

Standard Alignment Brief

Alignment with The Canadian Healthy School Standards

How the Pan-Canadian Standard for School-Based Substance Use Prevention, Education, and Intervention Aligns with and Complements the Canadian Healthy School Standards

At-a-Glance

The 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) and the *Canadian Healthy School Standards* (CHSS) share a common vision: schools as places where health and well-being are central to learning and lifelong success. They are complementary resources designed to work together.

The **Canadian Healthy School Standards** (2021) provide a broad, whole-school framework for elevating well-being across all dimensions of school life—organized as Foundational Standards (whole school approach, curriculum integration, local planning) and Implementation Standards (student-led, administrative leadership, community support, evidence use, professional learning).

The **Standard** (2026) applies this whole-school vision to a specific domain—substance use prevention, education, and intervention—providing the developmental scaffolding, tiered structure, and clause-level specificity needed to implement a coordinated K–12 response. Schools advancing the Standard are simultaneously advancing their CHSS goals, and schools already working within the CHSS framework will find the Standard a natural next step for their substance use response.

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This Alignment Brief was prepared on behalf of the Anchoring Change Executive Committee by: Tonje Molyneux, Ava Chaplin, Rhowena Martin, Shea Wood, Sarah McIlwaine, Shawna Meister, Reg Klassen, Ryan Fahey, Matt Drabenstott, and Emily Jenkins.

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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.

For more information about Anchoring Change:

Email: info@anchoringchange.ca

Visit: www.anchoringchange.ca

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Purpose of This Document

This brief is designed for education leaders, school health professionals, and policy makers who are working with the Canadian Healthy School Standards and want to understand how the new pan-Canadian Standard for school-based substance use prevention, education, and intervention relates to that broader framework.

Specifically, this document:

- **Maps** each of the eleven CHSS standards to corresponding elements of the pan-Canadian Standard
- **Demonstrates that** implementing the Standard advances CHSS goals simultaneously
- **Clarifies the “nested” relationship:** the CHSS describes the broader healthy school ecosystem, and the Standard provides the substance-use-specific layer within it
- **Supports adoption** conversations by positioning the Standard as consistent with school communities’ existing healthy school commitments

About the Two Resources

The Canadian Healthy School Standards (2021)

Overseen by the Canadian Healthy Schools Alliance—a collaboration of organizations spanning health and education, including Physical and Health Education (PHE) Canada, Ever Active, Ophea, and SIRCLE Research Lab—the Canadian Healthy School Standards (CHSS) provides a national framework for elevating well-being in Canadian schools. Grounded in the Comprehensive School Health model (also known as Health Promoting Schools) and informed by Indigenous knowledge systems, the CHSS centres equity, diversity, inclusion, and reconciliation. It is organized as Starting Points (leadership-level enablers), three Foundational Standards (whole-school approach, curriculum integration, local planning), and eight Implementation Standards (from student-led to evidence use). The CHSS is designed to build on, not replace, existing Comprehensive School Health work across Canada.

The Pan-Canadian Standard (2026)

Developed through a partnership 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 – also known as Comprehensive School Health - 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 various recommendations.

How They Relate

The CHSS and the Standard are not parallel initiatives; they are nested. The CHSS describes the broad conditions and commitments required for any school to become a health-promoting environment. The Standard applies those same conditions and commitments to a specific and urgent domain: promoting student well-being and preventing substance-related harms across K–12 schools. This relationship is reinforced by shared organizational roots: CASSA and PHE Canada contributed to the development of both resources.

The practical implication is straightforward: schools already working within the CHSS framework have laid much of the groundwork the Standard builds on. Conversely, schools that adopt the Standard will find themselves advancing the CHSS vision in the process—strengthening their whole-school approach, deepening curriculum integration, building community partnerships, and centring student voice.

Standard-by-Standard Alignment

Table 1 maps each of the eleven CHSS standards to corresponding elements of the pan-Canadian Standard, showing where and how the Standard operationalizes the broader healthy school vision specifically for substance use prevention, education, and intervention.

Table 1. Standard-by-Standard Alignment

CHSS Standard	What the CHSS Calls For	How the Pan-Canadian Standard Operationalizes This
Foundational Standards		
1. Whole School Approach	Building strong relationships with community partners, Elders, families; leveraging local assets; offering wellbeing-focused activities across the school environment; reviewing school rules and policies	The Standard's Health Promoting Schools (HPS) framework organizes action across four interrelated components: environments and relationships, teaching and learning, partnerships and services, and policy. Its guiding principles (EDID, trauma-informed practices, culturally responsive practices, harm minimization, student voice) ensure that this whole-school approach is equity-centred, decolonizing, and grounded in community partnership. Community partnership clauses appear at every developmental stage and tier.
2. Wellbeing Integrated Across All Curricula	Integrating health and wellbeing across all subject areas; culturally responsive programming; social and emotional learning; land-based education; movement across curricula	The Standard requires cross-curricular integration of substance use education (Grades 6–12 Tier 1), social-emotional skill-building embedded at every stage, coached physical activity and movement, and health literacy development. It explicitly requires culturally responsive materials that reflect diverse identities and experiences, and names the need to engage Elders and cultural supports across multiple clauses.
3. Charting Your Unique Plan	Identifying local assets; selecting context-relevant priorities; ensuring students see themselves in the plan; monitoring progress and celebrating success	The Standard's developing-building-sustaining implementation continuum is designed to meet schools where they are. Rather than prescribing a single model, it provides a common vision and practical roadmap for continuous improvement that recognizes diverse starting points, resources, and community realities. Schools are encouraged to surface and build on existing strengths.

Table 1. Standard-by-Standard Alignment

CHSS Standard	What the CHSS Calls For	How the Pan-Canadian Standard Operationalizes This
Implementation Standards		
1. Students as Change Makers	Student voices, leadership, and enthusiasm; peer-to-peer influence; students identifying priorities; building on student strengths and experiences	Student voice is elevated to a guiding principle in the Standard. Specific clauses include: student partnership (“active partners in creating substance-free, safer, and inclusive spaces”), youth leadership in health (co-designing well-being initiatives), and student engagement in program evaluation. These appear at Grades 6–12 Tiers 1–2.
2. School-Specific Autonomy	Activities driven by the school community; widening conversation to include diverse perspectives; meaningful inclusion of community as knowledge holders	The Standard explicitly respects local autonomy: “implementation must align with applicable legislation and be adapted to local contexts.” Its aspirational (not prescriptive) design, combined with policy revision clauses encouraging periodic review in response to local trends, ensures school communities retain decision-making authority within a shared national framework.
3. Demonstrated Administrative Leadership	Principals and administrators actively engaged in planning and implementation; establishing Healthy School committees; gatekeeping role in welcoming partners	The Standard assigns specific leadership responsibilities to school administrators, distinct from those assigned to school staff and policy makers. Administrator clauses include: providing leadership in belonging through positive relationships, coordinating incident response training, providing leadership in education continuity, and coordinating supports for students with complex needs.
4. Higher-Level Support	District, provincial/territorial, and First Nation/Métis/Inuit leadership setting the tone; affirming policies and improvement plans; dedicating resources	The Standard assigns system-level responsibilities to school policy makers (boards, districts, education authorities) including: enacting strengths-based policies, resourcing screening tools, requiring non-exclusionary responses to first-time use, and conducting periodic policy reviews.

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CHSS Standard	What the CHSS Calls For	How the Pan-Canadian Standard Operationalizes This
Implementation Standards		
5. Dedicated Champion(s) to Engage School Community	Staff champions providing leadership; supporting implementation; ensuring interconnection of programming; attending to champion wellbeing	While the Standard does not use the term “champion,” its implementation architecture distributes leadership across roles. It emphasizes supportive adult connections at every tier, mentorship clauses (Tiers 2–3), and coordinated school-community engagement. The developing-building-sustaining continuum implicitly recognizes the need for dedicated capacity to drive implementation and will support the development of a Champions Network.
6. Community Support	Strong internal and external partnerships; Healthy School committees with diverse membership; sharing decision-making power; wrap-around support	Community partnerships for prevention and education are required clauses at every developmental stage (Tier 1). At Tiers 2–3, the Standard calls for coordinated wrap-around supports, referrals to community-based services, engaging accredited community health professionals, and partnering with Elders and cultural supports. Family/caregiver engagement and shared decision-making are named across tiers.
7. Quality and Use of Evidence	Gathering school-based data through stories, surveys, interviews; using disaggregated data; respecting OCAP principles; tracking progress over time	The Standard is grounded in an evidence-informed approach (defined to integrate research, professional expertise, local context, and lived experience). It requires culturally responsive screening tools with appropriate privacy protections and emphasizes relationship-based monitoring alongside systematic measures. The implementation continuum supports ongoing monitoring and adaptation, including creating data-driven feedback loops that leverage existing data sources (e.g., attendance, discipline referrals, school climate) to support practice improvement and broader healthy school goals
8. Professional Learning	Professional development before and during implementation; conferences and workshops; integrating learning into existing staff time; supporting capacity building	The Standard identifies the need for incident recognition training (Tier 1), staff education on substance use responses, and building staff capacity for trauma-informed, culturally responsive, and evidence-informed practices. The Preface acknowledges educator reports of feeling ill-equipped and under-resourced, positioning professional learning as essential to implementation.

Using Them Together

The CHSS and the Standard are designed to reinforce each other. Here is how school communities can leverage both:



If You Are Starting with the CHSS

Your CHSS work has already established many of the enabling conditions the Standard requires: a whole-school orientation, community partnerships, administrative leadership, and a commitment to equity and student voice. The Standard provides a ready-made substance-use-specific application of that infrastructure, helping your school community move from general well-being goals to a structured, evidence-informed response to substance use across developmental stages and tiers of support.



If You Are Starting with the Standard

Implementing the Standard's substance-use-specific clauses will simultaneously advance your school's progress on multiple CHSS standards, including whole school approach, curriculum integration, administrative leadership, community support, and student voice. The CHSS can serve as a useful companion resource for broadening your healthy school efforts beyond substance use to include other dimensions of student well-being.



If You Are Working with Both

Use the CHSS as the umbrella framework for your school's overall well-being strategy, and the Standard as your detailed roadmap for the substance use domain within it. The CHSS's Starting Points (leadership familiarity, policy, funding, time, community connectivity, staff well-being) describe the system-level conditions that will enable successful Standard implementation. The Standard's developing-building-sustaining continuum provides a structured pathway for deepening your substance-use-specific work within the broader healthy school vision.



A Shared Commitment

The Canadian Healthy School Standards called for school communities across Canada to centre well-being as essential for learning. The pan-Canadian Standard answers that call for one of the most urgent domains facing Canadian schools today: substance use prevention, education, and intervention. Together, they equip school systems to create environments where every student is supported, connected, and given the foundation for lifelong health.

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>

Canadian Healthy Schools Alliance. (2021). Canadian Healthy School Standards. Ottawa, Ontario. <https://www.healthyschoolsalliance.ca/en/resources>



Learn More:

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



www.anchoringchange.ca



info@anchoringchange.ca

