

44 Victoria Street  
Suite 502  
Toronto, ON M5C 1Y2

Tel: (416) 367-3313  
Fax: (416) 367-2844  
E-mail: [admin@opha.on.ca](mailto:admin@opha.on.ca)  
[www.opha.on.ca](http://www.opha.on.ca)

#### **President**

Ellen Wodchis  
E-mail: [president@opha.on.ca](mailto:president@opha.on.ca)

#### **Executive Director**

Pegeen Walsh  
E-mail: [pwalsh@opha.on.ca](mailto:pwalsh@opha.on.ca)

#### **Constituent Societies**

Association of Ontario  
Health Centres

Association of Public Health  
Epidemiologists in Ontario

Association of Supervisors of  
Public Health Inspectors of Ontario

Canadian Institute of Public Health  
Inspectors (Ontario Branch)

Community Health Nurses'  
Initiatives Group (RNAO)

Health Promotion Ontario

Ontario Association of Public  
Health Dentistry

Ontario Society of Nutrition  
Professionals in Public Health

The Ontario Association of Public  
Health Nursing Leaders

*Charitable Registration*

March 17, 2017  
Attn: Minister Mitzi Hunter  
Ministry of Education  
14<sup>th</sup> Floor, Mowat Block  
900 Bay Street  
Toronto ON M7A 1L2

#### **RE: Student Well-Being Community Engagement**

The Board of Directors and Members of the [Ontario Public Health Association](http://www.opha.on.ca) (OPHA) wish to congratulate the Government of Ontario for its comprehensive efforts and the significant progress it has made in renewing the vision for Ontario's education system. In particular, we are pleased to see a strong focus on student well-being through the Well-Being Strategy for Education. We share your Ministry's vision of ensuring children have the best start possible.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the three proposed themes related to the Well-Being Strategy for Education:

1. Understanding Well-Being,
2. Promoting and Supporting Student Well-Being, and
3. Knowing Our Impact.

OPHA welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on these three themes using a health promotion lens.

#### **Understanding Well-Being**

While the working definition of well-being proposed by the Ministry in its engagement paper is comprehensive, there is room to expand on equity as it relates to health. Using a health equity lens when exploring the relationship between the social determinants of health (e.g., income, housing, culture/race, disabilities, and gender) and well-being will ensure that the definition is grounded in the lived experience of all students. In addition, there are opportunities to consider the potential positive or negative impact of the external environment on well-being.

A definition of well-being that includes the external environment allows for considerations such as policy change to support the activities and behaviours that promote well-being. Examples include:

- Increasing access to healthy foods, through policy changes for the school food environment, such as harmonized nutrition guidelines for children.
- Providing a safe and supportive environment for healthy eating and physical activity.
- Providing an emotionally and physically safe and supportive environment.
- Protecting children from harms associated with weight stigma, violence and bullying in the school setting.

From OPHA's perspective, a definition for student well-being would encompass both intrapersonal and interpersonal factors. Aligning the Well-Being Strategy with other initiatives in other Ministries (e.g. Healthy Kids Strategy, Poverty Reduction Strategy, Fresh from the Farm: Healthy Fundraising for Ontario Schools, Ministry of Children and Youth Services' Middle Years Strategy) would allow for greater consistency between all approaches aimed at improving well-being in children, and possibly, sharing of data and resources.

### **Promoting and Supporting Student Well-Being**

OPHA has been involved in several activities that contribute to promoting and supporting student well-being. OPHA, in partnership with the Association of Local Public Health Units (ALPHA) coordinated an engagement session for public health and health promotion stakeholders on behalf of your Ministry to provide feedback on the Phase II Child Care and Early Years Regulations. OPHA houses the health promotion resource centre [Nutrition Resource Centre](#) (NRC), with expertise in healthy eating and nutrition practice, program and policy. OPHA was contracted to refresh the nutrition guidelines for Ontario's Student Nutrition Program. We partnered with our School Nutrition colleagues from the Ontario Society for Nutrition Professionals in Public Health, a constituent society of OPHA and are well-entrenched in school health. In addition, NRC is a partner of the Healthy Kids Community Challenge that along with 3 other health promotion resource centres, provide implementation support to the 45 communities delivering programs and interventions designed to improve children's health and well-being. We encourage these communities to focus on their schools as the key settings to implement comprehensive health promotion interventions. The NRC houses the [Healthy Eating Manual](#) and the NRC Navigator. The Healthy Eating Manual is an online resource that includes lesson plans and developed for teachers and community leaders who have the opportunity and desire to incorporate healthy eating information into programs they are currently running or planning. The NRC Navigator is a one-stop, hub that houses evidence-based resources to support healthy eating programs, policies and practices. Not only has OPHA been engaged with your ministry and others to advance provincial healthy eating and nutrition initiatives in the schools, through the NRC, we directly support teachers and other health intermediaries to implement healthy eating initiatives including the school food and beverage policy. We also provide many other resources including webinars as further examples of this support. In November of this year, we are hosting a knowledge transfer and exchange forum on the topic of mental health and nutrition where issues of weight bias will be addressed.

Directing resources to embed health equity, healthy eating and nutrition principles into teacher education and training would be an excellent way to promote well-being in schools. Specifically, evidence shows that when food literacy is embedded into school curriculum it leads to increased consumption of vegetables and fruit. This would help to give them the best start in life for physical and cognitive development and healthy behaviors that prevent chronic disease. Including more resources to support educator training around weight stigma would help influence the social environment in the school setting to promote health and well-being. Furthermore, taking a health-in-all-policies approach, where health is considered in every aspect of a student's experience with the educational system could serve to make better use of resources.

## **Knowing Our Impact**

Evaluating the impact of any strategy or intervention is a crucial step in the implementation process. Some key considerations for measuring the impact of the Well-Being Strategy would be:

- Ensuring that there is consensus on what measurement indicators are needed and that the data can be reasonably collected.
- Sharing the results of the evaluation with all stakeholders including parents and caregivers.
- Including various forms of data (quantitative and qualitative) to provide a complete picture of the implementation process.

Overall, the measurement indicators for student well-being should reflect the comprehensiveness of the working definition of well-being.

## **How OPHA can provide support?**

OPHA is well-positioned to provide expertise on many mutual areas of interest that would impact student well-being, ranging from healthy eating and nutrition, environmental health and climate change, the built environment, injury prevention, food safety, immunization to health equity. Our individual and constituent society members come from a variety of sectors and disciplines, including public health nutritionists, inspectors, nurses, dentists, child health experts, epidemiologists, among others. As such, OPHA has access to a broad range of networks, expertise and insights from their innovative work.

OPHA wishes to thank the Ministry for the opportunity to participate in this consultation process. My NRC colleagues and I would welcome the opportunity to explore ways that we may be able to further support your efforts in developing and implementing this important strategy.

Sincerely,



Pegeen Walsh  
Executive Director  
Ontario Public Health Association

### **About OPHA**

*Created in 1949, OPHA is a not-for-profit organization committed to providing leadership on issues affecting the public's health and strengthening the impact of public health in Ontario. Our mission is achieved by providing professional development, evidence-based information, analysis on public health issues, access to multi-disciplinary networks, advocacy on healthy public policy, expertise and consultation.*