

## EAC Strategy for Reducing Childhood Obesity by Increasing Opportunities for Active Transportation

### Introduction

The Ecology Action Centre's (EAC) Active & Safe Routes to School program has consistently identified the role of safe and active transportation routes to and from school as being vital for supporting improved population and environmental health. Although many benefits are linked with active transportation, increased rates of physical activity are especially relevant for reducing childhood obesity.

### Opportunity

The Province of Nova Scotia recently announced its plan to develop a framework to address childhood obesity. Although the EAC has provided formal input into this framework, increased provincial interest in obesity reduction presents an opportunity to reinforce the importance of school siting in supporting physical activity among children and youth.

### Discussion paper

There is a current trend toward the closure of small, community-based schools in favor of the construction of large schools, often situated a distance away from the residents they are intended to serve. This is a concern, as distance is a significant barrier to active transportation. Based on this trend, the EAC has developed a discussion paper focusing on the lack of alignment between obesity-reduction efforts and the process used to site schools in Nova Scotia. The goals of the discussion paper are to:

1. Promote dialogue among key audiences as to how the school siting process may be better aligned with provincial efforts to reduce childhood obesity and
2. Contribute to reduced childhood obesity through improvements to the school siting process.

### Strategy

To achieve the goals referenced above, the EAC will employ a two-step strategy:

1. Engage with key audiences, which, initially, will include the Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness, school boards across the province, and the Nova Scotia Department of Education.
2. Based on discussions with these audiences, identify opportunities for changes in school siting that would contribute to childhood obesity-reduction efforts and relay those opportunities to the Department of Health and Wellness to determine how it can advance provincial efforts to reduce childhood obesity.

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