

Partnership Initiatives 2015-2016



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



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INTRODUCTION

Each year, the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) partners with local school boards and schools in efforts to develop and maintain healthier schools with the goal of to promoting optimal health, developmental potential and learning of school aged children and youth in Simcoe Muskoka.

This report contains a brief summary of health-related initiatives undertaken as a result of the ongoing collaboration and partnership between the SMDHU and local school boards/schools during the 2015-2016 school year.

NAVIGATING THE REPORT

This report is organized in accordance with the six curriculum-linked, health-related topics listed in the Ontario Ministry of Education's [Foundations for a Healthy School Framework](#). A coloured symbol(s) is listed along-side each activity:



Curriculum, Teaching & Learning



School & Physical Environments



School & Classroom Leadership



Home, School & Community Partnerships



Student Engagement

These symbols reflect the area(s) of the Foundations for a Healthy School that have been met through the implementation of each activity and, when used together, support schools in taking an integrated approach to addressing a range of health-related topics.

THE SMDHU HEALTHY SCHOOLS PROGRAM

The SMDHU Healthy Schools program helps to meet Ontario Public Health Standards across all program areas within the health unit. This is accomplished through supporting school health best practices such as healthy schools, comprehensive school health, and more.



At full complement, the [Healthy Schools program](#) at the SMDHU consists of:

- **2 School Board Liaison Public Health Nurses (PHNs)** who partner with school board senior administration to meet legislated requirements, streamline communications, and address common goals between the health unit and school board.
- **6 Healthy Schools PHNs***, assigned geographically (5 in Simcoe County and 1 in Muskoka). They work with school staff**, students, families and community partners using a comprehensive (best practice) approach, to create inclusive and equitable health initiatives that are accessible for the whole school community.
- **1 Registered Dietitian and 1 Public Health Nutritionist** who joined the Healthy Schools program in 2016. They provide best practice evidence, key messages, tools and resources, and expertise to promote healthy eating at school and in the community.

**During 2015-2016 the SMDHU experienced a funding shortfall as a result of a provincial funding freeze for cost-shared programs. This resulted in organizational restructuring, staff reductions and impacted health unit programs. Three temporary vacancies among Healthy Schools PHN positions occurred, impacting the capacity of the Healthy Schools program and service delivery.*

***Schools and school boards experienced labour disruptions throughout the 2015-2016 school year which limited staff capacity to collaborate with external partners on extra-curricular initiatives.*

HEALTHY SCHOOLS IN SIMCOE MUSKOKA

In the fall of 2015, the Healthy Schools PHNs contacted all publicly funded, English, elementary and secondary school administrators to offer an outreach visit with their assigned nurse.

- 86 schools (69 elementary and 17 secondary) accepted and participated in an in-person outreach meeting with their assigned Healthy Schools PHN.
- Healthy Schools PHNs conducted brief drop in visits at an additional 17 schools.

School health-related needs/issues commonly identified by school administrators included:

- feed all four
- growth and development/sexual health
- healthy eating/nutrition
- mental health/positive mental health promotion (including stress/anxiety & loneliness/sadness)
- parenting supports
- physical activity
- positive school climate
- poverty/under-resourced families.

Other health topics discussed included:

- bullying
- community, culture and caring
- drug use
- equity and inclusion
- healthy relationships
- oral health
- outdoor playground enhancement
- promoting grit and resilience
- social environment
- smoking/chewing tobacco
- addressing student behaviour.

Throughout the year, Healthy Schools PHNs supported interested schools with creating action plans to address their identified health issues. They shared evidence-based tools, provided health-related resources, and assisted schools to create linkages with additional health unit or community programs and services.

The PHNs assisted more than 30 schools to apply for community and/or school board funding to support their health-related initiatives. They also partnered with schools to implement a variety of student/school led activities to address health-related goals identified in their school improvement/learning plans.

Ophea's new [Healthy Schools Certification](#) provides an opportunity for schools to receive provincial recognition for their efforts. SMDHU Healthy Schools PHNs offered support to schools who were participating in Ophea's 6-step Healthy Schools Process. Three schools across two school boards achieved a level of Healthy Schools certification in 2016, with varying degrees of support from the SMDHU Healthy Schools program.

In addition to working with schools and school communities to support the well-being of students, the health unit participates on staff wellness committees in two school boards. A PHN from the SMDHU Chronic Disease Prevention – Healthy Lifestyle program supports school boards with creating healthier workplaces for staff. Healthier staff are better able to promote healthy social and physical environments and act as positive role models for students.

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Promoting School Readiness

Ready for Kindergarten events are held in Muskoka each year. Staff from the SMDHU's Oral Health, Vaccine Preventable Disease, Chronic Disease Prevention and Child Health programs participated in these events in 2016. The staff shared important health and parenting information, and were available to answer families' questions as they prepared their young children to enter into the school system.

The SMDHU also contributed to **Muskoka's Ready for Learning Calendar**, providing content related to oral health, vaccines, child injury prevention, healthy eating/lunches and environmental health.

Parenting Supports



The Positive Parenting Program (Triple P) is an evidence-based program that gives parents the skills to learn to work together with their children and teenagers to improve behaviour over time. Several schools across Simcoe Muskoka worked in collaboration with the health unit and other community partners to offer Triple P workshops for families and/or to promote Triple P messaging at schools.

Sexual Health Clinics and Education

The health unit has a longstanding partnership with Muskoka area secondary schools, offering sexual health clinic days staffed by a Sexual Health PHN. In 2015-2016, students were able to access one-on-one counselling, sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing, birth control and other support related to their sexual health through these clinics. The PHN also visited classes to share information regarding sexual health services, how to access clinic time with the nurse and facilitated discussions related to healthy relationships and STI prevention.

To support **Safe Prom initiatives** held at Muskoka area secondary schools, the Sexual Health PHN partnered with other health unit staff to host interactive displays providing information about being safe at parties, including substance use, sexual health services and safer sex.

Across Simcoe Muskoka Sexual Health PHNs also received requests from teachers throughout the school year seeking information to support them in delivering the healthy living strand of the **Health and Physical Education curriculum**. The PHNs provided consultation as needed, offering information and resources to support these teachers.

Immunization Clinics in Schools

The **Elementary School Immunization Program**, was delivered in two rounds of immunization clinics per school during the 2015-2016 school year. During these clinics:

- 12,567 Grade 7 & 8 students received Hepatitis B (2 doses) and Meningococcal Conjugate ACYW (1 dose) vaccines
- 3,712 Grade 8 female students received the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccinations (2 doses).

Due to recent changes in the **Immunization of School Pupils Act (ISPA)**, all students must now provide documentation of vaccination for meningococcal disease. The health unit offered consenting Grade 8 students, who may have chosen not to receive this vaccination in Grade 7 (prior to the new ISPA legislation), the option to receive this vaccine during round two of the elementary immunization school clinics.

Student Immunization Records



The health unit launched a **public awareness campaign** in November 2015 in an effort to reduce the number of student suspensions resulting from incomplete student immunization records.

The campaign materials were made available to support school-based promotion, and additional content (e.g. newsletter inserts, blog posts, e-flyers and print materials) were also provided.

In 2015-2016, the health unit resumed review and surveillance of student immunization records, with a focus on students in Grades 2 and 3, as well as all secondary students. After reviewing the records of these cohorts of students, the health unit mailed a series of immunization questionnaires to inform families of any incomplete records and options for updating the required immunizations. Families were also notified that students could be suspended if records remained incomplete.

Immunization “catch-up” clinics were offered at local health unit offices in the months of December 2015, January, March, April and May 2016 to support families in updating their child’s required immunizations. Catch-up clinics were also provided in three Francophone secondary schools to support students with incomplete immunization records to access the required vaccinations. A total of 98 immunizations were provided, resulting in a reduced number of students eligible for suspension in these schools.

The health unit required school principals to enforce suspension orders for Grade 2 and 3 students in the Trillium Lakelands District School Board Muskoka area elementary schools, and Francophone elementary schools whose immunization records remained incomplete as of February, 2016. 101 elementary students were suspended, and all were back in school with updated immunization records within four days.

HEALTHY EATING

School Food and Beverage Policy

School board compliance with Policy/Program Memorandum (PPM) 150 was supported in 2015-2016 by a partnership with health unit Registered Dietitians (RDs). The RDs reviewed applications from food vendors and offered support and resources to help ensure food offered for sale in schools met policy requirements.

Food Safety in Schools

Public Health Inspectors from the SMDHU Environmental Health department conduct **food inspections** in all schools with hospitality rooms and cafeterias. Inspection results are available online through the health unit's [Inspection Connection](#) website, along with inspection results from other food service providers in Simcoe Muskoka.

In 2016, a new standardized provincial **Food Handler Certification Training** course was launched, replacing the previous "Proton" certification led by local health units. Materials can be accessed through the SMDHU website and used by students in a self-study format or taught through classroom instruction. Public Health Inspectors proctor the exams for consistency and to maintain security of the provincial exams. Students must obtain a 70% or higher to pass. Certification is recognized across the province and is valid for 5 years. Eight high schools across two school boards accessed course material this school year. The health unit proctored ten exams at three schools.

Healthy Eating & Nutrition



Student Nutrition Programs provide nutritious breakfasts, snacks and lunches in schools based on nutrition guidelines outlined by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. A health unit Registered Dietitian participated on the Eat Well to Excel (Simcoe) and Student Nutrition Program (Muskoka) community partnerships steering committees in 2015-2016. The dietitian also consulted with schools, by request, to support understanding and implementation of the program nutrition guidelines.

Collaboration occurred between SMDHU and one local high school for the **Gardens N Greens Program** which included promotion of healthy eating through growing of food in outdoor gardens/indoor greenhouse, food safety work related to procurement of grown food and donations to the food bank and the school, Food Handler Safety certification, and education in hand washing.



Bright Bites is a new provincial nutrition program that breaks down the challenge of improving school nutrition into fun, easy-to-earn badges. The program was created by the Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health, including Registered Dietitians from the SMDHU. Bright

Bites was soft launched in the 2015-2016 school year with a lot of school interest and some participation. Promotion of the program is planned for the 2016-2017 school year across all Simcoe-Muskoka schools.



Dental screening was provided in 158 elementary schools to students from junior and senior kindergarten, Grades 2 and 8 were included in the screening. In some schools, where past SMDHU oral health assessment data reflected an increased need for service, Grade 4 and 6 students were also screened. A total of 22,592 elementary students in Simcoe Muskoka were screened.

Dental screening was also offered in six secondary schools. 102 students from these schools participated in the screening through a voluntary self-referral process.

In Simcoe Muskoka, a total of 23,689 elementary and secondary students participated in school-based dental screening and 2,068 urgent screening results were observed. Students in need of urgent dental treatment at the time of screening 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 \(HSO\)](#).

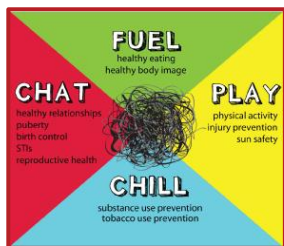
Preventive dental clinics were provided at a total of 81 elementary schools. Topical fluoride, pit and fissure sealants and cleaning were provided to students with parental consent.



To teach students about the importance of oral health, the health unit offered opportunities for students to learn from **Alex the Alligator** (the SMDHU's hand puppet pictured here). Alex comes with storybooks, activities and his very own toothbrush. Elementary students in junior and senior grades had the opportunity to build leadership skills and teach younger students about oral health using Alex, with support from their Healthy Schools PHN.

MENTAL HEALTH

Fostering Resilience in Students

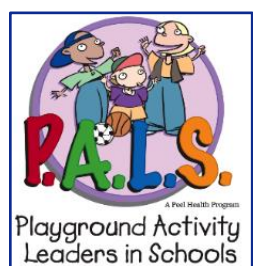


Can You Feel It?, a workshop designed by youth for youth, helps students build the necessary life skills to understand stress and develop healthy strategies for handling the stress they face in their everyday lives. Healthy Schools PHNs delivered workshops in schools and at school board events, by request.

Additionally, school staff and community members from one school board attended training by Healthy Schools PHNs to increase the number of trained practitioners available to offer the workshop. Healthy Schools support was also offered to a social work student at this school board to build her capacity to offer the workshop in both elementary and secondary schools. Healthy Schools PHNs also responded to several requests from schools to run or co-facilitate workshops in the classroom.

40 Developmental Assets® have been identified by the Search Institute® and are acknowledged as building blocks for healthy development that help children and youth to grow up healthy, caring and responsible. In 2015-2016, SMDHU Healthy Schools PHNs worked with interested schools to offer staff development related to developmental assets. For example: one school community brought principals from each elementary and secondary school together with the Healthy Schools PHN to develop a coordinated approach for fostering grit and resilience among students. Staff development and school-based initiatives were undertaken, based on the Developmental Assets framework and there are plans for this work to continue into next school year and beyond.

Playground Leadership



The Playground Activity Leaders in Schools (P.A.L.S.)/Healthy P.A.L.S. program supports schools to build leadership skills and developmental assets among student leaders, aims to increase physical activity opportunities for student participants, and provides opportunity to decrease bullying and playground incidents by engaging students in fun and safe activities during recess. Healthy Schools PHNs supported 17 interested elementary schools with P.A.L.S./Healthy P.A.L.S. training and implementation support.

Roots of Empathy

Roots of Empathy is an evidence-based program that has been shown to decrease levels of bullying and aggression while raising social emotional competence and increasing empathy among children who participate. Two PHNs from the Healthy Schools program delivered the program in one elementary school each. The School Board Liaison PHN to the Simcoe County District School Board (SCDSB) partners with a SCDSB staff person and Roots of Empathy to coordinate instructor training and local programming.

PERSONAL SAFETY AND INJURY PREVENTION

Road/Bike Safety



In collaboration with schools and community partners, health unit staff supported several road/bike safety presentations and events across Simcoe/Muskoka. The “**jello brain**” and “**egg/helmet drop**” were popular demonstrations presented by public health nurses to illustrate how fragile the human head/brain are and the importance of wearing a helmet. Helmet checks and free helmets were also available at some events.

Communicable Disease Prevention



209 consultations were provided to school board staff, school administrators, teachers, students and parents throughout the year related to infectious diseases and/or infection prevention and control. Staff from the health unit's Communicable Disease program provided information and education about:

- reportable diseases and reporting processes, as well as information about non-reportable diseases
- staff illness, including workplace acquired illnesses and prevention
- cleaning and disinfection of surfaces, hand hygiene and immunization.

They also responded to complaints related to infection prevention and control, as required.

The health unit investigated all reported **outbreaks of illness in schools**. Progression of illness among students and staff was monitored through daily consultations with administrators in affected schools. Information and support to assist the schools with managing outbreaks was also provided.

Infection prevention and Control

Student training was provided through the SMDHU for students participating in a Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) Health and Wellness program at 10 secondary schools across Simcoe Muskoka.

The health unit's Infection Prevention and Control Coordinator also collaborated with secondary schools offering Aesthetics Programs using a "train the trainer" model for staff development, to support teachers with understanding and teaching current Ontario-based best practices for infection prevention.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Physical Literacy

Physical Literacy has been integrated into Ontario's new [2015 Health and Physical Education curriculum](#) as a focus for learning. The emphasis on building skills, competence, and confidence within students to support lifelong physical activity habits is crucial to healthy living and is a shared priority between the health unit and school boards. Collaboration and learning opportunities related to physical literacy occurred between one school board and the health unit in 2015-2016 and will continue as this topic becomes further implemented within schools.

School Travel Planning



In follow up to a collaborative project started last school year, PHNs in the Barrie area continue to work with community partners and pilot schools at two school boards on advocating for school travel planning, a comprehensive approach to address active and safe routes to school.

The town of Bradford West Gwillimbury also met with interested community partners, including the health unit and representatives from two school boards, to discuss school travel planning. The health unit will continue to support schools with specific requests related to active transportation.

Outdoor Initiatives in Schools

There is a growing interest among schools in Simcoe Muskoka to create more naturalized school grounds that encourage teaching and learning in the outdoors. In 2015-2016 SMDHU supported one school board with several learning opportunities for teachers and parents to raise awareness and build skills for outdoor learning. PHNs also supported individual school-based initiatives related to gardens, school yard greening and outdoor learning, by request.

Child and Youth Situational Assessment

The health unit continued discussions with school boards about addressing the key findings from the SMDHU's Child and Youth Situational Assessment which was completed in the 2014-2015 school year. Conversations were related to school-based strategies for addressing topics such as physical activity, healthy eating, and healthy weights. Plans are underway to support school boards with considering implementing evidence-based programming related to those topics.

SUBSTANCE USE, ADDICTIONS AND RELATED BEHAVIOURS

Drug and Alcohol Awareness



This year, the health unit's **Truth and Consequences (T&C)** program was adapted and made available online as individual learning centres for use by classroom teachers. The learning centres include speaking notes, background information, student worksheets, curriculum links and rubrics. In addition to the online resources, the health unit worked with school staff and community partners to facilitate a full day T&C conference at six local high schools and one Alternative Learning Schools. More than 895 students participated in these events.



R.A.C.E. (Respect, Action, Courage, and Excellence) Against Drugs events were held in the South Georgian Bay, Orillia and Barrie areas through a collaboration between the health unit, school boards and a number of community partners. Schools across all school boards were invited to attend, resulting in participation from more than 1,200

Grade 5 students. R.A.C.E. events used the sport of auto racing, rotating students through a series of interactive and curriculum-based "pit stops", to provide substance misuse prevention education and build skills to support students in living drug, alcohol and tobacco-free.

Tobacco-Free Schools



As in previous years, **Tobacco Enforcement Officers (TEOs)** from the health unit conducted visits to all secondary schools to assess compliance with the Smoke Free Ontario Act (SFOA) and to support school administration to maintain smoke-free school grounds. In some cases, where capacity existed and schools identified tobacco as a concern, PHNs from the SMDHU Tobacco-Free Living program also visited and worked with schools to address identified needs.

A phased in approach has been used over the past several school years to reach all elementary and secondary schools to share resources and promote compliance with the SFOA. TEOs met with school administration from Francophone and private schools in 2015-2016 to distribute information

packages along with additional school signage, as required; resources were translated for use with Francophone schools. The TEOs were accompanied by PHNs where capacity permitted and schools identified tobacco as an issue. The multi-year SFOA in schools campaign is now complete.

The **Tobacco-Free Living** program also supported a variety of tobacco-related initiatives throughout the year to meet the needs of individual schools. Examples included: smokeless/chew tobacco awareness initiatives, tobacco-free living displays, offering information and supports for students wanting to reduce or quit using tobacco, and more.

Raising Awareness about Smoke-Free Vehicles

By law, any vehicle carrying a child under the age of 16 is to be smoke-free (under the SFOA). In response to complaints and inquiries by parents of school-aged children, the health unit provided schools with sample newsletter inserts which could be used in an effort to raise awareness among parents and others who drop off and pick up students at schools.

Electronic Cigarette Act

The **Electronic Cigarette Act (ECA)** began being phased in on January 1, 2016, and prohibits use of electronic cigarettes anywhere that smoking is prohibited. This Act provides legislation relevant to school board policy and procedures and requires compliance among school administrators, staff, parents and students and community members while on school premises. The Act also bans the sale of e-cigarettes and vaping materials to anyone under 19 years of age. The health unit's Tobacco-Free Living program will continue to support schools to understand and comply with the SFOA and new ECA legislation.

Tobacco Cessation Supports

Stop on the Road is an initiative funded through the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) and implemented in partnership with local health care providers including the health unit. The initiative addresses socio-economic barriers by providing access to cost-free smoking cessation treatment through workshops in local communities. The health unit worked in partnership with one school board in 2016 to share promotional materials with employees to enable interested staff to attend a workshop in their local community.

The **First Week Challenge** is a Canadian Cancer Society initiative that encourages adults to quit smoking for the first seven days of the month for a chance to win \$500. To promote tobacco-free living, the health unit shared information related to this challenge with school boards to support staff wellness initiatives.

HEALTH CONNECTION

SMDHU Health Connection is the health unit's free confidential health information and advice service. Schools, families and students can contact Health Connection to access health information and resources. A telephone interpretation service is available in 170 languages.

In addition to ongoing communication with Healthy Schools nurses, schools in Simcoe County and Muskoka contacted Health Connection for information and resourced. Common topics of inquiry included: communicable disease, immunization, health and social services, sexual health, tobacco prevention, comprehensive school health, physical activity, immunization, healthy eating/nutrition, infection prevention and control, oral health and head lice. Health Connection also supported schools to connect with their assigned Healthy Schools nurse, or staff from other health unit programs where additional support was being requested.



CONCLUSION

Ontario's renewed vision for education in Ontario commits to creating "personally successful, economically productive and actively engaged citizens". This includes supporting school boards and schools in prioritizing wellness in their improvement planning which highlights health as a contributing factor towards effective learning. This report summarizes the collaborative work completed during the 2015-2016 school year between the health unit and school boards and highlights the value placed on optimal health and learning by both agencies as we work towards Ontario's goal for education. The SMDHU further acknowledges the commitment demonstrated by two school boards through the provision of dedicated space, resources and staff for the School Board Liaison PHNs. The Healthy Schools program staff are looking forward to strengthen the partnerships with school boards in the 2016-2017 school year.

To access additional information about the initiatives described, please consult the SMDHU website at www.simcoemuskokahealth.org or contact the Healthy Schools Program Manager, Cathy Thomson at 705-721-7520, ext. 7469 or cathy.thomson@smdhu.org.



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