

# Health

2017

*This report is an excerpt from People for Education's Annual report on Ontario's publicly funded schools 2017.*

Young people do better in school when they are healthy, and they are healthier when they do better in school.<sup>1</sup>

There are nearly two million young people in Ontario's schools. The education system, where they spend much of their time, can have a profound effect on their physical, mental, emotional, and social well-being. The Ontario Ministry of Education has recognized the vital role of schools, not just in the province's Health and Physical Education (H&PE) curriculum, but also by adding a responsibility for student well-being to Ontario's Education Act.<sup>2</sup>

## Teaching Health and Physical Education

While some provinces teach health as a subject separate from physical education, Ontario integrates the two.<sup>3</sup> The H&PE curriculum takes a comprehensive approach, focusing on the skills students need to manage their health. Students learn about active living and movement competence in combination with other topics such as healthy eating, mental health, personal safety and injury prevention, substance use, addictions, and human development and sexual health.<sup>4</sup>

Ontario has comprehensive, evidence-based curriculum in place, but organizations such as UNESCO have found that well-qualified teachers are the key to unlocking the potential of H&PE curriculum and programs.<sup>5</sup> Studies have found that students often have better health outcomes when they are taught by a H&PE specialist, compared to a classroom teacher,<sup>6</sup> and they are more likely to be engaged in physical activity through intramural sports.<sup>7</sup>

### In 2017:

- 42% of elementary schools have a Health and Physical Education (H&PE) teacher, either full- or part-time.
- The percentage of elementary schools with a H&PE teacher varies by region, from a high of 73% of elementary schools in the GTA, to only 15% of elementary schools in eastern Ontario.

In this year’s survey, only 42% of elementary schools report having a specialist H&PE teacher, either full- or part-time, a figure that has remained fairly consistent over the past ten years. But there are regional discrepancies in access to these teachers. Only 30% of schools in northern and southwestern Ontario have H&PE teachers, while in eastern Ontario this rate drops to 15%. Elementary schools in the GTA are almost five times more likely to have a specialist H&PE teacher, compared to schools in eastern Ontario (see Figure 1).

### Student well-being as a goal for education

In 2014, the Ministry of Education included “promoting well-being” as one of its primary goals for education in *Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario*. While many schools, school boards, and education unions have been promoting health in schools for decades,<sup>9</sup> the inclusion of well-being as a key goal for the province cements education’s role in promoting healthy living for all students.<sup>10</sup>

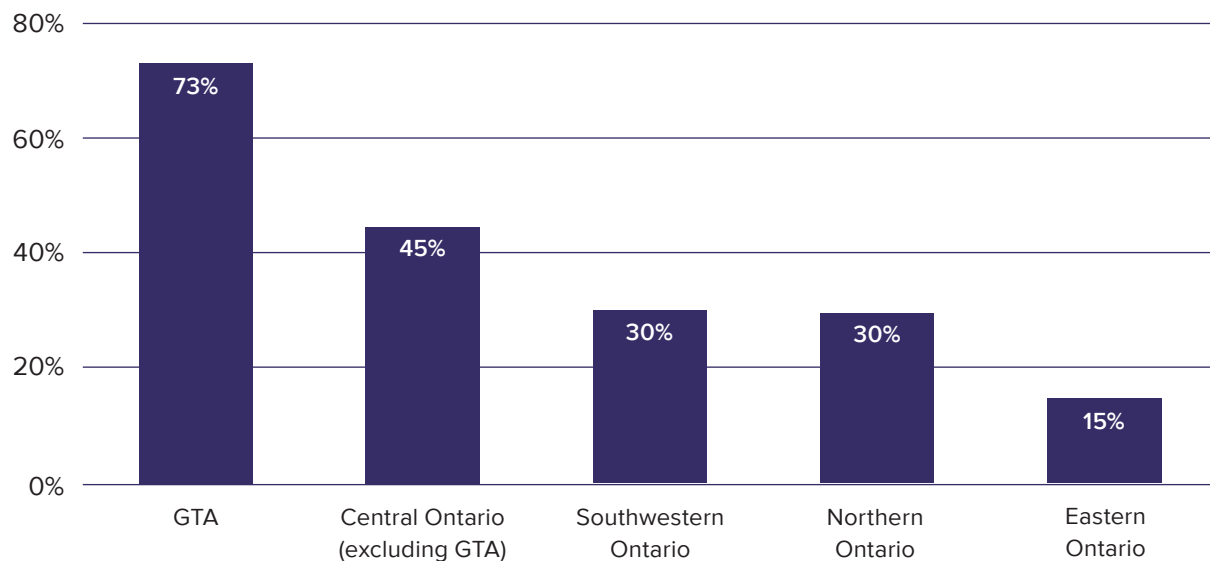
The Ministry of Education is in the process of developing a specific strategy to clarify what well-being means, and how to monitor the province’s progress in promoting well-being.<sup>11</sup>

“An effective school health program can be one of the most cost effective investments a nation can make to simultaneously improve education and health.”

World Health Organization. *School Health and Youth Health Promotion*.<sup>8</sup>

Figure 1

### Percentage of elementary schools with a Health and Physical Education teacher, full- or part-time, by region



Well-being is a positive sense of self, spirit and belonging that we feel when our cognitive, emotional, social and physical needs are being met. It is supported through equity and respect for our diverse identities and strengths.

Ministry of Education,  
***Ontario's Well-Being Strategy for Education: Discussion Document.***<sup>12</sup>

## Promoting comprehensive school health

The World Health Organization recognizes school health programs as one of the most cost effective approaches to improving both health and education outcomes.<sup>13</sup> A healthy school is a shared responsibility between staff, students, families, and community partners. Comprehensive school health can ensure that healthy approaches are embedded in all aspects of education and become a responsibility that is shared by all.

In this year's survey, 59% of elementary schools report that they offer opportunities for recreational programs, and a further 6% of elementary and 13% of secondary schools offer integrated health and/or social services.

## Notes

1. National Centre for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, *Health and Academic Achievement* (Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014).
2. "Purpose," *Education Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. E.2* (Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 1990).
3. Manitoba has Physical Education/Health Education, Quebec has Physical Education and Health, and British Columbia and Yukon have Physical and Health Education, but the other provinces currently treat Physical Education independently.
4. Ontario Ministry of Education, *The Ontario Curriculum: Health and Physical Education (Grades 1–8)* (Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2015) 22-39.
5. UNESCO, *Quality Physical Education: Guidelines for Policy Makers* (Paris, FR: UNESCO, 2015), 50.
6. Richard Bailey, "Physical Education and Sport in Schools: A Review of Benefits and Outcomes," *Journal of School Health* 76, no. 8 (2006): 397-401; Richard D. Telford et al., "Physical Education, Obesity, and Academic Achievement: A 2-year Longitudinal Investigation of Australian Elementary School Children," *American Journal of Public Health* 102, no. 2 (2012): 368-74.
7. Guy E. J. Faulkner et al., "Specialist or Nonspecialist Physical Education Teachers in Ontario Elementary Schools: Examining Differences in Opportunities for Physical Activity," *The Alberta Journal of Educational Research* 54, no. 4 (2008): 407-19.
8. "School Health and Youth Health Promotion," *World Health Organization*, accessed February 16, 2017.
9. See school improvement plans, school board improvement plans, and union and association position statements for more information on how schools have long been engaged in addressing the well-being of students and staff wellness.
10. Ontario Ministry of Education, *Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario* (Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2014), 3.
11. Ontario Ministry of Education, *Ontario's Well-Being Strategy For Education: Discussion Document* (Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2016).
12. *Ibid.*, 3.
13. "School Health and Youth Health Promotion," *World Health Organization*.