

Healthy Schools Handouts

Step 4

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Avoiding mixed messages in Healthy Schools initiatives



What are mixed messages?

School activities and events can touch on many health topics at once, such as healthy eating, physical activity, active transportation, positive mental health, substance misuse prevention and sun protection. Inadvertently, schools may introduce mixed messages when there are inconsistencies between health messages and healthy schools activities. For example, less healthy food may be used as an incentive to participate in wellness activities or sold as a fundraiser for healthy schools activities.

When Healthy Schools actions do not align with health messages the school values, there can be unintended consequences, including:

- Diminishing the importance of the health message. For example, giving out food and beverages that fall under the "Foods to Limit" in Canada's Food Guide at a school event makes the suggestion that healthy eating isn't that important.
- Creating an unsupportive environment that tempts staff, students and parents to engage in behaviours they might not otherwise, such as school-wide events like Donuts for Dads and Muffins for Moms.
- Inadvertently exposing staff, students and parents to harmful behaviours, such as sitting for an extended time at a conference or being at an outdoor event where individuals can't escape the sun or heat and no shade, sunscreen or water is provided.




How to avoid mixed messages

To avoid contradicting your school's values, consider possible mixed messages while planning all activities and events. The questions below will help ensure your initiatives fully support staff, student and parent health.

Questions to ask if you are selling or offering food:

- Do the food and beverage choices meet the criteria laid out in the School Nutrition Policy?
- Is there a place for people to wash their hands before serving food and before eating?
- Can we use reusable plates and cutlery or items that can be recycled or composted?
- If food will be offered outside, are we following food safety recommendations?



Questions to ask if you are hosting a meeting, presentation, health fair or other indoor event:

- Can we encourage attendees to carpool to the event?
- Is the location easily accessible by public transit, or easy to walk or bike to?
- Does the location provide secure bicycle racks?
- If participants will be seated during the event, can we build in movement breaks every 60 minutes and include activities in the agenda that encourage participants to move?

Questions to ask if you are running an outdoor event or activity:

- If the event is outdoors during high ultraviolet (UV) periods (April to September, 11 a.m. – 3 p.m.), how can we provide shade for those working the event as well as those attending?
- How can we encourage and support participants and event workers to use sun protection (sunscreen, sunglasses, hats, and protective clothing) and to take breaks indoors as needed?
- How can we encourage and support participants and event workers to use protection for West Nile Virus (protective clothing and insect repellent containing DEET) for evening or early morning activities during the late spring to early fall season?
- Are we following the Smoke Free Ontario Act legislation and existing tobacco-use policies for our school and the location where the event is being held?

Questions to ask if you will be raising money or offering prizes or incentives for participation:

- Do the items we sell support of our health promotion messages?
- Do the prizes and incentives we plan to offer support individuals to make healthy food and beverage choices, to be physically active and to be mentally well?

Questions to ask if you are running an event that involves physical movement or exercise:

- Have we included modifications to ensure activities are accessible for all?
- Can we provide a rest area for participants to take breaks whenever needed?
- Have we planned and included time for sufficient warm up and cool down?
- How can we ensure fresh tap water is available for all participants to ensure adequate hydration?

For more information visit the Region of Waterloo's [Healthy Schools Website](#).

Healthy fundraising ideas

Many of the traditional fundraising options that have been used by organizations for years, such as selling chocolate bars, can inadvertently send mixed messages if the organization values health and wellness. However, there are now many more options for fundraising that will align with the goals of your committee. Consider replacing unhealthy fundraising options with some of the healthy ideas listed below. Selling these items or hosting these types of events will help your school raise funds in a way that supports your school's values and sends a clear message that health and wellness is important to your school community.



Non-food fundraisers

Selling common and useful everyday items can be a great way to raise funds for your school. Another idea is to host an event at your school that invites family members, caregivers and the school community to come together in support of your school. This is a great way to bring the school community together to showcase the great things your school is doing to promote health and wellness and can even help to promote a sense of belonging all while raising funds at the same time!




Sales

- school spiritwear (hats, bags, travel mugs, water bottles, sweaters, etc.)
- calendars
- [greeting cards](#)
- [gift wrap, gift boxes/bags](#)
- flowers, plants and hanging baskets
- [seeds for gardens](#)
- [gift cards](#)
- [book Fair](#)
- [magazine subscriptions](#)
- coupon booklets from local shops



Events

- car wash
- [dance-a-thon](#)
- scavenger hunts
- walk/run event

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- team sports tournament (bowling, softball, etc.)
 - [family portrait sessions](#)
 - arts and craft show
 - talent show
 - musical
 - raffles (movie or concert tickets)
 - holiday gift wrapping
 - school carnival
 - school dance
 - theme days (Crazy Hair day, PJ day)
 - evening family events (e.g. movie night in the school gym)
 - [electronic device recycling](#)



Food-related fundraisers

You can still offer food-related fundraisers but try to select items that align with your school nutrition policies and that meet maximum nutritional guidelines. Some healthier options include:

- [local fruits and vegetables](#)
- [soup mixes](#)
- frozen chicken or turkey breasts
- spices
- [air popped popcorn](#)
- healthy cookbooks

For more information visit the Region of Waterloo's [Healthy Schools Website](#).

Sample action plan ideas: healthy eating

When developing your action plan, align activities with your goals and success indicators and include activities under each of the five interconnected areas of the Ministry's Foundations for a Healthy School. The suggestions below have been divided into these five interconnected areas. This is not an exhaustive list but will provide ideas to build upon as you reflect on your school's unique needs and capacity!



Curriculum, teaching and learning

- [Bright Bites](#) is a way to promote healthy eating through earning badges and using social media.
- The [Freggie™ In-School Program](#) is a ready-to-implement kit for JK-6 classes. This curriculum complements Ministry health guidelines, including Ontario's PPM150.
- Evergreen and LifeCycles have put together [Patterns Through the Seasons](#), which includes curriculum supports for a year of school garden activities and lessons for grades K-7.
- FITGO – a school wide challenge that involves completing classroom activity cards on topics such as: Healthy Eating, DPA, Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds and Healthy Environments.
- Food Literacy – use cross-curricular lessons to develop food literacy (e.g. create a healthy food budget in business class, work on measuring ingredients using fractions in Math).



School and classroom leadership

- Explore healthy fundraising opportunities. (see Healthy Fundraising Ideas handout)
- Explore healthy lunch options – choose options with whole grains, vegetables and fruits.
- Organize school wide campaigns such as a Nutrition Month where classrooms are challenged to a healthy choices door decorating competition.
- Celebrate diversity by discussing healthy foods from different cultural backgrounds.
- Incorporate more vegetables and fruits and instead of a Cake Walk have a Garden Walk.
- Avoid using unhealthy food as a reward.
- Role model healthy behaviours in front of students (e.g. using a reusable water bottle).



Student engagement

- Offer students the opportunity to be Food Helpers for the Nutrition for Learning Program.
- Seek student input into school menus for lunches and celebrations.
- Organize a cooking challenge where students invent dishes from available healthy ingredients and judges select winning recipes to be featured in the school newsletter or on the cafeteria menu.



Social and physical environments

- Engage the school community to source non-food alternatives for rewards and celebrations.
- Create and consistently follow school-wide healthy eating guidelines and policies.
- Create and maintain a school garden (connect with your Eco Schools team).
- Consider installing hydration stations to promote using refillable water bottles.
- Ensure water is promoted as the drink of choice at school celebrations and events.
- Establish new clubs such as a cooking club or salad club.
- Plan “Try It” days where the whole school community is invited to taste a new fruit or vegetable.



Home, school and community partnerships

- Promote family challenges such as trying a new healthy recipe featured in the school newsletter.
- Send home messages about creative, affordable ways to serve vegetables and fruit at home.
- Host an event that raises awareness about the importance of healthy eating by inviting a guest speaker, such as a dietitian, to share information, tips and tools with students, staff and parents.
- Partner with or visit a local nursery or farm to learn about growing fresh vegetables or fruits.
- Establish new healthy fundraising partnerships in the community such as [Fresh from the Farm](#).
- Partner with a local community dietitian to work with students, staff and parents to create a healthy school cookbook.

Other resources:

- Dietitians of Canada – [Nutrition Month](#)
- Ophea’s Resource Guide – [Ideas for Action:Healthy Eating](#)
- Public Health Resource Library – [Print resources and teaching kits available](#)
- Middlesex London Health Unit – [Student-Led projects](#)
- Region of Waterloo Public Health – [School Food Garden Start Up Guide](#)

For more information visit the Region of Waterloo’s [Healthy Schools Website](#).

Sample action plan ideas: physical activity

When developing your action plan, be sure activities align with your identified goals and success indicators and strive to include activities under each of the five interconnected areas of the Ministry's Foundations for a Healthy School. The suggestions below have been divided into these five foundations. This is not an exhaustive list but will provide ideas to build upon as you reflect on your school's unique needs and capacity!



Curriculum, teaching and learning

- The not-for-profit social initiative [ActiveforLife](#) includes resources and lesson plans for parents to help their children develop physical literacy skills.
- [Build Your Best Day](#) with this tool to help families learn about the [24-Hour Movement Guidelines](#).
- Find programs and information on physical activity benefits and guidelines at [ParticipACTION](#).
- [Passport for Life](#) is PHE's online platform that provides an assessment of student physical literacy skills and a teacher's guide with ideas and resources to help students set and achieve physical literacy goals.
- Ophea's new [Raise the Bar Intramural Program](#) provides an easy-to-follow four step process with everything needed to plan and run quality, inclusive and sustainable intramurals.
- Ophea also has other resources including [Lesson Plans](#), [DPA ideas](#), [Activities](#) and [Supplements](#).

Incorporate movement into regular lesson plans

- Provide opportunities for students to stand or move during class time.
- Conduct lesson plans outside, where natural movement and exploration can take place.
- Administration and staff can act as role models by breaking up sedentary behaviour by finding ways to stand, stretch and move every 60 minutes.



School and classroom leadership


- Develop a class timetable that ensures DPA occurs consistently.
- Implement a school wide DPA event (everyone does a similar activity at the same time).
- Start a walking (or other activity) group at lunch for students and staff.



Student engagement

Indoor/outdoor DPA at recess

- Train Healthy Schools Student Leaders and DPA Buddies.

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- Develop student activity leaders through PALS or Recess Guardians training.
 - Have students plan activities for indoor and outdoor recess e.g. Rethink your Recess.
 - Have students create a list of DPA activities and develop a schedule for class participation.

Provide opportunities for student leadership

- Support students to plan classroom and school wide activities that decrease sedentary behaviour.
- Have students work with a staff mentor to organize theme days that incorporate movement.
- Seek student ideas and feedback on the types of physical activities your school offers before, during and after school.



Social and physical environments

- Ensure physical activity equipment is in good condition and appeals to a wide variety of ages.
- Offer a variety of clubs, teams and intramurals to encourage movement for everyone.
- Hold student versus teacher challenges (basketball, pedometer, pickle ball, baseball etc.).
- Coordinate a walking or biking program (e.g. Walking Wednesdays, bike to school day).
- Install sidewalk markings and bicycle/scooter racks to support active transportation.
- Ensure adequate shade is provided on the school grounds (buildings, awnings, umbrellas, trees).



Home, school and community partnerships

- Student Transportation Services can help plan student travel including a Walking School Bus.
- Incorporate movement into special events (e.g. 'Family Fun Night' or parent education evenings).
- Connect with community recreation facilities for opportunities to try activities (e.g., tennis, skiing, snowshoeing, and curling).
- Partner with local agencies who can provide free or low cost activities to students and families.
- Participate in community wide fundraisers that promote physical activity (e.g. [Terry Fox Walk/Run](#))

Other resources:

- Ophea - [Health and PhysEd Curriculum Supports](#)
- Durham Public Health - [Physical Activity in the Curriculum](#)
- Middlesex London Health Unit - [Physical Activity Curriculum Supports](#)

For more information visit the Region of Waterloo's [Healthy Schools Website](#).

Sample action plan ideas: mental health

When developing your action plan, be sure your activities align with your identified goal(s), success indicators and strive to include activities under each of the five interconnected areas of the Ministry's Foundations for a Healthy School. To support you, the suggestions below have been divided into these five foundations. This is not an exhaustive list but will provide ideas to build upon as you reflect on your school's unique needs and capacity!



Curriculum, teaching and learning

- Opeha's [Level Up](#) is a free resource that provides resources and activities to promote mental health and well-being for ages six to 18.
- Download [Bounce Back Again](#), a Middlesex-London Health Unit kit including resources on how to start a conversation about bouncing back from adversity and how to promote resiliency.
- Visit [Can We Talk](#) to access the Canadian Mental Health Association's mental health lesson plans for Grades six to 12.
- The [Umbrella Project](#) is a two year school-wide initiative that teaches skills for emotional wellbeing.
- [School Mental Health Assist](#) is designed to help Ontario school boards promote student mental health and well-being through leadership, coaching support, resources and a community of practice.
- [Random Acts of Kindness](#) has social emotional learning curriculum and resources for grades K-8.




School and classroom leadership

- Send out a survey to staff, students and parents asking which topics are important to address in your school (e.g. coping and resiliency skills; bullying; substance use, addictions and related behaviours; sense of belonging; relationships etc.).
- Set up peer-mentoring or "buddy" programs (e.g. providing reading assistance to younger students, supporting students transitioning into secondary school).
- PrevNet has fact sheets and tools to support [Bullying Prevention](#) and promote safe and accepting schools.
- Create a positive environment by implementing activities such as "Give, Take, or Pass" to share compliments or daily meditation in classrooms or on the announcements.



Student engagement

- Gratitude graffiti - place mural paper around your school walls and ask students to write down things they are grateful for

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- High-five hallways - encourage students to “high-five” people they pass in the hallways throughout the day to help build a sense of belonging and connection.
 - Showcase students’ unique strengths, talents and interests by displaying student work in the hallway or through student-led assemblies, talent shows or musical events.
 - Help student leaders plan wellness events for the school that highlight positive coping strategies.



Social and physical environments

- Create an indoor wellness space where students and staff can quietly engage in calming activities such as meditation, listening to music, playing with puzzles, drawing or journaling.
- Create outdoor garden or gathering space where staff and students can mindfully connect with and explore nature.
- Use the [Bell Let’s Talk](#) campaign to spark conversation about mental health at your school and keep the conversation going all year.
- Promote [Mental Health Week](#) by sharing information and resources that promote mental health through your school newsletter or social media accounts.
- Create opportunities for staff connection such as Coffee Mondays, Salad Thursdays, Walking Wednesdays or other special events or activities chosen by staff.



Home, school and community partnerships

- Promote family challenges such as putting all technology away during meals.
- Hold information sessions for parents. Consider using translators and approaching leaders from diverse communities to help create a welcoming, positive and caring school environment.
- Build a sense of community by encouraging parents from diverse backgrounds to share their stories, cultures, histories and experiences through a classroom presentation or a school assembly.
- Contact community organizations that offer mental wellness activities such as yoga, mindfulness, social inclusion groups, music therapy, exercise classes, etc. and invite them to run staff and student wellness sessions at your school.
- Review the Kids Help Phone webpage for applicable resources and consider ordering some of their free posters and wallet cards for your school ([Order Form](#)).

For more information visit the Region of Waterloo’s [Healthy Schools Website](#)

Communicating about Healthy Schools: sample messages

Below are some sample announcements for each step of the Healthy Schools approach. Adapt and personalize these messages to suit your school's unique needs!



Step 1 – Establishing a Healthy Schools Committee

PA announcement sample

Healthy students = healthy learners = brighter futures! This is what our school is working to achieve. We are excited to announce our school is becoming a Healthy School. This means there is an opportunity for staff, students, parents and community members to join our Healthy Schools Committee and make a difference in the health of our school community. If you would like to learn more about Healthy Schools and how to get involved, contact _____ (Healthy Schools Champion). An information session will be held on _____ (date). Get involved and stay tuned for more updates and exciting events throughout the year. We are on our way to making our school the best it can be!

Newsletter sample

Did you know our school started a Healthy Schools Committee? It is a group of students, teachers, parents and community members working to make our school a healthier place for all! The Healthy Schools Committee will focus on addressing a priority health topic by developing an action plan of activities, events and initiatives that will support improved health for the whole school community. By working together, we can create a healthier school environment. We encourage students, staff, parents and community members to join the Committee and work with us in building a healthy school. If you are interested in joining or want to learn more, we invite you to the first Healthy Schools Committee meeting, which will be held on _____ at _____. Please contact _____ to get involved. See you soon!



Step 2 – Assessing your school's strengths and needs

Your Healthy Schools Committee is well on its way to developing a plan to improve our school's health, and they need your help! As an important member of the school community, the committee wants your input – What are our school's strengths? What areas can we improve on? Voice your opinion on what we should work on this school year! Contact _____ (Healthy Schools Champion) to share your thoughts.



Step 3 – Determine your priority topic

Your Healthy Schools Committee has decided on a clear focus for this school year! At our last meeting, we reviewed everyone's ideas, looked at our school data and discussed a number of health topics. We are excited to share that our priority topic this year will be _____. We would like to involve the whole school community with activities that will help us meet our goal of improving _____ (priority topic) and our overall school health! Stay tuned for ways you can get involved or contact _____ (Healthy Schools Champion)!



Step 4 – Create your healthy schools action plan

Your Healthy Schools Committee is busy putting together an action plan with ideas to improve _____ (priority topic) in our school community. One activity that we are working on is _____ (Provide details on an activity or promote an event and how staff and students can get involved). Continue to check _____ (Newswire/School Day), the school website, and/or social media for information about upcoming activities and events you can participate in!



Step 5 – Monitor your progress

Thanks to your support and participation, we have made excellent steps towards becoming a healthier school! A few examples of our accomplishments this year include _____ (list activities). We know it's important to always take time to reflect and learn from what we've done. One example of what we learned is _____ (Provide an example action the school will take based on what was learned). Congratulations to everyone involved! Let's keep the momentum going by continuing to work together to make our school the healthiest it can be!



Step 6 – Year end celebration

Your Healthy Schools Committee would like to thank the entire school community for the support and amazing participation seen throughout the school year with the many actions we took to improve _____ (priority topic)! We have accomplished a lot, including _____ (list accomplishments). This success would not have been possible without the hard work and input of the Healthy Schools Committee and the entire school community. As we wrap up this year and begin planning for next year, we'd like to invite new faces to join the Healthy Schools Committee. If you're interested in joining the Committee for next year, contact _____ (Healthy Schools Champion). Our Healthy School has a bright future and we're excited to continue this great work with more exciting ideas next year!

For more information visit the Region of Waterloo's [Healthy Schools Website](#).