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November 6th, 2003

**To: The Honourable Gerard Kennedy
Minister of Education**

Dear Minister :

On behalf of the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) I am writing to congratulate you on your commitment to promote and enable the community use of school facilities, as reported in the Toronto Star (October 30, 2003).

OPHA is an organization representing over 3000 health professionals working in public and community health throughout Ontario. Our mission is to provide leadership on issues affecting the public's health and to strengthen the impact of people who are active in public and community health throughout Ontario.

Increasingly we are witnessing a rapid increase in childhood obesity with the concurrent health risks for Type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular illnesses. Lack of physical activity is a major contributor to obesity in our children. Reduced access to gymnasias and outdoor playing fields is a significant barrier to the promotion of physical activity in our province. This is particularly so in low-income neighbourhoods.

OPHA through the efforts of its volunteers has two workgroup working on issues related to childhood health and well-being. The Ontario Healthy School Coalition is supported financially by OPHA to promote the concept of a healthy school community, one in which access to physical activity is an important component.

The Child Health workgroup is a multidisciplinary group of public health professionals, whose goal is to create environments that promote the health of children from birth onwards. The increasing prevalence of obesity among our children is of major concern to the workgroup.

Your determination to remove the barriers and to increase access to schools will help address the issue of children's participation in physical activity. I am writing to offer the support of OPHA and our wish to assist you in implementing the policy.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jack Lee
Executive Director