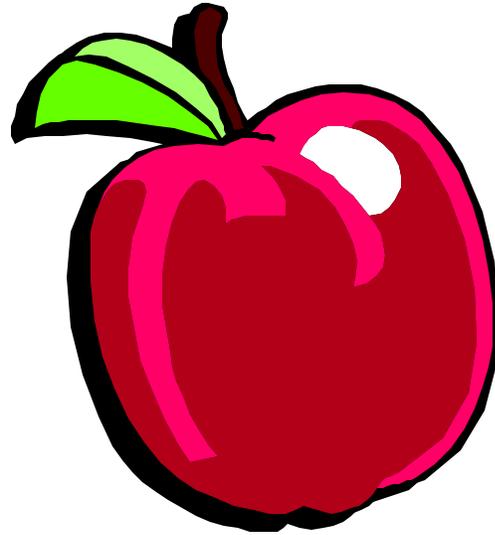


HEALTHY SCHOOLS



Resource Guide



Revised October, 2003

Ministry of Children and
Family Development

Program History

The Healthy Schools initiative began in BC in 1990 as a pilot project in the Ministry of Health. In recent years it has been funded by the Ministry of Children and Family Development, at about \$360,000 a year.

Early in 2003 the ministry changed its approach to the programs that it supports in schools around the province. In the past, school districts applied to the ministry for separate grants for each of up to six different programs. In some cases, schools and districts with high levels of need for support got little or no funding.

The new approach is called *CommunityLINK* (**L**earning **I**ncludes **N**utrition and **K**nowledge). The funding that would have gone to individual grants is now given to school districts, based on the number of children in each community and their need for support to help them reach their full potential in school. Schools, school districts and communities now make the decisions on how and where to spend that money to meet their particular needs.

Other agencies involved in developing *CommunityLINK* programs include the B.C. School Trustees Association; the BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Committees; the Association for Community Education in BC and Breakfast for Learning, a national, non-profit organization dedicated to supporting child nutrition programs in Canada.

Healthy Schools is one of the programs that *CommunityLINK* funding can be used for. If you are interested in setting up a program in

your school you should contact your local school district office.

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Introduction

Healthy Schools ...not just a concept, but a working process

The aim of the Healthy Schools Initiative is to actively involve students in learning and practising skills for decision making for health.

Healthy Schools is an exciting and dynamic process that provides students with opportunities to test their values and beliefs about health. It also teaches students to work cooperatively with others in finding solutions to health issues of concern to them.

Through a five-step process, students are involved in creating action plans that will make their school a healthier place. These plans are developed by students for students, with the help of teachers, administrators, parents, school nurses and other school members. This Resource Guide will walk you through the five steps that are integral to the Healthy Schools approach. (see page 6)

The Five Step Process

1. Create a shared vision of a healthy school.
2. Select the priority health issues.
3. Develop a plan.
4. Put the plan into action.
5. Evaluate, plan for the future, and celebrate!

Healthy Schools works because it gives students a voice, thereby enabling them to bring about change in a way that is important to them. By being involved in the Healthy Schools process, students have developed a variety of skills (e.g. leadership, problem solving, community participation, and community development).

For the school as a whole, the Healthy Schools process has had a positive impact. It has provided schools with a common focus and created opportunities for various members of a school to work together. This flexible process can be adapted to a variety of school situations. It is a good tool, which supports the Personal Planning K to 7 curriculum and the Career and Personal Planning 8 to 12 established by the BC Ministry of Education. Healthy School principles can also be integrated into a school's mission, annual plan or accreditation process.

The Healthy Schools approach has made a difference. Since its inception in 1990, hundreds of schools and thousands of students have developed ways to successfully create environments that are supportive of healthy growth and development. Schools and school districts have addressed an assortment of health needs ranging from self-esteem and peer support to healthy food choices and sound environmental practices.

Other resources you may want to access include public health nurses, your district or school counsellor, child and youth workers, and school based prevention workers. You may identify other resources in your community that could aid you in carrying out the process.

If there are schools in your area that have been involved with the Healthy Schools process, you may want to contact them directly for some ideas. Some areas have Healthy School coordinators. To find out if your area has one, you can call your school district office. Having a coordinator is not necessary to participate in the process. What is necessary is the *support of and commitment to a student-driven process.*

'A healthy school promotes wellness in its students and staff, and provides them with skills to live and interact in their community and in the world as a whole.'

Living School Health conference,
Silver Star Mountain Resort

Understanding Health and Health Promotion

...changing our perspective

There has been a tendency to think of health as just our physical health. But increasingly, we are realizing that health is much broader than absence of disease. In addition to physical health, our health encompasses mental, intellectual, emotional, spiritual and social dimensions.

There is growing recognition that our health is also closely linked with our ability to adapt to change and with the sense of control that we experience in our lives. Our health is very much influenced by the social, physical and economic environments in which we live, work and learn. Research indicates that our health is greatly affected by such things as adequate housing and income, equitable distribution of wealth, meaningful work, strong social support networks and positive conditions in our workplaces and schools.¹

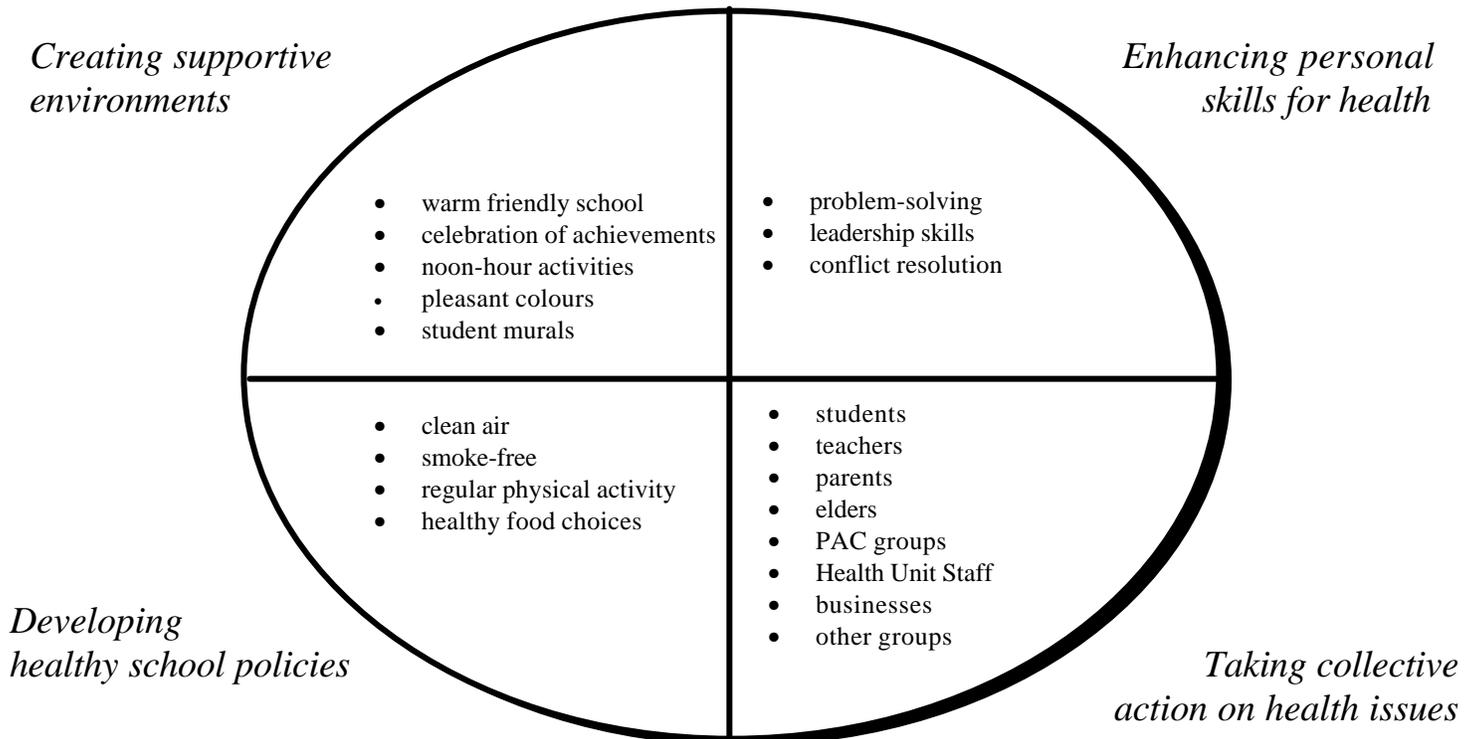
Health promotion is the "process of enabling people to increase control over, and improve, their health. It represents a mediating strategy between people and their environment, synthesizing personal choice and social responsibility in health to create a happier future."² Health promotion may include "education, research, legislation, policy coordination and community development."³

The Healthy Schools process in BC focuses on the role that children and youth can play in influencing their healthy growth and development. By learning skills which emphasize decision making, problem solving and community participation, students enhance their own personal health as well as act as change agents for their schools and communities. The aim of the Healthy Schools process is to encourage student involvement in four key areas:

1. creating supportive environments
2. enhancing personal skills for health
3. developing healthy school policies
4. taking collective action on health issues

These four areas of involvement are explained further in the following diagram...

The Four Key Areas of Student Involvement



What Is a Healthy School?

...clarifying the vision

A Healthy School is...	A Healthy School is not...
one that has school spirit, and where students and teachers want to be.	a place where students dread going everyday.
one that uses a team approach to decision making.	a hierarchical structure where teachers and administrators do not involve students in decision making.
responsive to issues identified by students in partnership with other school members.	about mobilizing a school around an outside agenda.
one that gives students opportunities to learn skills for educated risk-taking.	about giving students a leaflet concerning health risk behaviours.
students identifying their own health issues and solutions.	an education or health service organization setting priorities for youth.
students and parents participating in developing and promoting a healthy school environment and code of conduct.	about providing information about school rules for students and parents.
supportive of peer counselling and peer mediation programs where positive, caring relationships are reinforced.	about merely enforcing school rules.

The Key Principles

... what makes the Healthy Schools process work?

Healthy Schools is built on the following principles, and these are what make the process work. The ideas listed below are not all inclusive; rather they are a sample of the fundamental ideas underlying the Healthy Schools philosophy:

1. Student Voice and Ownership

The Healthy Schools process recognizes the importance of students having an active voice in identifying health issues and coming up with solutions. Through a grassroots, bottom up approach, students are supported in creating a healthy school environment.

2. Inclusiveness

The process works best when there is a broad range of students involved, reflecting different backgrounds and experiences.

3. Empowerment

It is important to recognize the importance of students being given the opportunity to speak for themselves in their own way, and to be part of decision-making in their school.

4. A Process Orientation

Healthy Schools is a process that can lead to positive change. It is an open style of working that is inclusive and non-prescriptive.

5. Partnerships and Participation

The school is a community of many members consisting of students, teachers, administrators, parents, school nurses and community members. By encouraging partnerships and participation from each of these members, a healthier school can be created.

6. A Holistic Perspective

Healthy Schools embraces the broad definition of health which encompasses physical, intellectual, spiritual, mental and emotional dimensions.

7. A Simple, Concrete and Fun Approach!

The Healthy Schools process has succeeded because it follows a simple five-step process. It also provides positive opportunities for many people within a school to work together in a creative and enjoyable way.

Step By Step: The Five-Step Process

...our five steps to developing a healthy school

A simple five-step process is at the heart of Healthy Schools programs across the province. Every participating school community follows this process. We see it as one of the keys to our accomplishments to date. The process involves intense student participation and input at every step, and goes like this...

Step 1: Create a shared vision of a healthy school

Brainstorm ideas for a healthy school.
Come up with a shared vision

Step 2: Select the priority health issues

Pick one or two ideas that you want to work on.

Step 3: Develop an action plan

Develop a realistic plan of action to achieve desired changes.

Step 4: Put the plan into action

Look at ways to make the plan work.
Launch the plan.

Step 5: Evaluate and celebrate

Reflect on what you have done, and on whether you have met your goals.

Celebrate and plan for the future!

'Lending A Hand' A Case Study

... *the five steps in action*

Brent Kennedy Elementary School in Crescent Valley (Kootenays Region) has been involved in the Healthy Schools initiative for several years now. Here is a brief sketch of how they used the five-step process to address wellness issues in the 1994/1995 school year...

Creating a Shared Vision

At the beginning of the 1994/1995 school year, the students at Brent Kennedy Elementary School got together to discuss and evaluate the previous years Healthy Schools project. As a way to create a shared vision for the new school year, they were all invited to join a Healthy Schools Council. Forty-two students, from Grade One to Grade Six, volunteered.

Selecting the Priority Health Issue

This volunteer council subsequently met with the Healthy Schools Project Co-ordinator to select a priority health issue. In their council discussion, the subject of behaviours during lunch breaks and recesses emerged as a priority health issue. The council decided that behaviours could be improved and created a program, 'Lending a Hand' to improve these behaviours. The decision making process was video taped by the local community cable television station.

Developing an Action Plan

'Lending a Hand' gradually developed into a plan that included organizing clubs and creating seasonal activities. For example, a computer club was created to help students organize such things as time schedules, student activities, get permission from teachers, check equipment, advertise, set guidelines regarding behaviour, and co-ordinate students by age group and number.

Putting the Plan into Action

The plan was put into action in a variety of ways. Besides having weekly Fun Days, students also organized special Spring Days, Snow Days and Health and Safety Workshops. Clubs were set up for students having interest in everything from chess and writing to computers and space. Parents served as advisors and liaisons with the wider community.

Evaluating and Celebrating

The various student teams and clubs involved in 'Lending a Hand' evaluated their own events and then shared their evaluations with the volunteer council. By setting up this last step in this fashion, the different teams were able to learn from each other and celebrate their successes.

Getting Started

... some important considerations

If you are considering implementing the Healthy Schools process in your school, here are some things to consider:

1. Check to see if your area has a Healthy Schools Co-ordinator. You can obtain this information by calling your school district office.
2. If your area does not have a local Healthy Schools Co-ordinator, you may want to connect with some key people that have been instrumental in promoting Healthy Schools.
 - public health nurses
 - school staff, such as teachers, counsellors, administrators
 - parents
 - students
3. In deciding whether you want to work with the Healthy Schools process, determine first if there is **interest** and **commitment** within your school.
4. For the process to work, an investment of time and energy is required. It is important to be familiar with any major changes or events that may be taking place in your school, such as accreditation, changing from linear to semestered systems, etc.
5. Make sure that everyone understands the broad definition of health and is familiar with the Healthy Schools philosophy. A healthy school encompasses everything from physical and mental well-being to environmental practices and a positive school spirit.
6. Remember that it is the process of empowering students that is important. Healthy Schools is not a prescriptive, adult-driven process, but rather it is one in which students are enabled to make decisions in collaboration with other school members.
7. The Healthy Schools process is flexible and can be adapted to meet the unique needs of your school. You may decide to introduce the process in the classroom level, or you may want to effect change more widely by involving a broad spectrum of student interests.
8. Regardless of how you proceed, begin with what seems manageable, and where resources are most readily available. It is fine to start small and expand later.
9. If your intent is to work more broadly with the entire school, consider establishing a planning committee. You may choose to begin afresh by starting a new Healthy Schools committee, or you may choose to connect with already existing groups, such as
 - student councils
 - peer counsellors or peer mediators
 - leadership groups
 - parent advisory groups
10. In establishing your committee, aim for diversity. Include students, school staff, school nurses, prevention workers, and parents, wherever possible. Initially, it is important to have an adult involved who can provide guidance and who has good rapport with students and other school members. Most importantly, this person should act as an advocate for students in participating in the Healthy Schools process.
11. Maintain ongoing communication. It is important to keep the key players within your school informed of all your activities. Encourage them to participate. You may want to promote what you are doing in the broader community.
12. Keep the process open and inclusive, so that new people can be brought on board at any time. The more people involved, the stronger the process will be.

*Remember that lasting change
requires time and patience*

Step One: Creating A Shared Vision of a Healthy School

The goal for this step is to have students and other members of the school community come together to create a shared vision of a healthy school. Developing a shared vision is important because it provides a focus or ideal that you can strive toward. It also reflects the values and beliefs that are important to your school.

To begin creating a vision, ask people to brainstorm ideas on what would make an ideal school.

Brainstorming could include:

- leading participants through a "back to the future" daydream in which they get a mental image of a school as they would like it to be in five or ten years.
- imagining yourself as a bird hovering above your school as the "ideal place to be". You are observing sights and scenes. How does your school look? feel? and sound? What are people doing? How are they interacting?
- an informal discussion in which there is a freewheeling exchange of ideas in which "anything goes".

Guidelines for Brainstorming

- Record all ideas.
- Go for quantity. Brainstorming is contagious and chain reactions can offer some innovative ideas.
- Do not discuss or evaluate ideas.
- Encourage creativity and free expression.

If the brainstorming seems to be focusing on one aspect of school life, encourage people to look at other areas (e.g. school spirit, instruction, leadership, rewards, activities, relationships, communication, the physical environment).

Once you have generated many ideas on what makes a Healthy School, you can then cluster or group these ideas together according to theme or similarity. Next, develop a statement in one or two sentences that includes the main themes or ideas that you have identified.

The Healthy Schools Committee at Frances Kelsey Secondary School in Mill Bay organized a visioning evening led by students. They came up with the following statement for their school:

"A well rounded environment where everyone feels socially safe, welcome, accepted and respected - with open communication, which encourages confidence in all, producing a life-long vision of hope."

Involving Different Age Groups in Creating a Vision

Primary Level: You may want to handle Step One as a classroom project. Since younger students sometimes have a limited understanding of the term "health", you may want to use other words such as:

- Describe a perfect or ideal school.
- How do you feel in such a school?
- Draw your perfect school.

Intermediate and Graduate Level: Older students usually have the maturity to discuss their ideas of an "ideal" or "perfect" school. This can be done in individual classrooms or with a representative group of students. Many schools have sponsored student forums or retreats and found these to be beneficial.

Important Developmental Questions In Step One

Before moving to Step Two, ask yourselves:

- Are students involved?
- Have we included many different members from within our school community?
- Are there others that need to be included?
- Have we set up an environment that encourages open and honest communication?
- Do we have general agreement for this vision?

*Take the time to develop a shared vision;
it will provide a guide for where you want to go in the future.*

Step Two: Selecting Priority Health Issues

The goal for Step Two involves taking all the good ideas that you developed in Step One and exploring them so that you can choose which ideas you will work on first. There is a tendency to move forward quickly at this stage and to jump into "solving the problem" without fully understanding what the needs are first. It is important to reflect on your choices before selecting priorities.

One way to begin is to refer back to your vision statement and spend some time looking at:

- what do we have in place in our school that supports our vision?
- what are the barriers and challenges that prevent us from achieving our vision?

Now you can concentrate on what areas you want to work on to reach your vision. You may again want to brainstorm the health areas you want to work on.

As with creating a vision, you may find that you have a lot of similar ideas that can be grouped together by theme. You then need to select a theme or health area to work on first. This can be done through a ballot, a show of hands or placing colored dots next to items you want to work on first. You have now established your priority health area.

Alexander Elementary School in Duncan organized a one-half day retreat for their 200 intermediate students. They met in their school gymnasium and broke into 14 small groups, with parents, school nurses and teachers acting as facilitators.

The school came up with a shared vision and identified two priority areas for further action—fitness and the environment.

Priorities can also be identified through a survey. For example, students at Burnaby South Secondary created a survey for their entire school of over 1000 students. Students were asked to pretend they were an androgynous person named Chris and to respond to a number of health issues that Chris might face each day.

The results were then used to determine the school's priority health issues.

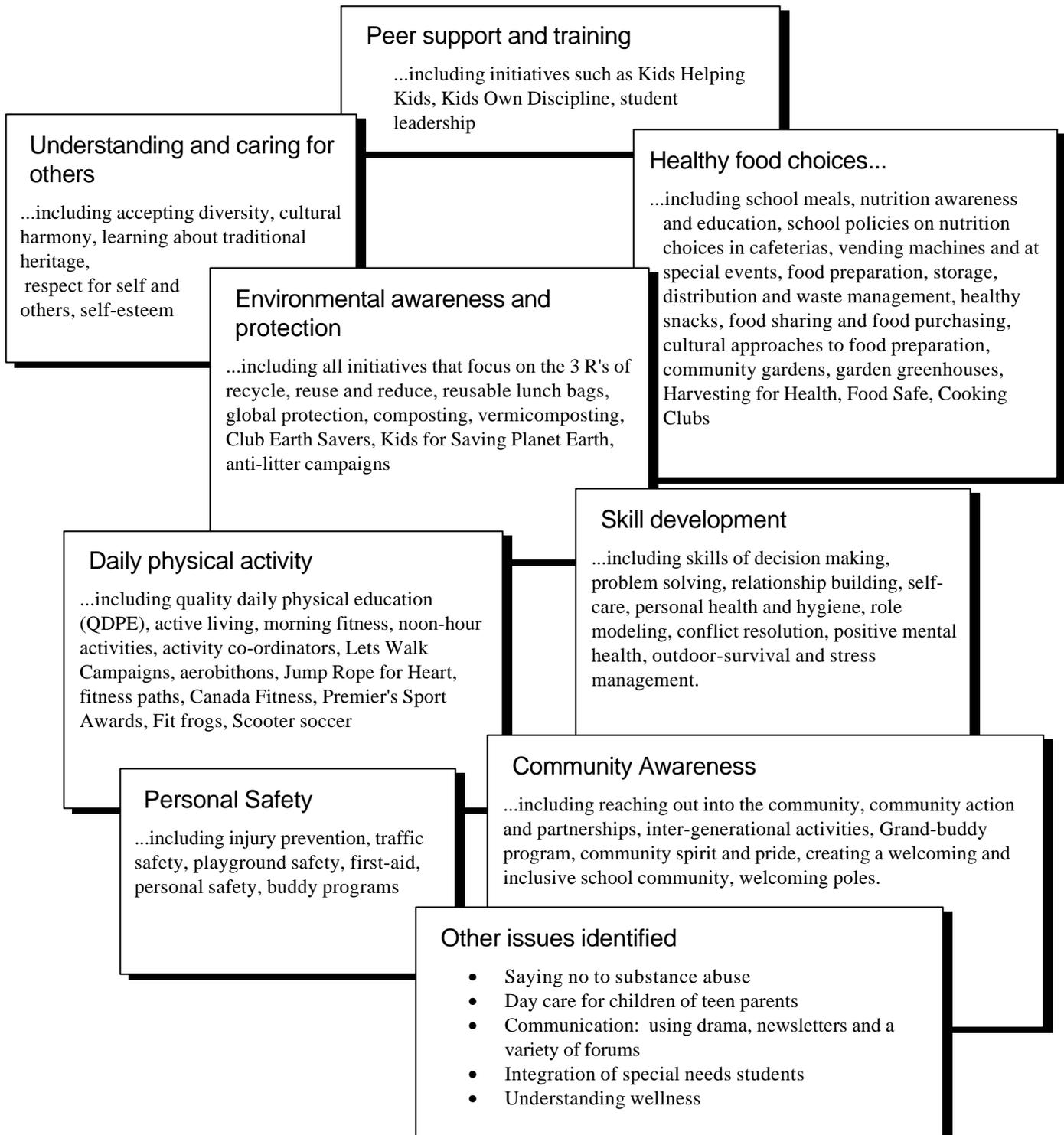
Some Hints in Selecting Issues

- Separate your ideas into short and long term plans.
- Begin with the short-term plans first.
- Start slow and start small.
- Tackle issues that can be realized and "hands-on".
- Start where you are most likely to succeed. Success helps to build credibility and gives an immediate sense of achievement.

Beginning small is the key to success.

Uncovering the Issues

In working with schools across British Columbia, the provincial Healthy Schools initiative has been able to help school communities identify and address a wide variety of issues. The issues that schools and students identify tend to revolve around some common themes. Here is a list of some of those themes:



Step Three: Developing a Plan

Take the priority issue or issues that have been identified from Step Two and develop a workable plan of action to achieve the desired changes.

For example, if environmental practices emerge as a priority concern, your school might develop a plan that includes a tour to your local recycling centre. Another option would be to set up a paper recycling system in each classroom.

This is an important time to discuss ideas and their potential for success and to look at possible obstacles. When planning, it is useful to think SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time-limited):

- Specific:** Is our plan small and concrete?
- Measurable:** How will we know if we have achieved what we set out to achieve?
- Attainable:** Do we have the time and resources to make the changes we want?
- Realistic:** Is this plan something that truly can be accomplished?
- Time-limited:** Does our plan have a beginning and an end?

Bear Lake Elementary School in Prince George involved students, teachers, support staff and their Parent Advisory Council in coming up with a vision for their school. Friendship and respect were the two top priorities. Many action plans were developed in each of these two areas. A few of these include cross grade buddy systems, organizing winter hobbies and crafts afternoons, developing a newsletter and a student of the week bulletin recognition, creating a school logo and motto.

Have you developed a smart plan of action?

Step Four: Putting the Plan into Action

Step Four is the time in which to launch your project and put your plan into action. In Steps One, Two and Three you laid some important groundwork. You sought commitment, gathered information, and did some careful planning. Now you can put all that creativity and effort to work.

As you move into action, keep your vision and goals in mind. In launching your project, look at different ways of spreading the word about what you are doing both within your school and in the community. Some schools have used school or community newspapers to promote their work. Others have made use of radio or television. Don't overlook obvious contacts within the school such as Student Councils, Parent Advisory Councils, and staff meetings.

Sharing stories can be an important way of publicizing your project and its activities. In sharing stories, let people know who was involved at various stages, how things went, what you would change if you were to do it again, and what your plans are for the future.

In launching your project be sure to monitor progress along the way. Don't be surprised if things don't unfold as you expected.

Students at Queen Alexandra Elementary in Vancouver initially decided on bike racks as a priority health need. But the school is located on a very busy street. Because of the hazards of riding bikes, they decided to refocus their efforts on a different priority need.

This example shows the importance of being flexible and open to change. The process of working together is as important as the actual health project you undertake.

Building partnerships is another important part of the Healthy Schools process. Partnerships can be among different members within a school (e.g. students, parents, teachers, school nurse) or can be with the broader community.

Dog Creek Elementary School in the Cariboo has worked on their Healthy Schools project for several years. The project helped the school and the community to work together as a team. The project began with the construction of a greenhouse and later expanded into composting and gardening. As a result of community involvement and increased knowledge of what is required to grow plants successfully in a greenhouse, many parents and students built their own greenhouses at home.

*Continue to inform others
and promote what you are doing*

Step Five: Evaluating, Planning for the Future and Celebrating

Evaluation is an important part of any project, as it allows you to assess your activities along the way and to make plans for the future. At the end of your project, it is important to spend some time answering the following questions:

Looking at Your Healthy Schools Process

In carrying out Healthy Schools, what impact did the five step process have on

1. those students who were involved in planning and getting your project started?

2. students who generally participated in your Healthy School activities?

3. your school as a whole?

Working Together

In looking at the various people who participated in your Healthy Schools process, how did your school do in terms of...

1. involving many different students?

2. involving other members from your school? (e.g. parents, school nurses, teachers, administrators, counsellors, etc.)

3. involving community resources?

Overall Impact

If you were to review the overall impact that the Healthy School process had on your school...

1. what worked particularly well? Why?

2. what did not work? Why?

3. what would you do differently?

Outcomes

Were there any unexpected surprises as a result of being involved with the Healthy Schools process...

1. at school?

2. at home?

3. in the community?

Brief Description of Your Project

In a few sentences, describe your Healthy Schools project. Discuss how the process was carried out, who was involved, and what plans your school is working on. This information can be used for your school or community newspaper, or your local office of the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

Plan for the Future

Once you have evaluated your project, you can plan what to do next. Sustainability is an important part of future planning. Spend some time looking at ways of ensuring that the project and overall Healthy Schools process continues. Look at ways of expanding to include new people.

Celebrate Your Efforts

Often not enough time is taken to celebrate successes. This may be a time to hold a celebration get-together for people who were actively involved in your Healthy Schools process. You may want to acknowledge the special contributions that people made through the giving of awards (serious to silly).

Celebrating at Dog Creek Elementary School

Every September, Dog Creek Elementary School plans a healthy lunch in celebration of its garden and greenhouse projects. The celebration focuses on traditional foods and preparation methods. All students, parents and teachers are involved in planning and cooking the lunch. Special guests are invited and take part in this old-fashioned and generous hospitality. Initially, this event began as a community lunch. Now it is a way for all participants to focus on their accomplishments.

*Celebrating your accomplishments
gives energy to your future*

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