

# Partnership Initiatives

2018-2019

Summary Report of Partnership Initiatives between the  
Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit, School Boards and  
Schools in Simcoe Muskoka

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DISTRICT HEALTH UNIT

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## INTRODUCTION

Student health and well-being are at the core of the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU)'s work in promoting school health. The vision of our School Health program is to promote optimal health, developmental potential and learning among school aged children and youth in Simcoe County and the District of Muskoka. We engage in ongoing partnership and collaboration with local school boards and schools to assist in achieving this vision.

Formal partnership agreements have been established between the SMDHU and two local school boards, demonstrating our mutual commitment to work collaboratively in support of healthy school environments that foster student well-being and academic success. The SMDHU also provides local support to schools from an additional five school boards.

During the 2018-2019 school year, the School Health program was comprised of:

- two public health nurse-liaisons who work in close partnership with school board senior administration and staff as well as health unit staff to meet legislated requirements, streamline communications, and foster collaboration between the health unit and school boards
- one public health dietitian to support nutrition-related initiatives in schools
- one public health nutritionist who provides best practice evidence and expertise on various nutrition topics
- six public health nurses (PHNs), assigned geographically to work with school communities in planning and implementing school health programs and initiatives; and a program assistant.

The team operates under the direction of the School Health Program Manager, within the Community and Family Health Department of the SMDHU.

This report provides a brief summary of the ongoing collaboration and partnership between the SMDHU and local school boards/schools during the 2018-2019 school year. The SMDHU acknowledges the ongoing commitment demonstrated by two school boards through the provision of dedicated desk space and technological resources for the public health nurse (PHN) liaisons.

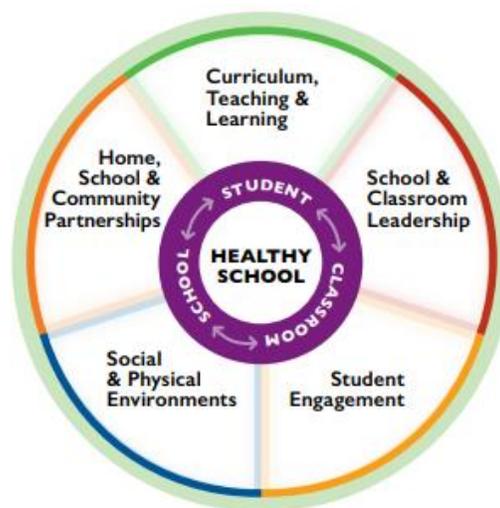


## SCHOOL HEALTH – GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The [Ontario Public Health Standards \(OPHS\)](#) 2018, requires all boards of health to develop and implement public health interventions using a comprehensive health promotion approach to improve the health of school-aged children and youth. A variety of protocols and guidelines have also been released to accompany the standards and include a School Health Guideline (2018), and a Mental Health Promotion Guideline (2018). The School Health Guideline directs public health units to:

- Collect and analyze relevant data to monitor trends, priorities and inequities related to the health of school aged children and youth.
- Provide population health information relevant to the school population to school boards to help identify public health needs.
- Develop and implement a program of public health interventions using a comprehensive approach.
- Offer support to school boards and schools to assist with the implementation of health-related curricula and health needs.

In addition to meeting the provincial requirements set out in the OPHS, the SMDHU's approach to promoting and supporting school health is guided by evidence-based practices in health promotion and comprehensive school health. Health unit staff utilize the Ministry of Education's [Foundations for a Healthy School](#) framework (2015) as a guide for supporting schools to address a variety of priority public health topics. Health unit staff apply a health equity lens, which takes into consideration the social determinants of health, in an effort to tailor programs and services in response to local community needs.



## **DATA COLLECTION AND ASSESSMENT**

The School Health team monitors trends in local, provincial and national data to identify key trends, priorities and inequities in the health and well-being of school-aged children and youth across Simcoe and Muskoka. During the 2018-2019 school year we engaged in, or supported the following data collection and assessment strategies:

### ***Climate Survey Data***

School boards engage in the collection of climate survey data every two years. This data can be used to support planning at the school level to address identified issues. The School Health program partnered with one school board to have School Health needs assessment questions added to their school climate survey and a data sharing agreement is in place related to this. They also supported another school board in the development of survey questions.

### ***Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey Oversampling***

The [Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey \(OSDUHS\)](#) is the longest-running Canadian survey that shows trends in student substance use and mental and physical health. It is administered every other year by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.

During the 2018-2019 school year, the SMDHU partnered with the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) by purchasing an oversampling of an additional 1,000 students attending school in the Simcoe Muskoka area. This additional data will produce reliable local estimates of health and risk behaviours. This will enable the health unit to make comparisons between the health status of local youth, Ontario averages, and Simcoe Muskoka data from 2015. The results may also be used to inform adaptations to existing services and/or the creation of new programming for school aged children and youth.

### ***University of Waterloo COMPASS Study***

The COMPASS study is a nine-year study (started in 2012-2013) about youth health behaviours funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) and Health Canada. It is being conducted and lead by researchers at the University of Waterloo. Students from SMCD SB secondary schools, in Grades 9-12 are involved in the study. Each school receives a detailed feedback report yearly, which includes evidence-based recommendations for health policy and program improvement. SMDHU PHNs are engaged as key stakeholders and provide support and resources to schools to help them translate these recommendations into action.

In the spring of 2019, Registered Dietitians at SMDHU worked collaboratively with researchers and other nutrition experts to revise the healthy eating components of the UW Compass research study. As a result, the healthy eating component of the COMPASS student questionnaire has been updated to align with Health Canada's new dietary guidance documents and the 2019 Canada's Food Guide.

## COMPREHENSIVE PUBLIC HEALTH INTERVENTIONS TO ADDRESS HEALTH NEEDS OF SCHOOLS

### *School Health*

- **Healthy Schools** support the well-being of students, staff and school communities. School Health public health nurses work in collaboration with school administrators to assess, create, implement and evaluate comprehensive health and wellness initiatives.
- **Outreach visits** to administrators were offered at a local school level by School Health PHNs. These visits provided an opportunity to assess school-specific strengths, needs and issues related to health and well-being. During these visits a range of topics of public health significance are discussed. Examples include: mental health, physical activity, healthy eating, injury prevention, and tobacco/substance use, among others. The school nurse works collaboratively with school staff to address identified issues.
- **Healthy Schools Grants** were offered to elementary and secondary schools during the 2018-2019 school year to support addressing student mental health and well-being. Grant approval was contingent upon the school developing a comprehensive plan for addressing student health and well-being. Funding in the amount of \$300-\$500 was granted to 41 schools across three school boards.

Over half of the schools who applied for a grant identified mental health as their priority topic, with healthy eating and physical activity being the next most common. Other identified health topics included growth and development, substance use, cultural diversity, and personal safety and injury prevention. Schools indicated that they had engaged school staff, school administration, parents, students, the health unit and to a lesser extent community partners in their initiatives. This aligns with a multi-stakeholder, comprehensive approach. The majority of schools also indicated that they had considered equity and inclusion principles in the planning of their activities for students.

- **OPHEA Healthy Schools Certification** recognizes and celebrates school communities for promoting and enhancing the health and well-being of students, school staff, and the broader community. School PHNs play an active role in supporting school communities in adopting the Healthy Schools approach and receiving certification. During the 2018-2019 school year, 19 Simcoe Muskoka Schools achieved [Ophea Healthy Schools Certification](#).
- **Community Partners with Schools (COMPASS) - Simcoe County** is an initiative of the Child Youth and Family Services Coalition of Simcoe County. Eight COMPASS teams exist across Simcoe County, linking schools with local providers of school

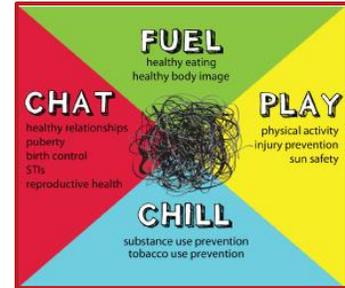
programs and services. School Health PHNs attend these meetings to support comprehensive school health and link schools to health unit services and programs.

### ***Mental Health Promotion***

School nurses promote and support the following programs/initiatives:

- **Kids Have Stress Tool/Stress Lessons** developed by the Psychology Foundation of Canada to help educators understand childhood stress and provide children and youth with tools to deal with stress in a healthy and effective way. There are programs available from preschools to Grade 12. In June 2019, SMDHU partnered with the SCDSB to provide a full-day train-the-trainer session on the program. Attendees at the training included over 20 school and school board staff and 12 PHNs from SMDHU. Staff will use this knowledge to support program implementation at schools across Simcoe Muskoka, in partnership with local boards, beginning in September 2019.

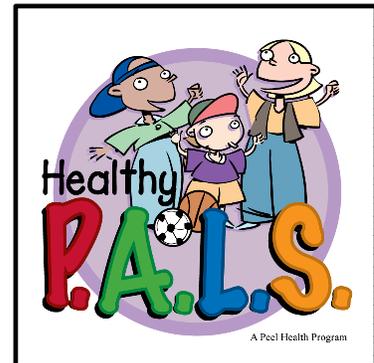
- **Can You Feel It?**, is a two part stress workshop for students in Grade 5 and up, that is available through the health unit for teachers to download and deliver in their classroom. The Can You Feel It? lessons build students' knowledge about stress, and support them in developing resiliency and healthy coping skills. School Health PHNs offered training to educators, and co-facilitated the program in classrooms by request to support capacity building in school staff.



- **Roots of Empathy** is an evidence-based program that has been shown to decrease bullying and aggression while raising social emotional competence and empathy among children. In 2018-2019, two School Health PHNs delivered the Roots of Empathy program, in one classroom each. A PHN-Liaison from the health unit partnered with an Itinerant Resource Teacher-Equity and Inclusion at the SCDSB to coordinate instructor training and local programming.



- **Healthy Playground Activity Leaders in Schools (Healthy P.A.L.S.)** is an elementary school program intended to develop student leadership skills and developmental assets, increase physical activity, and decrease bullying and playground incidents by engaging students in fun and safe activities during recess. The School Health PHNs provided teacher-supervisor training, supported student leader training, and provided ongoing implementation supports to interested schools, by request.



The Healthy P.A.L.S. program has been running successfully in many elementary schools across Simcoe Muskoka for several years.

### ***Healthy Eating Behaviours and Food Safety***

School Health dietitians and public health nurses promote and support the following programs/initiatives:

- **You're the Chef** is a best practice program designed to help students (aged 10 and older) develop the skills and confidence needed to prepare healthy and tasty recipes, with an emphasis on vegetables and fruit. In 2018-2019, health unit staff recruited and trained 50 volunteer leaders (including school staff, parents/guardians, and student leaders) from 19 schools across Simcoe Muskoka. These trained leaders facilitated the You're the Chef program at their school over a four to six week period. Students who participated learned basic cooking and safe food handling skills while learning to make healthy eating choices. Leaders reported that the students enjoyed trying new foods and cooking and had fun.



- **Canada's Food Guide implementation support** for schools boards was provided with the release of Health Canada's refreshed [Canada's Food Guide](#) in January 2019. Registered Dietitians shared communications with the school boards in February providing an overview of some of the key tools and resources and offered support and consultation services. SMDHU RDs collaborated with SCDSB secondary school teachers to develop curriculum supports for the food and nutrition programs at SCDSB.

- **School Food and Beverage Policy compliance** at local school boards and schools is supported by public health dietitians and public health inspectors, by request. In 2018-2019, the health unit reviewed applications from 36 food premises wanting to sell food in schools. Public health dietitians conducted nutritional assessments and offered supports and resources to the vendors as needed.



- **Student Nutrition Programs** are offered in the majority of elementary and secondary schools across Simcoe Muskoka. These programs provide access to nutritious breakfasts, snacks and/or lunches for students in need. Public health dietitians from the health unit provided regional support for these programs through participation on Simcoe County's Eat Well to Excel committee and the Muskoka Student Nutrition Program Committee. They also provided consultations to individual schools, as needed, to support local programming. Ontario Food Premises Regulation changes took effect July 2018, and regular communication and consultation occurred with school board partners

during this time to ensure board and individual school level compliance with the new regulations. The "[Menu for Serving up Healthy and Safe Food at School](#)" resource was updated to reflect regulation changes and to support schools with compliance.

- **Food safety inspections** were conducted in elementary and secondary schools throughout the 2018-2019 school year to assess compliance with the Ontario Food Premises Regulation. Public health dietitians collaborated with public health inspectors, by attending Student Nutrition Program inspections (where capacity permitted). The dietitians provided advice on healthy food options, shared health unit resources, and reminded schools of the health unit supports available to assist with healthy eating initiatives. Representatives from the SMDHU met with school board officials, as needed, to address concerns resulting from local food safety inspections.
- **Safe drinking water** in schools is achieved through an approach that includes strong legislation and health-based standards, on-going monitoring and regular testing of drinking water systems. In the 2018-2019 school year, the health unit responded to adverse water quality incidents reported by schools and child-care centres from across the Simcoe Muskoka region. The large majority of these adverse calls were related to adverse lead sampling results.

The health unit also provided communication and safety recommendations to school boards as the result of a major water main break in the City of Barrie. As part of our incident management process, we engaged in discussions with board partners after the event to identify successes and challenges with the event response. This valuable feedback will be used to improve and strengthen our response to significant occurrences moving forward.

### ***Healthy Growth and Development and Healthy Sexuality***

- **Triple P – Positive Parenting Program** is an evidence-based program that aims to



increase knowledge, skills, and confidence of parents and reduce the prevalence of mental health, emotional, and behavioural problems in children and adolescents. Public health nurses delivered Triple P at interested schools, and provided school staff orientation to Triple P by request. A variety of promotional strategies were used to raise awareness about

Triple P within local school communities, and to encourage participation in the sessions offered.

- Health Connection** is the health unit's free confidential health information and advice service. Approximately 63 publicly funded elementary and secondary schools contacted Health Connection during the 2018-2019 school year to access health information and resources on a range of public health topics, including: infectious diseases/infection prevention and control, immunization, healthy eating, sexual health, tobacco prevention and enforcement, cannabis prevention, oral health, and the determinants of health.
- Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder** (PDF1.16MB) lesson plan was updated and posted on SMDHU website in November 2018. This lesson plan covers components of the Social Sciences and Humanities and Health and Physical Education secondary curriculum. Multiple student activities have been developed to provide educators the flexibility to choose the activities that will best meet the needs of the students and educator. This resource was shared with school board partners via email for dissemination to educators.
- Sexual health clinics** were offered monthly from September to January, and weekly from February to June in the TLDSB's three Muskoka area secondary schools. Through the weekly clinics starting in February, 129 students accessed one-on-one counselling, sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing, birth control and other support related to their sexual health. In addition, 116 individual student visits to the clinic occurred for condom pick up.



### **Substance Use Prevention and Harm Reduction**

- Cannabis Education** was identified as a priority for school boards with the legalization in October of 2018. PHNs from the health unit's Substance Use and Injury Prevention program supported school board partners in identifying appropriate resources and educational materials for educators, students and families, and attended National Addiction Awareness Week events to engage students in discussion.
- R.A.C.E. (Respect, Action, Courage and Excellence) Against Drugs** is an interactive program for Grade 5 students that teaches about healthy decision-making and personal safety with regards to drug and alcohol. The program was delivered in Muskoka, Midland, Collingwood and South Simcoe by the health unit in collaboration with local community partners (including police and community mental health organizations). 3253 students from 87 schools participated in this program during the 2018-2019 school year.



- **Truth and Consequences** is an interactive drug and alcohol awareness program designed for Grades 7 and up. The program can be downloaded as a seven part lesson plan series and delivered by teachers in their classroom, or can be delivered in secondary schools as a conference in partnership with the health unit and community organizations.



An event was held at St. Thomas Aquinas in April 2019, actively engaging 140, Grade 9 students.

- **Smoking Awareness and Enforcement** programming was provided by Tobacco



Enforcement Officers (TEOs) and PHNs from the Smoke-Free program to support schools in meeting the requirements of the *Smoke Free Ontario Act*. During the 2018-2019 school year, compliance and education inspections were completed at all secondary school sites within the health unit catchment, including adult learning and alternative school sites. In response to ongoing requests for support from secondary school administrators related to smoking on school property, TEOs handed out 74 warnings for e-cigarette use and 12 warnings for cigarette smoking. Additionally, 14 charges for e-cigarette use and five charges for cigarette smoking were laid.

- **Vaping** continues to be an issue of concern for school boards, schools and the health unit. In response to requests, the health unit delivered 26 vaping presentations to elementary and secondary schools during the 2018-2019 school year. Education was provided to school staff, students and parents. Interactive vaping prevention and education displays were provided at nine secondary schools, where students were able to ask questions and engage in activities to learn more about the negative health effects of vaping.

### ***Injury Prevention***

Health unit staff promoted several events aimed at keeping our school communities safe and reducing the incidence of predictable and preventable injuries. Activities included sharing of key messages with the support of our school board partners through newsletter inserts/e-blasts, and through the health unit's social media, as well as facilitation of school based events. Examples include:

- **National Teen Driver Safety Week** occurred in October 2018, and focused on drugged, distracted, impaired and aggressive driving (including speeding).
- **[Parachute Canada - Safe Kids Week](#)** occurred during the first week of June. In 2019, the theme selected was Fall Proof Your Home.

## *Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour*

- **School Travel Planning** is a priority for SMDHU and our school board and community partners. The health unit has received funding of \$110,600 from the Ontario Active School Travel Fund to implement an Active School Travel Project (AST) from May 2019 to June 2020. The project application was supported by three school boards. The funding is being made available from the Ministry of Education and is administered through Green Communities Canada.

The overarching objective of the project is to increase physical activity opportunities for students by supporting and expanding active school travel programs for elementary age students (Grades K-8). We want more students to walk, cycle, scoot and skateboard for their daily school journeys. PHNs are currently in the process of engaging school administrators from across Simcoe Muskoka to determine their level of interest in participating in the travel planning process at their school. This work will continue through June 2020.

## *Infectious Disease Prevention*

- **Disclosure** of public health-related inspections on the SMDHU Inspection Connection website is currently being enhanced and will include inspections of hair and aesthetic programs as well as cafeterias which are considered personal service settings (PSS). Changes related to the PSS disclosures were communicated to schools boards in September 2018, and SMDHU staff provided ongoing support with compliance.
- **Consultations related to reportable illnesses** were provided by staff from the SMDHU's Infectious Disease program in response to 46 inquiries received from school administrators, school board staff, parents and teachers across Simcoe Muskoka.
- **Outbreak investigations** were conducted by the SMDHU, as required, in response to reports of increases in baseline rates of illness within schools. During investigations, health unit staff communicated regularly with school administrators in order to monitor progression of illness among students and staff, and to provide best practice recommendations related to cleaning and disinfection processes.
- **Inspections were conducted at schools offering personal services** such as hairstyling and aesthetics or cosmetology services. During inspections, public health inspectors assessed for compliance with appropriate infection prevention and control procedures.
- **Infection prevention and control awareness training** was provided by the SMDHU for students enrolled in a Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) Health and Wellness Program or Health Care Technology Course at four secondary schools across Simcoe Muskoka. Certificates of completion were awarded to approximately 50 students.

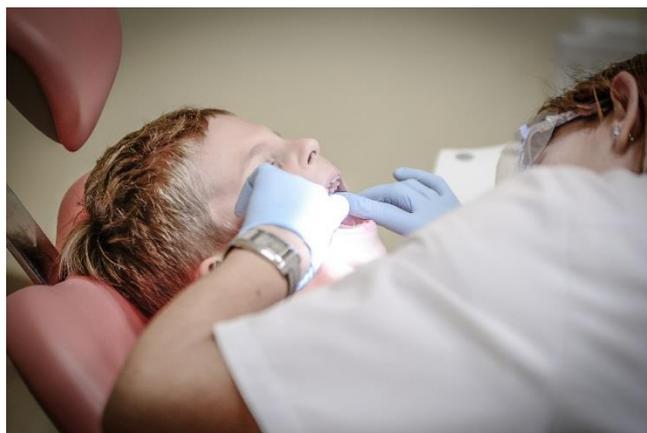
- **Inspections of before/after school programs**, licensed as child care providers under the Ministry of Education, were also conducted by the SMDHU. Recommendations were provided related to infection prevention and control (including appropriate cleaning and disinfecting products) for classrooms or school spaces that are shared with child-care programs.

### **Student and Staff Wellness**

- **Supporting staff wellness** has been identified by local school boards as an important component of promoting overall school health. School boards have demonstrated a strong commitment to integrating comprehensive workplace wellness best-practices into their approach. SMDHU staff attended a staff wellness event at SCDSB and provided information and resources on a variety of health topics.
- **Health-related policies and procedures** were reviewed by local school boards, in consultation with the SMDHU. Health unit staff provided support to the school boards in revising their health-related policies and procedures, as required, to reflect current evidence and best-practice recommendations.

### **Oral Health**

- **Dental screening services** were provided in 160 elementary schools across Simcoe Muskoka, in accordance with the Ontario Public Health Standards – Oral Health Assessment and Surveillance Protocol. A total of 23616 students participated in the elementary dental screening program. This included students from junior and senior kindergarten, Grades 2 and 7; in some schools, where past SMDHU oral health assessment data reflected an increased need for service, Grade 4 students were also screened. Screening was also provided at the request of parents. In addition, dental screening services were provided in 13 secondary schools.



1739 urgent dental concerns requiring additional follow up and case management were identified during screening. All students with identified dental care needs received follow up support from the health unit to ensure care through their family dental provider or publicly funded programs such as [Healthy Smiles Ontario \(HSO\)](#).

- **Preventive services** (such as topical fluoride, pit and fissure sealants, and cleaning) were provided to students at 128 elementary schools, with parental consent.

## ***Vision Screening***

- The Ontario Public Health Standards requires Ontario public health units to ensure that senior kindergarten (SK) children have access to vision screening services within their schools. This involves a series of three, simple, non-invasive screening tests screen children for issues with visual acuity, strabismus and amblyopia. In spring 2019, the health unit piloted a Vision Screening program at select schools across the region. In total, 1781 SK students were screened across 60 schools, and 593 were referred for further testing for potential vision issues.
- Complete reports on the pilot project have been provided to each school board. Implementation for the 2019-2020 school year will begin in September 2019, and will include all SK students in Simcoe Muskoka.

## ***Immunization***

- In the 2018-2019 school year, the SMDHU provided immunization clinics in elementary schools for students in Grade 7. Students received the Hepatitis B, Human Papillomavirus (HPV) 9, and Meningococcal Conjugate ACYW vaccines. The first dose of each vaccine was provided in the fall; a second dose of the Hepatitis B and HPV vaccines were provided in the spring. In the 2018-2019 school year a total of 20, 943 Grade 7 students were immunized.
- The health unit is required to collect, assess and maintain immunization records for each student attending school in accordance with the Immunization of School Pupils Act (2014). Suspension orders were issued by the Medical Officer of Health for 3735 elementary and secondary students whose records remained incomplete.

## **MOVING AHEAD TO 2019-2020**

The strategic partnerships between the school boards and SMDHU play a critical role in helping us achieve our mission of preventing disease and injury, and protecting the health of residents in Simcoe County and the District of Muskoka. SMDHU will continue to focus on enhancing and strengthening these partnerships as we prepare for the Ontario government's modernization of public health. Initial changes to public health unit boundaries are proposed to take place in the Spring of 2020. As we navigate these changes, SMDHU is committed to continued delivery of existing school programs and services through the entire school year.

## **CONCLUSION**

This report summarized the collaborative efforts of the health unit and local school boards during the 2018-2019 school year. The initiatives described provide examples of the partnership and mutual commitment between our organizations to support student health and well-being. To access additional information about any of the initiatives described in this report, please consult the SMDHU website at [www.simcoemuskokahealth.org](http://www.simcoemuskokahealth.org) or contact the School Health Program Manager, Cathy Thomson at 705-721-7520, ext. 7469, or [cathy.thomson@smdhu.org](mailto:cathy.thomson@smdhu.org).



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