

Child and adolescent health in education settings

Learning from national strategies: Flanders



Flanders
State of the Art



DEPARTMENT OF
CARE

departementzorg.be

Context: HEALTH TARGETS IN FLANDERS

▶ Flanders & Health Targets

- Long tradition of multi-year health targets in preventive health policy
- Most recent target (2015–2025): “De Vlaming leeft gezonder” (“The Fleming lives healthier”)

× Education Sub-Target: “By 2025, 80% of primary and secondary schools should have a qualitative, preventive school health policy.”

▶ What's next?

- **15 December 2025**: launch of the new Flemish health target on **healthy lifestyles**
- Strong focus on **children and young people** (high potential for lifelong impact)
- Clearer prioritization to make impact feasible and sustainable



WHAT WE KNOW TODAY?

Prevention Survey (“*Preventiepeiling*”) 2015, 2019, 2023

▶ What does it measure?

- Assesses the *quality* of a school’s preventive health policy
- Based on several **success factors** (e.g. policy-oriented work, participation, expertise, evidence-informed approaches)
- Scores per factor are combined into a **total quality score**

▶ Results

- Primary education: 43.5% of schools met the quality standard (ambition: 80%)
- Secondary education: 60% of schools met the quality standard (ambition: 80%)
- Trend: Lower results than in 2015 and 2019

▶ Why is this?

- To understand this, Flanders commissioned an in-depth study on the needs and barriers in schools (IDEA Consult, 2024).



Key conclusions from schools & system actors



Schools focus on their core educational mission

- Health is recognised as important, but not always a structured task
- Schools work mainly from daily practice = doing
- Vision and strategy are rarely documented
- Needs are picked up reactively in the school day



Expectations are unclear

- “Health policy” is not a clear or concrete concept for many schools
- Limited guidance on what is essential vs. optional



The landscape is fragmented

- Many health topics → many specialized organizations → many materials: It is too much for schools
- Leads to a continuous flow of communication, campaigns & requests
- Multiple policy domains at Flemish level
- A persistent gap between preventive health and education
- Local level is crucial, but uneven and difficult to navigate
- Preventive organizations and tools cover only part of what schools have to cover



A school's general policy-making capacity is a basic precondition

- Not health-specific: it's about having structures, routines and clarity
- E.g. making agreements, communicating consistently, organizing processes
- When this general capacity is under pressure, health work also struggles

Key Recommendations

- ▶ **Less fragmentation** and better alignment between actors, initiatives and themes, so schools receive a coherent and workable offer.
- ▶ **Clearer division of roles** in supporting schools, with renewed focus on close-to-the-school, hands-on support instead of mainly informational referral.
- ▶ A joint, coherent and **streamlined set of products and services**, tailored to the real needs and context of schools.
- ▶ One **recognisable and attractive brand and communication strategy**, increasing trust, visibility and ease of use for schools.
- ▶ **Structural support and coaching** for school staff to strengthen policy capacity without increasing workload.
- ▶ **Strong** central coordination and **governance** to guarantee quality, coherence and consistent follow-up across the full system.



What will change (1)



▶ A single, unified communication approach

- Prevention partners no longer communicate separately to schools
- One shared brand and coordinated messaging and strong campaigns on “health in schools”
- One central platform built around customer journeys (teacher, school leader, pupil support...)
- Each journey leads users directly to the right tools and guidance

'26-'27: We will build one website, a brand for all partners and products, a communication strategy with national campaigns

▶ A more focused offer of products and services

- Partners collaborate across themes (e.g. social-emotional skills, digital health, self-regulation) to build shared, cross-theme components instead of separate topic-by-topic offers.
- New: One coherent core package across lifestyle themes
- Clear layers: need-to-know, need-to-do, optional “nice-to-know”, Thematic depth still available when schools request it
- Overall offer becomes slimmer, clearer, more usable

'26-'27: Full audit of all existing materials, Reduce overlap & complexity and develop one holistic, lean and lifestyle offer

What will change (2)

▶ More support close to the school

- Coaching by local preventive partners (gezondheidsmakers) → Supports schools in doing, not just knowing
- External specialists (thematic prevention partners) can deliver concrete actions and support on demand

'26-'27: We will develop a set of standardized support tools for schools (intake tool, policy scan, planning and follow-up templates) fully aligned with school language, routines and regulatory frameworks.





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GEZONDE
SCHOOL

The Dutch Healthy School program

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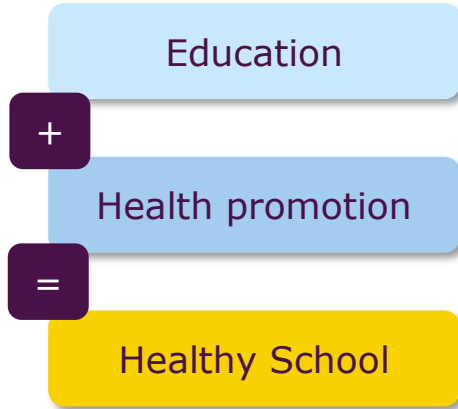
The Dutch National Institute for Public Health and
Environment (RIVM)



**Together we make
healthy living,
learning and
development of
pupils and students
the norm.**



A unique collaboration



25 regional public health services



Local support for schools by advisors



Together with the national knowledge centres



Hearing

veiligheid.nl
kenniscentrum alsaklevante



Physical activity
and sports

kenniscentrum
sport & bewegen
KVLO
Goed bereik bewegen



Media literacy

Bureau
Jeugd & Media



Sleep

VU
Hersen
STICHTING



Hygiëne

LCHV
LANDELIJK CENTRUM
HYGIËNE EN VEILIGHEID



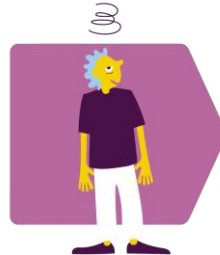
Environment and
nature

SME
GDO
Gemeenten voor
Duurzame ontwikkeling



Relationships and
sexuality

soAIDS
Nederland
Rutgers



Smoking, alcohol and
drug prevention

Trimbos
instituut



Well-being

Trimbos
instituut



Nutrition

eerlijk over eten
Voedingscentrum

And other important stakeholders

- **School professionals**
 - Healthy School Panel
 - User group for the platform *'Your Healthy School'*
- **Healthy school research network**
 - Exchanging national and international knowledge and developments related to healthy school research
 - Bridging the gap between research and practice

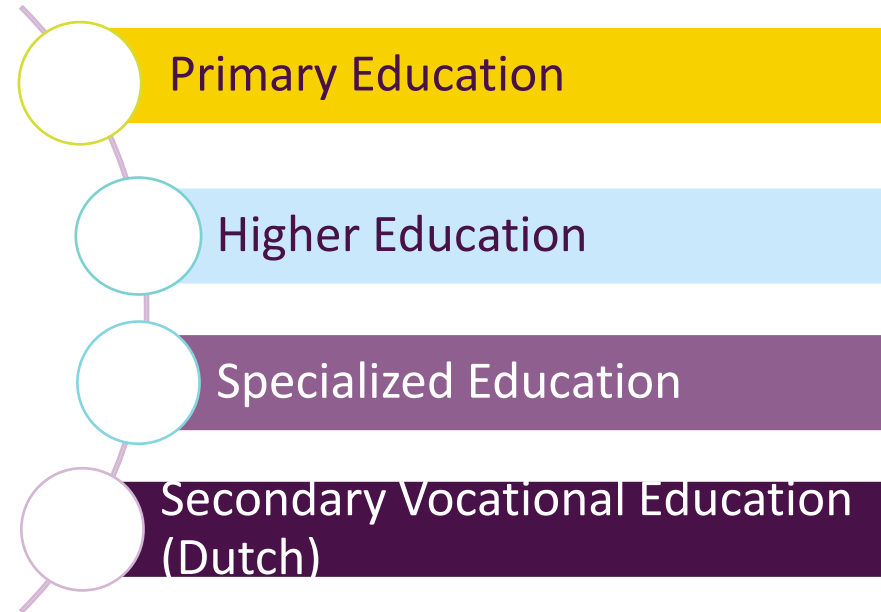


What is the Healthy School programme?

The Healthy School programme helps educational professionals in schools to work on the health and well-being of pupils and students in a school-wide and structural way, ensuring that this approach becomes part of the routines and identity of the school.

Based on scientific approaches:

- Plan-Do-Check-Act cyclus
- Whole School Approach



Together with the target group this is translated to the 'Healthy School-approach'.

The Healthy School approach

- **Structural approach:** preparation, implementation, evaluation *Plan-Do-Check-Act cyclus*
 - Builds on what the school is already doing and aligns with existing wishes and needs
- **Integral school wide approach:** based on four pillars *Health promoting schools (WHO, 1986), Whole School Approach*



- **Focus on success factors**
 - Create and sustain a supportive environment where health is prioritized
 - Pupil/student participation
 - Parental involvement

"A whole-school approach involves the integration of health and well-being into all aspects of school policy, practice, and culture — engaging staff, students, families, and external partners in a coordinated effort."¹⁵

The Healthy School approach



Building a solid foundation



The coordinator and the team



Starting point and opportunities



Create a vision



Safe and inclusive school climate



With the local network

Working on Healthy School-themes

- Set goals together
- Address all four pillars: **education, school environment, signal and policy**
- Focus on **success factors**
- Implement the plan

Holistic view → themes are linked and interconnected

Evaluate, reflect and look forward



Implementation by

The online platform 'Your Healthy School'

Based on key insights:

- Schools are **dynamic environments**
- Need for **tailored information**
- Importance of school **ownership**

**Developed through
co-creation**



Jouw
**GEZONDE
SCHOOL**

Launched Februari 2025

'Your Healthy School' platform

Everything you need to work with the Healthy School approach

- **Learning & development**

A range of training courses, e-learning programmes and webinars on the Healthy School approach and various health-related topics

- **Digital tool 'Let's get started'**

The tool that supports schools in working according to the Healthy School approach by providing insight into their progress and offering inspiration for their next steps



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We offer schools



The reach of the Healthy School programme

3799 school locations are working with the approach*.
This is 44% of all schools.

284 Healthy School advisors, divided over 25 regional public health services (GGD's)

40%

of all primary and specialized primary education schools

62%

of all secondary and specialized secondary schools

49%

of all secondary vocational education school locations



**This means that they have a certificate or make use of a financial incentive scheme. Measured in 2024.*



Take away messages

| Enablers | Challenges |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Health in all policies (four ministries) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dependent on national budgets• Separated assignments |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mandatory guidelines | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Voluntary policies |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unique collaboration and cooperation between national organizations• Support in health promotion by local advisors | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collaboration with many organizations |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support by online platform 'Your Healthy School'• Provides the ability to monitor | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Getting schools into the tool takes time• Monitoring the <u>effectivity</u> of the approach (with many other influencing variables) |