



Healthy Schools. Healthy Communities.

A Submission to the Government of Ontario

Budget Consultation 2010

Ophea
Chris Markham
Executive Director & C.E.O.
chris@ophea.org
416-426-7126



Ophea is a provincial non-profit organization with a mandate to support healthy schools and healthy communities through quality program supports, partnerships and advocacy. Ophea has over 31,000 registered members, and we work in partnership with Ontario's 36 public health units, 72 public school boards and non-government organizations representing education, public health, recreation, academics and parents to serve 2.1 million students and their families.

Ophea provides quality programs and services to leaders in schools and communities so that they are equipped to foster healthy active living for all. Ophea has a demonstrated history of facilitating collaborative partnerships, joint planning, integrated approaches, and directed action among and between the education, health, community and social services, sport and recreation sectors, and government at the provincial, regional and local level.

In recent years the **Government of Ontario has established an unprecedented number of policies and programs dedicated to improving the health and well-being of children and youth**, for example, the revised Health and Physical Education (H&PE) Curriculum Grades 1-8, Daily Physical Activity, Ontario Nutrition Standards for Schools, Safe Schools, After-School Strategy, the Ontario Public Health Standards, Equity and Inclusive Education, Foundations for a Healthy School, and full day learning for 4- and 5-year-olds. Ophea commends the government on this policy work and is fully supportive of this government's commitment to healthy active schools and communities.

We recommend that the 2010 provincial budget reflect the importance of these policies by providing funding for the implementation support required to realize their benefits. An investment of only five dollars for each of Ontario's 2.1 million students, provided as an evergreen commitment, will mobilize schools, communities and key provincial organizations to address these policies and ensure consistent and sustained progress towards our shared vision for healthy schools and communities in Ontario.

Establishment of such evergreen funding provides school communities the opportunity to catch up to the government's policy development and support the development, implementation and sustainability of targeted approaches to ensure full and fair access to health and learning opportunities in all of Ontario's diverse communities.

Ensuring that children and youth are prepared and positioned to lead healthy active lives, now and in the future, **is an investment in Ontario**. The concept of a healthy school includes the notion of creating healthier children and youth and healthier communities. A comprehensive, integrated approach to school health is needed to ensure resources are maximized. This approach benefits not only children and youth but also their parents, caregivers and surrounding communities.

Schools are a good investment – research has shown that **health and education are linked**, and that implementing health interventions within the school setting has a positive impact on health behaviours and outcomes for students. Schools play a key role in supporting not only the health of their students by ensuring universal access, but of their families and communities as well.

This cross-ministerial commitment would **align the objectives of the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health Promotion, Ministry of Children and Youth Services, Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and others** as appropriate. Ophea is prepared and positioned to mobilize the partnerships and programs required to realize the vision of schools as a community hub through which coordinated support related to health and learning can be provided to Ontario's children and youth and their families.

Students today are the leaders of tomorrow, and we need them to be healthy active individuals who have the ability to thrive in an ever-changing world. Research shows that health promotion and prevention of chronic disease is most effective when implemented early in life. **Dedicated funding aimed at prevention and education will help an entire generation get a healthy start and realize their full potential**, building a skilled and employable workforce, a creative cultural community and healthier individuals and communities, and lessening the burden on our healthcare and social service systems.

We welcome the opportunity for further discussion on any aspect of this pre-budget submission.