



Sharing the Success of Wellness Fund: Project Highlights

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The Alberta Healthy School Community Wellness Fund has compiled an interim summary report to share the excellent work and impacts of funded projects. This information is compiled from annual reporting by project leaders.

Wellness Fund Reach

Since 2007 a total of **150 projects have been funded** to develop healthy school communities in **over 750 schools**, **impacting more than 250,000 k-12 students** across Alberta. This equates to over **40% of all Albertan students**.

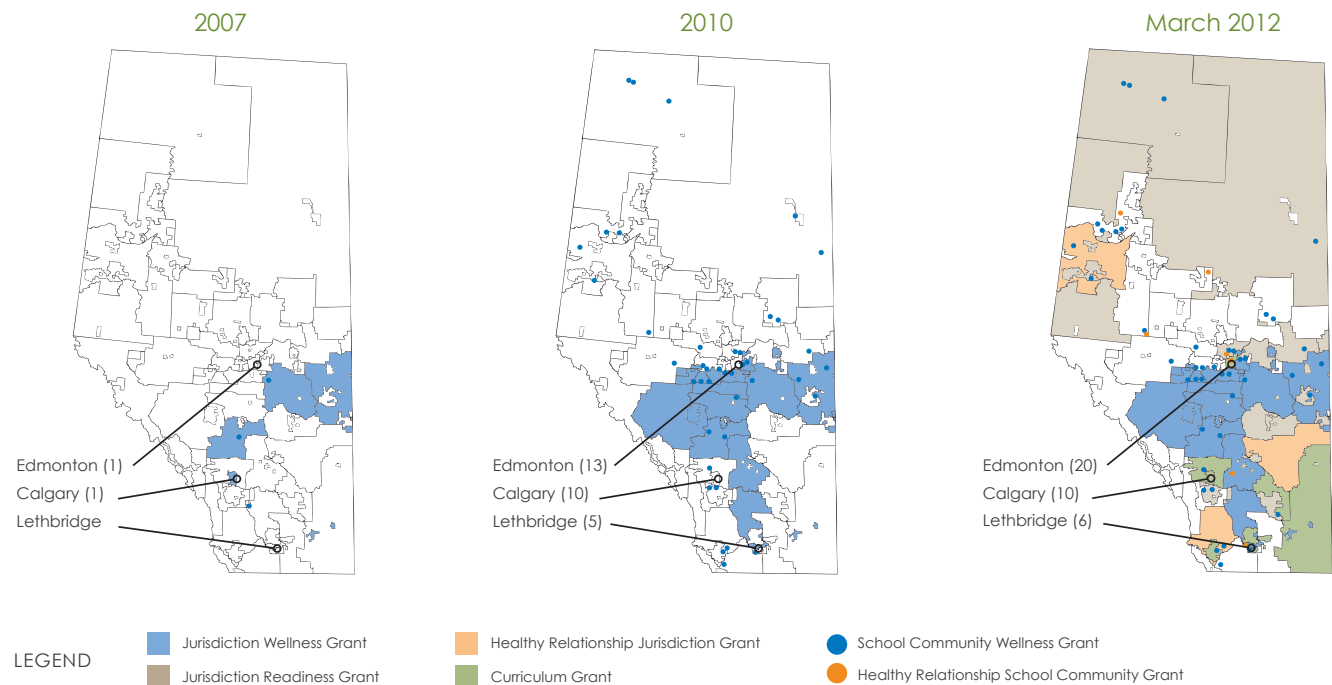
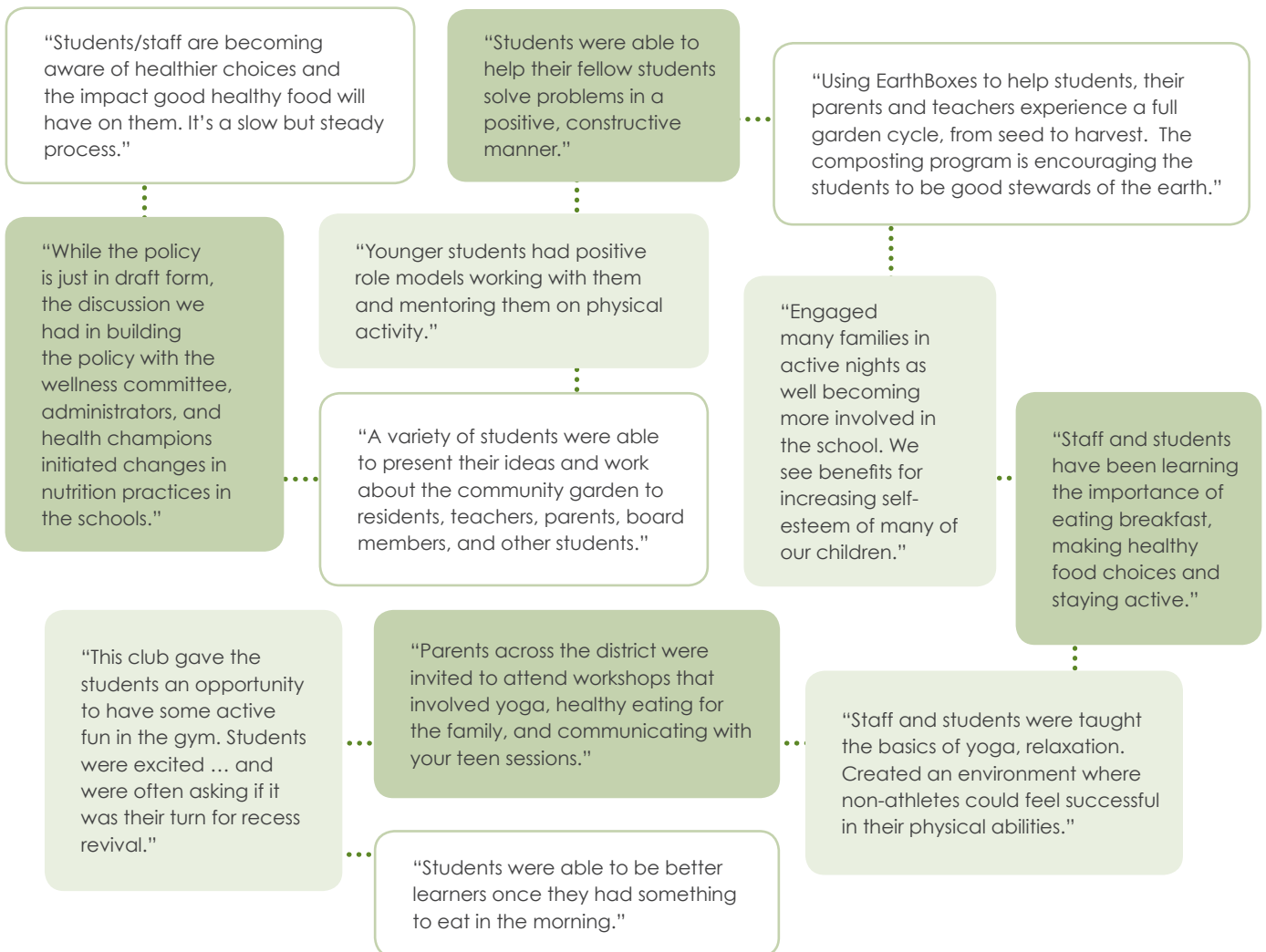


TABLE 1. Impacts of Priority Area Activities as Reported by Project Leaders in 2011

Active Living Impact	Health Eating Impact	Positive Social Environment Impact
OF ALL RESPONDENTS:		
89% stated that AL activities were provided to the school community	86% stated that Healthy food options increased in the school community	41% stated that a more positive school environment was created
80% stated that students increased their participation in AL activities	70% stated that healthy eating knowledge was delivered to students	38% stated that students increased their participation in PSE activities
52% stated that students increased their knowledge or awareness of AL	58% stated that students increased knowledge or awareness of healthy eating	29% stated that PSE knowledge was delivered to staff

Impact of Activities on the Whole School Community



Increasing Stakeholder Buy-In

Healthy students learn better! To improve buy-in from key stakeholders, such as principals, teachers, parents and superintendents, research was compiled in collaboration with Alberta Health Services to illustrate the link between a healthy school community and its positive effect on the learning abilities of students. Below is a summary of the compiled research.

Healthy Eating

Research shows that students who are well nourished perform better in school:

Fruit and vegetable consumption and dietary fat intake is important to academic performance. Further, overall diet quality and academic performance are associated with each other. (Florence et al., 2008)

Improvement of the physical eating environment can lead to an increase in student engagement and attentiveness in the classroom. (Storey et al., 2011)

Undernourished children have difficulty focusing on tasks, have lower self-esteem and are absent more often from school. (School Nutrition Handbook, Calgary Health Region, 2005)

Active Living

Research suggests that physical activity improves cognitive performance and academic achievement in children

Physical activity can:

- contribute to the school climate by creating a sense of togetherness and acceptance
- create positive self-perceptions of competence
- create positive body-image perceptions
- build social skills such as teamwork, fair play and tolerance
- build self-esteem
- reduce the likelihood of smoking and drug use behaviors
- improve academic performance

(WHO Promoting physical activity in schools: An important element of a health-promoting School. 2007)

Positive Social Environments

Research describes significant effects of positive social environments on the school community:

A healthy psycho-social school environment can enhance the social and emotional well-being of students, making a critical contribution to academic achievement. (Creating an Environment for Emotional and Social Well-being, WHO, 2003)

A variety of studies have shown that social- emotional learning programs have led to increased academic performance. (Zins et al., 2004)

"A school-wide approach to positive behavior effectively promotes a safe, orderly and predictable environment for learning and teaching." (Supporting Positive Behavior in Alberta Schools, Alberta Education, 2008)

Lessons Learned

As the development of healthy school communities is still in its infancy it is not surprising that many lessons have been learned over the last year, most notably the importance of time to focus on the process of healthy school community development. The most significant lessons learned are briefly described, explaining how they have been addressed or recommendations for how they could be addressed in the future.

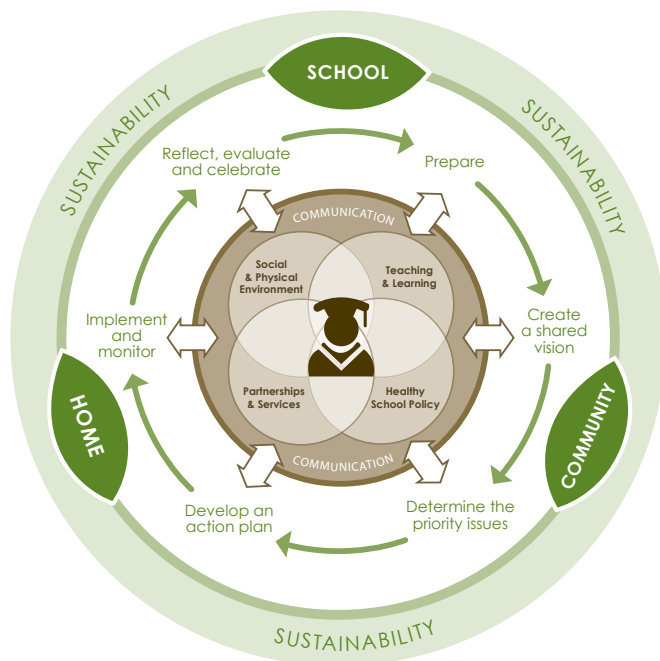
School communities need more time to achieve sustainable change

It has become evident that even three years of funding can be too short a time frame to completely embed change within a school community and develop a healthy school culture that will be sustainable. However, it is believed that three years, or even one year given proper focus on planning and development, can provide school communities with a strong foundation that supports progress towards sustainable change.

Use a step-by-step development process

Figure 1 demonstrates the relationship between the Wellness Fund's identified six step process and the Joint Consortium for School Health's Comprehensive School Health approach. This process is the mechanism used to assist in the development of a healthy school community.

FIGURE 1. A Process Model for Developing a Healthy School Community



The importance of collaborative partnerships

The development of a healthy school community is an all-encompassing process. The more individuals contribute, the more effective the work and the more likely it will be sustained. Contributions from partners such as Alberta Health Services, Ever Active Schools, Be Fit for Life and many other community partners across the province have been essential to the development of healthy school communities. The partnerships that have been developed between health and education have been key to the success of many projects and contribute to sustainability.

Rural and remote school communities may need additional support

The location of a school community is a factor that needs to be considered as isolated school communities often have limited access to partnerships, services and fresh produce. These factors can impede the ability to develop a healthy school community. Funding provision therefore needs to reflect the circumstances of the individual school or district.



Student Leadership

Increasingly the Wellness Fund has observed that student leadership in initiatives has a positive impact on the development of healthy school communities. Below are common ways in which projects fostered student leadership.



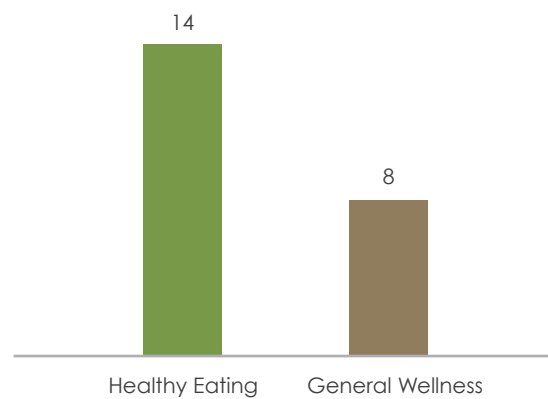


Policy and Practice

As of August 2011, 22 out of 30 district projects reported developing or fully implementing at least one policy, **impacting 340 schools and over 125,000 students**. A breakdown of the focuses of district policies can be seen in figure 2. While policy is not essential, it can help create sustainability by ensuring that practice becomes embedded within the culture of the school community.

Policy is about establishing a consistent course of action that will guide educational programming and decision making. Many school communities in Alberta are creating and implementing policies and procedures designed to improve the health and wellness of their school community. Policy in a healthy school community setting refers to the management of practices, decision-making processes, rules, procedures and policies at all levels that promote health and wellbeing, and shape a respectful, welcoming and caring school environment. In a school community context, it can be considered a contract between stakeholders. While policy is not essential, it can help create sustainability by ensuring that practice becomes embedded within the culture of the school community. The most successful way to develop policy is through consultation with all stakeholders; a top-down, bottom-up approach is more likely to achieve buy-in especially when policy is created from practice rather than by dictating practice.

FIGURE 2. Number and Type of District Policies Developed



Alumni Project Reporting

Alumni projects are those projects that have reached the cessation of their Wellness Fund Grant. Alumni projects still receive regular communication from the Wellness Fund, such as newsletters, resources and conference updates. As part of this regular communication a questionnaire was sent out to all 49 alumni projects. Of the 49 projects that were invited to participate 41% completed the questionnaire, a high response rate as alumni projects are no longer required to report. **Of the responding Alumni projects 75% indicated that their work on developing healthy school communities has expanded or been sustained since the ending of their Wellness Fund Grant.**



Areas of Focus

Since 2007 the Wellness Fund has funded projects which focus on the 3 priority areas of healthy eating, active living and positive social environments. In 2012 additional funding was provided in new areas.

1

Readiness Grants

To provide school districts with the opportunity to discuss and plan the development of their healthy school community.

13 projects have been awarded district readiness grants.

2

Curriculum Grants

To support high schools in embedding health and wellness throughout the whole curriculum.

6 projects have been awarded district curriculum grants.

3

Developing Healthy Relationships Grants

To support high school communities in addressing healthy relationships including responsible sexual behaviour.

10 projects have been awarded healthy relationships grants.

For more information, please contact:

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OUR PARTNERS

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Frameworks

Two key Alberta Education Frameworks for schools to be aware of are the "Framework for Student Learning" and the "Framework for K-12 Wellness Education". These documents provide guidance to support the development of a culture of wellness throughout the whole school community and across all curriculum areas.

