

Making Health Happen



***A
Toolkit
for
School Councils***



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“It is better to build children than to repair adults.”

Unknown

This kit has been created by the **Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition** for school councils. We hope you find it easy to read and helpful. This kit was originally created in 2006 and was revised in October 2012.

Many thanks to our ad-hoc committee who, like countless others, care about the future of children and youth in our province.....

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A special thanks to Cathy McCallum from the Hastings & Prince Edward Counties Health Unit for inspiring this idea.

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“Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn’t do than by the ones you did do.” *Mark Twain*

Overview

Welcome parents as partners, the healthy development of our children is a priority for most of us and schools can play a great role in the positive development of our children and youth. The research states that “healthy learners are better learners” (Basch, 2011). Child and youth growth and development should be a major priority of Canadian society, yet a great number of today’s children are adopting unhealthy lifestyles or have difficulty accessing healthy foods or physical activity opportunities due to financial limitations. The concern is that these children tend to become unhealthy adults who will face an increased risk of many illnesses such as cancer, heart disease, diabetes, and other chronic diseases (Tremblay & Willms, 2003) thus leading to increased adult morbidity and mortality in years to come (Canadian Pediatric Society, 2002).

There is growing recognition that parents as leaders in schools are in a unique position to contribute towards reversing this trend. A comprehensive school health approach with parents taking the lead as partners with the school and community is required. This toolkit has been designed for parents as leaders to assist you with an initiative that will benefit your entire school community.

Purpose of this Toolkit and Guide

Have you, or members of your school council, ever asked any of the following questions?

- How can we promote a welcoming school climate?
- How can we support a mentally healthy school?
- How can we encourage increased healthy habits such as more physical activity opportunities?
- How can we create a positive and safe school and community culture?

If you or any member of your school council have ever thought about, or talked about, any of these issues, this toolkit is for you. The information will help you lead the school council, Home and School Association to promote and support a healthy school community.

This toolkit provides an overview of Comprehensive School Health- Healthy Schools for school council and Home and School Associations in collaboration with school leaders, community partners and public health. Included are resources and tools from a variety of sources. While steps are outlined, keep in mind that establishing and sustaining a healthy school is a dynamic process that involves strategic planning, and a partnership approach.



Introduction

The Importance of Healthy Schools

For optimal learning, we need students and teachers who are healthy. We also need schools to be environments that reinforce health messages. The physical, emotional and social atmosphere of a school affects what and how children learn. Schools must be a place where children and youth feel safe, secure and at ease. It is everyone's job, including parents, to create a safe, healthy situation.

Schools can have a positive impact on student and staff health, ***parental engagement and leadership*** is critical to the success of this effort.

What is a Healthy School?

A healthy school sees the big picture. It uses what it has - social, emotional and physical - to protect and improve the health and well-being of staff and students.

- It respects the body, spirit, heart and mind of every person within the school community.
- A healthy school is free from prejudice, bullying and fear.
- It is a place where people, culture and traditions are valued.
- A healthy school is clean and safe, and values learning.
- It has proper lighting, ventilation, heat, fire and safety protection, clean water and proper waste disposal.
- A healthy school shows its health with positive student-teacher bonds; positive role models; healthy food choices; and opportunities for physical activity.
- Since each school is different, each must define the type of school it wants to be.

Benefits of a Healthy School

Health and success at school go hand-in-hand. If you improve the conditions for education, and the health of those who are part of the system, everyone wins. Here are a few of the benefits of a healthy school (Basch, 2011):

- Better student performance
- Safer school environment
- Active school population
- Increased health awareness
- Improved health education
- Greater health protection i.e. hand washing, vaccinations, etc.
- Improved self-care
- Lower health care costs in future
- Fewer days missed
- Closer ties between staff and students
- Improved morale
- Improved school image
- Greater level of commitment by parents and community

What is Comprehensive School Health?

Comprehensive school health is an internationally recognized framework for supporting student success through the creation of healthy schools. The Joint Consortium on School Health recognizes 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; and
- partnerships and services.

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

Figure 1:



Reference: <http://www.jcsh-cces.ca/index.php/school-health>

Steps to Create Change

Here are ways that you as a parent can help in the creation of a healthy school culture.

1. Form or Join a Committee

A school may want to make changes that benefit their students, staff and others; however, someone must start the process. This is where a school council can be the leader of change within their school community.

If parents on your council want to create change, then it is a time to do that. You may want to form a health committee as a sub-committee of school council. Or, your school may have groups/clubs that are already working on health issues, for example, a Safe School Committee, Social Justice Club or other clubs such as Ontario Students against Impaired Driving. They may be interested in expanding their scope to include a wider range of healthy school issues. Whatever format you choose, be sure your school health committee connects closely to your school council and school improvement planning process. Try to involve people from different groups which may be:

- Other parents
- Students
- Principals, Vice-principals
- Teachers
- Support staff (e.g. custodians, educational assistants)
- Public Health Staff (e.g. nurse, health promoters, nutritionists, inspector, etc.)
- Health agency volunteers
- Service groups
- Business

2. Select a Leader

If the group does not have a leader, pick one. The leader steers the ship and must be keen to protect and improve the health of the school. Select someone who is in touch with people, agencies, parents and groups that can help your school. A leader knows how to build teamwork. The leader may be a parent, educator, public health professional or student.

3. Involve and Empower Student Leaders

Students are a hidden resource within the school setting. In order to promote and advocate for change, students are necessary on any school health committee. It is stated many times that young people must be empowered in order to make a difference in their lives, especially when it pertains to their own health. They learn best from their peers and are influenced by their peer's actions. Young people, when organized and equipped with a vision for change, are a powerful force. When adults connect and organize with youth, they can change school conditions together. The adults come to understand the power of youth as effective leaders. Youth who organize can change other people's understanding of the role of youth in the health of society. However, youth need adults to help them plan, implement and evaluate a school health initiative. Together, everyone can make a difference!

4. Identify Strengths and Weaknesses

Determine the needs, interests and health of students and staff. Try to identify your school's strong points and weak points, and then set goals to build a healthier school.

The first step is to name the issues you would like to tackle. Ask students, teachers, administrators and parents about issues. Do a survey (see Appendix A: student survey sample) or focus group discussions to obtain the different perspectives in your school.

Make sure all information stays confidential. When you sum up the information keep it basic so it is easily understood, does not give blame and provide positive reinforcement to what is already working in the school community.

The list below suggests areas to consider when doing surveys. Ask public health staff who deal with healthy school to help you in the creation of a survey.

Physical Environment

- ✓ Health and safety: Is the school visibly crowded with items? Are boxes stacked too high?
- ✓ Is the kitchen clean? Does the cafeteria offer healthy foods?
- ✓ Is the air quality good?
- ✓ Are classrooms, gym, playgrounds and washrooms clean and safe?
- ✓ Are classrooms too crowded?
- ✓ Does the outside of the school have a clean presence?
- ✓ What is the condition of equipment, paint, and lighting?
- ✓ Is the school tobacco and drug free?
- ✓ Does graffiti and vandalism happen often?

Social/ Emotional Environment

- ✓ Do students, staff and parents feel safe?
- ✓ Do students, staff and parents feel a sense of belonging?
- ✓ Is the school culture welcoming and open to parents and community partners?
- ✓ Are the expectations for success the same for all students? Is it consistent? Do teachers expect more from one group and less from another?
- ✓ Are students welcome in all courses - females in shop, males in family studies?
- ✓ Do daily events include or exclude certain groups?
- ✓ Is there openness to the views and beliefs of others?
- ✓ Do you talk with parents and outside groups often, or does it seem the school has a "closed door" policy?
- ✓ How is information communicated to staff, students, parents and community partners?
- ✓ Do adults model the behavior they expect from their students?
- ✓ Does discipline conflict or promote healthy behaviour? (e.g. removal of physical education class as a punishment)
- ✓ Awards and recognition: Are students, groups and staff praised for their healthy actions?
- ✓ Innovation: Do you encourage parents, students, teachers, staff, etc. to become involved, bring new ideas forward, or are they out of the process?

Healthy Policies

- ✓ Are students and staff involved in meaningful participation of developing non-punitive policies that promote positive, healthy behaviours?
- ✓ Does the school practice and adhere to the guidelines set in the School Food and Beverage Policy?
- ✓ Does the school practice and adhere to the Daily Physical Activity Guidelines?
- ✓ Does the school practice and adhere to the Smoke Free Ontario Act and assist in the provision of positive health behavior programs?
- ✓ Does the school work with parents and community partners to develop the school improvement plan? Does the plan have a health component in it?

Partnerships and Services

- ✓ Does your school have a relationship with your local public health unit?
- ✓ When students or staff has health-related concerns, do you know what services are available within the board or community to refer them to?
- ✓ Does your school have strong connections with community resources, e.g., police, parks and recreation, local health clinics?
- ✓ Will people take part in evaluations to measure improvements in the school's health?
- ✓ Has the school received grants or money for health issues?

Teaching and Learning

- ✓ Do students receive physical and health education at least 3 times a week?
- ✓ Do teachers have enough health education resources?
- ✓ Do teachers balance a healthy message with extra-curricular supports? (e.g. healthy rewards for doing well)
- ✓ Are healthy rewards given to students when they exceed expectations?
- ✓ Do teachers role model healthy behavior in and out of the classroom?
- ✓ Are students urged to join healthy activities outside of school?
- ✓ Do health projects extend beyond the classroom?

5. *Select a Priority*

At times, things may come forward that require attention. For example a school may realize that cyberbullying has become a concern among school community members and they understand the need to address it. As a group, select health area as a first priority. It is often wise to “start small”, as early successes encourage a committee to take positive steps to addressing issues.

6. *Create an Action Plan*

Once your committee has identified their priority, develop an action plan. To have significant impact, a plan should address as many of the four components of the Comprehensive School Health model as possible: teaching and learning, social and physical environment, healthy school policy and partnerships and services. A plan may include:

- ✓ Goals, objectives, and activities: for example-
Goal [lofty statement] – This school will have a supportive environment, free from bullying and harassment.
Objective [specific, measurable] –To create a buddy system that will have positive impact on victims, bullies and bystanders.

Activity [several activities may be included in the plan] – Train students on the importance of speaking out against bullying.

- ✓ Who will take the lead to ensure the activity is carried out?
- ✓ What is needed to make it happen?
- ✓ What is the timeline?

Refer to Appendix B for a sample action plan.

Note: *A diagram on the next page describes how to plan action on a specific health issue using the Comprehensive School Health model.*

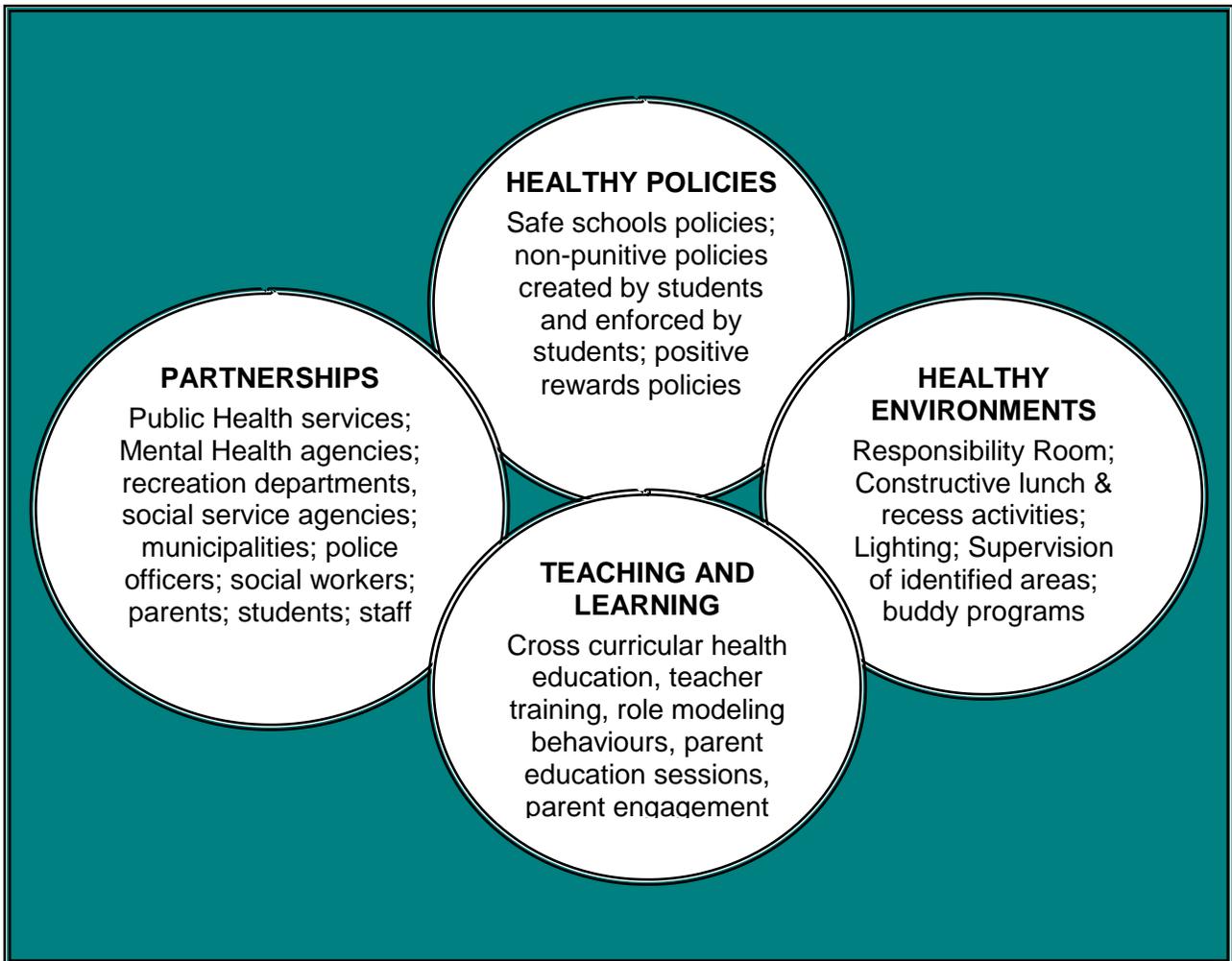
7. Implement the Plan

Involve many members of the school community in implementing the plan, not just the school health committee. This will expand the commitment to health. Be sure to inform all other school groups about the planned activities of your group, to ensure coordination and reinforcement of messages.



Example:

“Bullying” Issue



Adapted from: Ronson, B. & MacDougall, C. (2004, October) *Review of Healthy School Models*. Power Point Presentation.

8. Evaluate Your Plan

Evaluations help improve and expand plans by looking at how things went and the successes and challenges you experienced. Committees need to review how they met their objectives and how their activities led to achieving their overall goal.

Looking at how you worked as a group will give you insight into how you can improve in the future.

Here are some useful questions to ask when evaluating your plan and activities:

- What issue is your committee trying to deal with?
- Are you meeting your objectives?
- Is your plan working?
- Did it run as planned?
- Did it involve the broader school community?
- Did you make good use of available resources?
- Did you address all four elements of Comprehensive School Health or just some?
- How much did it cost?
- Did the benefits outweigh the cost?
- Did the plan result in positive changes at the school? If so, what changes?
- What would you do differently next time?
- Did you receive the level of support you expected?
- Did your committee receive support from all levels? (e.g. administrators, teachers, support staff, students, parents, outside agencies)
- What are the visible features of the program?
- What are some of the barriers your committee experienced?

9. Celebrate Successes

It is important to publicize successes to provide positive reinforcement not only to the school health committee, but also to the school as a whole. Celebrations increase understanding of what the concept of a “healthy school” means, and they strengthen school-wide commitment to the goal of creating the healthiest school possible. School health committees are more likely to continue functioning if members have fun.

Engaging Parents in a Meaningful Way

Getting parents involved is vital to the process. There are many ways that parents can become involved. Here are a few examples:

- Create a welcoming and engaging school for parents and their children.
- Encourage school administration to involve parents in the development of their School “Health” Improvement Plan.
- Hold family nights to talk about health issues. Involve the outside community.
- Engage them to ask the school population about health issues.
- Participate, promote and stage certain school events (e.g. Walk to School Day, Healthy Lunch Day, Turn off the Screen Week, etc.)
- Tour the physical area of the school to see what issues need instant action.
- Volunteer for playground duty.
- Start a lobby group to have the school board adopt the “healthy school” process.
- Write to community people (including other school councils) to raise awareness and seek their support for creating “healthy schools” in your area. See Appendix C for a sample letter.
- Tour the playground to see if there are any safety problems.
- Look for guest speakers on certain topics (e.g. health, safety, environment, etc.)
- Talk with teachers and administrators to monitor the program progress.

For more information on parent engagement read the **Planning Parent Engagement: A Guidebook for Parents and Schools** <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/healthyschools/foundations.html>

Benefits of a Healthy School

Health and success at school go hand-in-hand. If you improve the conditions for education, and the health of those who are part of the system, everyone wins. Here are a few of the benefits of a healthy school (Basch, 2011):

- Improved student performance
- Higher level of dedication to education by staff and students
- Safe school environment
- Active school population
- Increased health awareness
- Improved health education
- Greater health protection i.e. hand washing, vaccinations, etc.
- Self-care awareness
- Lower health care costs
- Fewer days missed
- Lower costs to recruit staff
- Closer ties between staff and students
- Improved teacher retention
- Lower drop-out rate
- Improved morale
- Improved school image
- Greater level of commitment by parents and community
- Attraction of high quality staff
- Greater willingness to accept change

School Health on the Net

HPS Assessment Tools

Health Assessment Tool for Schools – Ever Active Schools

<http://www.everactive.org/health-assessment-tool-for-schools>

Healthy School Planner – Joint Consortium for School Health

http://www.healthyschoolplanner.uwaterloo.ca/jcshsite_app/controller/index.cfm

Provincial and National HPS Partners

Council of Ontario Directors of Education

Planning Parent Engagement: A Guidebook for Parents and Schools

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/healthyschools/foundations.html>

Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition

www.ontariohealthyschools.ca

Ontario Physical and Health Education Association (Ophea)

www.ophea.net

People for Education

www.peopleforeducation.ca

School Health Action, Planning and Evaluation System

<http://www.shapes.uwaterloo.ca/>

Physical Health Education Canada (Quality School Health)

www.phecanada.ca

Public Health Agency of Canada / Health Canada

The Health of Canada's Young People: a mental health focus

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/dca-dea/publications/hpsc-mental-mentale/index-eng.php>

“Voices and Choices” Planning for School

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/dca-dea/prog-ini/school-scolaire/vc-ss/index-eng.php>

Canadian Association for School Health

<http://www.cash-aces.ca/>

Resiliency Canada

www.resiliencycanada.ca

Joint Consortium for School Health

<http://www.jcsh-cces.ca/>



Healthy Physical Environments in Schools

www.healthyschools.com

British Columbia Ministry for Children and Families “Healthy Schools Resource Guide”

http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/early_childhood/pdf/healthy_schools_website.pdf

British Columbia “Action Schools”

<http://www.actionschoolsbc.ca/content/home.asp>

Contains information, resources and a guide for teachers.

British Columbia Report of the Provincial Health Officer “An Ounce of Prevention: A Public Health Rationale for the School as a Setting for Health Promotion”

http://www.healthservices.gov.bc.ca/pho/pdf/o_prevention.pdf

Calgary Board of Education CSH Information

<http://www.cbe.ab.ca/programs/prog-comp-health1.asp>

Ever Active Schools

www.everactive.org

Healthy U – Alberta Government

<http://www.healthyalberta.com/HealthyPlaces/282.htm>



Institut National De Sante Publique Du Quebec

Science advisory report on effective interventions in mental health promotion and mental health disorder

<http://www.inspq.qc.ca>

Manitoba - Healthy Schools: A Conceptual Framework - Promoting Healthy Kids, Schools and Communities

<http://www.gov.mb.ca/healthyschools/>

Saskatchewan School Plus & Community Education

<http://www.education.gov.sk.ca/SchoolPLUS>

References and Resources Related to School Health

Anderson, A., & Stathakos, J. (2003). Better Health, Better Schools, Better Futures: A Guide for Teachers! *Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto*.

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Henderson, A.C. (1993). *Healthy Schools, Healthy Futures: The Case for Improving School Environment*. Santa Cruz, CA: ETR Associates.

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Community Resources

There are many volunteer health agencies in your community concerned about school health. They have free or low-cost resources and services to share. Below is a list of some community agencies that can help or even join your school health committee.

- ✓ Public health department
- ✓ Police services
- ✓ Mental health agencies (e.g. Canadian Mental Health Association)
- ✓ Heart and Stroke Foundation – local chapter
- ✓ Ontario Lung Association – local chapter
- ✓ School board representative – focusing on school health
- ✓ Family services
- ✓ Social services
- ✓ Addictions services
- ✓ YM/YWCA
- ✓ Recreation department

APPENDIX A: STUDENT POPULATION SCHOOL HEALTH SURVEY ELEMENTARY LEVEL

Your school health committee is doing a survey on student health issues. Your input is voluntary. The information collected will help us design activities to meet your needs. All information will remain confidential.

1. Are you:

- Male Female

2. What grade are you in?

- 4 5 6 7 8 9
 10 11 12 12+

3. Do you understand the term “healthy school”?

- yes no not sure

4. What issues are important to you? Please check the boxes that apply.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> healthy relationships | <input type="checkbox"/> alcohol and drug use |
| <input type="checkbox"/> conflict | <input type="checkbox"/> peer pressure |
| <input type="checkbox"/> dating | <input type="checkbox"/> personal safety |
| <input type="checkbox"/> anxiety | <input type="checkbox"/> loneliness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> depression | <input type="checkbox"/> racism |
| <input type="checkbox"/> bullying/school violence | <input type="checkbox"/> stress |
| <input type="checkbox"/> the environment | <input type="checkbox"/> happiness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> body image | <input type="checkbox"/> healthy eating |
| <input type="checkbox"/> physical activity | <input type="checkbox"/> tobacco use |
| <input type="checkbox"/> playground safety | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> other, please describe: _____ | |

6. What is the best way to deal with these topics? Please check.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> in-class discussions | <input type="checkbox"/> student-led activities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> guest speakers | <input type="checkbox"/> school-wide wellness days |
| <input type="checkbox"/> school community events | <input type="checkbox"/> peer counseling |
| <input type="checkbox"/> teachers leading by example | <input type="checkbox"/> mentoring programs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> student leadership | <input type="checkbox"/> parent involvement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> developing school healthy policies (more physical activity time, healthy eating, etc.) | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> other, please describe: _____ | |

7. Are you interested in learning more about “school health”?

yes no not sure

OPTIONAL QUESTION:

8. Are you interested in helping out with a school health committee?

yes no not sure

If you answered “YES” please print your name, grade and phone number below.

APPENDIX B: SAMPLE ACTION PLAN

Goal	Objective	Activities to Meet Objective	Timeline to be Done	Who will Take the Lead?
To create a positive school culture where students feel a sense of belonging	To develop a buddy system for all students.	<p>Review best practices.</p> <p>Identify student leader and students that require mentors.</p> <p>Host a training session for students</p> <p>Pilot test the program.</p> <p>Revise program and roll out to entire school</p>	<p>January</p> <p>February</p> <p>March</p> <p>April</p> <p>September</p>	<p>Healthy School Committee Vice – Chair</p> <p>Students</p> <p>School Administration</p>
	To provide a health communication campaign that promotes positive behaviours.	<p>Identify potential community partners.</p> <p>Gather input from parents, staff, and students about positive messaging.</p> <p>Gather information from other schools that offer healthy food choices.</p> <p>Outline steps they took.</p>	<p>September – May</p>	<p>Healthy School Committee and Principal</p>

Each school council should adapt this table to fit their needs.