

# Healthy Schools Strategy

## Standing Committee on Public Accounts Follow-Up on Section 4.03, 2015 Annual Report

The Committee held a public hearing on May 4, 2016 on our 2015 follow-up to our 2013 audit of the Healthy Schools Strategy. The Committee tabled a report on this hearing in the Legislature in October 2016. The report can be found at [www.auditor.on.ca/en/content/standingcommittee/standingcommittee.html](http://www.auditor.on.ca/en/content/standingcommittee/standingcommittee.html).

The Committee made four recommendations and asked the Ministry of Education (Ministry) to report back by mid-February 2017. The Ministry formally responded to the Committee on February

14, 2017. A number of the issues raised by the Committee were similar to the audit observations in our 2013 audit and 2015 follow-up. The status of each of the Committee's recommended actions is shown in **Figure 1**.

We conducted assurance work between April 1, 2017 and July 31, 2017, and obtained written representation from the Ministry of Education that effective September 1, 2017 it has provided us with a complete update of the status of the recommendations made by the Committee in its report.

**Figure 1: Summary Status of Actions Recommended in October 2016 Committee Report**

Prepared by the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario

	# of Actions Recommended	Status of Actions Recommended			
		Fully Implemented	In Process of Being Implemented	Little or No Progress	Will Not Be Implemented
Recommendation 1	1		1		
Recommendation 2	3		3		
Recommendation 3	2		2		
Recommendation 4	2		1	1	
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>%</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>0</b>

## Overall Conclusion

At the time of our follow-up, the Ministry was reviewing and revising both the School Food and Beverage Policy and the Daily Physical Activ-

ity Policy, which were the main subjects of the original audit.

According to the information the Ministry provided to us, as of July 31, 2017, seven of the Committee's recommended actions (88%) were in the process of being implemented. However, there has

been little or no progress on the remaining action (12%). That is, the Ministry had not set goals and targets for school boards to increase physical activity in schools, and periodically monitor, measure and publicly report on the progress made. The Ministry informed us it expects to start taking these steps after the policies are revised.

## Detailed Status of Recommendations

**Figure 2** shows the recommendations and the status details that are based on responses from the Ministry, and our review of the information provided.

**Figure 2: Committee Recommendations and Detailed Status of Actions Taken**

Prepared by the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario

Committee Recommendation	Status Details
<p><b>Recommendation 1</b></p> <p>The Ministry of Education and school boards should improve communication with parents to encourage healthier eating and increased physical activity, and assess the effectiveness of this communication.</p> <p><b>Status: In the process of being implemented by December 2017.</b></p>	<p>The Ministry has taken some action in this area, and has plans for additional actions, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At the time of our follow-up, the Ministry was surveying 25 school boards to determine the extent they communicate with parents about healthy schools policies—including the value of healthy eating and physical activity. The Ministry anticipated that school boards would complete the survey by the end of the 2016/17 school year. The Ministry was also planning to engage in follow-up discussions with the school boards with respect to their survey responses. By December 2017, the Ministry expects to have prepared a final report, which will include best practices with respect to parent communications and will share it with all 72 school boards.</li> <li>• In 2016/17 the Ministry provided funding, through the Parents Reaching Out (PRO) Grants program, to local projects that enhance parent engagement in their children’s learning in support of student achievement and well-being. The Ministry funded 275 school council projects a total cost of \$266,000 to provide workshops, events and sessions for parents to promote healthy living. In February 2017, the Ministry announced plans to continue the PRO Grant program in the 2017/18 school year.</li> <li>• In 2016, the Ministry created promotional videos that highlight successful PRO Grants projects and posted them on its website. One such video features a school council that successfully used PRO grant funds to do a series of Family Fitness Nights.</li> <li>• The Ministry posted two fact sheets for parents on its website—<i>Quick Facts for Parents: Learning about Active Transportation</i> (September 2015) and <i>Quick Facts for Parents: Learning about Healthy Eating</i> (December 2015). The Ministry informed us that it plans to release another factsheet for parents in September 2017 focused on physical activity.</li> <li>• In April 2017, the Ministry held six regional symposia for parents across Ontario and one French-language symposium that provided an opportunity to share information with parents on healthy schools initiatives, including healthy eating and physical activity.</li> <li>• Ontario youth aged 11–15 participated in an international survey in 2013/14 that captured health-related data. The Ministry plans to release Ontario’s survey results in September 2017, to raise awareness about the importance of promoting healthy eating and increasing physical activity.</li> </ul>

Committee Recommendation	Status Details
<p><b>Recommendation 2</b> The Ministry of Education should work with school boards to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ensure that school administrators and teachers receive sufficient training to implement the School Food and Beverage Policy and promote healthy eating; and <b>Status: In the process of being implemented by June 2018.</b></li> <li>develop consistent and effective strategies for monitoring compliance with the School Food and Beverage Policy; and <b>Status: In the process of being implemented by December 2017.</b></li> <li>develop measurable objectives for healthy eating and measure progress in achieving these objectives. <b>Status: In the process of being implemented by August 2018.</b></li> </ul>	<p>At the time of our follow-up, the Ministry was in the process of reviewing its School Food and Beverage Policy. This work will be done in four phases: (1) conducting research, including a review of policies in other jurisdictions; (2) consulting with stakeholders and other ministries through various working groups; (3) revising policies and developing performance measures; and (4) developing supports to assist with the implementation of the policy, including consideration of administrators and educators' needs. At the time of our follow-up, the Ministry had completed phase one and was working on phase two. The Ministry expects to release a revised School Food and Beverage Policy in June 2018, after which time the Ministry informed us it expects to make plans to help ensure administrators and educators receive training and other supports for implementation of the revised policy.</p> <p>At the time of our follow-up, the Ministry was surveying 25 school boards to determine implementation of the existing School Food and Beverage Policy. As noted in response to Recommendation 1, the Ministry expects to prepare a summary of key findings and best practices and send it to all 72 school boards by December 2017. In addition, the Ministry has completed an evaluation of pilot projects funded in 2014/15 through the Healthy Eating in Secondary Schools Grants (HEG), to change secondary students' attitudes and behaviours about healthy eating. Altogether, 90 projects were funded for a total \$3.2 million. The Ministry informed us that it will share lessons learned and best practices with school boards in October 2017.</p> <p>The Ministry plans to develop performance measures for the School Food and Beverage Policy during phase three of the policy review, expected to be completed by August 2018. According to the Ministry, it will try to align these performance measures with Ontario's work to promote and support well-being, which is intended to promote a positive sense of well-being in students and consists of four key components: positive mental health, safe and accepting schools, healthy schools, and equity and inclusive education. The Ministry also plans to consider appropriate monitoring roles for the Ministry and school boards.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 3</b> The Ministry of Education should work with school boards to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ensure that elementary school administrators and teachers receive sufficient training on how to incorporate daily physical activity into the school day; and <b>Status: In the process of being implemented by September 2017.</b></li> <li>establish a way to measure and monitor whether students are provided with the required daily physical activity. <b>Status: In the process of being implemented by December 2017.</b></li> </ul>	<p>In 2016, the Ministry began a process to review its Daily Physical Activity Policy using the same four-phase process described for the review of the School Food and Beverage Policy. At the time of our follow-up, the Ministry was working on phase three of the review (revising policies and developing performance measures), which it planned to complete by September 2017. In July 2017, the Ministry signed a one-year agreement with Ontario Physical and Health Education Association to develop resources, professional learning/training (in-person; online), and awareness/communication products to advance the revised Daily Physical Activity Policy.</p> <p>The Ministry informed us that, similar to the School Food and Beverage Policy, it would try to align the performance measures developed in phase three of the Daily Physical Activity Policy review with Ontario's work to promote and support well-being, which it expects to finalize by December 2017. The Ministry also plans to consider appropriate monitoring roles for the Ministry and school boards.</p>

Committee Recommendation	Status Details
<p><b>Recommendation 4</b> The Ministry of Education should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>assess options (including best practices in other jurisdictions) for increasing physical activity levels for both elementary and secondary school students; and <b>Status: In the process of being implemented by January 2018.</b></li> <li>set goals and targets for boards to increase physical activity in schools, and periodically monitor, measure, and publicly report on the progress made. <b>Status: Little or no progress.</b></li> </ul>	<p>In 2013/14, the Ministry provided \$1.3 million in funding for 70 projects through Physical Activity in Secondary Schools (PASS) grants. These grants were given to school boards and schools for initiatives aimed at changing the physical activity culture in secondary schools. The Ministry hired an external consultant to evaluate the outcomes of these initiatives. The consultant's final report (issued in 2016) found that the majority of projects reported increases in the number of students who: engage in regular physical activity at school; were more comfortable participating in fitness programs; and were more self-motivated to engage in physical activity. The Ministry is planning to share best practices identified through these initiatives with school boards in October 2017.</p> <p>In March 2017, the Ministry hired an external consultant to also evaluate whether the Ontario Physical and Health Education Association's (OPHEA) Healthy School Certification is an effective approach to support healthy schools activities, including increased physical activity. OPHEA is a not-for-profit organization that works in partnership with school boards, public health, government, non-government organizations, and private-sector organizations to develop programs and services that support healthy, active schools and communities. It provides certificates to schools that complete a six-step Healthy Schools Process and demonstrate innovative approaches to promoting health in their school community, with an emphasis on student engagement and community partnerships. The Ministry expects the consultant's evaluation to be completed by January 2018.</p> <p>The Ministry has not made much progress on the recommendation to set goals and targets for school boards to increase physical activity in schools, and periodically monitor, measure, and publicly report on the progress made. In 2014, the government committed to a long-term goal for children and youth to have access to 60 minutes of physical activity connected to their school day. According to the Ministry, future measures related to physical activity—whether for the Daily Physical Activity policy implementation or the broader 60 minutes of physical activity initiative—are being developed to align with Ontario's work to promote and support well-being.</p>