

healthyschools.ca



# Healthy Schools Certification Guidebook

2024 - 2025

Elementary & Secondary



# About Us



Healthy Schools Certification is offered in partnership between Ever Active Schools, Ophea and PHE Canada. These not-for-profit organizations champion healthy, active living in schools and communities to ensure that all children and youth enjoy the lifelong benefits of healthy, active living. Healthy Schools initiatives have reached hundreds of schools and demonstrated the positive impact of this approach on all members of the school community for over a decade.

## Healthy Schools Certification on Social Media

We're on social media and we want to hear what you're doing! Post on Instagram, X (Twitter) what you've been up to, or ask any questions using [#HSCert](#).

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all of our Healthy Schools Certification schools, public health, school boards/districts/authorities, academic researchers, funders and partners for their contributions to the development and review of Healthy Schools Certification Guidebook, tools, and processes.

Healthy Schools Certification's work takes place on traditional Indigenous territories all across Canada and we respect and value the enduring presence of Indigenous People on these lands.

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# Table of Contents



About Us.....	2
Table of Contents.....	3
What is Healthy Schools Certification?.....	4
4-Step Healthy Schools Process.....	6
Health Topics.....	8
How Can my School Get Certified?.....	9
4-Step Healthy Schools Process.....	13
Step 1: Assemble Your Team.....	14
Step 2: Identify Your School Community Priorities, Assets, and Health Topic(s).....	16
Step 3: Develop Your Plan and Take Action.....	20
Step 4: Celebrate and Reflect.....	24
School Support.....	25
Helpful Resources.....	26
Glossary.....	27

# What is Healthy Schools Certification?



## Overview of Healthy Schools Certification

The Healthy Schools Approach engages the whole school community to promote and enhance the health and well-being of children, youth, school staff, and the broader community. Healthy Schools Certification is based on a 4-Step Healthy Schools Process, inspired by the [Canadian Healthy School Standards](#) and [Canada's Comprehensive School Health Framework](#). This process helps a school to plan and implement a range of activities that promote well-being in the school community, focusing on health topic(s) that are important to the school. Through a point-based system, over the course of the school year, schools will be able to plan their Healthy Schools process steps online and apply for Gold, Silver, or Bronze certification.

## Goals of Healthy Schools Certification

Healthy Schools Certification is guided by the following goals:

- To support schools that want to enhance the health and well-being of their students and staff
- To increase student engagement and leadership opportunities to support health and well-being at school
- To increase adult engagement in prioritizing health and well-being at school
- To strengthen community engagement and partnerships

# What is Healthy Schools Certification?



## Healthy Schools Areas

Healthy Schools Certification awards points to schools that plan and run activities in four key areas:

- **Teaching and Learning:** Teaches students about your selected health topic(s) through curriculum
- **Social & Physical Environment:** Improves social relationships (e.g., student to staff) and/or enhances your school's physical environment (e.g., play spaces) in your school
- **Policy:** Supports school health policy (or policies) connected to your selected health topic(s) (e.g., Healthy Eating Policy)
- **Partnerships & Services:** Enhances partnerships and services with school and community partners and/or students' families

*Note: These areas are closely connected to Canada's Comprehensive School Health Framework and the Canadian Healthy School Standards.*

Planning activities relating to these four areas will help schools, school boards/districts/authorities, parents/caregivers<sup>1</sup>, and community partners<sup>2</sup> (including public health) work together to take a comprehensive approach to address health topic(s) in their school community.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this resource, the term "parents/caregivers" refers to parents, guardians, caregivers, immediate family, and extended family.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this resource, the term "community partners" refers to any community partner (including public health).

# 4-Step Healthy Schools Process



Healthy Schools Certification program is based on a 4-step process that supports school communities to take a planned and comprehensive approach to address health topic(s) over the course of a school year.

These 4 steps include:

- **Step 1:** Assemble Your Team
- **Step 2:** Identify Your School Community Priorities, Assets, and Health Topic(s)
- **Step 3:** Develop Your Plan and Take Action
- **Step 4:** Celebrate and Reflect

## DEADLINES



### **Deadline to register:**

Friday, November 29, 2024, at 10:00 a.m. (MT), 12:00 p.m. (ET), 1:00 p.m. (AT)

### **Final deadline for certification (to report on Steps 1 to 4):**

Friday, May 9, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. (MT), 12:00 p.m. (ET), 1:00 p.m. (AT)

# 4-Step Healthy Schools Process



## Healthy Schools Certification

### 4 STEP PROCESS



# Health Topics



Schools participating in Healthy Schools Certification can focus on up to three health topics based on their priorities:



Mental Health



Injury Prevention



Physical Activity



Growth and Development



Healthy Eating



Substance Use

*Note: The number of health topics selected by schools has no impact on certification levels (e.g., schools that select multiple health topics do not receive more points than schools that choose one health topic).*



# How Can My School Get Certified?



## Familiarize Yourself with the Healthy Schools Approach

Before you register, visit the Healthy Schools Certification [website](#) to learn more about Healthy Schools and what's involved. Still have questions? Get in touch by using the [Contact Us](#) form on our website.

## Review the Healthy Schools Certification Guidebook

Review the Healthy Schools Certification Guidebook thoroughly to ensure that you (and your team) understand the steps required to receive points toward your school's certification and the online reporting required for each step.

## Register Your School

Visit the Healthy Schools Certification [website](#) to register your school and set up your school's online dashboard. Only school staff can register their school. The deadline for registration is Friday, November 29, 2024, at 10:00 a.m. (MT), 12:00 p.m. (ET), 1:00 p.m. (AT).

## Familiarize Yourself with Your School's Online Dashboard

After you have successfully registered, familiarize yourself with your school's online dashboard, including the different support tools.



### TIP:

We have created a glossary of terms to help you with the Healthy Schools Certification language.

Visit page 27 to access the Glossary!

# How Can My School Get Certified?



## Complete Healthy Schools Process Steps 1–4 and Report

Steps 1–4 must be completed through the online dashboard by Friday, May 9, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. (MT), 12:00 p.m. (ET), 1:00 p.m. (AT). Schools can report on activities occurring after May 9, provided they are scheduled prior to submitting for certification.

***Important: Schools that do not meet this timeline will not be eligible for certification as timelines cannot be extended.***

## Receive Your Certification Results

School certification results will be communicated at the end of May. Schools that are certified will receive a digital banner with their certification level.

Remember:

- ✓ All reporting needs to be done using the online dashboard
- ✓ All reporting must be completed by Friday, May 9, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. (AT), 12:00 p.m. (ET), 1:00 p.m. (AT)
- ✓ All 4 steps must be completed to be eligible for certification

## Levels of Certification

Healthy Schools Certification has been developed using a point-based system aligned with the 4-Step Healthy Schools Process.

There are three levels of certification:

- Gold (400–450 points earned)
- Silver (350–399 points earned)
- Bronze (300–349 points earned)

*Note: Schools that complete all 4 Steps and receive fewer than 300 points will be recognized as a certified school, but will not receive Gold, Silver, or Bronze certification level. These schools will still receive a digital banner recognizing their efforts.*

# How Can My School Get Certified?



## Reporting Requirements

Reporting Requirements to earn points toward certification vary across each process step. In some instances, teams are only required to provide basic information (e.g., Yes or No answers) to earn points while, in other cases, additional information is required to demonstrate your work.



*In cases where additional information is required, this icon will be included to indicate that supplementary content must be provided (e.g., specifically written responses).*

## Healthy Schools Support Tools (HSST)

We have developed Healthy Schools Support Tools that may be used by schools participating in Healthy Schools Certification. These tools have been developed to support schools implement each process step. However, schools participating in Healthy Schools Certification are not required to use the support tools available.

Schools are encouraged to develop formal plans (using the Healthy Schools Plan Template or another planning tool), but only high-level information about school activities are required for reporting.

# How Can My School Get Certified?



## School Reporting Audit Process

In May, an audit will be conducted of all information submitted by schools through their online dashboard. Upon audit, a school will not receive a higher certification level than the one they submitted for. Following the review process, a school may receive a lower certification level than the one applied for if the reporting information provided was insufficient. Any reduction in level is made through consensus of the audit team. All results are final.

Once a school's certification level has been audited, schools will receive communication confirming their Healthy Schools Certification results (e.g., their level). All schools certified at any level will receive a digital banner with their certification level which can be proudly displayed on websites, social media platforms, and other digital platforms to celebrate their achievements. A print ready production file will also be provided along with the digital banner.

# 4-Step Healthy Schools Process



## Purpose

The 4-Step Healthy Schools Certification Process offers consistency in the approach teams take to build their healthy school. Since Healthy Schools Certification is based on a school's ability to follow the process, it is adaptable for all of the unique school communities across Canada. Each process step serves a specific purpose in becoming a healthy school.

## Point Values

- **Step 1:** Assemble Your Team (80 points)
- **Step 2:** Identify Your School Community Priorities, Assets, and Health Topic(s) (120 points)
- **Step 3:** Develop Your Plan and Take Action (200 points)
- **Step 4:** Celebrate and Reflect (50 points)

# Step 1: Assemble Your Team



Step 1 involves bringing together members of your school community to form your team and learning about the Healthy Schools Approach and process steps with your team members. This team includes a Healthy Schools Lead (a staff member from the school who agrees to oversee the team) and should also include a combination of students, other school staff members, principal/vice-principal, parents/caregivers, and/or community partners (e.g., Public Health, Child and Youth Workers, Elders, Grocery Store).

By the end of Step 1, your school will have established a team committed to making your school a healthier place. This team can always add members as you proceed through Steps 2–4.



**STEP 1**

**Assemble Your Team**



*Note: Many schools already have existing teams or classes with a common purpose aligned with Healthy Schools, such as a Student Leadership class, a Safe and Accepting Schools Team, or a Positive School Climate Team. We encourage schools to leverage these teams to avoid duplication.*

**Total Points Available: 80 points**

# Step 1: Assemble Your Team



## Team Members (up to 70 points)

Our team includes:

- Students (30 points)
- School Staff (10 points)
- Principal/Vice-Principal (10 points)
- Parents/Caregivers (10 points)
- Community Partners (e.g., Public Health, Child and Youth Workers, Elders, Grocery Store)(10 points)



*Note: You will need to describe the roles and responsibilities of each team member you select based on their skills and experiences.*

## Team Professional Development (10 points)

Our team has watched and discussed the Healthy Schools Certification Professional Development Videos this year.

Yes

No

### Required Resource

[Healthy Schools Certification Professional Development Videos](#)



*Note: Teams experience greater success in the Healthy Schools Certification program with a shared understanding of the Healthy Schools Approach and process steps.*

# Step 2: Identify Your School Community Priorities, Assets, and Health Topic(s)



Step 2 involves working with your team to better understand the priorities and assets of your school to help inform which health topic(s) should be your focus for this school year.

School priorities are determined by collecting/locating data (e.g., from surveys, focus groups, interviews) from different members of your school and community to understand which health topic(s) to focus on. Once you have identified your priorities, you will work with your team to identify the top assets (e.g., people, programs, places) that your school currently has in place to support addressing your priorities. You will use this information to help identify your health topic(s).

By the end of Step 2, your team will have located/collected key information relating to your school's priorities and assets and decided on your health topic(s) for the school year.



**STEP 2**

**Identify Your School  
Community Priorities, Assets,  
and Health Topic(s)**

**Total Points Available: 120 points**



# Step 2: Identify Your School Community Priorities, Assets, and Health Topic(s)



## Identification of School Community Priorities (5 points per data source; up to 10 points)

How did you collect information about your health priorities from your school community (e.g., focus group, interviews, survey, email)?

Describe what you learned about the health priorities of your school community from this information (e.g., a lack of after school activities, students not eating breakfast, etc. Be specific!).



*Note: You will need to answer the questions within the Identification of School Community Priorities section for each data source.*

## Information About Your School Community (up to 70 points)

Did your team collect information about your school priorities from? (check all that apply):

- Students (at my school) (30 points)
- School Staff (at my school) (10 points)
- Principal/Vice-Principal (at my school) (10 points)
- Parents/Caregivers (from my school community) (10 points)
- Community Partners (e.g., Public Health, Child and Youth Workers, Elders, Grocery Store) (from my school community) (10 points)

# Step 2: Identify Your School Community Priorities, Assets, and Health Topic(s)



## Identification of Assets (1 point per asset; up to 10 points)

### Name of Asset

(something that your school already has/does) (e.g., a relationship with a local grocery store, a club/team that will support HSC, an accessible playground, etc.)

### Health Topic(s) Connections

This asset supports the following health topic(s): (select all that apply)

- Mental Health
- Physical Activity
- Healthy Eating
- Injury Prevention
- Growth and Development
- Substance Use

### Describe this Asset

(What is this asset? How does it help make your school community a healthier place?)



*You will need to include at least 10 different assets to get all 10 points.  
You will need to check off which health topic(s) each asset helps support.*

# Step 2: Identify Your School Community Priorities, Assets, and Health Topic(s)



## Pause and Reflect with Your Team (10 points)

Our team discussed what we learned about our school community in Step 2: Identify Your School Community Priorities, Assets and Health Topic(s):

- Yes       No



*Note: If you select “Yes” you will need to describe what your team learned about your school community based on the results of your data sources and identified assets (e.g., our school needs to improve student mental health and we have assets to support us in achieving this).*

## Identification of Health Topic(s) (10 points)

Our team has chosen one or multiple health topic(s) to focus on this school year (identify a maximum of three topics):

- Mental Health
- Physical Activity
- Healthy Eating
- Injury Prevention
- Growth and Development
- Substance Use

## Team Involvement (Identify Priorities, Assets, and Health Topic(s)) (10 points)

Our team was involved in identifying school community priorities, assets, and our health topic(s).

- Yes       No



*Note: You will need to ensure that all data entered in Step 2 is in accordance with your school board's privacy policy (e.g., use initials or first names instead of full names when referring to your team members).*

# Step 3: Develop Your Plan and Take Action



Step 3 involves working with your team to develop a plan to address your health topic(s). Your team will implement, monitor, and update your plan as the year progresses to document the Healthy Schools activities that took place.

By the end of Step 3, your team will have a plan that shows all Healthy Schools activities that took place during the school year.



**Develop Your Plan and Take Action**

**Total Points Available: 200 points**

## Plan

Name of Activity:

Description of Activity:



*Note: You will need to select the health topic(s) you chose in Step 2 that supports the activity.*

## Activity Connections to Healthy Schools Area(s) (up to 80 points)

In our plan, connections were made to these areas during our activities (check all that apply). If checked, how did your activity (from your plan) support this Healthy Schools Area(s)?



*Note: If a Healthy Schools Area is selected you must include the name of the activity in your plan from Step 3 and how your activity supported the following Healthy School Area selected.*

# Step 3: Develop Your Plan and Take Action



- Teaching and Learning:** Teaches students about your selected health topic(s) through curriculum (20 points)

**i** *Note: Your response must include at least one specific curriculum connection the activity met (e.g., students learned how to manage emotions during team play (A1.1 Identification and Management of Emotions), D2.1 Canada's Food Guide).*

- Social & Physical Environment:** Improves social relationships (e.g., student to student, student to staff, staff to staff) and/or enhances your school's physical environment (e.g., improves play spaces/safe spaces for students) connected to your selected health topic(s) (20 points)

**i** *Note: Your response must clearly identify the social relationship enhanced (e.g., student to student or student to staff relationship) and/or physical environment (e.g., enhanced/improved play spaces, shared community space).*

- Policy:** Supports school health policy (or policies) connected to your selected health topic(s) (e.g., School Healthy Food Policy – states that all students have access to a healthy breakfast and snack) (20 points)

**i** *Note: Your response must include the specific name of the policy (or policies) (e.g., School Healthy Food Policy – states that all students have access to a healthy breakfast and snack, Ontario's Food and Beverage Policy [PPM 150]).*

- Partnerships & Services:** Enhances partnerships and services with school and community partners and/or students' families (20 points)

**i** *Note: Your response must include the specific name of the partnership(s) and service(s) (e.g., partnership with public health, local farm, community food share).*

# Step 3: Develop Your Plan and Take Action



## Team Engagement (Student Engagement) (20 points)

Did student team members lead activities in your plan (e.g., student-led activities with adult guidance and support)?

- Yes       No

## Team Engagement (Adult Engagement) (10 points)

Were adult team members (apart from your Healthy Schools Lead) actively involved in supporting activities in your plan (e.g., responsibilities were shared among adult team members)?

- Yes       No

## School Community Reach (up to 70 points)

The following audiences participated in/attended the activities in our plan (select all that apply):

- Students (30 points)
- School Staff (10 points)
- Principal/Vice-Principal (10 points)
- Parents/Caregivers (10 points)
- Community Partners (e.g., Public Health, Child and Youth Workers, Elders, Grocery Store) (10 points)

# Step 3: Develop Your Plan and Take Action



## Team Engagement (Plan Review and Updates) (10 points)

Our team regularly reviewed our plan. Adjustments to our plan were made if needed.

Yes       No



*Note: If you select “Yes” you will need to describe an adjustment that had to be made to your plan. If no adjustments were made, you will need to describe what led to the successful implementation of your plan.*

## Pause and Reflect with Your Team (10 points)

Our team discussed what we learned about our school community in Step 3: Develop Your Plan and Take Action.

Yes       No



*Note: If you select “Yes” you will need to describe what your team learned about your school community in Step 3 – be specific! (e.g., describe what activities worked best, and what activities could be improved).*

# Step 4: Celebrate and Reflect



Step 4 involves celebrating the contributions of each team member and reflecting on your Healthy Schools journey, including what you've learned and what impact you've had on your school, both this year and into the future.

By the end of Step 4, you will have celebrated the members of your team for all of their hard work and reflected (as a team) on the Healthy Schools activities you implemented this year, as well as the 4-step process you followed.



**Celebrate and Reflect**

## Total Points Available: 50 points

### Team Celebration (30 points)

We are celebrating the contributions of each team member in supporting the health of our school community.

Yes       No

**i** *Note: You will need to share what you have done (or will do) to celebrate and recognize the members of your team.*

### Pause and Reflect with Your Team (20 points)

Describe what was learned through your Healthy Schools Certification journey this year (e.g., What was a key learning? What is your team most proud of?).



# School Support



## We're Here to Support You!

Healthy Schools Certification is a team-based approach and we are always here to help. We work with schools across Canada to guide them through the Healthy Schools Approach by providing tools schools can use to build their capacity to implement this process annually.

To access resources to support Healthy Schools, please visit your school's [online dashboard](#) (once registered).

Additional questions or support requests can be submitted to our [Contact Us](#) form at any time during the school year.

## Healthy Schools on Social Media

We're on social media and we want to hear what you're doing! Post on Instagram, X (Twitter) what you've been up to, or ask any questions using [#HSCert](#).

# Helpful Resources



## **Canadian Healthy School Standards**

A resource created by the Canadian Healthy Schools Alliance with the purpose of sparking the conversation about Healthy Schools in Canada. It can serve as a checklist for those on their Healthy Schools journey or in a nonlinear manner wherever it is needed.

## **Canada's Comprehensive School Health Framework**

An internationally recognized framework that focuses on a whole-school approach for student academic achievement and health. This framework recognizes four areas in their Healthy Schools Approach that are consistent with the Healthy Schools Certification areas: teaching and learning, social and physical environment, policy, and partnerships and services.

# Glossary



## **4-Step Healthy Schools Process**

A process that supports school communities to take a planned approach to address health topic(s) in their school. These 4 steps include:

- Step 1: Assemble Your Team
- Step 2: Identify Your School Community Priorities, Assets, and Health Topic(s)
- Step 3: Develop Your Plan and Take Action
- Step 4: Celebrate and Reflect

## **Administration**

The principal and/or vice-principal(s) of a school.

## **Community Partner**

Any member of the school community who can contribute to the development of a healthy school (e.g., public health, recreation and sport groups, municipalities, local businesses). These partners may vary depending on the specific school community.

## **Data Source**

Sources of information used by school communities to identify their priorities (included in Step 2 of Opeha's 4-Step Healthy Schools Process).

## **Health Topic(s)**

The health topic(s) identified by a school community (e.g., healthy eating, mental health) to be addressed through their Healthy Schools activities for the school year.

## **Healthy Schools Approach**

A collaborative approach whereby members of the school community come together to share ideas, plan, and take action on health topic(s) while following a repeatable, step-by-step process to make sustainable change in their school, homes, and community.

# Glossary



## Healthy Schools Areas

The four interconnected areas that school communities should consider in their plan to comprehensively address their health topic(s).

- Teaching & Learning
- Social & Physical Environment
- Policy
- Partnerships & Services

## Healthy Schools Lead

The Healthy Schools Lead is the school staff member who will lead their school through Healthy Schools Certification. The Healthy Schools Lead is the key contact at the school who ensures that the Healthy Schools Certification registration and reporting are completed online. This position is decided by the school. The Healthy Schools Lead must be an employee of the school.

## Healthy Schools Support Tools (HSST)

These are a series of downloadable tools that were created to support schools in completing the 4-Step process successfully. They are all available online through each registered school's online dashboard and are customizable to each school's needs. Schools are encouraged to complete them and use them if they support their work. However, none of the HSST are mandatory.

## Parents/Caregivers

Parents and caregivers include all caring and care-giving members in the lives of students. This could include but is not limited to parents, grandparents, aunts/uncles, siblings, and guardians.

# Glossary



## **Public Health**

Schools are supported by a system of local public health that collectively cover your entire region and are individually responsible for serving the population within their geographic borders. Public health can play a key role in supporting school communities as it relates to Healthy Schools.

## **School Board/District/Authority**

A school board, district or authority is responsible for the oversight of a number of schools within a geographical region and meets the needs of their school communities. The terminology used is dependent on the Canadian region.

## **Team**

A group or committee operating in a school that supports planning and action as it relates to Healthy Schools. Members of the team should include individuals who are within (e.g., students, educators, support staff) and outside (e.g., public health, parents/caregivers) the physical school grounds.