



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: 2008 EVALUATION REPORT

THE TIME IS NOW: ACTION ON SCHOOL HEALTH

**Symposium and Forum
March 19 – 20, 2008
Sherwood Park, Alberta**



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Introduction from the ACHSC Co-Chairs

It would be accurate to say that the executive of the Alberta Coalition for Healthy School Communities regard the symposium “The Time is Now: Taking Action on School Health”, held in Sherwood Park, March 19 and 20, as an unqualified success. Despite receiving our funding in mid January and dealing with a myriad of planning details in a limited time frame, over 220 people registered for our two day event. This number included approximately 37 trustees representing 24 school boards, 16 School Superintendents or designates, an additional 10 districts represented by senior staff, 8 physicians representing 7 of the 9 health regions, 2 Medical Officers of Health, 30 educators/teachers, administrators, principals, parents and over 24 health professionals.

We have personally reviewed all evaluation forms returned to our organizing committee and the reviews are overwhelmingly positive. Many stakeholder groups were sitting down with each other for the first time to discuss school health (physicians, superintendents and trustees). It was clear, listening to discussions throughout the two days and reading the evaluation forms, that there is great enthusiasm for a collaborative model involving all groups that would move school health forward. ACHSC is committed to developing these regional working groups.

We were particularly excited to have the Alberta School Board Association co-sponsor the events. The presence of trustees, the medical community and the Alberta Teachers Association, all in the same room speaking to the issue of school health, was an unprecedented gathering of important stakeholder groups. It speaks well indeed to the future health prospects of the children of Alberta.

Pam Boyson and Dave Colburn, Co-Chairs, ACHSC

Overview

- The key strategy for *The Time is Now* project was to intensify partnership development with key stakeholders, in particular from the education sector, and consolidate collaborative strategic plans for comprehensive school health (CSH).
- The Symposium targeted decision makers and The Forum targeted front line practitioners. Both events succeeded in engaging the education sector to a greater extent than in past ACHSC events.

The Symposium

- The majority of delegates who responded to the evaluation agreed that The Symposium met their expectations with respect to increasing knowledge and awareness about the need for explicit commitment for school health promotion and increasing knowledge and awareness about best practices.
- The Symposium evaluation results reveal support for a regional model within which stakeholders may collaboratively work to better support school health in their jurisdictions.
- Clearly and repeatedly delegates call for increased collaboration between health and education at every level. Cross-ministerial work is called for to support CSH through such policy and programs as “*access to a central repository of best practice resources*” and “*sustainable funding*”.

- The main themes with respect to success in creating healthier school environments were about the development and implementation of school nutrition policies and actions. School feeding programs such as breakfast programs were mentioned most frequently. Key challenges mirror the call for provincial policies and the need for collaborative structures.
- All Regional Action plans created at The Symposium contain some element of strengthening collaborative structures between sectors to develop policy and take action on creating healthier school environments. Goals around advocacy for provincial initiatives, communication to stakeholders, and strategies around best practices in CSH were also predominate in action plans.
- Trustees that responded to the evaluation survey were very positive about ASBA taking further action on school health initiatives.

The Forum

- The vast majority of delegates rated the Forum favourably in terms of meeting their expectations to increase their knowledge and awareness about provincial initiatives (healthy eating and active living) and to increase their knowledge and awareness of creating supportive school environments for mental health. Delegates were less positive about the Forum's ability to deliver on increasing collaboration, commitment and action.
- Three priorities for action were: Increased collaborative strategic planning at all levels (local community, school, region, and province); stronger provincial leadership role in funding school health promotion; and increased communications around school health promotion.
- There is cautious optimism about the feasibility of action plans created by Symposium participants. The key challenges to implementing the actions plans were: funding; time; systems thinking and management support; knowledge, skill and resources; and partnership development.
- The potential outcomes for action plans were: increased collaboration, partnerships and networks; having a voice; increased sharing of knowledge, skill and resources; strengthened public policy, increased participation; and improved health and education outcomes.
- The next steps for front line practitioners were clearly and articulately laid out and they include: enhancing communication; enhancing knowledge, skill and resources; and increasing advocacy for school health promotion.
- A comprehensive list of potential stakeholders was reported by delegates that included all sectors of the community. Delegates indicated that engaging stakeholders in the work of school health promotion will require: strengthened leadership; increased communication and education; increased resources; and enhanced participation and partnerships.

Recommendations

1. Provincial leadership and coordination is needed to support CSH at the local and regional level specifically with respect to guidelines (e.g., food and nutrition), access to best practices knowledge, and network development.
2. Provincial funding support is needed in the form of time and salaries for people to facilitate CSH at the local school community level.
3. Regional School Health Action Teams need to be created and/or sustained in order to effectively:
 - Advocate for the adoption of CSH approaches in every school in Alberta,
 - Share knowledge as to best practice, and
 - Further develop and implement Regional Action Plans.
4. Communication vehicles are needed to support interaction among front line people to learn about what works and what does not in comprehensive school health.
5. There is a need to coordinate high quality information (e.g. database) as to what programs are in what schools in order to strengthen the planning, implementation and evaluation of school health promotion initiatives.
6. ACHSC needs to continue to provide educational opportunities (such as the Symposium and Forum) to increase knowledge and skill about how to plan, implement and evaluate CSH.