

Standard Alignment Brief

Alignment with the Joint Consortium for School Health's Canadian Standards and Indicators for Health Promoting Schools

How the Pan-Canadian Standard for School-Based Substance Use Prevention, Education, and Intervention Aligns with the Joint Consortium for School Health's Canadian Standards and Indicators for Health Promoting Schools

At-a-Glance

The Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health (JCSH) released the *Canadian Standards and Indicators for Health Promoting Schools* in 2023, providing a broad framework for planning, implementing, and sustaining HPS across all health topics in Canadian schools. 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) is a **domain-specific application** within that framework.

The **JCSH Standards** (2023) define the overarching expectations and indicators for what it means to be a Health Promoting School, applicable to nutrition, physical activity, mental health, substance use, and any other health domain.

The **Standard** (2026) operationalizes these expectations for the substance use domain specifically, providing the developmental stages, tiered supports, clause-level specificity, normative language, and designated responsibilities that translate broad HPS principles into structured, actionable guidance for substance use prevention, education, and intervention.

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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.

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Purpose of This Document

This brief is designed for JCSH members, provincial and territorial health and education officials, school authority leaders, and school health coordinators who are familiar with the JCSH Standards and Indicators and want to understand how the new Standard relates to the HPS framework they already use.

Specifically, this document:

- **Clarifies the nested relationship:** the JCSH Standards define the broad HPS architecture; the Standard provides the substance-use-specific application within it
- **Maps each of the nine JCSH Standards** to corresponding elements in the Standard
- **Shows how the Standard addresses** implementation barriers identified in the JCSH's Phase 2 research on supporting HPS adoption
- **Demonstrates that schools advancing** the Standard are simultaneously advancing the JCSH Standards and Indicators

About the Two Resources

JCSH Canadian Standards and Indicators for Health Promoting Schools (2023)

Developed through a rigorous research and consensus-building process, the *Canadian Standards and Indicators for Health Promoting Schools* provide nine Standards organized across four Domains:

- **The Health Promoting School** (Standards 1–5, covering community engagement, leadership, policy, environment, and curriculum)
- **Enablers** (Standards 6–7, covering governing system support and school health services)
- **Canadian Values** (Standard 8, covering equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and Indigeneity)
- **Quality Improvement** (Standard 9, covering monitoring and evaluation)

Each Standard includes Standard Components that describe what is expected, and Indicators that detail the signs that schools are meeting those expectations. These Standards and Indicators are applicable to all health domains and are not intended to compare schools or stipulate minimum requirements, but to guide the HPS approach as tailored to each school community.

In 2025, the JCSH released a Phase 2 report, *Promoting Adoption and Implementation of the Canadian Standards and Indicators for Health Promoting Schools across Canada*, documenting consensus among school-level experts on the tools, enablers, and barriers relevant to HPS implementation. This research provides important context for understanding how the JCSH Standard addresses real-world implementation challenges.

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 JCSH Standards and the Standard are not parallel initiatives; they are nested. The JCSH Standards define **what it means** to be a Health Promoting School across all health domains. The Standard provides guidance on **how to do it** specifically for the substance use domain. This means the two frameworks are not duplicative. Rather, they are operating at different levels of specificity within the same HPS architecture.

The JCSH Standards apply their nine Standards and 100 Indicators across every area of school health: nutrition, physical activity, mental health, sexual health, safety, and substance use. They intentionally do not prescribe domain-specific actions, because each domain requires its own evidence base, developmental considerations, and intervention approaches. The Standard fills this gap for substance use by translating the JCSH's broad expectations into developmental stages, tiered responses, clause-level actions, designated responsibilities, and normative language calibrated to the unique complexities of substance use prevention, education, and intervention in school settings.

The practical implication is straightforward: schools already working within the JCSH framework have laid much of the groundwork the Standard builds on. Conversely, schools that adopt the Standard will find themselves advancing multiple JCSH Standards in the process. The crosswalk table below makes these connections explicit.

Standard-by-Standard Alignment

Table 1 maps each of the nine JCSH Standards to the corresponding elements in the Standard. It is organized by the four JCSH Domains.



Table 1*Domain: The Health Promoting Schools*

JCSH Standard	What JCSH Calls For	How the Pan-Canadian Standard Operationalizes This
Standard 1: School engages the community for the implementation and sustainment of the HPS approach	Tailoring HPS to unique school perspectives and needs; welcoming all school community members; local partners sharing expertise and resources; school ownership of HPS activities; EDIA principles in all planning	Community partnership clauses at every developmental stage and tier; family and caregiver engagement; Elders and cultural supports in Tier 2 and 3 responses; wrap-around services connecting schools to allied health, community, and cultural organizations
Standard 2: School leadership is dedicated to the HPS approach	Transparent and accountable leadership model; HPS leadership team comprising staff, students, families; ongoing communication about HPS goals; professional development for staff	Administrator-specific clauses at every developmental stage (belonging leadership, positive discipline, incident coordination, education continuity); distributed leadership model (student leadership, family/caregiver engagement); staff capacity building for trauma-informed and culturally responsive practice; professional learning clauses
Standard 3: School policies support the HPS approach	Policies supporting the vision of a healthy school community; integrating EDIA and Indigenous perspectives; supporting student potential and staff knowledge; HPS reflected in plans, procedures, and practices	Policy maker clauses requiring strengths-based, non-punitive, non-exclusionary substance use policies; periodic policy review in response to local trends; policy alignment with harm minimization and equity principles; developing–building–sustaining implementation continuum embedded in policy
Standard 4: School environment is conducive to safety, health, and well-being	Safe physical and socio-emotional environments; fostering respect, connectedness, autonomy, and trusting relationships; welcoming, caring, safe, and cooperative climate; positive social interactions	Belonging-based prevention as a guiding principle at every stage; school environments and relationships as one of four HPS components linked to appropriate clauses; positive discipline; preserving positive relationships during intervention; safe spaces for students at elevated risk; restorative and healing-centred approaches

Table 1*Domain: Enablers*

JCSH Standard	What JCSH Calls For	How the Pan-Canadian Standard Operationalizes This
Standard 5: Curriculum and health education prepare students for healthy futures	Health education complementing provincial curriculum and aligned with evidence; increasing student knowledge and self-efficacy; promoting healthy lifestyle behaviours; social justice, EDIA, and Indigenous perspectives in curriculum	Teaching and learning as one of four HPS components linked to appropriate clauses; cross-curricular substance use education; social and emotional learning integration; health literacy and resilience; promoting healthy norms; exploring risks and harms; avoiding ineffective approaches (e.g., abstinence-only, scare tactics); culturally responsive materials
Standard 6: Governing system prioritizes and supports the HPS approach	Intersectoral partnerships between education and health; joint planning of responsibilities and resources; curriculum review reflecting HPS; school authorities disseminating aligned policies; professional development investment; dedicated staff for HPS capacity building	School policy maker clauses (board/district level) with designated responsibilities; implementation monitoring and evaluation tools; partnered governance structure with CASSA, CCSA, PHE Canada, Students Commission of Canada, and Wellstream; normative language (“shall,” “should,” “may”) distinguishing the potential for impact of recommendations
Standard 7: School health services support the health and well-being of all students	Health services aligned with HPS approach; accessible to all students; provided by licensed professionals; culturally safe, age-appropriate, evidence-based; clear protocols for communication with families	Tier 2 and 3 clauses for connecting students to accredited community health professionals; referral pathways to clinical and allied health services; culturally responsive screening; coordination between school and community-based supports; education continuity during treatment and recovery

Table 1*Domain: Canadian Values*

JCSH Standard	What JCSH Calls For	How the Pan-Canadian Standard Operationalizes This
Standard 8: School promotes equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and Indigeneity	Embracing diversity across all identity dimensions; incorporating Indigenous principles of cultural identity, interconnectedness, and community empowerment; acknowledging impacts of marginalization; engaging Elders and Knowledge Keepers; land-based approaches; bias-free curriculum delivery	Equity-oriented approach as a guiding principle; culturally responsive practice at every stage and tier; engaging Elders and cultural supports; recognizing disproportionate impacts of substance use on Indigenous, racialized, and marginalized communities; contextualizing student experiences within social determinants of health; strengths-based, non-stigmatizing language

Domain: Quality Improvement

JCSH Standard	What JCSH Calls For	How the Pan-Canadian Standard Operationalizes This
Standard 9: Monitoring and evaluation inform the implementation and sustainment of the HPS approach	Evidence-based tools for monitoring each Standard and Indicator; regular data collection to track progress; school community engagement in monitoring and evaluation; modifying implementation based on findings	Evidence-informed approach as a guiding principle; relationship-based monitoring (not surveillance-based); culturally responsive screening protocols; implementation monitoring and evaluation tools; periodic policy review in response to emerging evidence and changing substance use landscapes; partnered governance structure to support continuous improvement

Addressing Implementation Challenges

The JCSH's Phase 2 research (2025) documented the barriers and enablers that school-level experts identified as most critical to HPS implementation and maintenance. Many of the top-ranked challenges correspond directly to design features of the Standard. Table 2 shows how the Standard's structure addresses these challenges.

Table 2

JCSH Phase 2 Finding	How the Pan-Canadian Standard Responds
School administrators who recognize the value of HPS and understand their school context are the most critical enablers	The Standard assigns specific clauses to administrators at every developmental stage, including belonging leadership, positive discipline, incident coordination, and education continuity, building HPS into the administrator role rather than treating it as an add-on.
Limited staff time, insufficient human resources, and lack of designated HPS staff are the top barriers	The Standard's distributed leadership model and clause-level specificity reduce the burden of designing approaches from scratch. Its developing-building-sustaining continuum allows schools to assess what is already in place, prioritize work on foundational elements, and build capacity over time.
Funding is most critical during the planning phase and first year of implementation	The Standard's three-phase implementation continuum (developing, building, sustaining) acknowledges that schools enter at different readiness levels and provides a structured pathway that can be resourced incrementally rather than requiring full investment upfront.
Schools need specific actions at the school and school authority levels	The Standard assigns each clause to a designated actor (school policy maker, administrator, or staff) and uses normative language ("shall," "should," "may") to distinguish the potential for impact of each recommendation, directly addressing the need for role-specific, actionable guidance.
Tools must be easy to use, customizable to local context, and regularly updated	The Standard's clause structure allows for local adaptation within a nationally consistent framework, and ongoing implementation monitoring and evaluation ensures periodic review and updating in response to emerging evidence and school community needs.
Experts want strategies for supporting Indigenous students and those from diverse cultural backgrounds	The Standard integrates culturally responsive practice as a through-line, not an add-on: engaging Elders and cultural supports, contextualizing student experiences, recognizing disproportionate impacts on marginalized communities, and centering equity at every tier.

Using Them Together

The JCSH Standards and the Standard are designed to reinforce each other. Here is how school communities can leverage both, depending on where they are in their HPS journey.



If You Are Starting with the JCSH Standards

Your work with the JCSH Standards has already established many of the enabling conditions the Standard builds on: an HPS orientation, community engagement, leadership commitment, and attention to equity and Indigeneity. The Standard provides a ready-made substance-use-specific application of that infrastructure, translating broad HPS principles into developmental stages, tiered supports, and clause-level guidance calibrated to the unique complexities of substance use prevention, education, and intervention.



If You Are Starting with the Pan-Canadian Standard

Implementing the Standard's substance-use-specific clauses will simultaneously advance your school's progress on multiple JCSH Standards, including community engagement, leadership, policy, environment, curriculum, equity, and monitoring and evaluation. The JCSH Standards can serve as a useful companion resource for broadening your Health Promoting Schools efforts beyond substance use to include other dimensions of student health and well-being.



If You Are Working with Both

Use the JCSH Standards as the overarching framework for your school's Health Promoting Schools efforts across all health domains, and the Standard as your detailed roadmap for the substance use domain within it. The JCSH's implementation enablers—administrator understanding, community ownership, adequate staffing, and dedicated funding—describe the system-level conditions that will support successful Standard implementation. As the JCSH's new Healthy School Planner becomes available, it will offer schools a way to assess their progress across all nine Standards; the Standard's implementation monitoring and evaluation tools can complement the Planner by providing substance-use-specific metrics and progress indicators.





One Architecture, Shared Purpose

The JCSH's *Canadian Standards and Indicators for Health Promoting Schools* provide the pan-Canadian architecture for creating healthy school communities. The Standard for school-based substance use prevention, education, and intervention provides the domain-specific depth that architecture requires to translate principles into practice. Together, they ensure that substance use prevention, education, and intervention are not an isolated initiative but an integrated part of a whole-school approach to health—grounded in evidence, responsive to community context, and oriented toward equity and well-being for all students.

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- 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>
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Learn More:

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



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