



The APPLE Schools Story

The APPLE Schools seed was planted in 2006-07, when Dr. Allan Markin, a renowned philanthropist, had a dream of improving physical activity and healthy eating habits of children in Alberta. He began by working with University of Alberta representatives and the interim dean of the School of Public Health, Dr. Roger Palmer, to determine the best fit for his first and largest donation to the faculty.

Professor Dr. Paul Veugelers was identified as the ideal researcher to shape Allan's dream into reality. Paul's extensive resume included researching school health, receiving health research and scholar awards, and holding research chair positions in the health field. Best of all, he was willing to take the reins as the principal investigator and first director of what was soon to become APPLE Schools.

Paul needed someone to implement the project based on the Annapolis Valley Health Promoting Schools model, so he reached out to Marg Schwartz, the School Health and Wellness Manager for Alberta Education and Alberta Health and Wellness. Working on a strong implementation project backed by world-class research piqued Marg's interest and she welcomed the new challenge. **In November 2007, Alberta Project Promoting active Living and healthy Eating in Schools, or APPLE Schools, was born.**

Allan preferred anonymity over his \$5-million donation and promised more funding only if the project proved effective. **Armed with pressure to produce results, APPLE Schools began implementation and research.** Staff worked with school jurisdictions to select 10 underserved schools with lower than provincial averages in all health behaviours. They trained and hired 10 fulltime School Health Facilitators (SHF) for each school to implement changes on the ground level and improve the bleak statistics. The hard work paid off – in 2009, after touring one of the pilot schools, Allan agreed to be named as the funder, and in 2010, scientific evidence found that APPLE Schools met their goals! The schools saw *exceptional* improvement in physical and healthy eating

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behaviours. Many partners contributed to the success, and the published results of the study are referenced internationally.

In 2011, **Allan boosted his donation to \$15 million, enabling expansion to 37 vulnerable schools.** Eminent people attended the launch event, a sign that movers and shakers were noticing the project's impactful work. Indira Samarasekera, then President of the University of Alberta; Dave Hancock, then Minister of Education; senior executives from several oil and gas companies in the Fort McMurray area; and superintendents from partner school jurisdictions all attended the celebration.

By 2013, the project outgrew Paul's capacity as he was also a busy professor and senior researcher. **APPLE Schools separated from the University of Alberta as a research project, and became its own private charitable foundation** with a board of directors chaired by Dr. Lory Laing. In 2015, Jenn Flynn, an original staff member at APPLE Schools, moved into the Executive Director position to push the project to new heights.

Another growth spurt came in 2016 after APPLE Schools secured \$5 million – enough to sustain the project beyond 2020. **Thanks to generous funders, as of January 2017, the project supports 63 schools across northern Alberta.**

Proposed future funding will take APPLE Schools outside of Alberta in 2018, starting with two schools each in Manitoba and North West Territories, and possibly British Columbia. APPLE Schools adjusted their name to reflect the expansion – **APPLE will soon stand for A Project Promoting healthy Living in Every school community.**