

Healthy Happenings

May 29, 2007 *West Kootenay Network Celebration.* Location: Castlegar Recreation Centre, Castlegar, B.C.

June 4, 2007 *Lower Mainland Celebration.* Location: Langley School Board Office, Board Room, 4875-222nd St, Langley, B.C.

June 4, 2007 *Island Network Showcase.* Location: SJ Willis Auditorium, 923 Topaz Ave., Victoria, B.C.

June 6, 2007 *Okanagan North Network Celebration.* SD #23 (Kelowna) Location: Vintage Hills Golf Course, 3509 Carrington Rd., Westbank, B.C.

June 10-15, 2007 *The 19th IUHPE World Conference on Health Promotion and Health Education* Location: Vancouver Convention & Exhibition Centre
For more Info: www.iuhpeconference.org/en/conference

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Health Literacy

“Health literacy is a relatively new concept in health promotion. It is a composite term to describe a range of outcomes to health education and communication activities. From this perspective, health education is directed towards improving health literacy.”¹ Giving students the capacity (knowledge, skills and attitudes) to make informed decisions about their health is a fundamental element of the BC Healthy Schools Network.

While schools are very familiar with literacy in the traditional sense, the ability to read and write, or the ability to use language, health literacy is not as commonly understood. This term was originally used to focus on the need to understand information on prescription labels and medical brochures. “More recently, the concept has broadened to one of empowering people with the knowledge and skills to make informed choices about their health and wellbeing, to influence events in their communities and to have greater control over their lives.”²

Change is an ever increasing constant in our society and the public school curriculum reflects the evolving cultural priorities. Many of the influences on student health today did not exist 20, or even 10 years ago. Computer technology and video games increasingly encourage a sedentary lifestyle. Targeted and powerful media advertising sends mixed messages to today’s youth. Security issues encourage parents to restrict children’s activities often resulting in limiting their physical activity levels. Busy family lifestyles often relegate food choices to what is quick, simple and inexpensive; characteristics not frequently compatible with healthy, balanced eating practices.

¹ Nutbeam, D. (2000) Health literacy as a public health goal: a challenge for contemporary health education and communication strategies into the 21st century. *Health Promotion International*

² Nutbeam, D. (1999) Literacy across the lifespan: ‘Health Literacy’. *Literacy and Numeracy Studies*

The marketing of foods high in fat, sugar, or starch—such as soft drinks, candy, and potato chips—especially to children, is contributing to the high rates of overweight and obesity.

- Dr Perry Kendall, Provincial Health Officer, *Annual Report: Food, Health and Well-Being in British Columbia, 2006*

Healthy Schools Network members are taking proactive steps regarding these issues and are responding to the challenge to empower their students with the necessary health literacy skills to make wise and healthy choices.

DID YOU KNOW:

Children attending schools with an integrated program including daily physical activity, no junk food sales, health education, and parental and community involvement indicate that children are 59% less overweight and 72% less obese.

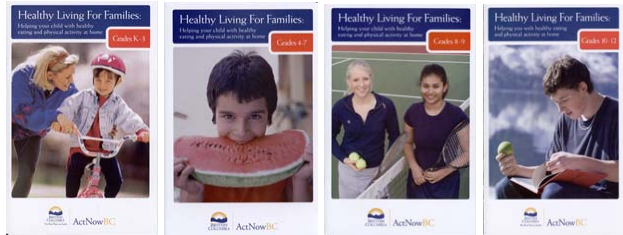
School-based healthy eating and physical activity programs:

- Provide a greater opportunity to enhance the future health and well-being of children because they can reach almost all children.
- Enhance learning and provide social benefits.
- Enhance health during critical periods of growth and maturation.
- Lower the risk for chronic diseases in adulthood.
- Help to establish healthy behaviors at an early age that will lead to lifelong healthy habits.

Veugelaers and Fitzgerald “Effectiveness of School Programs in Preventing Childhood Obesity: A Multilevel Comparison”. *American Journal of Public Health* 95, no. 3 (March 2005), p.434.

Resource of the Month

Make sure you take advantage of the new Healthy Living For Families series which was recently sent to your school district. These grade level booklets provide a great home support resource for your teaching units or school-wide initiatives on healthy eating and physical activity.



Additional copies will be available at no cost, while quantities last. Fax your request to the Ministry of Education warehouse (250)544-4405. Copies in 12 languages are now available online at :

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/health/tools.htm#res.

Health Literacy Resources

Centre for Health Promotion, South Australia

www.chdf.org.au

Click on “Virtually Healthy” and select Term 3, 2006

Dr. Ilona Kickbusch’s website provides great background

www.ilonakickbusch.com

A practical introduction to Health Literacy and Comprehensive School Health:

www.leo.oise.utoronto.ca/~aanderson/csh/

Success Stories

Health Literacy in the Okanagan

KLO Middle School focused on Health Literacy through the following inquiry question...“If students are shown how to read food labels by their peers, will they be able to demonstrate their understanding of food label information and will having this knowledge help them make healthier food choices?”

In order to find the answer to this inquiry question, KLO Middle School’s Marketing 9 class, developed a plan to teach the majority of the student body how to read and understand food labels. The grade seven students were given two lessons by the Marketing 9 students. One lesson involved playing an interactive nutrition label game on the internet and the other lesson involved the students watching a video the Marketing 9 students wrote and produced. The video called “*Nutrition Idol*”

explained the contents listed on the label and the impact these ingredients have on the body. Pre and post-tests were administered. Here are some of the formal results:

- 61% of the students improved on their second written test;
- 85% of the students feel more informed about food labels;
- 48% of the students feel they will read food labels regularly;
- 37% believe they will now read food labels some of the time; and
- 63% of the students believe reading labels will help them make better choices.

Through this format, many KLO students are more health literate with respect to healthy eating. Students have been seen reading labels, are talking about what they are consuming and feel empowered by their choices.

Howe Sound Builds Health Literacy

Howe Sound Secondary School began by asking the question, “Do existing tobacco cessation programs have any affect on the incidence of tobacco use by Howe Sound students?”

After establishing a school health team which included teachers, students, counselors, district and school administration, the BC cancer agency and Coast Garibaldi Health, a number of initiatives were developed and implemented including:

- Counselor led intervention groups
- Development of a Student Entrepreneur Network through a Capable Kids grant
- Use of available tobacco cessation education materials

Tobacco cessation materials addressed some of the basic standards of health literacy, such as, access to information and understanding of concepts, but the Howe Sound plan moved beyond this. With the support of school counselors, they were able to focus on decision-making skills, goal-setting skills and assist students in practicing healthy living habits.

Taking this multi-factorial approach yielded noticeable results and also led to a better understanding of the target group and to a number of new inquiry questions. The school is now examining issues revolving around at-risk youth and their connection to school and community. Finding ways to help at-risk students feel more connected to the school and community will support the sustainability of their school goal to reduce or eliminate student use of tobacco.

While they continue to expand their original initiatives, they are now delving into a new inquiry question: “What programs and initiatives will help at-risk youth feel more connected to school and community?”