

Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health

Youth Engagement Toolkit

MODULE 1: INTRODUCTION



JOINT CONSORTIUM FOR SCHOOL HEALTH

The Students
Commission
of Canada
Centre of Excellence for
Youth Engagement

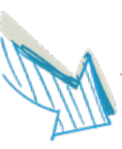


La commission
des élèves du
Canada
Le centre d'excellence pour
l'engagement des jeunes



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Viewing Additional Modules

This module of the Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health (JCSH) Youth Engagement Toolkit is one among eight.

The modules were developed as a single, comprehensive toolkit so we encourage you to explore them in sequence for the best experience.

This toolkit has been revised in 2024 to include information and tips about engaging with youth in a post-pandemic world. The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 prompted a global shift from traditional face-to-face teaching to online and hybrid learning methods; this global change required significant adjustments in teaching

practices and course design. This toolkit aims to bridge the gap between the virtual world and in-person connection to support educators and adult allies in navigating the hybrid learning environment and supporting youth to maintain engagement and a sense of community online.

To view the other modules, return to the main JCSH Youth Engagement Toolkit page to access links to all eight. Enjoy!



Module Introduction



Welcome

Welcome to the Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health's (JCSH) Youth Engagement (YE) Toolkit.

This Toolkit is intended to:

1. Help communicate the importance of youth engagement as a key approach to implementing comprehensive school health;
2. Provide research and rationale for practicing youth engagement in schools, school boards and districts, government ministries, health regions and community organizations;
3. Provide a “how-to” resource of effective practices to support youth engagement in these contexts.
4. Provide research and rationale for hybrid learning while equipping educators and adult allies with effective strategies for engaging students in virtual environments.



Navigating the Toolkit

This eBook toolkit was designed to enhance the experience of the reader through video and quick links to tools and resources.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This toolkit was created for the Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health by the Students Commission of Canada, lead organization for the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement. It draws heavily on videos and photos from 30 plus years of Students Commission projects. Thanks to all those youth and adults who have helped demonstrate what engagement looks like.

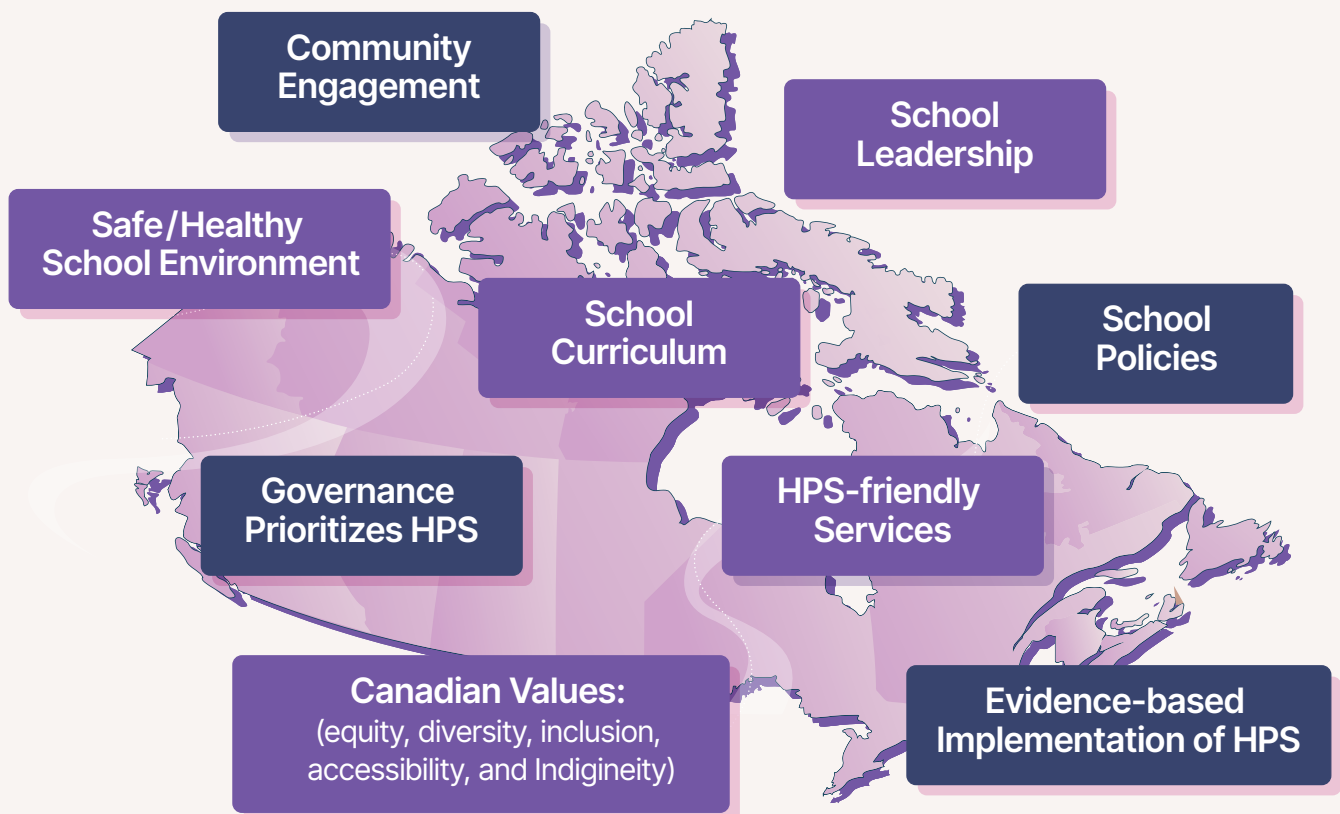
Toolkit Background

The Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health is a partnership of Canada's federal, provincial and territorial governments except Québec. Established in 2005, it brings together key representatives from each jurisdiction's health and education ministries/departments and helps them to work more closely together to support **Health Promoting schools (HPS)**. The JCSH addresses its efforts to advance HPS by sharing the strengths and challenges facing everyday school community. The JCSH recognizes how important it is for the health and education sectors to work together to improve student achievement across Canada. To guide the work of this collaboration, the JCSH

promotes four inter-related components that must be in place (and supported by a number of stakeholders) to realize HPS: (i) teaching and learning, (ii) social and physical environments, (iii) policy and (iv) partnerships and services.

Recognizing youth engagement as a culture and practice that can enhance health promoting schools, the JCSH reconnected with the Students Commission of Canada to revise this Youth Engagement Toolkit. The **Students Commission** was founded in 1991 with a mission to support young people to put their ideas for improving themselves, their communities and their world into action. In

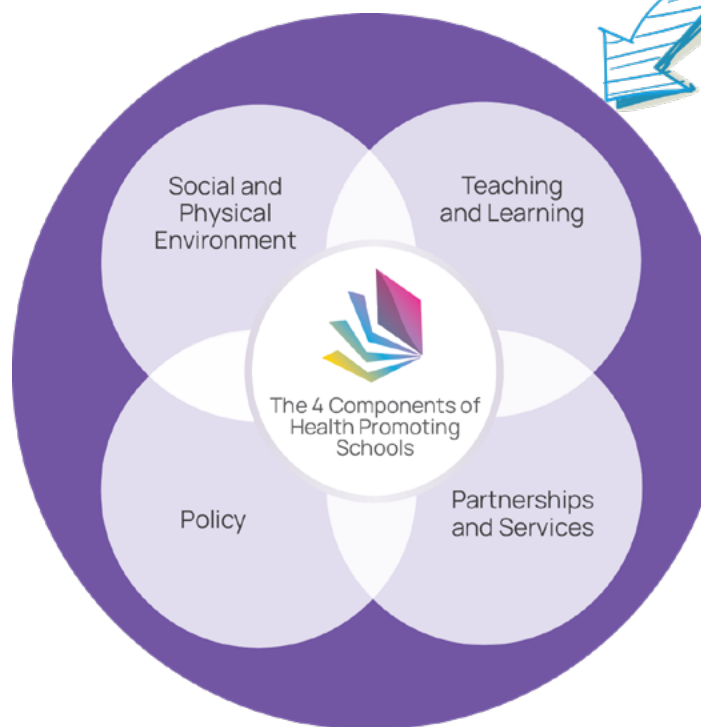
Canadian Standards for Health Promoting Schools (HPS) supported through:



2000, the Students Commission established the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement, which networks academics, youth organizations and young people to provide research, evaluation and training to improve youth programs and youth engagement in Canada.

Student engagement, a critical factor for effective learning, has become a key focus in educational research. **Student engagement** is the dedication, enthusiasm and diligence students demonstrate in pursuing knowledge, encompassing behavioural, affective and cognitive aspects¹. That is, student engagement includes factors such as attendance and class participation, interest, affinity, sense of community, emotional connection with the learning environment and educators, concentration and attention towards study materials, effort to exceed expectations and their enjoyment of intellectual challenges. Hybrid learning, which combines face-to-face and online instruction, is seen as an effective approach to enhance engagement since it provides students with both the in-person connection of face-to-face learning and the autonomy of online learning.

Both research and experience have demonstrated that youth engagement and youth-adult partnerships can change a young person's life for the better.¹ The Students Commission's core values: Respect, Listen, Understand and Communicate™ and processes inform its work. This toolkit draws on practical examples and illustrations from the programs of The Students Commission, its partners and the latest in research and evaluation from the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement.



FOUR COMPONENTS OF HEALTH PROMOTING SCHOOLS

Look for these symbols in the margins to see how youth engagement supports the four pillars of Health Promoting Schools.



**SOCIAL AND
PHYSICAL
ENVIRONMENT**



**TEACHING
AND LEARNING**



POLICY



**PARTNERSHIPS
AND SERVICES**

Why is Youth Engagement Important?

It's simple. Youth engagement (YE) can and does change lives. This eBook is designed to give you insight into the “how” and “why” of YE, as well as the outcomes you can expect. YE recognizes young people's right to participate in decisions that impact them and acknowledges the great skills and strengths they bring to the table. It injects young people as valued stakeholders into creating effective and inclusive policies, programs and environments.

YE is especially crucial in the post-pandemic world for several reasons:

Reduces Social Isolation: Many young people experienced heightened social isolation during the pandemic due to lockdowns and social distancing measures. Engaging them in activities and communities helps counteract these feelings of isolation, providing them with meaningful interactions and a sense of belonging.

Promotes Social Connection: Active engagement fosters stronger connections among peers and with supportive adults. This

helps build a network of relationships that can offer emotional support, friendship and a sense of community, which are vital for mental and emotional well-being.

Supports Mental Health: Engaging youth in positive and constructive activities can alleviate stress and anxiety, which have been prevalent among young people during and after the pandemic. It also encourages the development of coping skills and resilience.

Encourages Personal Growth: Through engagement, young people have opportunities to develop new skills, interests and talents. This growth can enhance their self-esteem, sense of purpose and readiness to contribute positively to their communities.

Strengthens Community Bonds: When youth are actively involved, they contribute to and benefit from a stronger, more connected community. This mutual support helps communities recover and thrive in a post-pandemic world.



“I learned that the government of Canada is interested in the opinions of young people and that everyone has different and valuable opinions.”

– Youth Participant, HBSC Consultation

WHAT IS YOUTH ENGAGEMENT?



To access “What is Youth Engagement?” video click above.

Effective youth engagement leads to positive outcomes for young people at three levels:

1. The Individual level: e.g., increased personal skills, healthy choices and sense of identity.
2. The Social level: e.g., stronger positive connections with friends and adults and a larger support network.
3. The System level: e.g., greater civic engagement, policies and programs responsive to the needs of young people and new creative ways to govern.

For instance, flexibility in the academic schedule, practicing to be responsible for one's own learning and maintaining self-discipline, time-management skills and availability of lecture records for future reference have been reported as the individual level positive outcomes of virtual youth engagement².

Please see the [Literature Review](#)³ for a detailed overview of the research and outcomes related to youth/student engagement.

STUDENT-LED RESEARCH INQUIRY

Tricia Labrie, Health Promoting Schools Coordinator, in Central Okanagan BC, co-developed the Got Health? pilot student engagement program. Got Health? is a student-led inquiry program which engages young people in creating healthy school environments. It was piloted in 8 schools in the interior of BC. In addition to creating opportunities for students to assess their schools through photo voice and lead research projects, the program provides training sessions for adults on how to work effectively with youth. The program is based on the comprehensive school health framework. “Despite the different focuses of the inquiries (e.g. after school physical activities, breakfast programs, smoking cessation, etc.), they were all about connectedness, belonging and contribution,” Tricia recalls.

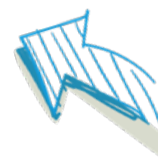
Youth Engagement and Health Promoting schools

Youth engagement is an integral component of Health Promoting Schools⁴ (HPS) and an evidence-based strategy to achieve positive health outcomes and enhance student achievement. When young people are engaged in decision-making, they feel connected to their school environment⁵ and community⁶, they build relationships with their peers and adults^{6,7} and they learn new skills⁸. They are more likely to make healthy decisions, have healthy behaviors and take fewer unhealthy risks⁹. They are also more likely to do well in school^{7,10} and continue learning throughout their lifetime¹¹.

HPS requires the involvement of the whole school and community; everyone is needed and everyone has something valuable to contribute. This is done when the school community addresses priority actions and initiatives through

four distinct, but inter-related components:

- **TEACHING AND LEARNING**
- **SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT**
- **POLICY**
- **PARTNERSHIPS AND SERVICES**



The purpose of HPS is to bring about a school climate that supports the best possible health and learning outcomes. Young people can contribute meaningfully to all levels and activities of school health - from teaching and learning, to improving the physical and psychosocial environment, to decision-making and healthy school policy development, to partnerships with parents/guardians, the wider community and services.

HEALTH PROMOTING SCHOOLS



To access "Health Promoting Schools" video click above.

"I am completely sold on the idea that youth engagement in policy development needs to be done early, it needs to be done often and it needs to be student lead."

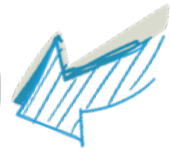
– Policy Maker, Ministry of Education, ON

"Youth know what is meaningful and valuable to their community. Even if you are just a few years removed, you will not understand their reality like they do."

– Lynn Ann Duffley, NB

"I feel amazing because of this conference. It was life changing."

– Youth Participant



Digital Collaboration

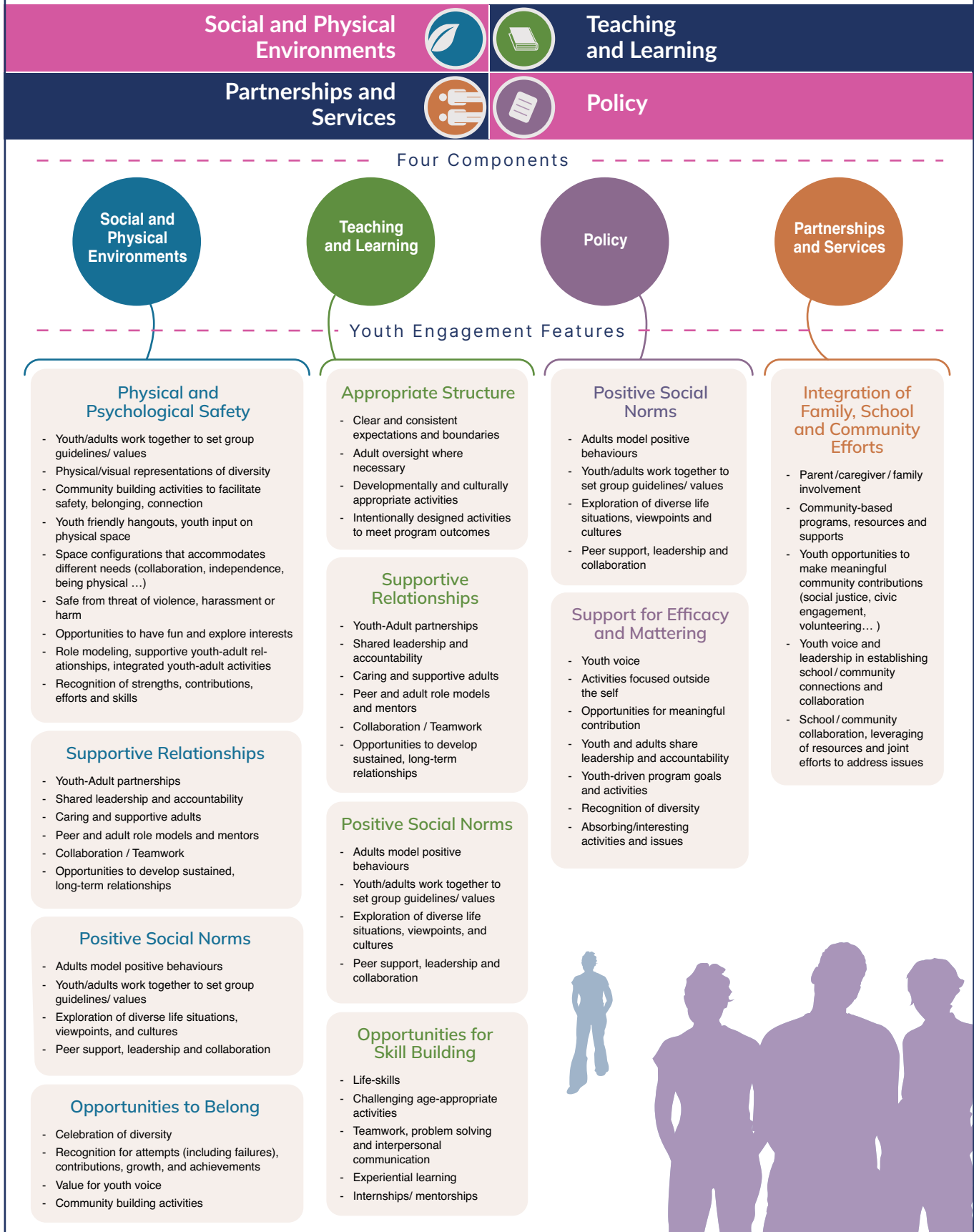
Many students and educators have transitioned to collaborating and addressing priority actions in a hybrid fashion, both virtually and in-person. Digital collaboration combines processes and tools to facilitate communication and interaction between educators and students. This is accomplished through the utilization of various software platforms and tools. The interactivity provided by technological tools such as Microsoft Teams facilitates collaborative learning through meaningful interactions among course participants, which also aligns with educational theories that emphasize the social nature of learning¹⁴. Therefore, these tools allow students to work together on activities and projects to achieve a deeper understanding in a framework of effective communication where their social skills are developed and their prior knowledge is leveraged. Interactive teaching methods are fundamental in preparing students with the necessary professional skills to effectively apply their theoretical knowledge to practical, real-world situations¹⁵. Digital collaboration promotes connectivity between students and teachers, thereby increasing efficiency and promoting a sense of community online.

FUNDAMENTAL ELEMENTS TO VIRTUAL YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

The conceptual framework Community of Inquiry (Col), used to enhance the quality of online learning experiences, defines three fundamental elements: social presence, teaching presence and cognitive presence¹². Social presence denotes the ability of learners and instructors to establish a sense of community and connection in the virtual environment. Cognitive presence refers to developing students' critical thinking and inquiry skills. While teaching presence is the most crucial component given that it integrates the social and cognitive presences to provide authentic online educational experiences¹³, it refers to the development and implementation of learning activities by the instructor. According to the Col model, the interaction among these components is essential for fostering a rich and effective online learning experience.

KEY FEATURES OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

and the 4 Components of Health Promoting Schools (HPS)



Check out the [Key Features of YE and HPS resource](#).