

# School Health Environment Survey

Working towards becoming a healthier school

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## Background

In 2004, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH) released the *Healthy Weights, Healthy Lives* report calling on all levels of government, the health care system, communities and individuals to take action on Ontario's obesity epidemic<sup>1</sup>. Specific to school health, the report included the following recommendations:

- Assess school environment (e.g. cafeterias, vending machines, opportunities for physical activity, fund-raising and special food days);
- Develop plans to create a healthy school environment, and;
- Monitor progress.

The Ministry of Health Promotion (MHP) responded to the report by acting to create healthier environments through the promotion of healthy eating and physical activity, and in 2006 released Ontario's Action Plan for Healthy Eating and Active Living (HEAL)<sup>2</sup>. The School Health Environment Survey (SHES) was developed to assess and monitor the progress of the HEAL initiative, as well as other local and provincial policy and program interventions related to healthy schools.

At the request of the Ontario MHP the SHES was developed in 2006 by the University of Waterloo's Centre for Behavioural Research and Program Evaluation and the provincial Public Health Research, Education and Development Program (PHRED) to achieve the following objectives:

1. Assess school environments as they relate to physical activity and healthy eating programs, activities, committees and guidelines. These data are intended for use to:
  - a) allow schools and boards to develop plans to create/maintain a healthy school environment based on local evidence;
  - b) monitor progress of local and provincial policy interventions related to healthy schools (e.g. Ontario's Action Plan for Health Eating and Active Living).
2. Add value to the local, regional and provincial levels by:
  - a) providing feedback to schools, school boards and public health;
  - b) actively involving community partners (e.g. local public health units) whose mandate is to work with schools and develop and implement guidelines to support healthy eating and physical activity;
  - c) encouraging schools to solicit input from school parent councils to improve the learning environment for their children.
3. Align survey categories with the Ontario's *Foundations for a Healthy School* (High Quality Instruction and Programs; A Healthy Physical Environment; A Supportive Social Environment; Community Partnerships), based on a Comprehensive School Health framework in order to:
  - a) maintain consistency with terms used by Education, Public Health, and other national school health organizations;
  - b) enable future expansion of the categories beyond physical activity and healthy eating.

## Implementation Phase

A representative sample of 500 schools across Ontario has been selected to participate in the School Health Environment Survey (SHES) in the fall of 2007. The SHES is a school-level survey (no individual student data will be collected) that should be completed by members of the school community most knowledgeable about the school's physical activity and healthy eating facilities, programs, activities, committees and guidelines. For example, the group may consist of the principal, teachers, parents, and a community representative (e.g. public health nurse). The survey takes approximately 30 – 45 minutes to complete.

As mentioned above, the SHES is designed to facilitate a partnership between schools and public health units. After completing the survey, each school receives a customized feedback report that highlights strengths and areas for improvement and includes information and resources to help schools make health promoting changes. Each school will have the opportunity to share its

results with its local public health unit, with potential for using the results as a starting point to plan and implement health promoting changes in their school.

## Your Role

You can support the School Health Environment Survey in a number of ways:

1. Learn more about the School Health Environment Survey by visiting [www.shapes.uwaterloo.ca/shes](http://www.shapes.uwaterloo.ca/shes).
2. If you serve schools or school boards, let them know that you support the survey and encourage them to participate if they are contacted by project staff with an invitation to complete the survey.
3. Limited resources were available to contact provincial stakeholders with a mandate to provide support for health and education. If you are in such an organization, and are not aware of your organization's response, we encourage you to become informed and inform relevant decision makers.

## References

1. Chief Medical Officer of Health (Ontario). 2004 Chief Medical Officer of Health Report: Healthy Weights, Healthy Lives (2004). [http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/pub/ministry\\_reports/cmoh04\\_report/healthy\\_weights\\_112404.pdf](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/pub/ministry_reports/cmoh04_report/healthy_weights_112404.pdf)
2. Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion (2006). Ontario's Action Plan for Healthy Eating and Active Living. <http://www.mhp.gov.on.ca/english/health/HEAL/actionplan-EN.pdf>