



UpLift  
Partnership

# IMPACT REPORT

- 2019 / 2022 -



[upliftns@dal.ca](mailto:upliftns@dal.ca)

[www.upliftns.ca](http://www.upliftns.ca)

# Acknowledgement

We are all Treaty people. Nova Scotia is in Mi'kma'ki, which is the unceded traditional territory of the Mi'kmaq people. Those involved with the UpLift Partnership recognize the Mi'kmaq stewardship of this land and work towards relationships of peace and friendship.



## A healthier Nova Scotia through a youth-engaged Health Promoting Schools approach

---

The UpLift Partnership is a School-Community-University partnership supporting the health and learning of school-aged children and youth using a Health Promoting Schools (HPS) approach. The UpLift core team is hosted within Dalhousie University's Healthy Populations Institute, while operating in partnership with government, Nova Scotia Health, school communities, non-profits and the private sector.

At UpLift, we bring together partners across sectors to collaborate in creating conditions for healthy learning environments. A key component is engaging youth to drive the changes they want to see, through the work of our Youth Engagement Coordinators and HPS Leads. We then collaborate with decision makers to create change.

Our work is evaluated through a process involving students, school staff champions, Youth Engagement Coordinators, and other members of the HPS network in Nova Scotia. Data are collected through a range of methods including focus groups, surveys and story sharing. This report outlines key findings of the evaluation since the UpLift partnership began in 2019.

# WHAT WE LEARNED

71 schools across Nova Scotia participating in UpLift completed a HPS Assessment Tool to help plan and evaluate their work to support student health and well-being. Here is a snapshot of current school activities to support health and learning (✓), what could be improved (⚠️), and the biggest gaps (✗). The HPS Assessment Tool was completed by school staff and in some cases students.

## SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

	 School Food	 Active Schools	 Active Transportation (AT)	 Inclusivity & Mental Health
✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adequate time to eat</li> <li>Emergency food available</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Active outings</li> <li>Alternative space for physical education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Safe bus pick-up/drop-off</li> <li>Adequate bike/wheel storage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School is safe and supportive</li> <li>Mental health is part of Student Success Planning</li> <li>Students can gain understanding/appreciation of diversity in/out of class</li> </ul>
⚠️	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Healthy rewards and fundraisers</li> <li>Food meets varied dietary needs/preferences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Indoor space available during poor weather</li> <li>Physically active lessons</li> <li>Playground inclusive for diverse abilities/needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School supports students to walk to/from school</li> <li>Adequate traffic calming</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Opportunities for students, family, and communities to celebrate individual differences</li> </ul>
✗	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teaching and Learning (growing, preparing, sharing and learning about food in class)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intramurals* and equipment for physical activity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School implements AT programs</li> <li>Bike routes safely connect students to school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gaps in inclusivity and mental health were rarely identified through the HPS Assessment Tool**</li> </ul>

\*The COVID-19 Pandemic is a factor in some cases where intramurals could not be offered.

\*\*Gaps in the school environment related to inclusivity, mental health and well-being were identified by less than 5% of schools.

# WHAT WE LEARNED

Through the HPS Assessment Tool, school communities have identified both strengths and gaps in current structures and systems supporting healthy school environments. Below are some highlights of what we found.

---

## STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Data show an opportunity to increase student engagement in all areas of the school environment.

### STRENGTHS

- Students' voices and positive contributions are acknowledged and applauded.

### GAPS

- Students are rarely engaged as leaders and decision-makers in:
  - Healthy eating or menu planning.
  - Physical activity/movement.

## COMMUNITY & SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

There are a variety of existing school-community partnerships that support health and well-being, as well as opportunity to continue developing partnerships to fill HPS gaps.

### STRENGTHS

- Many schools have community partnerships to support physical activity, among other health and well-being initiatives.

### GAPS

- Schools rarely partner with the community to support healthy eating (including accessing community resources/services).
- There are few opportunities for the school community to learn about benefits of physical activity.

## TEACHER & SCHOOL STAFF ENGAGEMENT

There is opportunity to engage and enhance capacity among staff in all areas.

### STRENGTHS

- Many schools support staff to maintain/improve their own mental health and well-being.

### GAPS

- There is a lack of training and resources to educate and empower staff to model and teach healthy eating, including a lack of training regarding the NS School Food and Nutrition Policy and little/low engagement in menu planning.
- Many teachers are not provided training or resources to deliver physically active lessons.
- Teachers and school staff are rarely encouraged to use active travel to/from school.

# UPLIFT'S SOLUTION

The data collected show that schools in Nova Scotia need more support to create healthier learning environments. The data also show that youth have the knowledge, skills and ability to be leaders in creating healthier school communities.

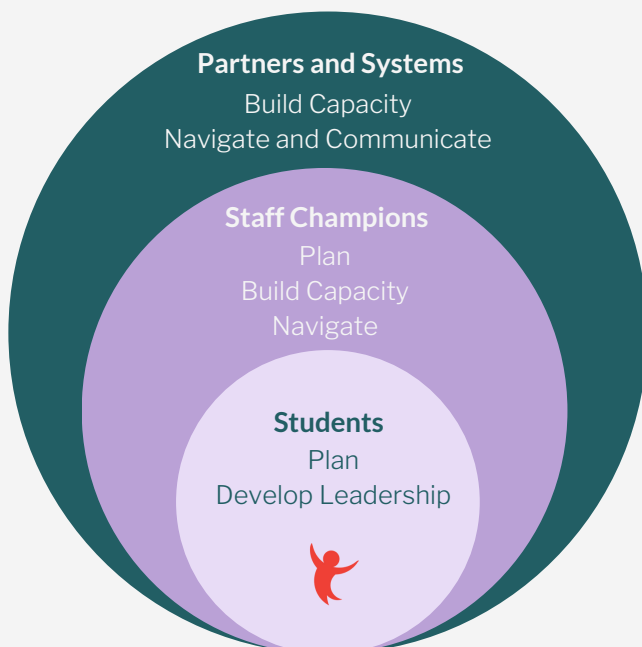
At UpLift, we see meaningful youth engagement as a key ingredient of the provincial Health Promoting Schools approach. Through the work of Youth Engagement Coordinators (YECs) and HPS leads in schools, UpLift is demonstrating the impact of youth engagement in participating schools.

## YEC ROLE

**The YECs support student engagement and leadership development in their UpLift and HPS work.**

**They create conditions to meaningfully engage students to shape their school environments from start to finish - by surveying their peers, idea creation, project planning, implementation and celebration.**

**Their roles are multifaceted and include working with students, staff, partners, and systems to engage youth in decision-making.**



- **Build partnerships and relationships** - at various levels to support UpLift and HPS work.
- **Navigate and Communicate** - build awareness among teachers, principals, parents, students, and partners through various mechanisms such as newsletters, one-on-one meetings; navigate and problem-solve issues.
- **Support advocacy** - work with students and/or staff champions to advocate for HPS and student engagement.
- **Outreach and connect** - share ideas to support schools in their UpLift and HPS work.
- **Build capacity** of staff champions and others; identify/develop resources; provide learning opportunities and link school staff to other learning and funding opportunities.
- **Plan** - introduce UpLift, gather data to support program planning and develop grants.
- **Facilitate and uplift student engagement and leadership in HPS work** - gather diverse student groups; provide opportunities to define strengths and needs in their school and take on meaningful roles to realize their ideas, in collaboration with staff champions.

# UPLIFT'S SOLUTION

## HPS UpLift Student Action Grants

A component of UpLift's youth engagement is to meet with schools to brainstorm and implement HPS UpLift Student Action Grant projects. These are one-time \$5,000 grants that go toward boosting HPS within the school. The YECs and HPS Leads support students in the grant process by helping with project planning, development, implementation and celebration.

### The Impact of the Grants

The magic of the grants is the way that students are leading the process, along with the skills that they are building throughout the journey. Students named the following skills and benefits:

- Interpersonal skills
- Financial literacy
- Planning skills
- Negotiation & compromise
- Increased confidence
- Ownership and pride



\*Potential reach is defined as the total student population in schools engaged with UpLift.

# THE OUTCOMES

The Youth Engagement Coordinators have had a positive impact on schools that participated in the HPS UpLift Student Action Grant process. Their role is a key ingredient in implementing the grants through meaningful youth engagement.

## Increased understanding of youth engagement processes

Increased knowledge and understanding about techniques and processes to engage students. UpLift helped to emphasize the importance of student engagement and provided a model of how to effectively engage students in supporting their own health and well-being.

"Learning that it's important to listen to the kids. Not that I didn't know that, but it's important to listen to the kids because what we think and what they think are two totally different things. And I learned to give the kids some room to develop some of that...because look at what they did. It's amazing" - Staff Champion

## Strengthened student voice and leadership

The staff champions consistently described how students took leadership roles in the HPS UpLift Student Action Grant project, including making decisions and taking ownership for the work.

"You have to give your ideas and say, 'this is what I want'. And you have to be willing to take advice, and it can't always be your way. So, you have to sometimes go with the flow." - Student

"We're able to speak up a little bit more now because we just boosted our confidence. Even if it's just a little bit. I thought I was the exact same, but now I speak up a lot more." - Student

## Enhanced leadership for HPS at the local level

In the focus groups with staff champions, participants discussed student leadership as well as knowledge and skills gained by students through their engagement with UpLift (e.g., planning skills, decision making, financial planning, health and well-being, etc.).

"Any time you can be involved in a project of these magnitudes, be the teacher or staff that's doing that.. it sets a great example for other teachers. And it shows them what you can do. Everybody in the building knows what UpLift is, and they're always thinking about what the next project might be." - Staff Champion

"Our older students were thinking of things that weren't even going to benefit them. I think it was going to be strictly just for the younger students. But seeing them really take that on and be very selfless and community focused, it was awesome." - Staff Champion

## Increased collaboration at the community level to support HPS

Focus group participants described how UpLift and the HPS UpLift Student Action Grant had facilitated bringing family and school members into the school and connected the school and community.

"I think it's nice to have opportunities to invite the guests in, and work alongside community members, and really like not just work in the school in the curriculum, but how we can expand the curriculum and make those connections. And provide real life experiences for students." - Staff Champion

# THE OUTCOMES

## Enhanced social and physical environments

HPS UpLift Student Action Grants have supported enhancement to the social and physical environments; particularly in the areas of physical activity and mental health.

"Ours was not so much a grant in the sense that kids were out getting exercise. It was more on the mental health side of things, which as it turned out, really became a huge issue for kids who felt isolated when our classes couldn't meet, when they were in cohorts, that kind of thing. It really, really helped with the mental health of everybody in the building." - Staff Champion

## HPS embedded in school processes and structures

Adult champions discussed how UpLift is aligning with other work to support student health and well-being and facilitating the embedding of HPS and youth engagement within the school.

"Our SSP wellness lens has been really driven with this work, and with the outcomes of the work. So, that's something that will foster change throughout our school for the next X number of years, and potentially shape how we look at things going forward... It's just really, really important from that SSP lens." - Staff Champion

"It's also influenced, for example, how we're using our Student Advisory Council funds now. So, we've made a decision as an SAC that the majority of the funds that we spend all have to come from student proposals on things they'd like to see at the school." - Staff Champion

# THANK YOU

We believe that youth have the right to grow and learn in a school community that nurtures their well-being and provides them with the opportunity to reach their full health and learning potential. This report is evidence that the Youth Engagement Coordinator role has contributed to:

- Enhanced understanding and support of youth engagement
- Strengthened student voice and leadership
- Increased collaboration at the community level to support HPS
- Enhanced social and physical school environments
- Embedded HPS in school structures and processes

Health Promoting Schools is supported by decades of research and is proven to improve health and learning for youth. Looking forward to 2023 - 2024, UpLift's Youth Engagement Coordinators will continue supporting schools in their HPS work.

Read our full evaluation report [here](#).

