



## Couch potato in-training?

It's time to  
get serious  
about health: for  
our kids and our  
schools.

Ready...  
Set... Go!



## You know it in your heart.

You know it every time you think back to your own childhood – riding your bike, climbing trees, playing hide and seek, road hockey or pretend. You know our kids are just not healthy enough.

The statistics bear out what you know in your heart. But the numbers only tell one part of the story. What they don't tell you is the reason this is all so important: Our kids' physical, emotional and mental health are the key predictors of their future quality of life.

So let's cut to the chase. Our kids need help – our help. And it's not help that is hard to give. We just need to do it!

## READY!

### Why should we care about school health?

- By graduation, the average student will have spent 15,000 hours watching TV and only 500 hours in Health and Physical Education programs.
- European kids walk an average of 2,400 more steps per day than Canadian children.
- Canada ranks 21st out of 28 countries for child well-being.
- Canada ranks 27th out of 28 countries for childhood obesity.
- One out of four Canadian children is overweight or obese.

### Why are schools a great place to improve kids' health?

- Students spend an average of six hours a day, five days a week, for 12 to 14 years in school – that's more than 16,000 hours! This makes schools the ideal place to promote physical activity, mental health and healthy eating.
- Research shows that physical activity increases

students' ability to focus and pay attention in class, and improves their chances for academic success.

- It's easy and usually more affordable for students and families to access physical activity programs connected to schools. Many programs outside of school require pre-registration and fees.
- Kids take Health and Physical Education (H&PE) classes every year until Grade 8 and for one year in high school. But the classes aren't just about physical fitness. Along with movement skills, kids learn about safety, healthy eating, human development, mental health, sexual health, injury prevention, and substance use and abuse.
- In Ontario, the H&PE curriculum is the only curriculum that includes a direct focus on making healthy choices, including decision making, critical and creative thinking and relationship and social skills.
- A strong H&PE curriculum, supported by great programs, helps students address all of the emotional challenges and hard choices they face.

# SET! **What is my school doing now to promote health? 20 questions to ask.**

Take a few minutes to assess your school. (You can do it with your school council.) Share the results. Then make a plan.

1. Do elementary students have at least three classes of Health and Physical Education (H&PE) each week?  
 Yes  No  Not sure  n/a
2. Is H&PE taught by a specialist teacher?  
 Yes  No  Not sure  n/a
3. Do all students participate in 20 minutes of physical activity every day?  
 Yes  No  Not sure  n/a
4. Are there organized physical activities for students during recess and/or lunch?  
 Yes  No  Not sure  n/a
5. Do students have access to a range of athletic equipment during and/or lunch?  
 Yes  No  Not sure  n/a
6. Do the H&PE classes have a combination of physical activity, movement skills training, and healthy living components?  
 Yes  No  Not sure  n/a
7. Are the locations where H&PE is taught safe and in good repair and is there a variety of athletic equipment – also in good repair?  
 Yes  No  Not sure  n/a
8. Do the teachers in your school receive training and support to help them include physical activities in the school day?  
 Yes  No  Not sure  n/a
9. Does your school have a wide variety of extracurricular athletic programs?  
 Yes  No  Not sure  n/a
10. Do as many girls as boys participate in extracurricular athletic programs?  
 Yes  No  Not sure  n/a
11. Are the extracurricular athletic programs available at no cost?  
 Yes  No  Not sure  n/a
12. Does your school make walking and cycling to and from school easy for students (by providing bike racks, a crossing guard, etc.)?  
 Yes  No  Not sure  n/a
13. Does your school have any organized programs to help kids walk or bike to school?  
 Yes  No  Not sure  n/a
14. Do students receive instruction about healthy food choices?  
 Yes  No  Not sure  n/a
15. Does your school cafeteria offer students a range of healthy food and drink options?  
 Yes  No  Not sure  n/a
16. Is healthy food offered at school events, meetings, and fundraising activities?  
 Yes  No  Not sure  n/a
17. Has your school signed up for the Ontario Ministry of Education's Healthy Schools Recognition Program?  
 Yes  No  Not sure  n/a
18. Does your school have a Healthy Schools committee that includes the principal, teachers, students, parents and community partners?  
 Yes  No  Not sure  n/a
19. Does your school work with community partners (e.g. Public Health, Parks and Rec.) to provide a range of programs for kids and families?  
 Yes  No  Not sure  n/a
20. Does your school have any programs led by students that focus on health (physical, mental or emotional)?  
 Yes  No  Not sure  n/a

# GO!

## How can we make our school a “healthy school”?

### 1. After your assessment, get together with other people in your school and make a plan:

Sign up for the Ministry of Education’s Healthy Schools Recognition Program. Schools pledge to take on a healthy activity in their school – and receive recognition for it. Schools can start a new activity or build on an existing one. Go to [www.edu.gov.on.ca](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca) and look for the “Healthy Schools” link.

Work with your school council, principal and teachers to decide on ways to build a health-promoting environment throughout your school community. Use your school’s health and physical education (H&PE) programs as a starting point and ask the school staff how you can support them. Specialist H&PE teachers, or school board H&PE consultants can provide support to classroom teachers, the principal and the school council.

Hold events for the whole school community – parents, neighbours, local businesses – that focus on increasing physical activity, building awareness of healthy food choices and providing information about mental health supports.

### 2. It’s not about creating athletes. It’s about changing how we think, how we eat, and how we feel.

Partner with neighbourhood organizations. Partnerships provide more opportunities for kids to participate, and can help families access things like mental health supports and recreation programs.

Encourage students to develop their own programs. Youth-led programs engage more young people and help kids connect with their peers.

Make your school a healthy school. Ontario’s School Food and Beverage policy outlines what kinds of foods and drinks can be served and sold in Ontario schools.

The acceptable foods have low amounts of fat, sugar, and

sodium. The policy applies to all food sold in schools, including food sold in cafeterias, vending machines, or at school fundraising events.

### 3. Think about what’s happening after school:

Send information home to let everyone know what’s available for kids after school. Kids who are outside during the after-school period are healthier and more active.

Contact your local Parks and Recreation department to find out what’s available in your area. Many municipalities offer free, subsidized, and low-cost fitness programs and activities.

### 4. Communicate:

Spread the word! Use your school newsletter, website, or bulletin boards to feature articles and information about the importance of integrating issues of health and physical activity throughout your school.

Encourage all families in your school community to participate in physical activity every day and to make healthy food choices. Ontario’s School Food and Beverage policy doesn’t apply to food brought from home, but parents may find the guidelines helpful in making healthier choices when packing lunches.

Write to your local newspaper about what you’re doing at your school or make a deputation to your school board or city council about the importance of school health.



## This health and physical education tool kit is brought to you by...



People for Education is an independent organization working to support public education in Ontario's English, Catholic and French schools. Our website has lots of resources for parents, data about Health and Physical Education programs in Ontario's schools, links to information about programs in other provinces and a wide range of research on health and physical education. For more information, go to [www.peopleforeducation.ca](http://www.peopleforeducation.ca).



This project was made possible through funding from the Heart and Stroke Foundation's Spark Advocacy Grants. For more information, go to [www.heartandstroke.ca/spark](http://www.heartandstroke.ca/spark).

## For more information contact:

- The Ontario Ministry of Education  
[www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/healthyschools/foundations.pdf](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/healthyschools/foundations.pdf)
- The Ontario Physical and Health Education Association  
[www.ophea.net](http://www.ophea.net)
- Children's fitness tax credit information  
[www.cra-arc.gc.ca/fitness](http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/fitness) (federal) or  
[www.fin.gov.on.ca/en/catc/faq.html](http://www.fin.gov.on.ca/en/catc/faq.html) (provincial)
- Active Healthy Kids Canada  
[www.activehealthykids.ca](http://www.activehealthykids.ca)
- Ontario Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance  
[www.ocdpa.on.ca](http://www.ocdpa.on.ca)
- ParticipACTION  
[www.participaction.com](http://www.participaction.com)
- Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition  
[www.ontariohealthyschools.ca](http://www.ontariohealthyschools.ca)