The École en santé approach’s prime objectives are prevention and promotion of healthy lifestyles. Indeed, we believe that we should not wait until problems arise to act; we need to work upstream and long term to achieve sustainable results. Inserted in a three-year strategic planning, an annual success plan is developed by the École en santé Committee, in consultation with the school team and community. This strategy encourages reflective practices and allows yearly adjustments overcoming the weaknesses identified and aligned with problems encountered.
It is a collective project uniting everyone in the common goal to support young people to develop life skills and expertise aimed at their overall health.
ten years, we noticed passivity amongst young people, few physical activities were offered. The majority of them also had poor nutrition. These two observations have been our thinking prompts. According to the logic, we believe that if we work with young people in a right state of mind and body; if we are able to project them into the future, to give meaning to their education, we have a winning formula to support perseverance and academic success in daily life.

Aware that the problem was beyond physical activity and food, we knew we had to first act to equip students with respect to them. Thus, in the second year, we benefited from the collaboration of the Community Health Centre through the expertise of a nutritionist who joined the Committee. Soon, the project resulted in a holistic approach to a multitude of student development factors.

By which means is the project entrenched in the teachers’ practices and school life in general?

It should be mentioned that without claiming to reinvent the wheel, it proved essential for us to build on the positive actions already implemented in the school. We first identified and reinvested them in order to incorporate them into a more comprehensive approach which, in a vision of integration, seeks the collaboration of the whole school, in synergy with the community.

From the start, the approach was duly explained to the school team to favour adhesion of its staff, all of whom were and still are consulted cyclically for the development and evaluation of the program. To do this, several work projects are proposed and targeted continued development is offered. Thus all are familiar with the École en santé approach and its main axes.

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What characterized the educational École en santé approach?

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What strategies promote the École en santé approach’s sustainability?

To be able to re-evaluate the actions implemented in the Amik-Wiche School, to improve them and, above all, to align them with the students’ needs, we operate under an annual audit plan. At the beginning of each school year, an action plan is presented to the school team to ensure that all concerned actors are informed of the changes and preferred orientations. These strategies allow an economy of energy, while we avoid breaking down the interventions.

Do you notice some changes in the students’ lifestyles?

As the curriculum progresses, we notice a clear increase in student participation in activities offered as part of the École en santé program. Their involvement appears as progressive and influenced by a collective passion. We note in this regard that older students inspire younger ones to participate. Certainly, without them being necessarily familiar with the workings of the program, they recognize and appreciate the activities arising from the École en santé approach.
You mentioned upstream prevention, are measures established at the elementary to initiate education of healthy lifestyles?

Exactly, my work mandate [Jasmin Cossette] also extends to Amikobi Elementary School where the program is currently developed to educate and inform pupils beginning at the elementary. At this level of education, the approach focuses primarily on nutrition and physical activity. For the last four years, the Healthy Lifestyle Committee (VHS) has been established at the elementary in the Lac-Simon community. Our hypothesis is that if students are already equipped at the elementary, they will be more encouraged to participate in activities proposed as part of the École en santé approach when enter the secondary school. We therefore expect a positive change in the coming years.

What benefits have been observed since the introduction of École en santé program at Amik-Wiche high school?

The consequences of our actions are tangible within the school. However, when students complete their courses, it appears that they yet transfer very little their knowledge. Nonetheless, although the results in this regard are still insufficient, we are assured that when they leave high school, students are duly informed.

We can consider that the coming years will allow an improvement and prevention at a young age is our path to success. Yet, environmental influence remains very strong. After the youth transition to secondary school, we lose sight of them and no longer have control over them. At the very least, we anticipate long-term exponential advances. Indeed, these students will become parents and in turn will transmit these healthy habits in their children. Do not expect any change in the short term, because it is impossible. We believe in a better future. The École en santé program is a long-term project whose benefits will last for a long time.

What are the key factors of the École en santé approach implemented in your school?

The current École en santé program in our school is preventive and promotional priority referring to six key factors operationalized through four levels of action. This typology stemmed from observations in the educational environment as well as the consultation of official documents (see references), on which we are building theoretically. Through key factors addressed and the designated interveners, some autochthonous traditions are also visited to record the activities within the cultural characteristics of students in our community.

The identified six key factors are self-esteem, social skills, living habits (diet, physical activity, sleep, etc.), safe and healthy behaviours, favourable environments, and prevention services. In a search for balance, the six key factors are invested in four levels of action: the student, the school, the family, and the community. The objective is primarily to prevent and educate students in a positive way, not to intervene when the problem is already there.

In short, in our annual success plan, which is inserted into a three-year strategic planning, every prevention or promotion procedure identifies one or more key factors affecting one or more levels of action.

To ensure balance, we operate with a table showing, for each act, the factors and target levels. Thus, beyond the student and the school, some activities are primarily addressed to the family and the community. We always work on what is tangible.
Are these activities proposed within the courses or are they rather extracurricular?

We increasingly tend to integrate the École en santé approach within classes, through learning and evaluation situations (LES). We ask for active participation and collaboration from teachers in all disciplines. To do this, we suggest themes or aspects to work according to target directions that they can incorporate into their teaching content. We also invite them to find or even develop educational materials and SAEs about discussed key factors. Numerous original teaching materials have been developed. Through this, we have what we call specific “mass activities” bringing the whole school together: for example, running or athletic activities within the community are offered to all students. These activities are unifying and promote a healthier lifestyle. The effects of the École en santé program therefore thrive inside and outside the classroom. Extracurricular activities are also available outside of school hours.

Following the annual review of our success plan, we currently tend to offer something other than sports to meet the needs of students. Indeed, we notice now that boys are less involved than girls. We are eagerly seeking to develop activities which do not necessarily involve physical effort to mobilize the greatest possible number of boys: for example, culture, science or art- related activities are under development to expand our spectrum of actions.

Within the École en santé program, what means were set up to support the academic success and perseverance of the students?

In ten years, the number of hours of physical activity per week available to students increased from 0 to 20 hours. This gives a good example of the efforts made to catch young people’s interest. Not being able to provide empirical data on dropouts, we know that inside as outside of school, a great number of actions are put in place to motivate young people and encourage them to complete their secondary-level education. To do this, we offer targeted activities based on the students’ interests to create cohesion, a sense of belonging in small groups: for example, the Amik-Wiche en forme project provides indoor training sessions for them on weekdays after school.

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In 2008, we surveyed the students in relation to their socio-educational environment. The results showed that they did not nurture their sense of belonging toward the school and they were demotivated. These findings allowed us to offer, along with students, practical ways to remedy the situation. In the 2012 re-evaluation, we noticed an improvement in student responses who felt more involved in their school. The choice of actions depends on their needs and interests. To do this, key actors are always consulted.

To conclude, would you tell us about the transferability and future prospects of the École en santé approach?

We had the initiative to inform the First Nations Education Council (FNEC), which groups 22 communities, of the educational advances made in our

We anticipate long-term exponential advances.
We know that this approach has a positive impact on our students and we are confident that its export would be beneficial to other communities. In this sense, we have already presented the project elsewhere. We are also willing to support them in the implementation of the approach, hence the development of a transferable model. Finally, we continue to question our practices in order to refine our approach.

Thank you very much, gentlemen, for your eloquent testimonies. The rigour and passion with which the École en santé approach is implemented in Lac-Simon’s Amik-Wiche High School comes through strongly in what you say. We also feel the conviviality, the caring values, and openness that are the hallmark of your school and your community. Above all, your desire to be attentive to students in the real concern to support their retention and to help them achieve educational success is well understood, which is very much to your credit.

REFERENCES


