Alberta Centre for Active Living

Healthy School - Community Partnerships Evaluation

2015

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background Information

Comprehensive School Health (CSH) is an internationally-recognized and effective approach for building healthy school communities through health and education (Joint Consortium for School Health [JCSH], 2015). CSH encompasses the whole school environment with actions addressing four distinct yet inter-related pillars (JCSH, 2015):

a) Social and Physical Environment

b) Teaching and Learning

c) Healthy School Policy

d) Partnerships and Services

When used together, these pillars provide a strong foundation for CSH and provide students with the necessary support to realize their full potential, both as learners and as healthy, productive members of society.

Partnerships and Services are an essential component for student achievement and the health of everyone in the school and surrounding community. They enhance the range of supports and opportunities for students, parents, educators, and others (JCSH, 2015). More specifically, school-community partnerships are built connections between schools and community members, organizations, or businesses to directly or indirectly promote students' social, emotional, physical or intellectual development (Epstein, et al., 2002).

OBJECTIVES

The overarching goal of the evaluation was to assess and document the experiences of collaborating in school-community partnerships within Alberta.

The objectives of this report are to:

1) Outline the importance of school-community partnerships.

2) Classify the common types of school-community partnerships.

3) Distinguish between the various roles individuals play within a school-community partnership and the possible communication styles that can occur.

4) Identify the benefits and challenges associated with school-community partnerships.

5) Provide recommendations on how to foster successful, future school-community partnerships.

WHAT WE DID

- The Alberta Centre for Active Living was contracted by Ever Active Schools to assess current school-community partnerships established within Alberta.

- Five community representatives and three school representatives agreed to share their experiences.

- Participant job titles included Wellness Coordinator, Health Promotion Coordinator, School Vice Principal, Healthy Schools Program Coordinator, Wellness Recreation Director, and School Principal.

- Individual one-hour telephone interviews were conducted with each participant.

WHAT WE HEARD FROM SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP PARTICIPANTS

The school environment is where young children and adolescents spend the majority of their day for the early 10 to 12 years of their lives (Thomas, Rowes, & Harris, 2010). Therefore, it is an excellent platform for health promotion initiatives to reach a large number of students simultaneously and over an extended period of time; which is considered essential for sustainable behaviour change to occur (Nutbeam and Harris, 2004; Thomas, Rowes, & Harris, 2010). However, it is well known that schools often don't have the capacity, time, resources, or funding to implement healthy initiatives without the partnership aid of other organizations and members of the wider community (Thomas, Rowes, & Harris, 2010).

School-community partnerships are voluntary agreements between two or more partners to work cooperatively and weave resources and knowledge together to achieve a common goal (Altman, 1995; Center for Mental Health in Schools, n.d.). They are important because they enhance community and school policies, programs, and structures, and thus, they contribute to lasting school improvement (Alberta Education, 2005). When schools, families, businesses, government, community-based organizations, and media view one another as partners, a caring community forms to help all children succeed in school and later in life (Epstein, 1995).

IMPORTANCE OF ESTABILISHING SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Participants felt very strongly about the importance of school-community partnerships and outlined several reasons for taking a unified and coordinated approach.

- *"Healthy students are better learners and healthy employees are better workers. However, the schools can't do it alone. There must be others at the table that are willing to step up and assist the schools."* (Participant quote)

- The students learned valuable life skills as a result of school-community partnerships, such as leadership, empathy and compassion, value in giving back to others, and the overall importance of adopting a healthy lifestyle.

- *"Our students do not learn well sitting at desks in rows and rows and rows. They work better if they have opportunities to engage in real life situations with real life people. As such, we need partnerships to take charge and challenge the norms; partnering with someone who isn't afraid to implement healthy initiatives."* (Participant quote)

- *"The schools don't work in isolation of communities. If we are all supporting the same mandate to increase health and wellness within our society, we should be collaborating!"* (Participant quote)

- *"Giving back to the community is one of the most important things a school can do."* (Participant quote). The students made a significant and positive impact in someone's life; someone who might have really needed the assistance.

- *"Partnerships foster new and fresh ideas"* (Participant quote); especially ideas that generated support in multiple environments.
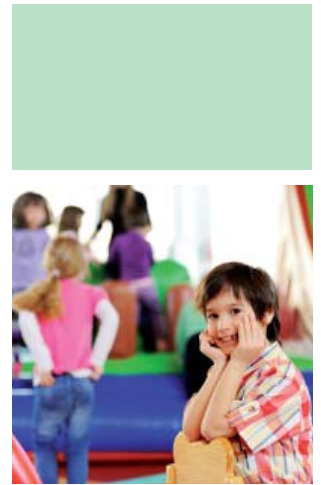
TYPES OF SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

School-community partnerships can take on numerous formats and membership within the partnership can be quite diverse. Each partnership is uniquely composed based on the people involved, the resources available to one another, and the specific goal or outcome that is trying to be achieved. All of these factors determine the reason why a school-community partnership is formed.

The main reasons participants had formed school-community partnerships were for:

1) Facility use agreements

"We have community use agreements where the community groups get to use the school free of charge. And then our school uses the facilities of the outdoor village for free as well." (Participant quote). For instance, one school uses the hockey arena and curling rink as their pseudo gym space to enhance the students' physical education experiences.

2) Healthy initiatives assessment

Partnerships were put in place to assess what the schools are currently doing, what they are good at, what their needs are, and how their initiatives or action plans could be supported by external community organizations.

3) Information dissemination and knowledge translation

Maximizing opportunities for joint learning and mutual knowledge exchange is an important strategy in building partnerships (JCSH, 2009). *"[I distribute] all health-related information. So it can be Alberta Health Services based, or it could be information from U Walk, Be Fit For Life, Ever Active Schools, or the Wellness Fund. So anything that would impact the world of school, staff, or student health. We even work with the Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan to put out some of their information on staff wellness."*

4) Engaging students through global issues

"Local, national, and international service learning projects throughout the year get the kids realizing the power that their voice can have and the good that they can do. These large scale, one-time events are fantastic ways for us to rally around a school-wide project, to have every child involved, and to find certain students that become leaders."

5) Innovative learning and research

"School teachers receive training about physical literacy in the classroom, how to integrate those concepts into their everyday Physical Education classes, and how to develop their lesson plans. They then come to the Tri-Leisure Centre to learn how to translate those lesson plans onto the environment of ice, land, and in the water."

Participants commented that their partnerships had been established for varying lengths of time, ranging from newly established partnerships within the last couple months to partnerships that have been ongoing and strong for over 15 years. Partnerships that had been established for extended periods of time often had stronger ties and a larger network. They also had a strong understanding about maintaining successful partnerships from years of trial and error. Therefore, it was important that these partnerships provided support and guidance to the newer partnerships. By passing on information about their previous endeavours, they were able to learn from each other's mistakes instead of reinventing the wheel with each new partnership.

HOW DO SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS FORM?

Creating school-community partnerships involves intentional development and planning (deFur, 2012). For instance, to start the partnership process, the school should specifically choose and contact a community member or organization for the partnership with the purpose of utilizing their complementary resources (Butterfoss, Goodman, & Wandersman, 1993). In this case, a community partner was any business or facility within or beyond local boundaries that could be used for recreation, learning, enrichment, and support.

Based on participant data, schools partnered with a wide variety of community groups and organizations including:

Community Partner Types	Community Partner Examples
Community Members	Individual volunteers from the local community; self-employed yoga/fitness instructors
Local Community Organizations	Central Alberta Youth Unlimited; Sexsmith Wellness Coalition; Caroline Family Centre; Lacombe Ford; local grocery stores and food banks
Healthcare Organizations	Canadian Cancer Society, Canadian Mental Health Association
Provincial Active Living Partners	Be Fit For Life, Ever Active Schools; Wellness Fund
Government Agencies	Municipal Government Agencies; Alberta Health Services; Calgary Police Services
National and International Volunteer Organizations	YMCA; Boys and Girls Club; A Better World Canada; Free the Children
Large Businesses	DOW Canada; Cenovus
Cultural and Recreational Institutions	Cardell Place; Caroline District Athletic Agriculture Society; Glenbow Museum, Calgary Zoo; Tri-Leisure Centre
Media Organizations	Local newspapers, radio and television stations

Following agreement to partner together, an initial planning phase should take place. This helps both sides of the partnership determine partnership roles and responsibilities, outline a shared understanding of the community or school needs, determine mutual goals between partners, and jointly establish a shared vision with desired outcomes (Molloy, Fleming, Rodriguez, Saavedra, Tucker, & Williams, 1995). Additional partnership planning would include identifying stakeholders, building consensus and leadership capacity, and agreeing upon a collaborative approach (Alberta Education, 2005).

Collaborating within school-community partnerships should be a mutually beneficial and well-defined committed relationship, entered into by both the school and a community group to achieve common goals (Molloy et al., 1995).

There are numerous ways in which a school-community partnership can form. From participant experiences, the most commonly stated ways include:

1) Community groups or businesses outreaching to connect with schools

- For large scale one-time events, local business often contacted the local school and requested assistance from the students. The more students involved, the greater the impact the event could possibly have.

- Active living organizations promoted their knowledge and support around school-community partnerships and assisted community groups to establish partnerships with schools.

2) Schools applying to external agencies or organizations to obtain financial resources

- Parents or teachers who are interested in initiating healthy living activities within the school applied for external grant funding to assist the school with implementation.

- Similarly, provincial healthy living organizations advertised grant funding opportunities to schools and community groups.

3) Casual and spontaneous conversations with others

- Individuals met during a meeting or conference and realized they shared similar health-related goals through casual conversation. The two parties realized the potential of working together and agreed to form a partnership.

- Informal conversations with the school district prompted the local healthy living organization to obtain their own space within the school. A principal of one school noted, *"They could actually look after the healthy initiatives instead of it being an addition onto the school's responsibility; it just made sense."* (Participant quote).

- A dedicated group of provincial active living partners, who all possessed the same mandate and mission statement, acknowledged that working together instead of separately would move the work around creating healthy children and school communities faster.

4) Motivated, passionate, and innovative individuals taking initiative to make a difference

- New teachers came into the school with fresh ideas and the willingness to take on new projects. They pushed the boundaries of creativity and encouraged veteran teachers to broaden their knowledge and acceptance of healthy initiatives.

- A community organization gained knowledge of an opportunity to collaborate and avidly sought to create a partnership. *"Community Choose Well sent an e-mail out promoting a pilot project through Ever Active Schools. So I approached a school in our community to propose participating if they would have 1) staff interested; 2) parents interested, and 3) students interested."* (Participant Quote).

The hallmark of collaboration can be marked by a formal agreement among participants to establish an autonomous structure to accomplish goals that would be difficult to achieve by any of the participants alone (Center for Mental Health in Schools, n.d.). This mutual understanding document is called a Letter of Agreement or Memorandum of Understanding. One participant noted that "User groups have to sign contracts at the town level that state what they will and won't do in the buildings that they're accessing." The Letter of Agreement or Memorandum of Understanding should outline all of the necessary arrangements between the parties in the partnership.

Interestingly, most participants stated that within their school-community partnership, no Letter of Agreement or Memorandum of Understanding had ever been established. Through formal and informal discussion, participants gained a full understanding and scope about their partnership including goals, roles and responsibilities, partnership duration, target completion dates or key dates, progress monitoring, and any processes to monitor or evaluate initiative impact.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF INDIVIDUALS IN THE PARTNERSHIP

Partnerships involve diverse roles among multiple environments. "People aren't necessarily better than each other because of their role in their organizations. From superintendent down to janitors, we're all here for the kids. Everyone is viewed as an important part of the team." (Participant quote). Collaboratively, everyone's role is to support and motivate one another. Participants noted different roles between the schools and the community members:

1) Roles of the individual from the school

- **Liaison** – act as the connection between the school and community environments to establish new partnerships/opportunities and to maintain existing ones.
- **Involvement Promoter** – encourage parent and community participation in healthy initiatives.
- **Healthy Role Model** – model healthy lifestyle choices within the schools to inspire students to buy into healthy initiatives and behaviours.
- **Communicator** – disseminate information to partnered organizations, parent volunteers, or grant funding agencies.
- **Reinforcer** – identify issues or problems that arise, reinforce school policy, and act as a mediator between the school and community partners.

2) Roles of the community member

- **Researcher and Innovator** – find new and different ways to introduce healthy active living at home, school, work, and play.

- **Educator** – host workshop sessions with teachers to broaden their understanding of physical literacy and physical education concepts, and share ideas on how to incorporate these concepts into the curriculum.

- **Needs Assessor** – help the school in assessing where they currently stand in achieving their goals, what they are good at, and where they can expand moving forward.

- **Communicator** – create channels of communication through resource dissemination and information sharing.

- **Supporter** – recognize that teachers and school staff have priorities in many areas. Support the school staff to make the activities and initiatives manageable.

COMMUNICATION STYLES DURING THE PARTNERSHIPS

"Open and honest communication is critical for partnerships to succeed," stated one school member participant. Exchanging relevant and important information allows the partnership to grow and become more efficient as the partners are able to provide a higher degree of service to one another (Baum, 2008). This sharing of information also creates an atmosphere of mutual respect, trust, and inclusion (Center for Mental Health in Schools, n.d.). The more each side of the partnerships knows and understands, the stronger the partnership is. "The community cannot support the schools, and vice versa, if they don't know all the facts," agreed a school member participant.

School and community member participants identified both informal and formal means of communication as successful ways to exchange knowledge and information. The preferred form of communication varied based on culture, geographic location, personal relationships, and the number of individuals or partners involved.

Informal Communication – communication means that are typically casual and spontaneous.

a. In-person verbal conversation

"Being able to pop into each other's office and have spontaneous conversation is really, really nice." (Participant quote)

- Advantage: brainstorming ideas and dealing with issues that arise can occur through instantaneous conversations and thus increase partnership efficiency. *"If something does arise, we can work together and deal with it at that moment."* (Participant quote)

- Disadvantage: not everyone has the capacity to have immediate in-person verbal conversations due to proximity or comfort level with one another.

b. Telephone calls

- Advantage: telephone calls are instantaneous and feedback is quick.

- Disadvantage: non-verbal or facial expressions are not seen, which could lead to misinterpretations.
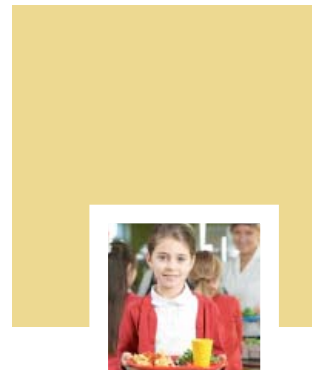
c. E-mail

"I'm finding that people are easier to communicate with via e-mail instead of by phone, because people will answer your e-mail when they have two minutes. Versus when it's a phone call, you kind of have to wait until they have more time to call back." (Participant quote)

- Advantage: e-mails are fast, inexpensive, reach a wide audience, attach files such as documents or images, and provide a reference record of your communication.

- Disadvantage: the conversation tone or information could be misinterpreted.

d. Social networking

- Advantage: there is the ability to increase networking potential and information sharing with like-minded people.

- Disadvantage: interpersonal interactions are limited since information sharing is so rapid

Formal Communication — communication means that are more thought out and prepared.

a. Written feedback

"The community has written letters to the school and put articles in the newspapers after an event, highlighting their appreciation; what a wonderful service it is." (Participant quote)

- Advantage: writing letters to the school and providing the school with recognition for their hard work provides the school and community with positive reinforcement about partnerships.

- Disadvantage: when requesting feedback from schools or community members, responses are often delayed because it takes more time to draft a written response. Additionally, feedback is typically only provided by those who have a very strong opinion about the matter being explored, and therefore, limits the scope of information received.

b. Face-to-face scheduled meetings

"Meetings are where we get the most accomplished. We'll meet and really work on where we are now, where have we been, and where can we go from here." (Participant quote)

- Advantage: in-person meetings result in rich, in-depth information and are excellent for addressing the larger picture or pressing items, such as budget or action planning. Meeting notes are taken and all thoughts are documented.

- Disadvantage: meetings often can be lengthy and veer off topic before a final decision or action plan is made.

c. Parent council meetings

- Advantages: having parents involved provides an easy and immediate way to disseminate information to the families, and thus, potentially promoting a healthy home.

- Disadvantage: there is often a lack of turnout by parents. Only those parents who are really interested will attend the meetings, thus causing a gap or challenge in information dissemination.

Often, multiple modes of communication fostered the best results: *"We started with face-to-face meetings, first of all, to understand where we're at and where we're going. Then from there, we conversed through e-mail or telephone calls."* (Participant quote). However, it was ultimately up to the dynamic of the partnership and what worked for the partners involved.

Information Dissemination

Information dissemination is critical for every party involved in the school-community. It ensures everyone is informed and up-to-date with current affairs. Similar to communication styles, information dissemination can take numerous formats and is specific to what works best for the partnership. Some of the most common formats as stated by participants were:

Accessible public documents

A. **Open school calendar:** *"Everything that happens in our building goes in our online school calendar."* (Participant quote). School administration and staff were able to see what school rooms, resources, dates, and times were available on any given day. The lines of communication remained open and transparent.

B. **Google Docs or Wiki:** Web-based documents, spreadsheets, or presentations that allowed multiple users to create, collaborate, and edit documents online. *"We use Google Live documents so people can edit, view, and contribute to the document. So we're seeing the whole collective of what's going on and everyone's on the same page for what we talked about, as well as where we're going to go next."* (Participant quote). Since the documents could be accessed by all, *"we are all able to keep the conversation going and co-creating."* (Participant quote).

E-mail

E-mails allowed for information to be received immediately by a large number of people within the target audience. It was also an efficient method for keeping the school division and higher level administration in the loop about monthly meeting minutes or the school's current objectives. *"My team and I have a distribution list for the key contacts in every school district that we send zone information to. The relevant information then gets passed to administrators and health champions in each of the schools; like a ripple effect."* (Participant quote).

Newsletters

School newsletters, that contained photos in addition to the text, provided parents with a visual representation of the school's healthy initiative, the impact that it had on the students, and where the money had been allocated to. *"We promote our breakfast program through our newsletter. We take pictures of kids having a healthy breakfast and send it to all of our students' parents."* (Participant quote).

BENEFITS FROM COLLABORATING IN A SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

There are several documented benefits that occur from school community partnerships, such as achieving goals which members might not have been able to accomplish on their own, cultivating unique educational opportunities, or enhancing an organization's credibility (Molloy et al., 1995). Participants discussed and provided detailed examples about who benefits from school-community partnerships and how they benefit.

Student Benefits

Students develop valuable characteristics through the hands-on learning experiences that school-community partnerships provided. Such examples include:

- Acquired leadership skills by having opportunities to lead.
- Learned about generosity by giving back to their community and donating their time during school, after school, and on weekends to achieve their community-service goals.
- Gained awareness about diverse global perspectives and had a better understanding of international struggles.
- Recognized the powerful impact of their voices and that they can play an important role in the grand scheme of life.
- Made personal connections with other students and looked forward to working together.
- Enjoyed planning activities and were excited to participate school-community partnership initiatives. As such, the school staff rarely experienced student push-back and felt the students genuinely want to give back to the community.

"If we actually stop and step back to take a look at where our students are now, it's really truly amazing! They're a wonderful group and giving back is now just part of the school culture." (Participant quote).

School Benefits

1) Increased participation at health and wellness events

Health and wellness has become a priority within numerous school divisions. *"This would not have been possible without the help from our partners."* (Participant quote). Participants noted that there is an increased number of schools participating in healthy initiatives, such as Winter Walk Day, Jump Rope for Heart, or Relay For Life. Additionally, there is now a noticeably greater awareness and attendance at conferences or workshops focused on healthy schools and communities, such as Ever Active Schools' Shaping the Future conference or the Healthy Active School Symposium.

2) Revising healthy school policies

- Instead of the previous short term "Band-Aid" approach, where the focus was only on planning one year at a time, schools and community members are creating partnerships with long term plans in mind.
- School district board members are increasing their involvement and interest in school-community initiatives. As a result, they have created more steering committees to ensure healthy initiatives take place within the school and community environments. For instance, districts are updating their policies to ensure there is a greater focus on healthy hot lunches within the schools and decreasing student hunger rates.
- School districts are seeing twice as many school wellness teams being established, accepted and supported by school administration.

Teacher Benefits

School staff and teachers had felt a greater sense of comradery and respect towards one another since being involved in a school-community partnership. Teachers have become more educated about healthy living through professional development opportunities provided by partnered organizations and have therefore willingly adopted healthy lifestyles within the school. Teachers now recognize the importance of taking care of their health and have even established their own fitness groups after school.

Partners and community organizations recognized that teachers are very busy individuals and generously looked for ways to assist them. By offering to take the lead role in planning events or initiating partnerships, teachers have noticed reduced stress levels and pressure to perform. For example, Alberta Health Services completely planned and implemented a career day for students at a local school without requesting assistance from teachers. Additionally, programs run by community volunteers or parents, such as Monday Morning Smart Start breakfast program, required little teacher involvement. As such, the teachers allocated their efforts elsewhere and did not feel overworked or overwhelmed.

Community Benefits (i.e., Recreation Complexes or Non-Profit Agencies)

1) **A broader knowledge and understanding about the school environment**

- Community partners gained insight and a new perspective lens about the school environment, such as how the school operates, how many staff are required to plan and implement an initiative, the potential stressors associated with managing large volumes of students, what resources and manpower they could offer the community in achieving a community goal, or the time commitment involved in planning events.

2) **Opportunities to grow, collaborate, and cultivate manpower**

- Community groups and organizations collaborated on projects with matching mandates to increase healthy initiatives within the schools.

- The schools and communities strategically worked on projects together to minimize the duplication of efforts.

- Schools, community groups, and recreational centres all brought a different perspective to the table around health and well-being to improve the work each partner is doing.

- *"More hands make for light work."* (Participant quote). By having the school's student population involved in community-led initiatives, the community gained access to more personnel to divide the labour. As a result, the task at hand became easier and the progression of the project was often faster.

Collaborative Partnership Benefits

Participants said that their partnerships have grown stronger and more stable over the years. There has been increased networking between schools and communities by recognizing the good synergies that resulted from partnerships. There was a greater awareness about active living organizations and recreation complexes, and how they can assist the schools. As such, there were more multidimensional partnerships being developed, such as schools partnering with local recreation complexes to utilize their facilities but also partnering with active living organizations to obtain information and resources.
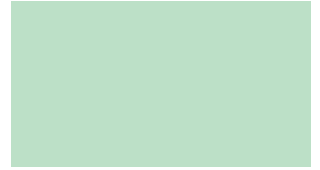
OTHER NOTICEABLE IMPACT AND CHANGES

1) Breaking stereotypes and changing mindsets

- *"There's sort of this negative perception around the kids hanging out and goofing around in the recreation facility. They're not terrible people; they're just bored. Give them something to do and they're great!"* (Participant quote). Providing adolescent students with a goal to work towards can change the community's misconception about adolescent students being reckless, intimidating and mischievous. *"Kids want to learn and will rise above and beyond the challenge that you throw at them"* (Participant quote), but they often just need a little guidance and instruction.

- Through partnerships, recreation centres have been able to change school and community perceptions that recreation centres are unidimensional and expensive to use with limited collaboration opportunities.

- Veteran teachers who were set in their previous mindsets became more accepting of adopting healthy lifestyle choices. For instance, one participant noted that teachers were more tolerant with students coming into class 10-minutes late from the Monday Morning Smart Start breakfast programs. This was because they were more educated about the importance of healthy eating for student success. They understood that the extra 10 minutes spent at the Monday Morning Smart Start breakfast program would ensure the students were receiving the proper nutrition necessary to fuel their school day.

2) The exchange of facility use and resource acquisition

- Schools gained access to community recreation facilities (e.g., arena, curling rink, or swimming pool) for fun, integrated learning and unique physical education experiences. Similarly, the community gained access to a school's facility to host various local programs or events, such as yoga classes, workshops or courses, sporting leagues, catering preparation or special events.

- Community and provincial active living partners provided schools with easy-to-use informational resources, such as a compiled list of relevant "healthy eating at school" documents.

- Recreation centres offered local schools the opportunity to use the centre's facilities during low-use times, thus enhancing their own customer service base and granting opportunities to partner.

3) Access to target population

- Organizations focused on school health and well-being gained direct access to their target audience and disseminated information directly to teachers, administrators, and health champions. In theory, the information would have an influencing ripple effect by educating the teachers, who then come in contact with students, who could then take the information home and influence their own parents and community environments.

- Partnering with provincial active living organization provided organizations or schools with access to large distribution lists, which therefore fostered information dissemination to a wide audience.

CHALLENGES FACED DURING SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

It is without fail that partnerships often coincide with challenges. However, the ultimate test for the strength of a partnership can be exhibited in how the challenges are recognized, managed, and overcome moving forward. Participants outlined their own personal challenges that they have encountered throughout school-community partnerships.

1) Less opportunities in rural communities

- Small communities experience limited growth opportunities as they sometimes do not have access to similar resources or facilities that large cities do.
- It is more expensive to transport students and/or organizations to events.
- *"Large scale one-off events are not sustainable in the long run."* (Participant quote)
- *"The communities don't grow as fast as larger cities, and therefore there isn't as many new things coming into the community to foster partnership opportunities."* (Participant quote).

2) Financial challenges

- Without external funding, there is often limited revenue generated from healthy hot lunches in the canteen to sustain the program.
- The school does not receive any financial compensation from community members to cover the costs of damaged equipment.
- Changes to, withdrawal of, or completion of funding support can unfortunately cancel healthy school-community initiatives. Although they are often necessary to start an initiative, single-year funding grants are not a secure and sustainable form of support.

3) Apprehensive school staff

- School staff and teachers already have a full course load to manage and may become uneasy with taking on additional activities.
- School staff members consider the use of their school as a privilege to the community. Disrespectful community groups cause greater issues and unnecessary stress, thus damaging the relationship with the school for future community use.

4) Community groups disrespecting partnership agreement

- Community groups may abuse facility privileges and often do not have the same respect towards the school's equipment.
- Community groups do not recognize their wear and tear on the school equipment and often do not take ownership when they damaged equipment.
- Community members sometimes ignore school signage and trespass into school classrooms or computer labs that are off-limits for community group use.

5) Lack of buy in

- Parents occasionally disagree with school initiatives or fundraising projects which can cause pushback and confrontation.
- Higher level policies and district administration may limit school-community partnership initiatives as they may not fit within the traditional way or roles of a school.

6) Inability to foresee the unknown

- Unforeseen circumstances could cause volunteers to miss their scheduled shift, and thus causing roles to be reassigned to account for the missing manpower.
- Unable to estimate the number of students attending the breakfast program each morning and therefore unable to accurately determine appropriate amounts of fresh food purchasing and preparation.
- Year to year, schools are unsure if there will be an individual willing to coordinate reoccurring and successful healthy school initiatives, such as the Monday Morning Smart Start breakfast program and its associated tasks (i.e., food ordering or volunteer scheduling).

7) Other

- Sometimes it can be difficult to find a project that fit everyone's mandate.
- Not all schools are interested in implementing healthy initiatives in their school, and therefore, they are not interested in completing a school health assessment to generate a healthy action plan.
- Time constraints: *"Some of our smaller districts still really struggle, because there's isn't dedicated time to really lead and promote health as a priority."* (Participant quote). *"Time is always the challenge for everyone."* (Participant quote).
- When working within a team, often there can be contrasting personalities and competing opinions which can impact partnership dynamics or cause tension.
- Organizations or schools may have useful resources to offer but are unsure of how to foster a school-community partnership.

FUTURE GOALS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Setting new goals and readjusting the partnership's target achievements allows partners to focus on what's really important. Goals provide individuals with a sense of control and purpose to the project, promote a better use of time through prioritizing important tasks, and motivates partners to continue striving towards those goals.

Participants noted several key goals and achievements that they would like to work towards for their future. The most commonly stated future goals were:

- Continue to create as many new community connections as possible.

- Maintain existing partnerships when possible.

- Work hard to complete the action planning phase of the partnership.

- Foster opportunities that build good citizenship in the community and shed a positive light on the school.

- Povide continuous education to school staff and community volunteers about the importance of healthy living.

- Continue to provide students with health opportunities in their schools that could transition into their out-of-school or afterschool care programs.

- *"Complement, lift, and leverage the work that the school communities are doing."* (Participant quote)

- Encourage healthy initiative buy in from district board members or apprehensive teachers.

Participants mentioned several other notable goals they would like to work towards for their own individual school-community partnership:

- *"I tell the teachers, you're the experts of your domain. I challenge you to look beyond our school and see how our students benefit from our community surroundings! Such things like using the arena for broom ball during gym class or the ravine to collect water samples for science class."* (Participant quote)

- *"I would like us really working hard with our districts to see that health is maintained as a priority, and that it's imbedded into their strategic planning, both at the district and at the school level."* (Participant quote)

- *"We see a huge opportunity from a youth leadership perspective. So being able to tie some things together between the recreation centre and the curriculum, such as the volunteer hours students require in order to graduate and being able to provide leadership opportunities."* (Participant quote)

- *"We'd like to redefine the role of the recreation centre and broaden our scope. We try and not just be a traditional rec centre, but also become a hub for the community; things like winter festivals and garage sales and hockey tournaments and all those kinds of community events as well."* (Participant quote)

- *"There's often that disconnect between the research side of things and what the schools and communities are doing."* (Participant quote). *"There's tons of great research that is happening or not happening, and I would just love to see a much stronger link between the two."* (Participant quote)

- Promote and increase the awareness of the available services and resources: *"There's some people that still don't really understand the scope of what Ever Active could do in their school… and they didn't realize the things they could access and the resources that are available are fairly affordable."* (Participant quote)

- Find the courage to make bold movements: *"At swim meets, french fries are the biggest seller, right? And so that was the big thing: you can't take out the fries because that's the biggest revenue generating piece. But the fact is they took out the fryer and now people eat the vegetable sticks instead! So you just have to have the courage to be able to make that first move."* (Participant quote)

One participant brought up an extremely interesting and important goal; one that focused not only on a local perspective, but one that would reach and influence school-community partnerships nationally. *"What [anonymous] and I have dreamed about is to be able to scale up what we're doing in Alberta to have a national focus. Unhealthy schools aren't an isolated issue just for Alberta. Being able to have a platform and the support at the national level for our Healthy Living Classroom prototype would be an amazing opportunity! And we're also trying to have the evidence and the research to support the work that we're doing, and to be able to share and disseminate that so that other people can leapfrog off of that as well."* (Participant quote)
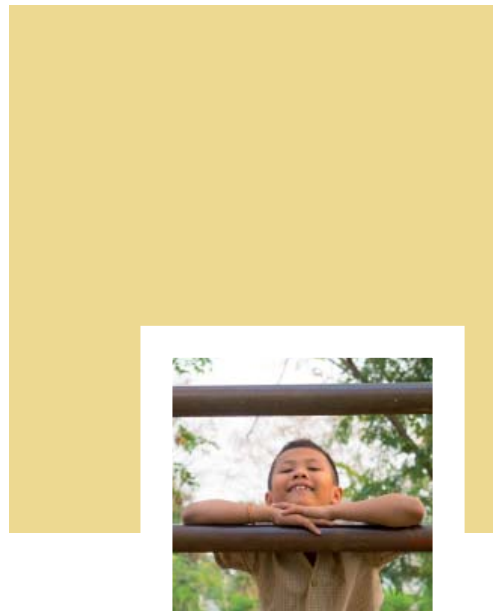
REPORTING ON PROGRESS

One of the final key pieces in maintaining strong school-community partnerships is progress reporting. The ultimate goal is to clearly demonstrate *"if the initiative was a good idea, if people would participate again, and if it was helpful…"* (Participant quote).

An important step in progress reporting is measuring the collective impact of the school-community partnership initiative. Depending on what information the partnership is interested in reporting, both qualitative and quantitative data could be collected. For some, qualitative feedback provided the necessary in-depth information about participant experiences and showcased the importance of the initiative. *"We receive a lot of verbal feedback from the students that are buying the food. If they are glad to have the opportunity to eat those types of healthy foods at lunch, if it helped them feel better in the afternoon – like more energy – and if it helped them to focus more. As well as testimonials from the teachers saying, 'Oh I really noticed this made a difference in the students'"* (Participant quote). Quantitative data, on the other hand, provided the partnership with raw objective information expressed in numerical format, such as financial income or purchasing costs. *"What we're going to track is the sales. We are going to go back three months of sales and compare it with those specific days that the healthy lunch series was offered in the canteen."* (Participant quote).

Participants noted that they sought other ways to translate the initiative impact when measuring progress was not possible. Utilizing university researchers was often a beneficial method as they have greater expertise in data collection and could open doors to other resources. For example, a community representative participant was able to collect healthy behaviour change over time: *"We're currently doing some research with the schools around Healthy Active classrooms and we're measuring pre intervention (one week before they come), during the intervention, and then a period of time after, to see if they've changed any of their behaviors in terms of being more physically active and less sedentary."* (Participant quote). It was also important to note that extensive measurement was not always necessary. Simply *"sending an e-mail to the coordinator of the Healthy Breakfast program, just to say what was served or how many people came…"* was also valuable information to collect. *"It just gives us some data throughout the year."* (Participant quote).

As a whole, the progress report should provide the partnerships with enough information to be able to make informed decisions moving forward. The document can range from an informal one-page memo or a long formal report. For some partnerships, formal progress reports were the basis for their entire year's action plan. *"We encourage all of the schools in our district to complete the Healthy School Planner. And then we can see on a year-to-year basis what has improved or where they can improve. This drives the action plans for the following year for those schools and outlines what they could be doing differently, how they can build partnerships, and how to celebrate those existing partners so that they continue to come back to offer programs or services, or even just offer the resources and support in the school."* (Participant quote). Lastly, this document was also a great way to showcase a granting agency or financial funding body that their invested money was going to a good use and was positively influencing the students and community.

In summary, participants outlined that both informal and formal progress reports should touch upon the following items to ensure that all parties are fully informed and engaged:

- Goals that have been accomplished and future goals;

- Guiding values, principles and beliefs;

- Resources used or required moving forward;

- Successful communication strategies;

- Challenges that have been encountered and how they were overcome;

- Noticeable impact or improvements within the target population;

- Supporting quantitative data; and

- Current and transparent financial standing or budget constraints.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL FUTURE SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Even though the partners involved or the initiatives being implemented may be very similar in nature, every school-community partnership possesses unique characteristics. What is successful for one partnership may not work for another. However, by sharing lessons learnt from previous experiences, partners can hope to foster and strengthen successful future school-community partnerships. From their previous experiences, participants provided endless opportunistic and unique recommendations:

- *"It takes the village to raise the child."* (Participant quote). **Include a broad representation of multidisciplinary organizations** in the partnership to generate multiple cross-dimensional perspectives and access to multiple environments (i.e., home, community, recreation centres and school).

- When possible, **utilize local and outside resources**, such as a fitness instructor to each student yoga classes. This saves on cost, ensures expertise in the field, and prevents teachers from feeling overwhelmed and overworked.

- **Be transparent about fund allocation.** Having the breakdown of funds available to the public can increase initiative buy in and support from others.

- **Strive to find innovative inexpensive ways to partner** and provide hands-on learning experiences for the students. For instance, purchase and plant local vegetables in Rubbermaid containers and have students partner with community volunteers to learn about horticulture.

- Remember that **every school district and school is different.** *"What works for one district will not work for another district. Projects have to match what their needs are, the resources that they have available, and the culture that already exists within their school."* (Participant quote)

- **Attempt to foresee potential barriers or challenges**, and engage in forward thinking to minimize those challenges beforehand.

- **Share experiences and minimize competition between schools.** For example, provide a different school each year with the opportunity to become involved in single-day large scale special events, such as We Day. By sharing experiences, competition between schools is minimized and all students have an equal chance to learn, grow, and feel that sense of accomplishment upon giving back to the community.

- *"Make concentrated efforts to **go beyond the walls of your own facility** to see what other organizations are doing to be able to see how we can link together."* (Participant quote)

- **Build partnerships strategically.** *"By pairing with partners who share similar interests and are dedicated and passionate, we better align efforts towards a collective impact so we aren't duplicating efforts."* (Participant quote). As such, both sides of the partnership benefit equally.

- **Provide evidence of the project's success** - *"If they see the benefits of what's going on with their kids, and once they learn some of the strategies behind it, then I think they'll be more accepting of healthy initiatives."* (Participant quote)

- *"I would recommend and encourage other recreation people to **attend school health and wellness conferences** such as Shaping the Future or those sorts of things. Because if you end up sitting with a bunch of teachers, you learn a lot more about what they deal with at the school, because I'm not a teacher. I don't have any education degree."* (Participant quote)

- If organizations or schools are unsure of how to develop new partnerships or are unsure of the best partnering organization to suit their desired goal, **seek assistance from moderator organizations.** For instance, *"Moving and Choosing would be willing to answer questions or mentor other communities about who you are looking for and where to start. Moving and Choosing would be happy to offer whatever support we can."* (Participant quote)

- Remember that **financial grants are not always secure.** Grants are beneficial in getting a project off the ground running, but funds typically run out after a year or two, thus leaving the school or community group searching for alternate funds or cancelling the project.

- **Maintain open and honest lines of communication** with the community groups about what facility use expectations are and what standards they are held accountable to.

- **Involve parents in school-community partnerships when possible.** Parental involvement can often make actions progress faster and cause greater buy in from other parents. *"Sometimes it takes a parent to get that work to move forward faster. Information coming from a parent to another parent can sometimes have more pull, more buy in."* (Participant quote)

- Remember that **partnerships are always a work in progress.** They require constant learning, innovation to create opportunities to leverage together, a balance of give and take, patience as the partnership grows, perseverance during hardships, constant concentrated efforts, and recognition that groups are stronger together.

CONCLUSION

It is well documented that healthy students are better learners, and healthy employees are better workers. *"We know that students stay in school longer and their academic outcomes are better when they're healthy. So all around, the long term benefit is hopefully a healthier society."* (Participant quote). To warrant changes, *"schools are working hard to ensure ideas, like proper nutrition, active living and positive social environments, are happening in each school to the best of the ability that the school has. However, we couldn't provide the opportunities that we give to kids without the financial commitment, volunteers' time commitment, professional expertise and knowledge, and valuable skill sets of the community. These opportunities are all a result from the collaborate framework of school-community partnerships."* (Participant quote)

From a community perspective, *"the best thing that we can do within our organizations is to really step up to the plate to support and reinforce what the schools are trying to do."* (Participant quote). *"It's about being able to spread out the energy and provide support for those teachers."* (Participant quote). Likewise, community members really appreciate the support that a school provides for their initiatives. *"Giving back to the community is one of the most important things a school can do."* (Participant quote). The students learn valuable skills and can often make a significant positive impact on someone's life.

"Education doesn't only happen within the four walls of the school." (Participant quote). The environments are interdependent, cyclical and rely on one another to promote health and wellness from a variety of perspectives. By forming partnerships between schools and communities, the group can provide the best possible resources and support to enhance health and wellness (Cox-Petersen, 2011). Ultimately, the sum of the efforts, through partnering and by encompassing various environments, is greater than that of each group on their own (Cox-Petersen, 2011). Partners can collaborate to promote *"healthy eating, active living, positive well-being for children and youth where they live, work and play."* (Participant quote). However, partnerships take time and patience while requiring open and honest communication. Building familiarity between partners and their level of work takes time, but fosters confidence and builds trust within the partnership (Peel, Peel, & Baker, 2002). There are many different types of partnerships and they are formed for numerous different reasons. Each individual plays an important role towards achieving a common health and wellness partnership goal. Participants should openly embrace and encourage others to form school-community partnerships. *"We should never say no – you never know what people are capable of, what can be learnt, how people can help, and what other doors will open."* (Participant quote).

Alberta Education (2005). *Chapter 2: Developing Community Partnerships.* Retrieved from: https://education.alberta.ca/media/1260778/ch11.pdf

Altman, D.G. (1995). Sustaining interventions in community systems: on the relationship between researchers and communities. *Health Psychology, 14*(6), 526-36.

Baum, F. (2008). The New Public Health (3rd ed.). Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

Butterfoss, F.D., Goodman, R.M., & Wandersman, A. (1993). Community coalitions for prevention and health promotion. *Health Education Research, 8*(3), 315-30.

Center for Mental Health in Schools, (n.d.). School-Community Partnerships: A Guide. Retrieved from: http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/guides/schoolcomm.pdf

Cox-Petersen, A. (2011). The Importance of Educational Partnerships. In Cox-Petersen, A. Educational Partnerships: Connecting Schools, Families, and the Community. (pp. 3-28). California State University, Fullerton, USA: *SAGE Publications, Inc.* Retrieved from: http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/33868_Chapter1.pdf

deFur, S. (2012). Parents as collaborators: Building partnerships with school and community-based providers. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 44*(3), 58-67.

Epstein, J. L., Sanders, M. G., Simon, B. S., Salinas, K. C., Jansorn, N. R., & Van Voorhis, F. L. (2002). *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin

Joint Consortium for School Health [JCSH], 2009. School-family-community partnerships: A knowledge kit for school and community leaders. Retrieved from: http://www.jcsh-cces.ca/upload/JCSH%20Substance%20Use%20Toolkit%20SchoolFamilyCommunity%20v1.pdf

Joint Consortium for School Health [JCSH], 2015. *The 4 Pillars of Comprehensive School Health.* Retrieved from: http://www.jcsh-cces.ca/index.php/about/mandate-mission-vision

Molloy, P., Fleming, G., Rodriguez, C.R., Saavedra, N., Tucker, B., & Williams, D.L. (1995). *Building Home, School, Community Partnerships: The Planning Phase.* Retrieved from: http://www.sedl.org/pubs/fam01/planning.pdf

Nutbeam, D. and Harris, E. (2004), Theory in a Nutshell. *A Practical Guide to Health Promotion Theories* (2nd ed.). McGraw-Hill, Sydney.

Peel, H.A., Peel, B.B. & Baker, M.E. (2002). School/university partnerships: a viable model. The International Journal of Education Management, 16(7), 319-25.

Thomas, M., Rowe, F., & Harris, N. (2010). Understanding the factors that characterise school-community partnerships: The case of the Logan Healthy Schools Project. *Health Education, 110*(6), 427 – 444.