

UPLIFT PARTNERSHIP



School Community Engagement & Action Evaluation
Summary Report

September 2024





01

Introduction



02

Findings




03


Conclusion








The **UpLift** Partnership's vision is *a healthier Nova Scotia through a youth-engaged Health Promoting Schools approach*. In working towards this vision, a focus of the **UpLift** Partnership is to align with and enhance work that is currently underway to support the health and well-being of children and youth through effective implementation of the HPS model using a youth engagement (YE) approach. The vision is achieved through six areas of work. These areas and associated goals are:

 **Partnerships & Leadership:** Health Promoting Schools (HPS) approach that is resourced by and embedded within the Nova Scotia (NS) health and education system;

 **Planning & Evaluation:** Evidence-informed HPS approach across NS with a comprehensive accountability framework aligned with partner goals;






 **Youth Engagement:** Engaged and empowered NS youth who support child and youth health and well-being through a HPS approach;

 **School & Community Engagement & Action:** School and community environments across NS that support child and youth health and well-being through a HPS approach;





 **Capacity Building:** Evidence-informed practice within the NS health and education systems to support HPS;

 **Communication & Knowledge Exchange:** Community support across NS for a HPS approach.

This evaluation of *school community engagement and action* work gathered data to describe activities done by **UpLift** to build school and community environments that support child and youth health and well-being through a HPS approach, as well as to assess the outcomes of school community engagement and action:

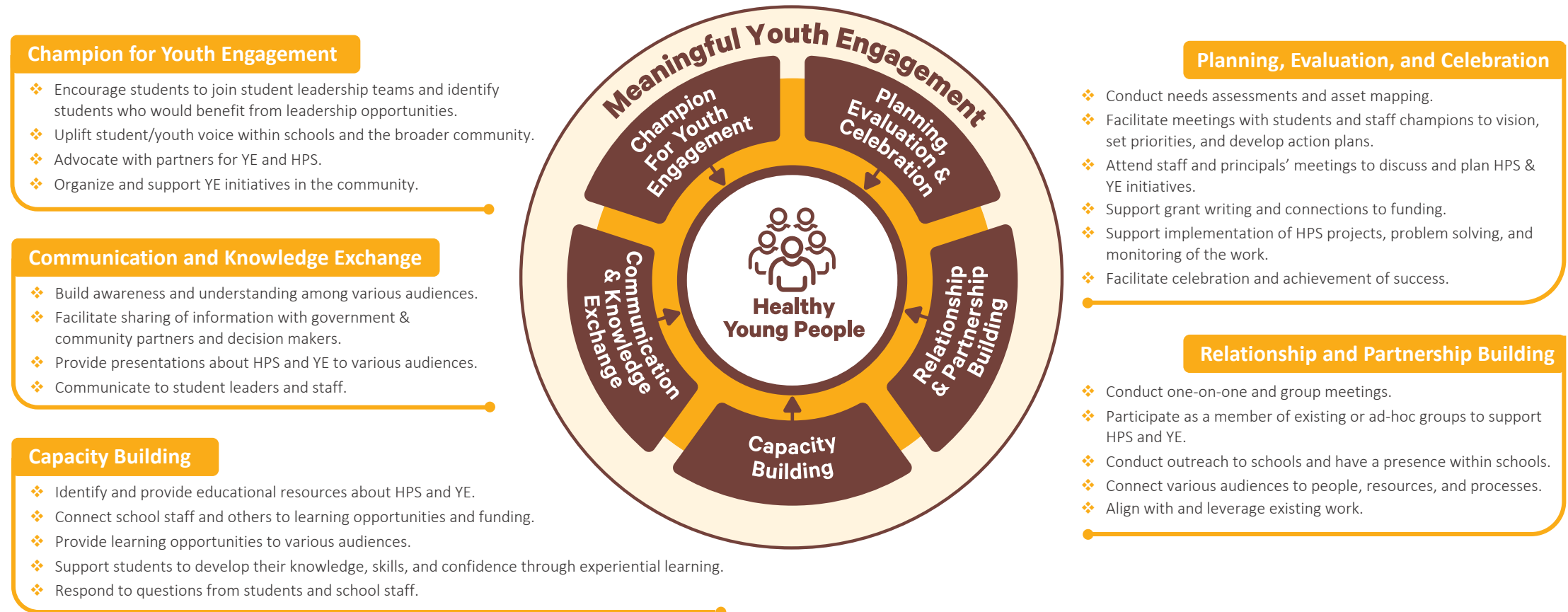
-  Strengthened student voice through **UpLift** to influence HPS
-  Increased meaningful leadership role for youth in HPS
-  Enhanced social and physical environments that support health and learning within schools and communities
-  Enhanced leadership for HPS at the local level
-  Enhanced collaboration at the community level to support HPS

The evaluation used both quantitative and qualitative methods:

-  Tracking forms completed by the YECs and HPS Leads
-  A review of program documents
-  A partnership survey
-  Focus groups conducted with students and staff champions

The Youth Engagement Coordinator (YEC) role is multifaceted and includes support for key HPS elements (see Figure 2). Figure 1 illustrates the five key areas of work of the YEC (represented in brown), and the outer circle represents the approach to meaningful YE that is embedded in all work of the YECs. Together the YEC approach and roles are helping to achieve one of the key outcomes of the work – healthy young people.

Figure 1
Role & Approach of the Youth Engagement Coordinators





Approach

In all of their work, the YECs used a participatory approach centered on meeting people “where they were” and using interactive engagement activities (e.g., running icebreakers to support relationship building; using a Price is Right themed activity, a dot matrix, an activity with Monopoly money, to help students prioritize and budget). These approaches helped to build HPS and YE knowledge, skills, and confidence and create champions to advance and embed YE and HPS throughout the school community.



Supporting Inclusion

The YECs and HPS Leads described what they did to help ensure that HPS and YE activities were inclusive: targeting projects to support inclusion (e.g., working with students and student equity staff to use funding to develop projects for inclusion); capacity building (e.g., supporting teachers to incorporate inclusion into teaching and learning); planning (e.g., assessing how well the school environment supports inclusion); partnerships (e.g., working with RCE/CSAP and community partners to promote participation of students of various ages, ethnicities and genders in HPS initiatives); creating safe and inclusive environments (e.g., encouraging students to ask questions to better understand different cultures, supporting students to raise issues related to inclusion with staff and administration).



Building Relationships & Partnerships

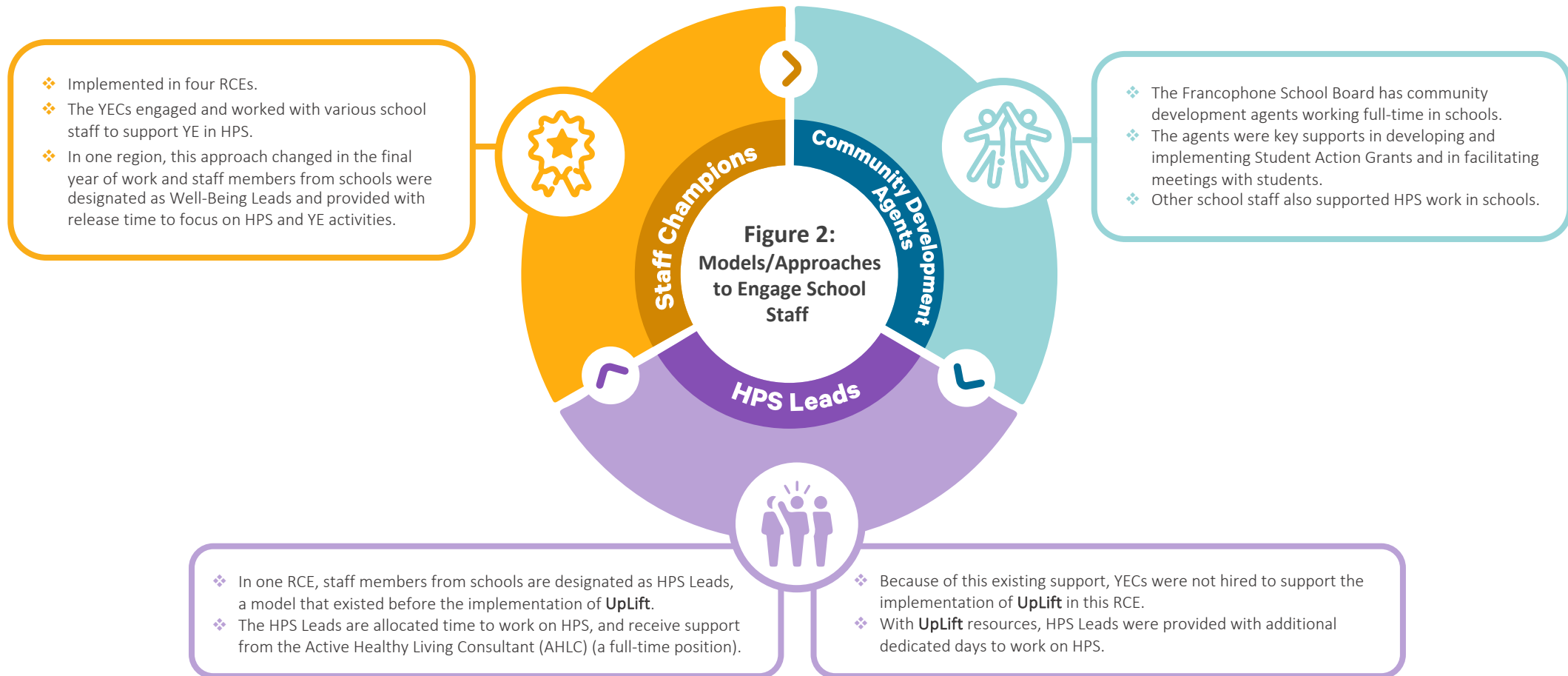
Relationship and partnership building were key activities of **UpLift**, including work done by the YECs. The YECs met with partners at the provincial, regional, and community levels. The meetings included one-on-one meetings to build awareness about HPS and YE through information sharing, discussing potential activities (planning and coordinating), and collaborating to support HPS efforts. Some partners joined HPS staff and/or student leadership committees within schools to support their work. Table 1 provides the approximate number of meetings of the YECs throughout **UpLift**.

Table 1: Approximate Number of Meetings of YECs

Structure or Organization	Total # of Meetings
Provincial	
Provincial HPS Team	19
Provincial CSAP	153
Other – e.g., businesses, government departments, academia	122
Total – Provincial	294
Regional	
NSH - existing structures and one-on-one meetings	213
RCEs - one-on-one and small group meetings; presentations; meetings with existing staff structures and ad-hoc groups	196
CCTH – One-on-one meetings and group meetings	32
Others - e.g., organizations that support healthy eating, physical activity, and YE; committees that include representation from several types of organizations	63
Total – Regional	504
Community	
Municipalities	96
Other - (e.g., ad-hoc groups consisting of school and community partners; community centres; Community Health Boards; environmental organizations; food security organizations; French language associations)	150
Total – Community	246
Total Overall	1,044

Staff champions played a key role in **UpLift** and were essential supports for HPS and YE. Staff champions included teachers, administration, guidance counsellors, Indigenous student support staff, SchoolsPlus staff, and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) coaches. The roles of staff champions included building awareness, knowledge, and skills; planning and project development and implementation; and building relationships /partnerships. The role of school staff can be considered to amplify the role of the YECs.

Various models/approaches were used by RCEs/School Board within **UpLift** to engage and work with school staff depending on the context of their HPS work and type of staff they had within their region, which are described in Figure 2.



The number of schools engaged in **UpLift** in each region/board ranged from 12 to 66 with varying processes used to support engagement (e.g., schools identified by RCE/Board leaders to be engaged first, expression of interest process, presentations and processes to determine readiness). Table 2 presents the schools that were engaged in and participated in **UpLift** across the six RCEs/Board from 2019 to 2024.

Table 2: Schools Engaged

School Year	# of Schools	# of Grades	# of Students
2019-2020	8	PP-6 (n=85)	2,356
2020-2021	49	PP-9 (22)	12,832
2021-2022	56	PP-12 (n=22) 4-9 (n=15)	18,773
2022-2023	42	5-12 (n=21)	13,313
2023-2024	21	8-12 (n=11)	6,683
Total:	176	N/A	92% of potential students reached* (53,957/58,456)

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

A component of the **UpLift** Partnership was a \$5,000 grant available for participating schools to support YE in HPS. Table 3 provides the number of grants approved across all RCEs/CSAP by year. A total of 163 grants were approved over the five years of **UpLift** representing an investment of \$815,000.00.

Table 3: HPS UpLift Student Action Grants

Year	# of Grants Approved
2019-2020	4
2020-2021	25
2021-2022	43
2022-2023	62
2023-2024	29
Total:	163

As illustrated in Table 4, 87% (n=142/163) of HPS **UpLift** Student Action Grant projects addressed mental health, 69% (n=112/163) addressed physical activity, and 30% (n=49/163) addressed healthy eating.

Table 4: Type of Projects Supported Through HPS UpLift Student Action Grants*

Type of Project	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total
Physical Activity	2	21	34	39	16	112
Healthy Eating	3	4	11	21	10	49
Mental Health	0	24	38	59	21	142

**Note: project type numbers exceed the number of grants approved because projects addressed more than one project category (e.g., most projects addressed mental health AND physical activity).*

Many of the grants addressed more than one area, with close to half of projects (47%, n=76/163) focused on both physical activity and mental health, 10% (n=16/163) of projects focused on healthy eating and mental health, and 15% (n=25/163) of projects focused on all three categories.

Short Term Outcome:

Strengthened student voice through UpLift to inform HPS

Student voice was enhanced through the development and implementation of HPS initiatives. Most projects were student led and provided students with the opportunity to identify needs within their school and address them, and to advocate at the school and community levels. Overall, students noted that they felt heard and respected throughout the process and students shared that the opportunity to contribute to meaningful change at school and in their community helped them to understand the potential of speaking up.



...It's definitely taught me a lot about leadership and stuff in the community. We plan stuff, and then it actually happens. So, it teaches us that we have a voice... (Student Focus Groups)



...We didn't tend to consult with students and involve them in decisions, to reach out to understand their priorities and interests. I find that now the links between staff and the students are much stronger, and that students are heard and valued. They see that their ideas are put into action... (Staff Champion Focus Groups)



...I think just having an adult go around and ask the students what they want, what are the problems, what are the solutions, is hugely impactful... (YEC Interviews)



Short Term Outcome:

Increased meaningful leadership role for youth in HPS

HPS initiatives supported through **UpLift**, including the **UpLift** HPS Student Action Grant projects, provided students with opportunities to engage in meaningful leadership in HPS. Various student leadership committees and structures were engaged. Student leaders were empowered to select, develop, and implement HPS projects including consulting with the general student body to help identify needs; brainstorming ideas and setting priorities; collaborating and communicating with school and community partners to support project implementation; problem solving implementation challenges; and celebrating success. Students and staff champions shared that their experience with **UpLift**/HPS was positive and memorable.



...It's fun to be part of something in the school, to help to create a better environment... (Student Focus Groups)



...The kids were very engaged and interested...they had an opportunity to understand that they, as students, had value in terms of what they wanted to see... (Staff Champion Focus Groups)



Short Term Outcome:

Enhanced social and physical environments that support health and learning within schools and communities

The HPS **UpLift** Student Action Grants and other funding for HPS work supported enhancements to the social environments (e.g., animal therapy, calming corners, groups for arts-based activities, special events to promote relationships/community, creation of all gender washrooms) and physical environments (e.g., creation of indoor and outdoor spaces for students and staff to eat, engage in physical activity, and learn; equipment for physical activity and to support healthy eating). Below are projects developed through the HPS **UpLift** Student Action Grants.

Sample Project: Mental Health Resource Room



Students developed a mental health resource room. Students can access this tranquil room during breaks or when they need a space for emotional regulation. Their design features comfortable seating, soft lights, a sound machine, a weighted blanket, and plants.

Sample Project: Community Bike Track



A group of grade nine students built a bike (pump) track on school property as a fun way to build mountain bike skills. Students worked with school staff and the YEC in their region to select the project and plan the location where the bike track would be built. Students valued the bike track as an opportunity to facilitate physical activity and relationship building, enhance mental health, and spend time in nature.

Students and staff members expressed satisfaction and enthusiasm for improvements made to social and physical environments and noted that new infrastructure and spaces are well used. Further, students and staff discussed that many projects are related to school well-being goals identified through student success planning. The YECs and staff champions described the grants as catalysts for change and helping to facilitate a culture shift within schools to better support student health and well-being.

Short Term Outcome:

Enhanced leadership for HPS at the local level

In addition to building student leadership and knowledge and skills to support HPS, it was also noted that staff champions have engaged with teachers and other school staff through **UpLift**, which is helping to build leadership for HPS within schools.

*...any time you can be involved in a project of these magnitudes, be the teacher on staff that's doing that... it sets a great example for other teachers. And it shows them what you can do. **UpLift** is now...everybody in the building knows what **UpLift** is, and they're always thinking about what the next project might be. (Staff Champion Focus Groups)*

Another way in which leadership for YE in HPS has been demonstrated is through embedding HPS within regional and local processes and structures, particularly within schools (e.g., within teaching and learning, curriculum, Student Success Planning, criteria for funding).

*...After **UpLift**, I brought up the idea to start our own committee at our school. Me and a friend decided to start our own committee, similar to **UpLift**, focusing on wellness. So, it's inspired me to do that... (Student Focus Groups)*

...Our Student Success Planning wellness lens has really been driven with this work, and with the outcomes of the work. So, that's something that will foster change throughout our school..., and potentially shape how we look at things going forward... (Staff Champion Focus Groups)

...I think this has really shown that every teacher could add health aspects into their program...the Nova Scotia Active Smarter Kids, so we've brought them in... and even the outdoor learning...the partnership in the Uplift project has really shown myself and other staff that there are other areas to get to. So, I think it's raised the level of how we do things in our building... (Staff Champion Focus Groups)

Short Term Outcome:

Enhanced collaboration at the community level to support HPS

Students, staff champions, and YECs shared that schools developed new partnerships or improved existing partnerships while implementing their projects, including with community organizations, municipal government, NSH, other schools, and private companies. Project supports provided by partners included advice and ideas, capacity building and resources for students, and equipment/materials.

...I think that we strengthened or leveraged the existing connections that we have... (Student Focus Groups)

...I think it's nice to have opportunities to invite guests in, and work alongside community members, and not just work in the school, in the curriculum, but see how we can expand the curriculum and make these connections. Provide real life experiences for students... (Staff Champion Focus Groups)

...It was really, really great to see the community come together to support the youth... (YEC Interviews)

Partnership mapping was used in two RCEs to assess how the YECs have contributed to relationship and partnership building related to HPS in their region. This involved outlining the network of partnerships and relationships developed by the YECs, through a survey with HPS network members. The partnership mapping helped to illustrate an increase in collaboration at the school, community, and regional levels as a result of the YEC positions. YECs played an important role in connecting with and supporting schools to advance YE in HPS and in connecting school champions to regional HPS partners, and were key to expanding the reach of HPS and YE.

An evaluation was conducted of school community engagement and action, including YE to describe high level activities and measure outcomes.

Uplift supported strengthened school community engagement and action with a focus on YE. Over the life of the initiative, the role of the YECs was defined and refined to include planning, evaluation, and celebration; relationship and partnership building; capacity building; communication and KE; and being a champion for YE. Through all of these areas of work, the YECs' approach was rooted in meaningful YE, and their work highlighted the value of the position within the system. **Uplift** also demonstrated various models to support building staff champions within schools, who are critical to supporting YE in HPS. A total of 163 schools were engaged in **Uplift**, representing a potential reach of 53,957 students and an investment of \$815,000 in HPS initiatives. Progress towards school community engagement and action outcomes included:



Strengthened student voices to influence HPS through opportunities for students to advocate for their needs and priorities, which has lasting impacts on their and others health and wellbeing.



Increased meaningful leadership role for youth and student action in HPS through opportunities to select, develop, and implement HPS projects.



Enhanced social and physical environments to support health and learning through the HPS Uplift Student Action Grants.



Enhanced leadership for YE in HPS at the local level through promotion of YE in HPS by school staff and embedding of YE in HPS within regional and local processes and structures.



Increased collaboration at the local level to support YE in HPS through development of new partnerships and strengthening of existing partnerships between schools and community organizations, municipal government, NSH, other schools, and the private sector.



The **Uplift** Partnership's vision was *a healthier Nova Scotia through a youth-engaged Health Promoting Schools approach*. In working towards this vision, a focus of the **Uplift** Partnership was to align with and enhance work that is currently underway to support the health and well-being of children and youth. This work focused on the effective implementation of the HPS model through catalyzing meaningful YE within the model. **Uplift** included the following areas of work: partnerships and leadership, capacity building, planning and evaluation, communications and KE, and school community engagement and action with a focus on YE.

The **Uplift** Partnership provided a significant investment of resources in Nova Scotia to support YE in HPS and student health and well-being. This investment has demonstrated the value of YE in HPS, culminating in an investment by NSH in nine YE focused positions across the province. Valuable products and processes have been developed, and many will be sustained to support YE in HPS moving forward. The vision of **Uplift** -- *a healthier Nova Scotia through a youth-engaged Health Promoting Schools approach* – guided the work of the **Uplift** Partnership and will continue to guide HPS and YE work in Nova Scotia in the longer term. Continued investment in YE in HPS catalyzed through **Uplift** will help to ensure a sustainable and consistent approach across Nova Scotia, build healthy communities, and improve student achievement and health and well-being of Nova Scotian children and youth. The **Uplift** Partnership has achieved what it set out to do, and sustained YE is a critical legacy of the last 6 years.

Thank You

