

CHAPTER II

Stage 2 Establishing the School Health Committee

*Objective: Establish a School Health Committee responsible for the development and maintenance of the **Voices and Choices** planning process.*

2.1 Role

The School Health Committee will be responsible for generating ideas, creating direction and planning program strategies.

The School Health Committee's main role is to coordinate the school's health promotion initiatives. A second very important role of the committee is to involve other students, parents, and staff as volunteers. However, most importantly, the committee serves as the communication link with students, staff, and parents; allowing their input into the process and keeping them informed of progress and developments.

2.2 Who Sits on the Committee?

Committee members should reflect the organization of the school at all levels.

The committee should reflect the composition of the school. In establishing the committee, take into account:

- ✓ all grades and academic levels or special programs within the school, and
- ✓ demographic features.

The committee should include participants that represent key roles within the school organization, such as students, administration and teachers (and/or staff groups), parents, the public health nurse, guidance and counselling, health and physical education, and special education.

Participation on the committee should be voluntary. Volunteers should be encouraged by administration and by their teachers, and parents. The best form of encouragement is assurance that administration and teachers fully support the program.

To ensure fresh ideas are being generated and the project continues, it is important to:

- ✓ involve a dynamic group of students, teachers and parents;
- ✓ prepare to change as the student population changes; and
- ✓ welcome new members to the existing committees (try to avoid all the committee members changing at the same time).

2.3 How is the School Health Committee Formed?

The process for selecting or recruiting committee members will have an impact on the project's success. The complimentary mix of committee members is key to how it will function throughout the entire process. The process needs to be inclusive in order to form a School Health Committee that reflects the surrounding environment. (Guiding Principles 2, 3 and 5 in the Introduction)

2.4 Tasks of the Committee

The committee will be responsible for a number of tasks as the Voices and Choices planning process is put in place. These include:

- ✓ conducting the Needs Assessment;
- ✓ reviewing results of the Needs Assessment;
- ✓ preparing the School Health Plan;
- ✓ developing, implementing and evaluating school health program activities;
- ✓ communicating regularly with students, teachers, parents and administration;
- ✓ evaluating the process throughout; and
- ✓ encouraging student involvement.

2.5 Committee Meetings

The committee will meet more or less often depending on the step of the process and the scope of the programs being implemented. Members should count on meeting at least every two weeks during the busiest stages. Minutes of meetings should be taken to keep a record of the committee's progress, decisions and actions. These minutes need to be shared with the staff, students, and parents, either through posting them or through newsletters.

Meeting reports should include:

- ✓ committee name;
- ✓ members of the committee/sub-committee (in attendance or absent);
- ✓ date meeting was held;
- ✓ summary of topics covered at the meeting;
- ✓ list of tasks to be done;
- ✓ person/persons responsible for tasks;
- ✓ target completion date/follow-up date; and
- ✓ date of next meeting.

In the beginning and throughout the process of 1) conducting the Needs Assessment, 2) interpreting the School Health Profile, and 3) creating the School Health Plan, the committee will need to meet frequently and will probably wish to have a number of sub-committees. In future years, the School Health Committee will probably find that certain times of the year require more meetings and time. These periods will likely correspond with the start and finish of the school year, when new program action plans are being developed, and when evaluation is taking place.

2.6 Student Participation

To achieve the goals of Voices and Choices, the School Health Committee needs to involve a number of willing students as early as possible and from all grades and programs within the school. For example, during the needs assessment stage, a school could involve 20 to 40 students to participate on a team that coordinates, explains, and encourages completion of the questionnaire. Providing opportunities for individuals to exercise the ability to influence their surroundings in a meaningful way is an important part of what makes a person feel well.

2.7 Communication

Communication with students, teachers, parents and administration is critical to the successful development and implementation of school health programs.

Throughout all stages of the process, the committee is responsible for keeping students, teachers, parents, and the administration informed about school health program activity. Communication through administration and teachers can encourage participation of all students as the Voices and Choices planning process evolves. In the initial stages, communication may take place through announcements, posters, assemblies, and/or an announcement letter to parents. Face-to-face dialogue is the most valuable and credible communication tool. The committee should keep administration and teachers informed of progress, future plans, and activities. Using the meeting minutes is one way of keeping administration and teachers up-to-date. Other methods include inclusion on staff meeting agendas and parent/school council meeting agendas, regular columns in the school newsletter, or a regular bulletin board or display case for posting information.

2.8 Tips for Success

The School Health Committee must be committed to creativity and full participation. It may sometimes be difficult to maintain health promotion as a priority, given what may appear to be more pressing issues (e.g., budget planning, staffing, reorganization, program cuts, and curriculum changes). Committee members need to establish and then "stick to" a minimum number of meetings during the year. For example, there could be one formal meeting on the first Tuesday of each month. This practice allows committee members to plan ahead and ensure they are available for every meeting.

A strong and committed chairperson for the committee is essential. It is important that all members, including administration, teacher, and parent representatives work together in a non-confrontational manner towards creating a more health-promoting school. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the chairperson to periodically remind committee members of their role and purpose.

2.9 Evaluation

Evaluation is an integral part of the planning and implementation processes. Therefore, your committee may wish to establish a sub-committee at the very beginning that is responsible for evaluation. There are helpful sections in each chapter in this Guide that address evaluation, as well as checklists in the appendices that will help the School Health Committee review key questions. These can be used as summaries for the stages and the basis of the evaluation committee reports.

Since evaluation is a fundamental part of this planning process, you may wish to start thinking about how it affects the program from the very beginning. Some areas you may wish to address include:

- ✓ ensuring that you maintain accurate and up-to-date records;
- ✓ planning on reviewing the process regularly, from many perspectives, and many viewpoints;
- ✓ regularly developing lists of questions that need to be answered; and
- ✓ thinking about ways to integrate an on-going evaluation of activities to complement what is provided in the Voices and Choices planning process.

An entire stage has also been dedicated to evaluation and its accompanying celebration of achievement (Stage 7). You may find it helpful to refer to Stage 7 at this time. It will provide some insight into what information your committee needs to be collecting throughout the planning and implementation process in order to achieve success.

The inclusiveness of the composition of the School Health Committee and the process used to form it serve as an important foundation to the stages that follow. Keep a record of this process for future use. Then, if participants on the committee change, they can review these records and learn from previous experiences.

These records may include:

- ✓ how the committee was formed,
- ✓ the terms of reference and mandate of the committee,
- ✓ the structure and plans for renewal and succession,
- ✓ how the committee (and sub-committees) function,
- ✓ frequency of meetings,
- ✓ how the decisions are to be made, recorded and communicated, and
- ✓ training that the committee members received to help them fulfill their roles more effectively.

This information will serve as an important part of any formative process evaluation and may be a part of a valuable learning experience for other schools wishing to implement this program.

Stage 2 - Establishing the School Health Committee

To help the school establish and activate a School Health Committee, the following checklist was developed.

- Does the committee include members from all school groups, especially students, administration, teachers, parents, and health related disciplines within the school?
- Does the committee meet on a regular basis? At least once a month?
- Does the committee keep minutes of meetings?
- Do the minutes include a record of decisions, actions and progress?
- Does the committee communicate with the student and teacher population? If yes, how? How frequently?
- Are administration, teachers and parents provided with progress reports on program activities?
- Does management visibly and consistently support the program?
- Does the committee clearly understand and accept or 'buy into' its role, and tasks?