

About Ophea.

Ophea is a charitable organization working toward an Ontario where all 2 million children and youth have the knowledge and skills they need to make informed choices about their health and well-being. Through our programs and services, Ophea works with all schools across Ontario (in English and French) and maintains relationships with key decision makers in all schools boards, faculties of education, public health units. Ophea actively collaborates with government across several ministries, as well as with other non-government agencies to support children and youth well-being initiatives in school communities.

Ontario's school health context is evolving.

The delivery of education within a COVID 19 context has been challenging, however, the government of Ontario has a number of key policies that aim to improve the health and well-being of children and youth to prepare them for the challenges of work and life. Primary amongst these policies is the 2019 Health and Physical Education (H&PE) curriculum that impact all students in the province. The H&PE curriculum provides them with opportunities to develop the skills and strategies that will contribute to their ability to make healthy decisions now and into the future. It also supports the development of physical and health literacy, mental health and well-being.

In working together we are stronger and more effective.

Schools serve all of Ontario's children, including those in our most vulnerable populations, and they provide multiple entry points to support student health and well-being. Across Ontario, school boards and public health units have varied capacities to support effective implementation of H&PE. The context of implementation is challenging with less than half (39%) of Ontario's elementary schools having a specialist H&PE teacher (People for Education, 2018), and as a result implementation of the curriculum has fallen largely to Ontario's generalist teachers. These teachers often have minimal training, experience, or comfort in addressing all areas of the H&PE curriculum. At the same time 79% of Ontario parents believe H&PE is important and helps prepare children to address a variety of health issues (EnviroNics, 2018).

Ontario schools need to focus on teaching students health skills that matter.

Representative client survey data (2020) have identified topic areas that teachers are seeking additional support with including:

- Opportunities for H&PE from an at-home lens, a physical distance lens, and a blended learning model.
- Support with integrating and assessing learning in H&PE instruction.

Ophea recommends continued collaboration with sector stakeholders and subject-matter experts (e.g., CAMH, SMHO, PrevNET) to address these components of the curriculum into Ophea's existing H&PE teaching supports; provide teacher (and teacher candidates) outreach and training; as well as engagement of parents and families, to enable student success.

The prioritization of H&PE and taking this approach will help students reach their full potential, prepare students with the skills, knowledge and confidence to succeed, address teacher (and teacher candidate) needs to deliver quality education.

Why now.

Children are facing greater health risks than ever and they are becoming less healthy and active; putting them at greater risk for chronic diseases and placing a burden on provincial health care spending. Ensuring that students receive quality H&PE instruction as a fundamental part of public education, is the most effective way of providing children with knowledge and skills to help them make safe and informed decisions now and in the future.

For more information please contact Chris Markham, Ophea's Executive Director & CEO, at chris@ophea.org.

Sincerely,



John Dance
President, Ophea



Chris Markham
Executive Director and CEO, Ophea