

# Implementing CSH Through APPLE Schools

For the past seven years, I have had the pleasure of working with the students, staff and community of Lac La Biche in rural northern Alberta as an APPLE Schools health champion at Aurora Middle School. Through a comprehensive school health approach, students, staff and the community of Lac La Biche have worked together to sustain programming to support positive mental health, healthy eating and physical activity for the students of Aurora Middle School.

Aurora Middle School is joined by 73 other schools from British Columbia, Alberta, Northwest Territories and Manitoba as part of the APPLE Schools project. The APPLE Schools project, “shifts schools’ culture around health and wellness, making the healthy choice the easy choice for everyone.” APPLE Schools uses evidence-based data to develop a school action plan specific to the needs addressed by students and staff. Aurora’s goals focus on sustaining a school environment that supports healthy eating, to improve recess opportunities for students and DPA breaks within the classroom and to continue to provide healthy alternatives for celebrations, holidays and work events.

To support healthy eating choices, students are provided with daily fruit bins in homeroom classes. Each week one classroom cleans and distributes fruit bins for the entire school. By having students directly involved, they gain an appreciation and take ownership in the process. This year our funding for fruit bins ran out, and community members, Councillor Charlyn Moore, the Parent Advisory Council and

the Lac La Biche Kinettes have generously donated funds to keep this weekly nutrition project going. Aurora’s cafeteria provides breakfast for students through a healthy initiative from Northern Lights School Division partnered with the Alberta nutrition grant, and students who do not have lunch are supported by our Kids Are Worth It program. Through administrative leadership, and staff desire, the cafeteria has transformed and currently provides healthy options for students to purchase daily lunches.

Each month our school focuses on a specific topic addressing healthy eating, physical activity or mental wellness through the APPLE Schools monthly campaigns. By providing a daily morning announcement, students and staff kick off each day with a message to build awareness. These announcements connect to a visual display on a centrally located bulletin board. Aurora’s SWAT (student wellness activity team) are involved by creating the visuals for their peers where staff can build on topics from information to share in health classes.

Each year APPLE Schools provides our school with implementation funding to support our individualized action plan. This year, APPLE Schools funds have been used to purchase DPA bins. Our 15 classrooms are provided with a different DPA bin on a biweekly rotation by SWAT to provide students with classroom movement breaks. The Grades 7 and 8 recreation-theme classes use equipment funded through a BOK’s (Building Our Success) grant to lead recess activities for younger

elementary students. These students have gained valuable leadership experience through implementation of recess games, and our younger students engage in organized games run by peers. This also builds our younger students' capacity as they will be able to be student leaders in the future keeping the use of the equipment sustainable for years to come.

Being part of the APPLE Schools team, I am fortunate to have attended professional development, gaining research knowledge and practical applications, through attending APPLE Schools fall and spring knowledge exchanges, EverActive Schools self-regulation games PD, HPEC conferences and Shaping the Future. Using information from these conferences with the support of Tina Skakun, our APPLE Schools health mentor for northeast Alberta, we have been able to provide staff with professional development on DPA games, self-regulation games and recess games. Sharing resources adds strategies to colleagues' tool boxes and strengthens the school community.

One other huge success that we have had due to the APPLE Schools program and through the generous donation from many community sponsors is the building of a growing dome. This dome allows our school to grow vegetables, berries and Indigenous plants year-round. Prior to the pandemic, produce was used in home economics and for taste testing. Currently, the dome is housing Indigenous medicinal

plants as part of the medicine box project. Students and staff can connect to Indigenous culture through smudging, gifting and tending to the plants in the growing dome. It also provides a place to relax, a unique space for science lessons and curriculum connections, and the chance to participate in some plant therapy.

The approach to health and wellness that APPLE Schools offers is truly invaluable! They have helped to change the perspective Aurora Middle School has on comprehensive school health, have influenced students to make the "healthy choice, the easy choice," and have supported staff to implement healthy changes in their classrooms to allow students to reach their full potential.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank APPLE Schools for their dedication to our school for the last seven years and for the years to come, as our school continues on its health and wellness journey. This is only a brief overview of the initiatives that we have achieved; however, due to the pandemic, we have had to shift our approach which has proven successful.

APPLE Schools has an amazing website with many free resources for schools to access, including DPA activities, fitness circuits and monthly campaigns. If this article has piqued your interest, check them out at [www.appleschools.ca](http://www.appleschools.ca).

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