January 7, 2010

Dear School Council Chair,

We are writing to tell you about the Healthy Schools Recognition Program and to encourage you to help create a healthier learning environment at your school.

Now is the perfect time to build on previous successes, or decide how to get involved for the first time.

The Healthy Schools Recognition Program encourages school councils, students, school staff and community partners to engage in healthy activities. Over the last three years, more than 3,000 schools pledged to undertake more than 6,500 healthy activities. They received a certificate and pennant as recognition of their commitment.

Participation in the Healthy Schools Recognition Program is easy. If you have already participated, you can expand on previous years’ activities, or you can choose to develop a different one. The important thing is to do something healthy.

There is a range of healthy activities your school can do. Visit www.ontario.ca/healthyschools to:

- Find tips and ideas to help your school community be healthier.
- Use the search tool to learn what other schools have done.
- Read success stories from other schools — and share your own to inspire others.
- Discover a list of health promotion dates to help plan an activity around a healthy day or week.
- Learn more through our Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).

Other sources for inspiration include EatRight Ontario and Ontario’s After-School Initiative. EatRight Ontario offers nutrition information, healthy recipes and more for all age groups and can be found by visiting www.eatrightontario.ca or calling 1-877-510-5102. The After-School Initiative delivers after-school programs that focus on healthy eating and nutrition education, physical activity, personal health and wellness education or activities that address local priorities. To view some of the resources that can support agencies implementing the After-School initiative visit: www.mhp.gov.on.ca/english/after_school/default.asp.
To apply to the Healthy Schools Recognition Program, simply download the application form from www.ontario.ca/healthyschools. Schools are encouraged to apply by April 8, 2010.

Remember, there are many ways to promote a healthy learning environment. Activities highlighting the importance of physical activity, healthy eating, bullying prevention, personal safety, substance use and abuse, and mental health can all be counted towards your school’s participation.

The Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games being held in Vancouver next year offer a unique opportunity for students to get excited about physical activity. Offering an Olympic themed healthy activity at school can get kids engaged in the Olympics while getting healthy.

There are great benefits to participating in the Healthy Schools Recognition Program. When students are healthy, they are better able to learn. And developing healthy habits now, means they are more likely to lead healthy, active lives in the future.

Planning a healthy project or activity for your school is also a great way for parents to get involved with the school and community. We encourage you to work with students, school staff and local organizations to develop activities and promote the Healthy Schools Recognition Program throughout the community. We are also writing to your principal, student councils and local public health unit to encourage their involvement.

We hope your school will commit to becoming healthier by participating in the Healthy Schools Recognition Program for 2009-10.

Sincerely,

Kathleen O. Wynne
Minister of Education

Margaret R. Best
Minister of Health Promotion