



What we heard

April 2023



The goal of strengthening substance education in schools is important to community partners.

Educators and community organizations responding to the Substance Education in Schools Pre-Engagement Survey (n=17) were unanimous in agreeing that strengthening substance education in schools is “urgently”, “very” or “definitely” important.

What concerns community partners?

- Substance use among students
- Danger of the tainted drug supply
- Lack of knowledge of substances among students
- Need for mental health supports

What is already happening?

<p>Teaching and Learning (Classroom)</p> <p>Student-facing programming (e.g. High on Life, Public Health in-class programs)</p> <p>Curriculum and other resources (e.g. Kids in the Know)</p> <p>Teacher training and capacity building (e.g. Youth Violence Prevention Project)</p>	<p>Social and Physical Environment (School)</p> <p>Comprehensive School Health approaches</p> <p>Board or school level health-promoting strategies and policies (e.g. School Mental Health Ontario)</p>	<p>Partnerships and Services (Community)</p> <p>Social workers and MH nurses in schools</p> <p>Facilitating access to programs and services (e.g. CHOICES program, safe sobering site)</p>

What are the main challenges?

Community Organizations	Educators
<p>Capacity & Resources</p> <p>Ensuring community support is available</p> <p>Very limited resources and staff time</p>	<p>Capacity & Resources</p> <p>Teachers have many curriculum priorities</p> <p>Release time for capacity and knowledge building</p> <p>Capacity of community partners</p>
<p>Complexity</p> <p>Variety of issues requiring the appropriate response / proper organization to lead</p> <p>Supporting those who live with and around others living with addiction</p> <p>Coordination at the school or board level with programming and curriculum</p>	<p>Complexity</p> <p>Ensure trauma informed lens is used</p> <p>Garnering support for this work at many levels (classroom, admin, support staff)</p> <p>Meeting needs of students with different needs and abilities</p>
<p>Differing values / priorities</p> <p>Harm reduction messages may be a challenge with educators and parents</p>	<p>Differing values / priorities</p> <p>Staff may be unaware of importance / value of this work, particularly at elementary level</p>

What are the most important outcomes?

Prevent or delay substance use
Promote safer substance use
Increase knowledge and promote open and honest conversations
Increase mental health literacy, coping skills and access to services

What supports do schools need?

Student facing programming

Teaching training / coaching

Collaboration for early intervention and harm reduction services



What we heard: Youth

We asked 10 youth to tell us about the substance education they remembered from school.

Of those who recalled receiving substance education at school (n=8), they reported:

- Receiving education in the classroom in grades 6-8, from “teachers”, “community experts” and “police officers”
- Learning about “safe use” was reported as being helpful
- Receiving unhelpful messaging: “stigmatizing language”, “no awareness of resources”, “morality” message of “drugs are bad” and, “police presence created fear / deepened stigma”

Youth feedback on how to make substance education more helpful to students:



