

Standard Alignment Brief

Alignment with British Columbia's Physical and Health Education Curriculum

How the Pan-Canadian Standard for School-Based Substance Use Prevention, Education, and Intervention Aligns with and Complements British Columbia's Physical and Health Education Curriculum

At-a-Glance

British Columbia's Physical and Health Education (PHE) curriculum already requires schools to address substance use across the K–10 continuum. The new pan-Canadian standard, *School-Based Substance Use Prevention, Education, and Intervention: A Multi-Tiered and Developmental Approach for Kindergarten to Grade 12 Schools in Canada* (the Standard), provides the comprehensive school-level system that surrounds and supports curriculum delivery.

The **PHE curriculum** defines what students should know and be able to do: the Big Ideas, Curricular Competencies, and Content that teachers deliver in classrooms. It addresses the **teaching and learning** component of a Health Promoting Schools approach.

The **Standard** addresses all four Health Promoting Schools components: environments and relationships, teaching and learning, partnerships and services, and policy. It provides the tiered supports, school-level policies, community partnerships, screening protocols, and intervention pathways that ensure substance-use-related teaching and learning is embedded within a coherent, equity-oriented, whole-school system.

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Please cite this document as follows:

Anchoring Change. (2026). How the Pan-Canadian Standard for School-Based Substance Use Prevention, Education, and Intervention Aligns with and Complements British Columbia's Physical and Health Education Curriculum. Vancouver: Anchoring Change.

Anchoring Change is a national initiative designed to transform how schools across Canada address substance use through coordinated, evidence-informed prevention, education, and intervention. Its approach is grounded in developmental and prevention science, student well-being, and the practical realities of education systems.

The initiative is led through a collaborative partnership between Wellstream: The Canadian Centre for Innovation in Child and Youth Mental Health and Substance Use at the University of British Columbia, the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA), the Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA), Physical and Health Education (PHE) Canada, and the Students Commission of Canada.

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Purpose of This Document

This brief is designed for British Columbia (BC) educators, school administrators, district leaders, and curriculum coordinators who want to understand how the new pan-Canadian Standard relates to the PHE curriculum they already deliver.

Specifically, this document:

- **Clarifies the complementary relationship:** the PHE curriculum provides the classroom content; the Standard provides the whole-school system around it
- **Maps substance-use-related PHE content** at each grade band to corresponding Standard clauses
- **Shows how the PHE curriculum's Big Ideas connect** to the Standard's organizing frameworks and guiding principles
- **Demonstrates that adopting the Standard strengthens** and supports PHE curriculum delivery rather than adding to it

About the Two Resources

BC Physical and Health Education Curriculum

BC's PHE curriculum is organized around a Know–Do–Understand model. **Big Ideas** capture the deep understandings students develop over time. **Curricular Competencies** describe what students will do to demonstrate learning (e.g., "Assess and evaluate strategies for managing problems related to mental well-being and substance use"). **Content** identifies what students learn about at each grade, including substance-use-related topics that progress from awareness of different types of substances in Kindergarten through to the physical, emotional, and social aspects of psychoactive substance use in Grades 9–10. PHE is required for all students through Grade 10.



The Pan-Canadian Standard (2026)

Developed through a collaboration between Wellstream, the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA), the Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA), Physical and Health Education (PHE) Canada, and the Students Commission of Canada, under the management of CSA Group, the pan-Canadian Standard provides a structured set of clauses organized across three developmental stages (K–Grade 5, Grades 6–9, Grades 10–12), three tiers of support (universal, targeted, intensive), and integrated within a Health Promoting Schools framework. Each clause assigns responsibility to school policy makers, administrators, or staff and uses normative language (“shall,” “should,” “may”) to distinguish the potential for impact of the recommendations. The Standard is voluntary and designed to meet schools where they are. Rather than prescribing a single model or requiring immediate compliance, it provides a common vision and practical roadmap for continuous improvement.

How They Relate

The PHE curriculum and the Standard are not parallel documents; they operate at different levels of the school system. The PHE curriculum is a **classroom-level tool**: it tells teachers what to teach about substance use at each grade. The Standard is a **system-level framework**: it guides school communities on how to organize prevention, education, and intervention across all four components of a Health Promoting Schools approach: environments and relationships, teaching and learning, partnerships and services, and policy.

This means the PHE curriculum addresses one of the Standard’s four organizing components (teaching and learning). The Standard addresses the three additional components that the curriculum, by design, does not: the school environments and relationships that make teaching effective, the community partnerships and services that extend support beyond the classroom, and the policies that sustain the work over time. Adopting the Standard does not change what BC teachers teach; it strengthens the system that surrounds and supports that teaching.

Substance Use Content: Grade-by-Stage Alignment

Table 1 maps the substance-use-related content from BC's PHE curriculum at each grade band to corresponding clauses in the Standard. This is not exhaustive; it highlights the most direct connections.

Table 1		
Grade	PHE Curriculum Content (Substance Use Related)	Pan-Canadian Standard Clauses
K	Different types of substances; hazards and potentially unsafe situations	Tier 1: • Belonging-based prevention • Health literacy and resilience (social-emotional skill-building) • Early identification and support • Routines for emotion management • Avoiding ineffective approaches (e.g., detailed substance information, abstinence-only approaches) • Aligned messaging with families/caregivers • Community partnerships for prevention and education • Coached and mentored physical activity • Nurturing student interests
1	Different types of substances and how to safely use or avoid them	
2	Effects of different substances, and strategies for preventing personal harm; managing and expressing emotions	
3	Nature and consequences of bullying; relationship between worries and fears; factors that influence self-identity	
4-5	Potential effects of psychoactive substance use and strategies for preventing harm (Gr 4); factors influencing use and potential harms (Gr 5); puberty; media and body image; sources of health information	Tier 2: • Supportive adult connections • Trauma-informed supports • Building healthy coping strategies

Table 1

Grade	PHE Curriculum Content (Substance Use Related)	Pan-Canadian Standard Clauses
6-7	Strategies for managing personal and social risks related to psychoactive substances and addictive behaviours (Gr 6); signs/symptoms of stress, anxiety, depression (Gr 7); consequences of bullying, stereotyping, discrimination; emergency response principles	Tier 1: • Belonging-based prevention • Promoting healthy norms • Exploring risks and harms • Integrating prevention into curriculum • Student partnership, youth leadership in health • Building connection and reducing risk • Recognizing and responding to incidents
8-9	Media and social influences related to psychoactive substance use and addictive behaviours (Gr 8); physical, emotional, and social aspects of psychoactive substance use (Gr 9); healthy decision-making; emergency response	Tier 2: • Targeted screening • Trauma-informed supports • Contextualizing student experiences • Strengths-based, restorative practices • Building protective skills • Facilitating connections to supports Tier 3: Referrals to care
10	Physical, emotional, and social aspects of psychoactive substance use and addictive behaviours; goal-setting and self-motivation; consequences of health decisions; signs/symptoms of stress, anxiety, depression; CPR/AED	Tier 1: • Exploring risks and harms • Foundations for social-emotional competence • Navigating life transitions Tier 2: • Targeted capacity building to manage life stressors • Healing-focused planning Tier 3: • Tailored interventions • Individualized support plans • Education continuity

Big Ideas: Conceptual Alignment

The PHE curriculum's Big Ideas describe the deep understandings students develop over their school career. Several of these Big Ideas connect directly to the Standard's organizing frameworks and guiding principles as shown in Table 2.

Table 2	
PHE Big Idea	Connection to the Pan-Canadian Standard
Good health comprises physical, mental, and emotional well-being (K–1)	The Standard's guiding principles and Tier 1 clauses operationalize this understanding: belonging-based prevention, social and emotional learning, coached physical activity, and health literacy all address the interconnected dimensions of health that the Big Idea describes.
Personal choices and social and environmental factors influence our health and well-being (Gr 4–5)	The Standard's socioecological approach and evidence base section explicitly address how individual, interpersonal, community, and societal factors interact to shape substance use health, moving beyond individual choice to address the systems that shape it.
Healthy choices influence our physical, emotional, and mental well-being (Gr 6–10)	The Standard's harm minimization principle and Tier 1 education clauses (promoting healthy norms, exploring risks and harms, integrating prevention into curriculum) provide the structured framework for developing this understanding specifically in relation to substance use.
Advocating for the health and well-being of others connects us to our community (Gr 8–9)	The Standard's student voice principle, student partnership and youth leadership clauses (Gr 6–12 Tier 1), and community-engaged education clauses (Tier 3) directly operationalize this Big Idea in the substance use context.
Healthy relationships can help us lead rewarding and fulfilling lives (Gr 8–9)	The Standard positions belonging and positive relationships as foundational to substance use prevention: belonging-based prevention appears at every developmental stage, and supportive adult connections, preserving positive relationships, and restorative practices are core Tier 2 clauses.

What the Standard Adds Beyond Curriculum

BC's PHE curriculum provides strong substance-use-related Content that progresses developmentally from K to 10. The Standard complements this by providing three categories of support that a curriculum, by design, cannot:



Tiered Supports for Students at Elevated Risk

The PHE curriculum is universal; it applies to all students. The Standard adds Tier 2 (targeted) and Tier 3 (intensive) clauses for students at elevated risk or already experiencing substance-related harms. This includes responses to first-time use, targeted screening, supportive adult mentorship, building protective skills, coordinated wrap-around supports, referrals to care, and individualized support plans. These are not curricular activities; they are school-system responses that ensure no student falls through the gaps.



Policy and Environment Clauses

The Standard includes clauses directed at school policy makers (boards and districts) to enact strengths-based policies that minimize exclusionary practices, require non-punitive responses to substance use incidents, and conduct periodic policy reviews in response to local trends. It also addresses school environments and relationships, requiring administrators to provide leadership in belonging, positive discipline, and inclusive community-building. These system-level conditions shape whether curriculum delivery is effective.



Community Partnerships and Services

The Standard requires partnerships with community, allied health, and cultural organizations at every developmental stage, and calls for engaging Elders, cultural supports, accredited community health professionals, and peer support workers in Tier 2 and 3 responses. The PHE curriculum acknowledges the importance of community connections but cannot itself create the partnership infrastructure the Standard describes.



Strengthening What BC Already Does

BC's PHE curriculum already provides developmentally progressive substance use education from Kindergarten through Grade 10, a significant strength that aligns closely with the Standard's teaching and learning expectations. The Standard builds on this foundation by providing the tiered supports, policy guidance, community partnership structures, and whole-school infrastructure that ensure this curricular content is delivered within a coherent, equity-oriented, and compassionate system. Together, they equip BC schools to move from strong classroom content to comprehensive, school-wide substance use prevention, education, and intervention.

References

Anchoring Change. (2026). School-Based Substance Use Prevention, Education, and Intervention: A Multi-Tiered and Developmental Approach for Kindergarten to Grade 12 Schools in Canada. <https://anchoringchange.ca/TheStandard>

British Columbia Ministry of Education and Child Care. (2019). Physical and Health Education K–10: Curriculum. <https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/curriculum/physical-health-education>

Learn More:

Anchoring Change is a national initiative to transform school-based substance use prevention, education, and intervention in Canada



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