
WORKSHOP ABSTRACT

Collaboration between Health and Education and Training in Flanders: an example of an approach with more impact on school health policy

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Rita Van Durme¹, Tineke Van Steenkiste²

1: Departement Of Education And Training, Brussels, Belgium

2: Flemisch Institute of Healthy Living, Belgium

The Flemish Government determines numerous health objectives, one of which is for people to adopt a healthier lifestyle by the year 2025 in terms of diet, sedentary behaviour, physical activity, and tobacco, alcohol, and drug use. Another important goal consists of reducing mortality by suicide among men and women by 10% compared to 2020 by 2030. Achieving those objectives requires efforts from several government departments, including the Department for Education and Training. To improve school health policy, the Department for Education and Training can rely on various health experts. This collaboration was further strengthened in 2021 by creating a network in which education and health policies are even better aligned. The network aims to achieve the health objectives determined by the Flemish Government by enhancing cooperation and better attunement to each other, thus generating more impact on school health policy. All organisations in the network focus on encouraging health-promoting schools in Flanders and thus on prevention.

The network's organisations develop health strategies, give advice, and design practices and training programmes related to various health themes and health-promoting schools. They investigate schools' needs and opportunities, and map out possible measures towards a whole school approach in four domains: education, environmental interventions, regulations and agreements, and care and coaching.

Key stakeholders in education, such as school representatives, pedagogical guidance services, pupil guidance centres, and the Department for Education and Training take into account frameworks that strengthen the implementation of school health policy, such as the decree on pupil guidance in basic education, secondary education and the pupil guidance centres, and frameworks for education quality and learning outcomes.

The Department for Education and Training supports the network with various measures, such as setting up meetings with relevant partners, developing guidelines on health-related topics, and ensuring effective communication and dissemination of preventative campaigns.

In the network group, work is being done on a joint narrative and various initiatives to encourage the implementation of health-promoting schools in Flanders. The network is constantly evaluating its operations to be able to make the necessary adjustments based on the present needs and requirements. A larger impact assessment is planned early 2023. An evaluation of the network

group's joint action plan will be conducted in 2023 to determine if its objectives are met and desired outputs are achieved.

Establishing a fruitful cooperation takes time and effort. After more than a year, however, the network has already achieved good results. Firstly, communication has been strengthened on several levels. Secondly, people and organisations reach out to each other more easily and have a better grasp on each other's field of expertise. Lastly, duplication of work is prevented by maintaining effective and transparent communication. All this is taken into account in actions the network set-up.