "Wellness Champion" to support student and staff wellness.
6. Providing opportunities and support for all school staff to participate in professional learning and have access to resources related to mental well-being, healthy eating, and active living.
7. Basing supports for student and staff wellness on research and informed best practice that is aligned with Alberta Education and Provincial regulations.
8. Ensuring that strategies for mental well-being, healthy eating, and active living are addressed in annual school wellness action plans and connected to Three Year Education Plans.

9. Incorporating information and resources about mental well-being, healthy eating, and active living in communications to parents/guardians and community partners.
10. Utilizing assessment tools to measure and monitor the effectiveness of the wellness strategies implemented.
11. Monitoring the implementation and evaluation of district supports that promote positive mental health, healthy eating and physical activity.

Mental Well Being

Background

CRPS recognizes the importance of mental health to learning, as well as to students' and staff members' social and emotional development. Students and staff with positive mental health are resilient and better able to learn, achieve success and build healthy relationships.¹¹

Using a comprehensive school health approach, to promote mental health results in improved academic success, behaviour, motivation, attendance, wellbeing, greater social and emotional skills, increased connection to school, and better self-regulation for students.¹² Given the important relationship between positive mental health and success, CRPS schools have an important role in nurturing positive mental health and well-being.¹¹

Definitions

Mental health

Is a "state of well-being in which every individual realizes their own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to contribute to his or her own community." Mental health is not fixed, and it is influenced by a range of factors including life experiences, learning and work environments.¹¹

Mental illness

Is defined as alterations in thinking, mood or behaviour associated with significant distress and impaired functioning in one or more areas such as school, work, social or family interactions and the ability to live independently.¹¹

Mental health literacy

Is defined as: 1. understanding how to foster and maintain good mental health 2. understanding mental disorders and their treatments 3. decreasing stigma and 4. understanding how to seek help effectively.¹³

Trauma Informed Practice

Is an organizational framework that involves understanding, recognizing, and responding to the impact of trauma, emphasizes physical, psychological, and emotional safety for everyone, and creates opportunities for survivors to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment.¹⁴

Social Emotional Learning

Is the process through which children and youth learn the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours to recognize and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.¹⁵

Self-Regulation

Refers to how people manage stress, how much energy they expend and how well they are able to recover. Effective self-regulation enhances growth, learning and emotional, social and physical well-being. Mindful self-regulation involves learning to recognize and respond to stress in all its many facets, positive as well as negative, hidden as well as overt, minor as well as traumatic or toxic.¹⁶

Procedures

Principals' role:

1. Ensure strategies for mental well-being are written into annual school action plans.
2. Support and model the promotion of positive mental health and healthy relationships for staff, students, and families, for example, messages and resources on school communication and social media sites.
3. Provide opportunities and support for all school staff to participate in district and school based professional learning and have access to resources related to mental health.
4. Support a universal and comprehensive approach for mental health literacy (common language for discussing positive mental health and mental illness) with staff, students and their families including the implementation of district supported programming.
5. Promote a safe climate for students and staff to discuss mental health.
6. Building the capacity of staff, students and families about healthy technology use and its impact on mental well being.
7. Incorporate information and resources about mental health in communications to families, such as newsletters, website updates, bulletin boards.

School staff role:

1. Support and model the promotion of positive mental health and healthy relationships for staff, students, and families.
2. Provide opportunities for students to develop positive relationships, build skills and develop positive mental health strategies, including, but not limited to, self-regulation, social emotional learning, and a growth mindset.
3. Provide opportunities to promote mental health literacy (common language for discussing positive mental health and mental illness) among students.

4. Provide support and access to resources for students that address positive mental health and mental illness.

Healthy Eating

Background

CRPS recognizes that healthy eating is an important part of growth and development and contributes to student learning. Healthy eating is more than the food a person eats. It is about where, when, why and how they eat. Food choices are influenced by the aspects of the social and physical environments that affect the types of foods available, the affordability and accessibility of food, and exposure to nutrition information and food marketing.^{17,18} Therefore, the division endeavours to create supportive school environments for good nutrition and lifelong well-being by encouraging healthy eating for all students and staff.

Together with proper nutrition, division schools should promote food literacy and sustainable food practices for all students and staff. This can be implemented through nutrition education, limiting the sale and use of non-nutritious foods, and working in collaboration with key partners in the community to encourage a health-promoting environment. It is important to recognize the diversity of students, as related to stages of growth and development, socio-economic status, activity levels, food allergies/intolerances as well as religion and culture. Each school environment is unique and school staff are in the best position to determine what activities are effective in encouraging healthy eating behaviours in the lives of their students and staff.

Definitions

Food literacy

Is a set of skills and attributes that help people prepare healthy, tasty, affordable meals for themselves and their families. Food literacy builds resilience, because it includes food skills (techniques, knowledge and planning ability), the confidence to improvise and problem-solve, and the ability to access and share information. Food literacy is made possible through access to healthy food and living conditions, broad learning opportunities, and positive sociocultural environments.¹⁹

Items sold and free of charge

Includes all foods offered for sale by the school or by contracted food service providers. This includes vending machines, school stores and cafeterias, or in conjunction with fundraising activities and sporting events. It also includes items distributed through school snack programs, lunch and breakfast programs, food rewards, school special events and other similar activities.

Sustainable food practices

Contribute to both community and ecological health; build awareness of all stages of food production; support local producers and systems as much as possible, and is resilient to change (including climate change, rising energy prices, etc) and accessible and affordable to everyone.²⁰

Procedures

CRPS will create and maintain a healthy eating environment for students and staff.

Principals' role:

1. Ensure strategies for healthy eating are written into annual school wellness action plans.
2. Ensure that all food and beverages offered in schools (including items sold and free of charge) are closely aligned with the principles outlined in the Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth food rating system (see table 1) and Canada's Food Guide.^{21,22}
3. Provide opportunities for all school staff to participate in professional learning and have access to resources related to healthy eating.
4. Ensure staff involved in food programming have received food safety training.²³
5. Ensure the school facility has an Alberta Health and Safety permit and all safe food handling requirements are followed.²³
6. Schedule adequate lunch breaks to provide an appropriate amount of time and space for students and staff to eat.
7. Promote accessibility, competitive pricing, and the visible display of healthy choices.
8. Encourage food-based fundraising initiatives to include items from the "Choose Most Often" and "Choose Sometimes" categories.²¹
9. Provide students with opportunities to participate in sustainable food practices including growing produce, learning food preparation skills, and composting.
10. Incorporate information and resources about healthy eating in communications to parents on a regular basis, for example, newsletters, website updates, bulletin boards.

School staff role:

1. Ensure foods offered at special events (sports events, class parties, field trips, etc.) are closely aligned with the principles outlined in the Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth food rating system (see table below) and Canada's Food Guide.^{21,22}
2. Encourage water as the preferred beverage that students consume during instructional time.
3. Choose non-food items, the majority of the time, when providing rewards and incentives.
4. Role model healthy food and beverage choices during instructional time.

Table 1 : Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth - food rating system

Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth - food rating system	Choose Most Often	Choose Sometimes	Choose Least Often
	These foods have good or excellent nutritional value. The products in this category are lower in unhealthy fat and added sugar, and higher in vitamins, minerals and/or fibre. These foods should be consumed daily.	These foods have moderate amounts of nutrients, but are higher in sugar, sodium and/or fat. These foods should be consumed in moderation. Eating too many foods from this category may displace the consumption of more nutrient rich foods.	These foods provide little nutrient value and are high in fat, sugar or salt and low in vitamins and minerals. These items are not recommended and should be offered rarely and in small portions. These foods are not included in Canada's Food Guide.
Elementary	100%	0%	0%
Junior High*	60% - 100%	0% - 40%	0%
High School*	60% - 100%	0% - 40%	0%

*Junior High / High School: 60% Choose Most Often is the minimum standard; schools should strive to reach 100% Choose Most Often; 40% Choose Sometimes is the minimum standard, schools should strive to reach 0% Choose Sometimes.

Active Living

Background

CRPS recognizes that physical activity plays an important role in developing students and staff who have the knowledge, skills and opportunities to lead active and healthy lifestyles. A growing body of evidence indicates that physical activity in childhood is essential for a healthy brain and leads to improved: thinking and learning, emotional regulation and self-control, problem-solving ability, memory, brain plasticity (neuroplasticity), stress management, ability to cope with anxiety and depressive symptoms, self-esteem and self-worth, attention and focus.²⁴

Schools play an important role in supporting a healthy active lifestyle by creating an environment that includes both planned and spontaneous physical activity. Physical activity at school should occur throughout the day; vary in form and intensity; take into account each student's needs based on physical ability, cultural practices, and experience; consider resources available within the school and the larger community; and allow for student choice.²⁵ Students should be encouraged to live an active lifestyle with a daily balance of sleep, sedentary behaviours, and physical activities that support healthy development.²⁶

Definitions

Active Living

Is a way of life in which physical activity is valued and integrated into daily life.²⁸

Active transportation

Is using your own power to get from one place to another, including walking, biking, skateboarding, in-line skating, jogging/running, non-mechanized wheel chairing, etc.²⁹

Daily Physical Activity

Is the Alberta Education policy to ensure that all students in Grades 1 to 9 are physically active for a minimum of 30 minutes daily through activities that are organized by the school.²⁶

Movement breaks

Are short (<10 minute) periods of physical activity embedded within instructional time. Examples include energizers, games, dance, breathing/calming exercises and stretching.³⁰

Moderate-Intensity Physical Activity

Is intense enough to elevate the heart rate. A person can talk but not sing during activities of this intensity.³¹

Physical Literacy

Is the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge, and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life.³²

Recess

Is a regularly scheduled break within the school day. It is usually held in the schoolyard and allows children to engage in a variety of activities (sports, games, reading, talking, etc.) in a safe environment.^{33,34,36} It is a necessary and critical component of the school day that enhances children's physical, social, emotional and cognitive development.^{35,36}

Sedentary Behaviour

Is any waking behaviour characterized by low energy expenditure while in a sitting, reclining, or lying posture.³⁷

Vigorous-Intensity Physical Activity

Is when heart rate increases substantially, body temperature increases quickly, and a person cannot say more than a few words without pausing for a breath.³¹

Procedures

Principals' role:

1. Ensure strategies for active living, physical literacy, and daily physical activity (DPA) are written into annual school action plans.
2. Grant exemptions, when appropriate, under the following conditions:

- a. Religious beliefs - upon written statement from the parent to the principal.
- b. Medical reasons - certification to principal by a medical practitioner indicating which activities the student is not able to participate in.
3. Ensure that physical activity is embedded within the school timetable including quality physical education instruction and DPA in compliance with the Alberta Education [physical education program of studies](#) and [DPA policy](#).^{38,39}
4. Carefully consider event scheduling to limit the disruption or cancellation of physical education, recess and other physical activity opportunities.
5. Support recess breaks for all students, recognizing the importance of movement for behaviour regulation, attention, focus and learning.⁴⁰
6. Provide active indoor recess opportunities when needed, with a focus on offering alternatives to sedentary screen time.
7. Support active travel to and from school.
8. Incorporate information and resources about active living and physical activity in communications to parents on a regular basis (e.g., newsletters, website updates, bulletin boards).
9. Provide opportunities for all school staff to participate in professional learning and have access to resources related to active recess, classroom movement breaks, physical literacy, DPA and physical education.

School staff role:

1. Role model and participate in physical activity alongside students, when possible.
2. Provide a variety of diverse and inclusive opportunities for students to develop physical literacy skills, participate, feel comfortable, and build confidence in active settings.
3. Incorporate physical activity and movement-based teaching approaches into all subject areas to support the development of physical literacy skills.
4. Use both indoor and outdoor environments for physical activity, in all seasons.
5. Design classroom spaces to include alternative seating options such as standing desks, stools, cushions, etc. that students can access when appropriate.
6. Replace sedentary behaviors and light physical activity with additional moderate to vigorous physical activity when possible.²⁶
7. Support recess breaks for all students, recognizing the importance of movement for behaviour regulation, attention, focus and learning.

8. Incorporate regular movement breaks during academic instruction to avoid extended periods of sitting or sedentary screen time.
9. Inform parents about active living opportunities, expectations for participation in physical education and DPA, and appropriate clothing and footwear to support physical activity.

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AP 172 Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

AP 351 Safe and Caring Schools Culture

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