

CHAPTER I

Stage 1 Building Commitment

*Objective: Encourage commitment to the implementation of **Voices and Choices: Planning for School Health**.*

1.1 Commitment

Commitment from your organization and its key players is essential to successful health programs.

Successful health programs will depend on the school's commitment to the eight principles and five paths to school and student health and well-being. It is also essential that administration be prepared to:

- ✓ respond to the major issues identified in the Needs Assessment Questionnaire;
- ✓ address all five paths: personal health practices, psycho-social environment, personal resources, physical environment and support services; and
- ✓ make available sufficient resources, human, financial, and material, taking into account the school's current fiscal environment.

1.2 Involving Key Players

Students are key to this planning process and should be involved from the beginning. Include students that represent all groups in your school – different grades, genders, cultures, languages, abilities, differing needs, English as a Second Language (ESL), and others. You should also include the school administration, teachers, staff, parents, the school community, and anyone else who could bring a different perspective to the table.

1.3 Possible Barriers

In a time of fiscal restraint, it may be a challenge to market a project that requires an investment over the longer term. There may be some reluctance to commit to the student participation and empowerment philosophy and to this project.

Financial costs can often be restrictive. However, due to the web-based technology, your school can avoid prohibitive expenses for such things as data-entry, the purchase of documents, and consultants fees. Your school may need to photocopy several documents. If the team chooses to conduct a paper and pencil version of the NAQ (see Stage 3), the school will need to make multiple copies of this document. The school may also choose to invest in resources to make posters, write letters, and develop newsletters.

What about the investment of **time**? The largest time commitment will come from the person who introduced the process initially, as well as the School Health Committee. An integral part of the planning process requires meetings at regular intervals and opportunities to promote the project (assemblies, announcements, presentations, etc.) and celebrate its successes.

1.4 Possible Opportunities

A crucial part of the School Health Plan's marketing relates to the **benefits** that your school will reap from adopting this philosophy and process. Apart from the overwhelming emotional benefits of having completed the project, successfully engaged students, and the resulting healthier environment for all, your school may experience cost savings you never would have expected. This includes: reduced staff absenteeism, less vandalism, fewer injuries and a better use of current equipment and facilities, thereby decreasing the need to replace or buy new items.

While building commitment and forming an inclusive School Health Committee requires time and effort, it is the greatest investment your school will make. While meaningful student involvement can bring success to the project, the reverse can also be true; only inviting students to participate in the Needs Assessment may contribute to its failure. One pilot project neglected to include students in the planning process and on their committee, then found that their resulting school health plans were not successful. Involving as many players as possible from the school environment will ensure that many aspects of school and student health are examined; that enthusiasm is generated from a variety of individuals within your school community; and that there is a common understanding about the project.

The benefits of integrating the Voices and Choices philosophy and process into your school's strategic planning are far-reaching. As healthy lifestyles influence learning, and learning influences health, the implementation of Voices and Choices: Planning for School Health is an investment in everyone's future.

Attitude is a fundamental part of not only allowing change to take place, but also positively and actively adopting change. For many reasons, students, teachers, parents, staff, and administrators may feel a reluctance to change the status quo. That is why it is important to involve everyone from the very beginning of the process and ensure their participation throughout.

As previously mentioned, an essential part of the marketing plan will need to focus on the clear potential of this perspective and the benefits involved in listening to the students' voices through the *Needs Assessment Questionnaire*. It will also be easier to bring people on-side when changes begin occurring in the school. The rewards that the committee and the school reap will be in direct proportion with your degree of investment.

1.5 Letter of Agreement

As part of the process for preparing the school to undertake the needs assessment component, a **Letter of Agreement** will be completed (Appendix 3-C). This letter requires your school to follow through with the development and implementation of a School Health Plan that addresses the needs and preferences identified in the *Student Needs Assessment Questionnaire*, as well as agree to an Acceptable Use Policy for using the on-line database. Your school principal must sign this letter in the early steps (Stages 1 and 2) of the Voices and Choices process.

1.6 Evaluation

The most important part of the evaluation is to involve all key players and get their commitment to support the **Voices and Choices** planning process. Building commitment forms the foundation that will gather the strength for subsequent stages.

As the 'champion' introducing this process to the school, keep a record of the activities undertaken and people contacted to gain commitment (Appendix 1-B). Often, a key player or group of players can be overlooked at this or a future stage. Or, sometimes an individual or group initially expressed a lack of interest in participating, but may have changed their mind at another point in the process. As committee members change, the committee often loses the 'corporate or collective memory' of what was done and why. It can be very helpful later on to have a record of who was approached and what the results of the conversations were. Then, as future School Health Committees undertake the process evaluations, they can build on the experiences that past committees recorded.

You may wish to post a description of the process your school has undertaken on the Health Canada web site so that others can share your learning experiences.

Stage 1 - Building Commitment

Before moving to Stage 2, verify that the following have been addressed:

- Are we prepared to embrace the notion of the link between health and education?
- Are we prepared to undertake the process involved in implementing Voices and Choices: Planning for School Health?
- Are we committed to the eight principles?
- Are we prepared to set a school health policy?
- Are we prepared to address all five paths to our school's and our students' health and well-being?
- Are we willing to involve the students as a core belief?
- Are we willing to conduct the Student Needs Assessment?
- Are we prepared to act on the needs and preferences of students to an extent that is consistent with the school's current fiscal environment?
- Is our school's administration committed to playing a visible, ongoing and participatory role throughout the process?
- Are the parents supportive of the Voices and Choices philosophy and planning process?
- Are the teachers supportive of the Voices and Choices philosophy and planning process?
- Are the students supportive of the Voices and Choices philosophy and planning process?
- Are the school board officials supportive of the Voices and Choices philosophy and planning process?
- Has the letter of agreement/understanding been agreed to by all parties?

Appendix 1- B Keeping Track of Key Committee Members

Person to be Contacted	Date Contacted	Result	Further Action
1. Principal			
2. Student Council			
3. Parent Council			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			
11.			
12.			
13.			
14.			