Dear School Authorities and Principals:

Re: Opportunities for Healthy Schools Initiatives and the BC Healthy Schools Network

There is an extensive body of research which supports the common-sense idea that when children are healthy they learn better, achieve more and have higher self-esteem. Healthy schools embrace, and incorporate into every aspect of their daily work and culture, the view that schools, families, the health sector and the community share responsibility for children’s healthy growth and intellectual development. Being a healthy school means incorporating policies and practices that support students’ health and overall well-being, recognizing the links between health and student achievement.

As a government, we are striving to improve the health and wellness of our entire population by leading the way in North America in healthy living and physical fitness. In the school setting, this commitment has been addressed by our provision of new and updated legislation, guidelines, and initiatives.

At this time I’d like to thank each school authority and principal for providing positive leadership within your authority by:

✓ recognizing the benefits of provincial strategies for healthier students;
✓ supporting healthy schools targets which actively promote healthy lifestyle choices such as increasing fruits and vegetables consumption, increasing physical activity, reducing overweight and obesity, and reducing tobacco use; and
✓ championing healthy lifestyle initiatives such as food and beverage guidelines for food sales in schools, daily physical activity, and the smoking legislation as it applies in your schools.

Your continued support in addressing these key issues is foundational to their success.

As we look towards the 2008-09 school year, I’d like to present some opportunities for your schools to include in their healthy school planning.

**BC Healthy Schools Network**

In 2008-09, the Ministry anticipates adding 40 - 50 new schools to the BC Healthy Schools Network, which is a voluntary organization of public and independent schools whose common goal is to address health promotion through a comprehensive approach. This year 70 schools have made significant gains in the areas of teaching and learning, partnerships, and school policies and procedures in pursuing a healthier school environment.

Healthy Schools Network teams are supported by the Network of Performance Based Schools (NPBS), a voluntary action research learning community in BC designed to improve student learning. Use of the BC Performance Standards is integral to this work,
as well as networking to connect people, ideas and resources around the province that are focused on improving student learning.

Schools in your authority may apply to join the BC Healthy Schools Network by filling out the attached application form, due June 20, 2008. General inquiries should be directed to Susan Garvey, Manager, Healthy Schools Network, at susan.garvey@gov.bc.ca. Schools selected for the 2008/2009 school year will be notified by June 27, 2008.

**BC Healthy Schools Assessment Tool**
The Ministries of Education and Health have established the *BC Healthy Schools Network Assessment Tool* which schools can use to systematically assess how their school is doing with respect to the key components of a healthy school. Once the assessment is completed, schools will have identified an area of focus. This focus will help schools develop a school health improvement plan which will lead to more students realizing the academic, social and emotional benefits of a healthy school. Please view the assessment tool at [http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/health/hsnetwork/hsn_assessment_tool.pdf](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/health/hsnetwork/hsn_assessment_tool.pdf)

**ActNow BC Healthy School Designation**
In September 2008, the ActNow BC Healthy School Designation will recognize BC schools that have demonstrated inspirational leadership and commitment in creating optimal healthy school learning environments for their students. Once a year, schools that have met the criteria of a Healthy School will be awarded a $500 grant to support successful efforts towards their school health goals. We are hoping that recognition at the provincial level will acknowledge the ongoing work that many schools are engaged in and encourage other schools to increase their focus on school health.

For inspiration, please read the Healthy School Network stories from the 2006-07 school year (the 2007-08 stories will be available in July), as well as tap into a broad selection of up-to-date resources on the Ministry’s Healthy Schools and Healthy Schools Network websites, at [http://bced.gov.bc.ca/health](http://bced.gov.bc.ca/health) and [http://bced.gov.bc.ca/healthyschools](http://bced.gov.bc.ca/healthyschools).

I hope you will find these opportunities and resources exciting and informative in supporting your district’s efforts to build healthier school environments for your students.

Sincerely yours,

James Gorman, EdD
Deputy Minister, Education

Pc: Gordon Macatee
Deputy Minister, Health

Attachments: 1) BC Healthy Schools Network: Application for New Membership
2) BC Healthy Schools Network: Membership Requirements and Benefits