

Strengthening and expanding the Into Kids' Health program

Date: November 1, 2024

To: Board of Health

From: Medical Officer of Health

Wards: All

SUMMARY

The Ontario Public Health Standards' School Health Guideline, 2018, indicates that the board of health shall develop and implement a program of public health interventions to improve the health of school-aged children and youth. [The Toronto Healthy Schools Strategy](#) formalizes the commitment of Toronto Public Health and the Toronto school boards to support student well-being through the creation of healthy school environments.

The Into Kids' Health program, is an evidence informed collaboration between Toronto Public Health and Toronto schools serving equity deserving communities that aims to create healthy school environments. Participating schools receive up to \$7500 to be spent over two years, as well as additional Toronto Public Health initiatives and resources. A wide range of school initiatives have been implemented through the Into Kids' Health program, including revitalizing outdoor spaces, improving student mental health and strengthening ties to the community.

To expand the reach of the Into Kids' Health program to more equity deserving schools and streamline the administrative process for issuing funds to individual schools, this report seeks City Council authority for Toronto Public Health to transfer funds of \$300,000 or less annually beginning in the 2024-2025 school year to participating school boards (Toronto District School Board, Toronto Catholic District School Board, Mon Avenir, Conseil scolaire Viamonde).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Medical Officer of Health recommends that:

1. City Council authorize the Medical Officer of Health to enter into agreements, on an ongoing basis, with the Toronto school boards (Toronto District School Board, Toronto Catholic District School Board, Mon Avenir and Conseil scolaire Viamonde) for the transfer of funds in the total amount of \$300,000 or less per year as part of the Into Kids' Health program within the approved Toronto Public Health budget, on such terms and conditions as are satisfactory to the Medical Officer of Health and in a form approved by the City Solicitor.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

This report recommends that Toronto Public Health (TPH) provide a lump sum schedule A payment to each of the participating school boards (Toronto District School Board, Toronto Catholic DSB, Mon Avenir, Conseil scolaire Viamonde) for a total annual limit of \$300,000 or less starting from the 2024-2025 school year.

Funding for the recommended program is included in the 2024 base operating budget of TPH.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has been advised of the financial impacts associated with the program to be considered along with other priorities in future budget.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on September 11, 2023, the Board of Health received a report that provided an overview of the current programs operated by teams across Toronto Public Health to support the health needs of school-aged children and youth, and key priorities and actions for the future.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2023.HL6.1>

COMMENTS

The School Health Guideline, 2018 within the Ontario Public Health Standards indicates that the board of health shall develop and implement a program of public health interventions using a comprehensive health promotion approach to improve the health of school-aged children and youth.

Evidence-informed programs like APPLE Schools in Alberta (Alberta Project Promoting Active Living and Healthy Eating in Schools), which are based on the Comprehensive

School Health (CSH) approach, have demonstrated that allocating resources towards school-based programs, is likely to reduce the public health burden of chronic diseases.

The Into Kids' Health (IKH) program, is an evidence-informed initiative with the goal of creating healthy school communities and mitigating the health disparities affecting children and youth. Participating schools serve equity deserving communities and receive up to \$7500 to be spent over two years, as well as additional TPH initiatives and resources through the implementation of CSH. In IKH schools, TPH staff work as "mobilizers", supporting a comprehensive school community assessment; the development and implementation of an action plan; coordinating services through connecting with other local partners; engaging parents and students; and providing funds for action plan activities.

TPH staff play a collaborative role with school staff to develop multi-component school action plans that address multiple health behaviours and topics (e.g., mental health, food literacy or physical activity). Together, TPH and schools implement actions to engage staff and students while building capacity and leadership, enhance social, natural and built school environments, promote health education through curriculum resources, and establish community partnerships that promote health. TPH staff work with schools and help facilitate the sustainability of school activities so that they have long-term impacts and can be replicated in subsequent years independently by schools.

Funds are used to enhance and strengthen the initiatives already supported by TPH staff in schools, fostering environments that encourage physical activity, healthy eating, community connections, and positive mental health, while also promoting long-term sustainability of these activities. Outdoor school environments are enriched through equipment and supplies for gardens, playgrounds, and inquiry centres (e.g., tools, seeds, soil, asphalt markings, seating, blackboards, play equipment, storage, plants etc.). Funds can also be used to purchase physical activity equipment to support structured and unstructured play and cooking supplies to enhance food literacy. In addition to these activities, schools can create safe, welcoming spaces and clubs (e.g., buddy benches, supplies to create chill zones such as seating/mats/lighting/books/puzzles/plants/other sensory materials and other supplies to support clubs depending on the theme) and purchasing materials and services to organize events that foster a sense of belonging such as wellness days or other community-building events.

2023/2024 Into Kids Health Program Successes

In the 2023/2024 school year, a wide range of initiatives were implemented to enrich the school environment and student well-being through the IKH program. These efforts included revitalizing outdoor spaces, such as gardens, playgrounds, and outdoor inquiry centres, as well as replenishing play equipment and programs to encourage daily physical activity, water consumption, and food literacy.

In addition to these initiatives, schools prioritized improving student mental health by creating safe, welcoming spaces, and organizing events that foster a sense of belonging. Wellness days, student clubs, chill zones, buddy benches, and community-building events were all part of these efforts.

Many of these activities were led by student leaders and involved parents and caregivers. Schools strengthened their ties to the community by partnering with local organizations such as farms, libraries, charitable foundations, community centres, nearby schools, and other City Divisions and service agencies.

Streamlining Program Administration

To expand the reach of the IKH program to serve more equity deserving schools, TPH is working with Toronto school boards to introduce a phased, cyclical funding model of fund transfers to the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) and the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) in the 2024-25 school year. This approach was first piloted in the TDSB and TCDSB to improve approval and tracking mechanisms. Now that the tools and processes have been refined and positive results achieved, more schools in these boards will be included, and TPH plans to further expand to French school boards, Mon Avenir and Conseil scolaire Viamonde, in the coming years. In doing so, IKH will be able to expand its reach, enabling more schools to participate.

Toronto Public Health Strategic Impact

The Into Kids' Health (IKH) program and its related initiatives align with the following priorities and objectives of the [Toronto Public Health Strategic Plan 2024-2028](#):

Priority 1. Strengthen health protection, disease prevention and emergency preparedness, and the following objective:

c. Effectively communicate with the public about how they can protect their health.

Priority 2. Promote health and well-being across the lifespan, and the following objectives:

a. Reduce the burden of chronic and infectious diseases across the lifespan.

b. Prioritize effective interventions for children and youth to meet their changing needs.

d. Advocate for healthy social, natural, and built environments and collaborate with partners on initiatives that advance these goals.

Priority 4. Advocate to advance health equity, and the following objectives:

b. Collaborate with partners across multiple sectors to address local health needs.

c. Share evidence, advocate and collaborate to influence actions that impact population health.

Next Steps

To expand the reach of the IKH program to serve more equity deserving schools, TPH is requesting that City Council approve authority for the Medical Officer of Health to enter into agreements, on an ongoing basis, with the Toronto school boards (Toronto District School Board, Toronto Catholic District School Board, Mon Avenir and Conseil scolaire Viamonde) for the annual transfer of funds to a maximum amount of \$300,000. This will enable more schools to adopt this service delivery model and streamline the funding process which will improve approval and tracking mechanisms.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

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