



## Strategies to Support a Positive School Climate

# Nutrition and Physical Fitness

Physical fitness is related to one's ability to perform physical activity, which is defined as any movement of the body that results in energy being expended (Caspersen et al., 1985). Physical activity is necessary for healthy development in childhood, and is linked to cognitive functioning and academic achievement (Fedewa & Ahn, 2011). Similarly, a healthy diet plays a major role in a child's physical and mental growth and maturation (Perez-Rodrigo & Aranceta, 2001). Current dietary guidelines recommend foods and beverages that are nutrient-rich and low in sugar, sodium and saturated fat (Critch, 2020).



### Why is it important?

- Nutrition and physical activity habits developed during the school years influence health-related behaviours in adulthood (Craigie et al., 2011).
- Proper nourishment and a healthy breakfast contribute to student performance at school (Taras, 2005).
- The majority of young people fail to meet the recommended 24-hour movement guidelines (Tapia-Serrano et al., 2022), highlighting the opportunity for intervention within the school setting.

## In Practice

Given the importance of physical activity and nutrition, schools should provide opportunities to participate and have access to education and training to support long term health and fitness.



### What can schools do?

School leadership can successfully introduce comprehensive school-based health programs by:

- Developing guidelines that clearly articulate health education goals, policies and expectations, with concrete strategies for progress monitoring.
- Fostering a school environment characterized by positive peer support.
- Providing training and resources to school staff so that they can effectively implement the programs.
- Establishing partnerships with community agencies to obtain additional health-related supports (e.g., professional services and facilities).

Beyond these basic tenants, schools should ensure that strategies are tailored to the needs of the school community (Veugelers & Schwartz, 2010).

When selecting health-related strategies, schools should consider the following practices:

- Adopting policies that outline quality standards for the food and meals served and sold in schools.
- Introducing food assistance programs that allow for expanded access to nutritious meals (Frisvold, 2015).
- Developing foundational movement skills to participate in a range of physical activities (Mandigo et al., 2009).
- Providing additional opportunities for students to participate in physical activity before, during and after school (Hills et al., 2015).
- Facilitating a minimum of 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per day among students (Tremblay et al., 2016).



## In the Classroom

Educators can ensure that students receive consistent messaging concerning nutrition and fitness by:

- Making curricular adaptations that integrate health-related concepts into everyday classroom lessons and discussions.
- Introducing regular physical activity breaks throughout the school day, including opportunities to stretch and walk around the school (Ahamed et al., 2007).
- Where appropriate, demonstrating one's own lifelong health habits in order to model the behaviours expected of students.
- Finding opportunities to involve the parents and caregivers in supporting and reinforcing healthy behaviours at home.

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