

Cross-sector Partnership with the Education Sector: School Boards, Schools and Parent Councils

Working together to create communities where it is easier for all children to live healthy lives.



Background

The Healthy Kids Community Challenge Burlington (HKCCB) worked with cross-sector partners to develop Healthy Kids Opportunity Sites to promote physical activity, healthy eating and hydration, as well as reduced screen-time. This program built on existing community programs by providing funds, resources, guides and toolkits.

The focus was to build on the assets of a community. One way they did this was by developing partnerships with the education sector. This case study focuses on the challenges, strategies and actions to inspire others to develop partnerships with local school board representatives (e.g., superintendent, physical education consultants), school administrators (e.g., principals, teachers, secretaries), and parent council/members. The aim is to highlight overall challenges experienced, recommended strategies and actions taken by the HKCCB that could serve as examples for others interested in working with those in the education sector.



Challenges Experienced

- **Bureaucracy/administration processes:** School boards represent many schools across more than one municipality; therefore, there were competing interests on what programs should be implemented.
- **Human resources/staff capacity:** There are a lot of people working within the school board and they are busy with implementing their set mandate so it was hard at times to connect with people at different levels (e.g., school board, administration, teachers) to be engaged as a partner and to implement activities.

- **Lack of a champion:** Administrator's within the education system agreed to work with HKCCB; however, there was not a champion at the local level (e.g., school) to make this happen. This made it difficult to know what was needed and how to work together.
- **Lack of time:** To develop relationships within and across the school boards, schools and with parent councils.



Overall Recommended Strategies from HKCCB Experiences

- **Leverage relationships:** Connect with the different actors who represent the education sector (e.g., school board superintendent and consultants, principals, teachers, and parent council members) and work with them to share their capacity.
- **Align mandates:** Make sure what is being 'asked' fits into the goals of the school board in order to create a 'win-win situation' for the community. Instead of developing a program plan without input from the different actors, find out what are the strategic directions/priorities for each organization.
- **Foster an environment for a shared understanding:** Learn about how their organization functions and identify how the partnerships can fit within this environment.
- **Share a common vision:** Work towards a common goal or vision and create 'win-win situations'. Identify shared objectives and show how the project activities can help them achieve their vision.
- **Be flexible and adaptable:** Consider how people and organizations can be part of the partnership. Be open to different organizations participating across a continuum (e.g., distribution site to active decision makers).



Examples of Actions

- Provided funding for one water filling station per school in one municipality and a school board matched the funds to provide this same resource in schools in another municipality in their district.
- A Principle said their staff was at their capacity and not able to be part of the project, HKCCB approached a parent council member to see if their council could take on this role and they did.
- Approached different education sector actors and asked "What are you working on as a school board? School? Parent Council?" and aligned their 'ask' for involvement with their answer. This helped identify local champions and HKCCB found that "when a champion was present and active, it made a difference."

- Hosted a Leadership Forum Conference with students in grades 4 to 6. Each school in the board could send two students and one staff person to participate in a half-day conference. The purpose was to provide information so that participants could be champions within their schools for the HKCCB project and messages.
- Created two ‘Neighborhood Support Worker’ positions. These are folks who went out and met with people within organizations (at all levels; front line to management) and had conversations to learn more about the sector, the organization and to identify ways each organization could work within the HKCCB. They often had the first contact for developing the relationship and built trust by sharing information about the partnership and identifying shared goals and objectives. This also helped inform the work of ‘Neighborhood Action Teams’ that included people from the community to develop a community informed action plan for the HKCCB. These were paid part-time positions (~21 hours per week per person) at a cost of approximately \$20,000 per year per position and included other duties related to project (e.g., program planning and evaluation, development of resources, coordinate over 70 organizations).
- Developed [resources](#) to support building healthy communities in school environments.

Lesson Learned

Use the strengths of the community and build on them to develop trusting relationships.



About Keeping Kids Healthy through Collective Impact

This case study is part of an environmental scan serving to inform the Keeping Kids Healthy through Collective Impact project, an initiative that aims to build cross-sector linkages between health and social sectors in order to promote health equity and better address the social determinants of health. By sharing broadly the results from this case study, it is intended that others may find examples of strategies that can be applied in a variety of local contexts similar to those that were observed during the Healthy Kids Community Challenge activities as ways to promote cross-sector partnerships.

- To learn more about Healthy Kids Community Challenge Burlington visit [City of Burlington](#)
- For other ideas to build cross-sector partnerships, visit the Ontario Public Health Association’s [Keeping Kids Healthy through Collective Impact project](#)
- We want to hear from you! Visit opha.on.ca/KeepingKidsHealthy.aspx to learn how to write your own case study and submit for publication.

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