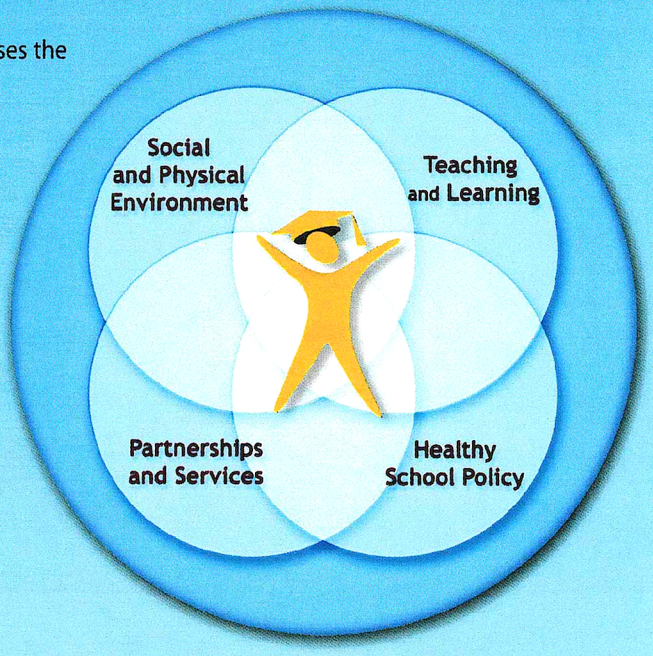
What is Comprehensive School Health?

Comprehensive school health is an internationally recognized framework for supporting improvements in students' educational outcomes while addressing school health in a planned, integrated and holistic way.

It is not just about what happens in the classroom. Rather, it encompasses the whole school environment with actions addressing four distinct but inter-related pillars that provide a strong foundation for *comprehensive school health*:

- social and physical environment;
- teaching and learning;
- healthy school policy; and
- partnerships and services.

When actions in all four pillars are harmonized, students are supported to realize their full potential as learners – and as healthy, productive members of society.



Why Do We Need Comprehensive School Health?

Health and education are interdependent: healthy students are better learners, and better-educated individuals are healthier. Research has shown that *comprehensive school health* is an effective way to tap into that linkage, improving both health[1] and educational outcomes[2] and encouraging healthy behaviours that last a lifetime.

In the classroom, *comprehensive school health* facilitates improved academic achievement and can lead to fewer behavioural problems[3]. In the broader school environment, it helps students develop the skills they need to be physically and emotionally healthy for life.

Comprehensive School Health:

- Recognizes that healthy young people learn better and achieve more
- Understands that schools can directly influence students' health and behaviours
- Encourages healthy lifestyle choices, and promotes students' health and wellbeing
- Incorporates health into all aspects of school and learning
- Links health and education issues and systems
- Needs the participation and support of families and the community at large

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1 Stewart-Brown, S. (2006). *What is the evidence on school health promotion in improving health or preventing disease and, specifically, what is the effectiveness of the health promoting schools approach?* Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe (Health Evidence Network report; http://www.euro.who.int/document/e88185.pdf, accessed 16 Sep. 2008).

2 Murray, N.D., Low, B.J., Hollis, C., Cross, A. Davis, S. (2007). Coordinated school health programs and academic achievement: a systematic review of the literature. *Journal of School Health*, 77 (9), 589-599.

3 ibid

Pillars of Comprehensive School Health

When We Say	We Mean
Social and Physical Environment	The social environment is: • The quality of the relationships among and between staff and students in the school. • The emotional well-being of students. • Influenced by relationships with families and the wider community.
	The physical environment includes: • The buildings, grounds, play space, and equipment in and surrounding the school. • Basic amenities such as sanitation and air cleanliness.
Teaching and Learning	• Resources, activities and provincial/territorial curriculum where students gain age-appropriate knowledge and experiences, helping to build the skills to improve their health and wellbeing.
Healthy School Policy	• Management practices, decision-making processes, rules, procedures and policies at all levels that promote health and wellbeing, and shape a respectful, welcoming and caring school environment.
Partnerships and Services	Partnerships are: • The connections between the school and students' families. • Supportive working relationships within schools (staff and students), between schools, and between schools and other community organizations and representative groups. • Health, education and other sectors working together to advance school health.
	Services are: • Community and school based services that support and promote student and staff health and wellbeing.

Different Terminology, Same Ideas

The term "*comprehensive school health*" is widely used in Canada. In other jurisdictions, the approach may be known as "health promoting school" or "coordinated school health" and its pillars may be expressed in different ways.

However, the underlying concepts are the same; they are all based on the World Health Organization's Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (1986).

Comprehensive School Health in Canada

Effective, sustainable progress in *comprehensive school health* depends on a common vision, shared responsibilities and harmonized actions among health, education and other sectors. The challenge is to coordinate these efforts so that partners pool resources and develop action plans together with, and in support of schools.

In Canada, the Joint Consortium for School Health models, supports and encourages the partnerships between health and education that are essential to *comprehensive school health*. It works across provincial, territorial and federal governments to better coordinate and integrate efforts that champion improved health and learning for children and youth. For more information on *comprehensive school health* in Canada, contact the Consortium at inquiry@jcsh-cces.ca , or visit www.jcsh-cces.ca.

Joint Consortium for School Health
Governments Working Across the Health and Education Sectors