



TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Dr. Alexander Summers, Medical Officer of Health  
Emily Williams, Chief Executive Officer

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## SIGNED SCHOOL BOARD AND PUBLIC HEALTH PARTNERSHIP DECLARATION

### **Recommendation**

*It is recommended that the Board of Health receive Report No. 84-23 re: “Signed School Board and Public Health Partnership Declaration” for information.*

### **Key Points**

- The Council of Ontario Directors of Education and the Council of Ontario Medical Officers of Health (CODE-COMOH) Committee recommended that all schools' boards and health units establish and maintain a written partnership agreement to support a mutually beneficial working relationship between the local school boards(s), and public health units.
- The Middlesex London Health Unit (MLHU), Southwestern Public Health (SWPH), Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB), and London District Catholic School Board (LDCSB) have recently developed and signed Partnership Declarations ([Appendix A](#)).
- The school health team will maintain their collaborative efforts with local school boards, enhance existing partnerships, and actively participate in joint projects, initiatives, and programs at the board level.

### **Background**

It is widely acknowledged that there is a strong reciprocal link between academic success and physical and emotional well-being (ASCD, 2012). Consequently, the education system places significant importance on the well-being of students, urging a comprehensive integration of well-being into its core mission, going beyond their educational role (Colao, Piscitelli, Pulimeno, et al., 2020).

To achieve both academic performance and student well-being, school boards have partnered with various community organizations and agencies. Historically, public health is one of the agencies that partner with school boards to promote optimal health among children and youth.

**Public Health in our local Schools.** The synergy between public health units, school boards and schools rely on strong partnerships, as this is key to supporting the development of interventions that cross education and health. As a result of the MLHU’s recent strategic prioritization and new organizational structure, the Elementary and School Teams have merged into one School Health Team. A pivotal aspect of the restructuring involves a stronger presence and engagement with local school boards. Collaborating closely with these boards will enable a coordinated approach to address health-related challenges and implement initiatives that positively impact all school communities. The restructuring of MLHU’s school health team underscores the necessity of delineating roles and responsibilities within the partnership between public health units and school boards.

**CODE-COMOH recommends the creation of Partnership Declarations.** CODE-COMOH (Council of the Directors of Education - Council of the Medical Officers of Health), is a committee that was formed as a result of many emerging programs that required joint communication and work between Education and Health and the need to establish a relationship at the highest level between public health agencies and boards of education. This group has recommended that all schools' boards and health units establish and maintain a written partnership agreement to support a mutually beneficial working relationship.

The establishment of partnership declarations would solidify the reciprocal partnership objectives between the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education and foster collaborative efforts to support the development of healthy school environments as well as the ability to share data more effectively. Further, a guideline was developed to aid in the creation of partnership declarations. The guideline was a high-level overview, intended to be a communication tool to explain the purpose of the partnership and identify specific content sections such as purpose, goals, approaches, and expectations. Despite the CODE-COMOH recommendation, an environmental scan conducted in 2022 across 32 out of 34 public health units revealed that, prior to COVID-19, only 60% of regions had established partnership declarations with at least one of their collaborating school boards. Furthermore, it was noted that the COVID-19 pandemic hindered the creation and renewal of these partnership declarations.

### **Status Update**

During the 2022-2023 school year, Middlesex London Health Unit (MLHU), Southwestern Public Health (SWPH), Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB), and London District Catholic School Board (LDCSB) initiated the review and development of Partnership Declarations. By the spring of 2023, a Partnership Declaration was successfully updated and signed between TVDSB, SWPH, and MLHU. Additionally, the Partnership Declaration between LDCSB, SWPH, and MLHU was also finalized and signed this fall. Please see [Appendix A](#) for copies of the signed Partnership Declarations.

### **Next Steps**

- The School Health Team will maintain their collaborative efforts with local school boards, enhance existing partnerships, and actively participate in joint projects, initiatives, and programs at the board level.
- The School Health Team plans to revisit and update partnership declarations every two years to ensure they align with shared goals and priorities. Additionally, the school health team will engage in ongoing discussions to identify opportunities for enhancement.
- The School Health Team has been actively developing data sharing agreements, and the goal is to finalize these agreements by the end of 2023. Currently, the Health Unit has a signed data sharing agreement with London District Catholic School Board and are working closely with the Thames Valley District School Board. These agreements will define the pertinent data and information crucial for collaborative efforts, and establish procedures for consistent data sharing, with provisions to adapt as needs evolve.
- The School Health Team also plans to initiate the process of establishing Partnership Declarations and data sharing agreements with the French School Boards and the public health units whose jurisdictions overlap.

For a full reference list, please see [Appendix B](#).

This report was prepared by the School Health Team, Healthy Living Division.

Handwritten signature of Alexander T. Summers in black ink.

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