

Student Involvement: An Important Part of a Healthy School Community

Students are important team members in the process of building healthy school communities. They should be involved in planning, carrying out, evaluating and celebrating school wellness initiatives. This resource provides an overview of why student leadership and engagement are critical to success. It also includes ideas for involving students in the Comprehensive School Health (CSH) approach.

Why should students be involved?

- Students have unique views on health and insights into which ideas will work well in their school. Students' ideas should be considered in all phases of school health initiatives. They may have innovative solutions that school staff hadn't considered.
- When school health initiatives are driven by the student voice, they are more likely to be accepted and thus successful.
- Involving students as leaders in school health initiatives
 - builds their capacity for making healthy choices over the long term
 - inspires them to take ownership for their well-being
 - helps them become engaged thinkers and ethical citizens with an entrepreneurial spirit
 - can contribute to a variety of student learning outcomes and competencies

Student engagement versus student leadership

Student engagement is when students are meaningfully involved in school health initiatives. For example, school staff might discuss health with students and use the information gathered to plan events or activities that the students will want to take part in. Student leadership is when students are not only engaged, but also take ownership of and lead school health initiatives. For example, student leaders might consult their peers, as well as school staff, to inform health-related actions in their school.

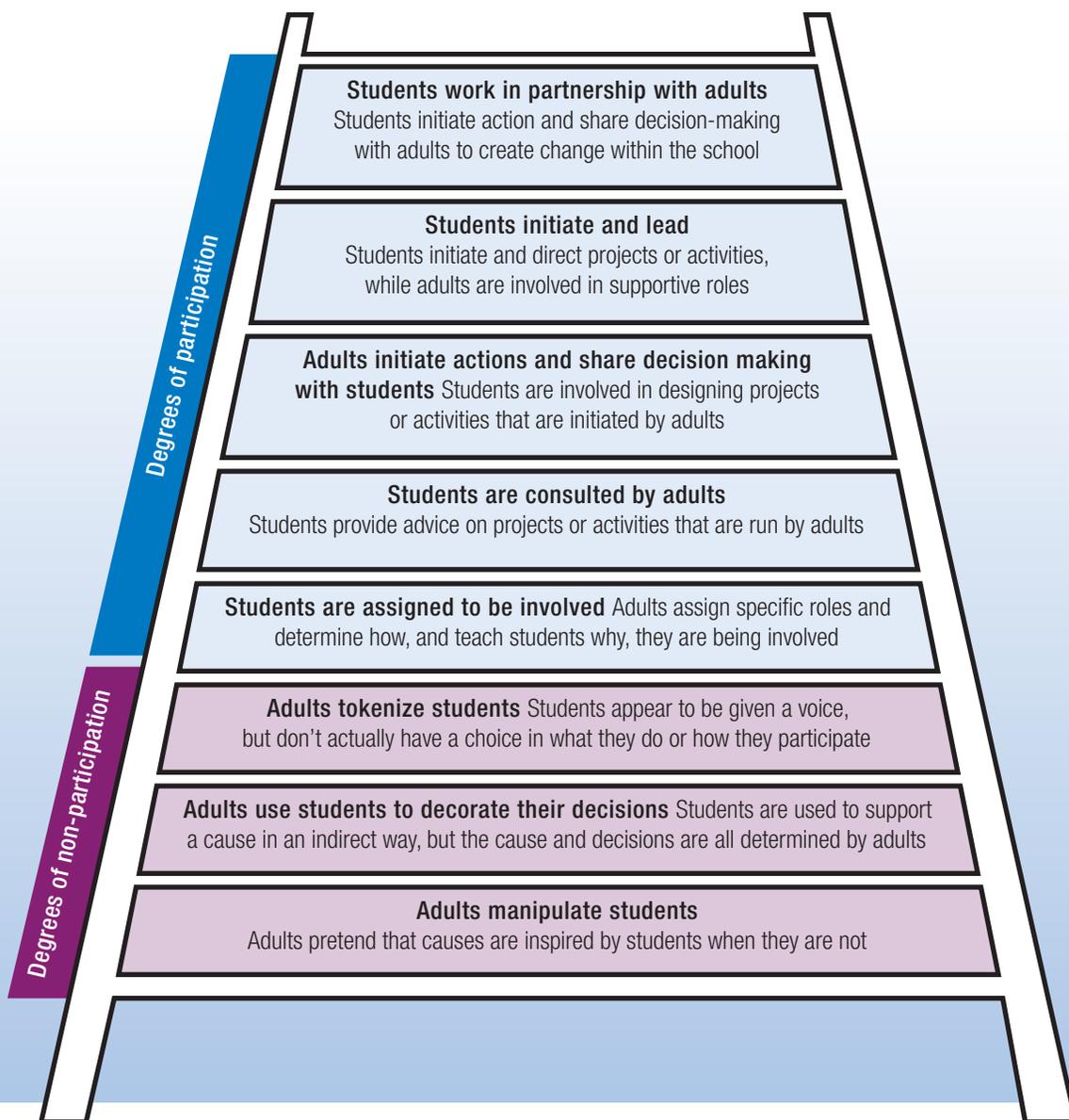
Student competencies	Student involvement in school health
<i>Examples</i>	<i>Activities that can support competencies</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • communication skills and the ability to work well with others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • deciding on school health priorities based on discussions with peers and school staff • working as part of a school health team
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • information management skills, including researching an issue, evaluating the credibility of information, and applying new information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • investigating health issues of concern within the school community • using reliable health information to guide improvements in the school
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • critical and creative thinking skills and their application to solve problems and make decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing school health action plans that address challenges using innovative solutions • using input from school community members with diverse opinions when choosing health priority issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • life skills that support health and well-being 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • modeling healthy behaviours for peers and family members • making changes to the school environment that support healthy choices

What role can students play in creating healthy school communities?

There are many ways to involve students in creating healthy school communities. Students can help define the health needs of the school, identify gaps, suggest ideas to address these needs and engage their peers in the process. Opportunities for student engagement, as well as student leadership, are important at all stages of health initiatives, though

the level of involvement may vary at different stages of the project or based on the age of the students involved. The diagram below shows different levels of student involvement, with the highest levels of involvement happening at the top. Examples of how students can be involved are included in the table on the next page.

Ladder of student involvement in schools¹



¹ Hart, R. (1997). *Children's Participation: The Theory and Practice of Involving Young Citizens in Community Development and Environmental Care*. Cited in Fletcher, A. (2005). *Meaningful Student Involvement Guide to Students as Partners in School Change*. SoundOut.org and HumanLinks Foundation. Retrieved from <http://www.soundout.org/MSIGuide.pdf>.

Examples of student involvement in school health initiatives: from engagement to leadership

Engaged students	Student leaders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> participate as members of the school health team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> guide the school health team (e.g., a student acts as the chair)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> review and provide input on the school vision for health and wellness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> facilitate activities with peers and school community members to develop a school vision for health
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> participate in conversations about the health issues that matter to them provide input on school health assessments and school health action plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> design and carry out surveys to collect ideas related to wellness from all students in the school
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> learn about the depth and breadth of health within the classroom research health topics that are identified as priorities within the school community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> create newsletters related to health and wellness to use inside and outside of the school teach other students and/or their families about health and what it looks like in their school
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> vote on potential strategies to include in the school's health action plan are involved in consultations or forums related to school or jurisdiction wellness policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> coordinate advisory councils who provide input on school or school jurisdiction decisions (e.g., policies, action plans)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> take part in health and wellness initiatives (e.g., school gardens, after-school programs, active living challenges) attend and take part in events related to health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> take on specific responsibilities related to health and wellness in the school (e.g., maintain the school garden, monitor policy implementation, lead DPA activities during recess) plan and lead activities or events to market and raise awareness of healthy changes in the school
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> provide feedback within evaluations of school health initiatives (e.g., input on surveys or through focus groups) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> gather and summarize information about the effects of the school health initiative create and deliver presentations that highlight the impact of school wellness initiatives

Supportive resources

- **Resources to Support Student Leadership and Engagement:**
AHS provides a few examples of activities to help students understand their personal leadership style, identify leadership development goals, and learn how to work with others.
<http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/7123.asp>
- **Peer Leadership: A Guide to Implementing School-Based Peer Leadership Programs (Alberta Health Services)**
This resource provides junior and senior high school staff with a guide to implement a peer leadership program among students. Although the resource focuses on preventing substance abuse and gambling problems in schools, the overall concepts can be applied broadly to involve students as leaders related to all school health initiatives.
<http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/healthinfo/AddictionsSubstanceAbuse/if-tch-peer-leadership-manual.pdf>
- **Resources to Support Mentoring Programs in Schools (Alberta Mentoring Partnership)**
This website provides information about the benefits of mentoring programs for schools (e.g., improving student health and developing student leadership capacity). The website provides guidance, supportive resources and career and technology studies (CTS) course outlines (approved by Alberta Education) for school-based mentorship programs.
<http://albertamentors.ca/for-educators/benefits-mentoring-schools/>

Background reading

Alberta Education, Student Engagement

<https://education.alberta.ca/student-engagement/student-engagement/>

Government of Alberta. Speak Out—The Alberta Student Engagement Initiative

<https://soundout.org/speak-out/>