Centre for Health Promotion STUDIES

SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Public Policy Processes and Getting Physical Activity into Alberta's Urban Schools

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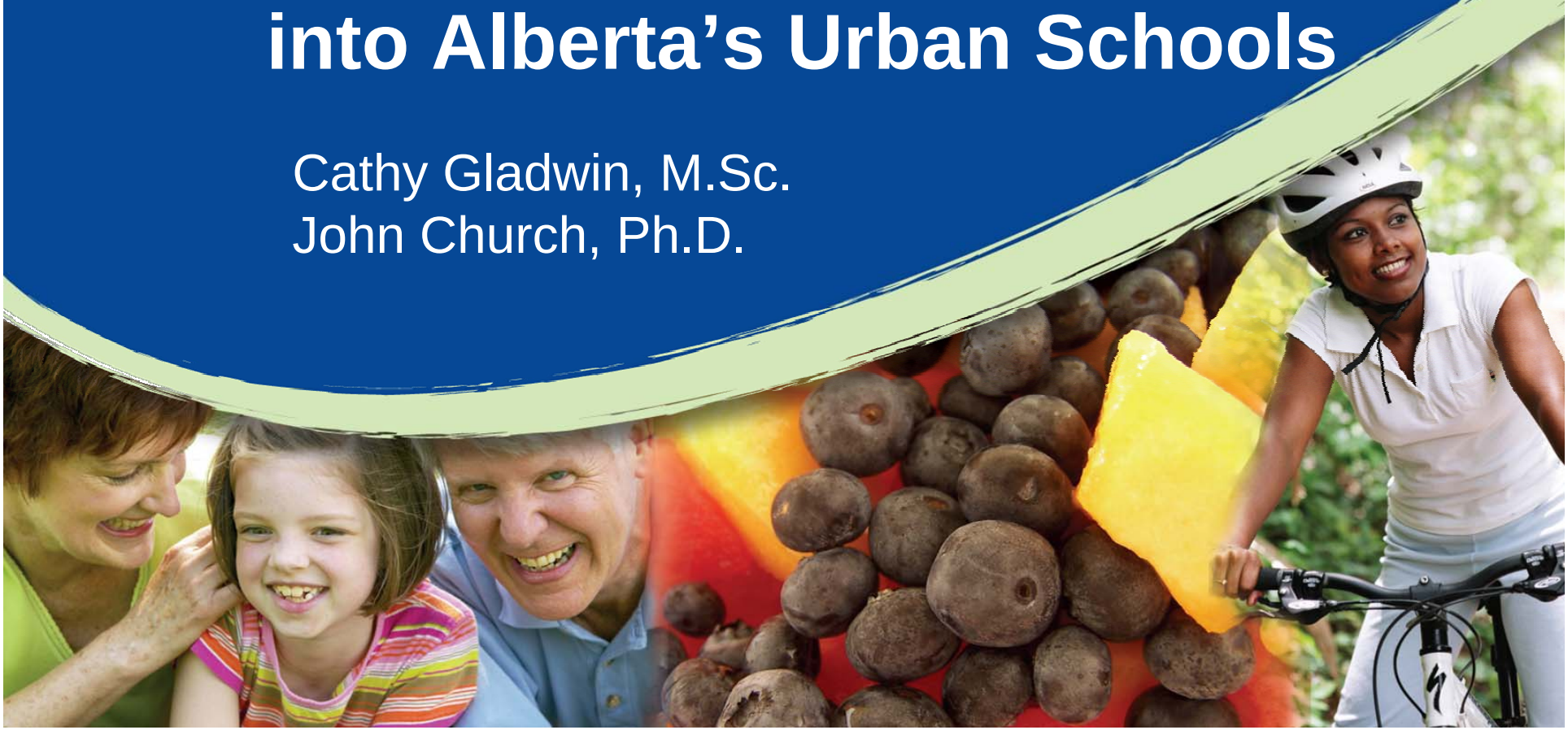

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Many thanks to my committee :

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Background

Overweight in Canadian children has increased significantly

- 1981: 15% of boys and 15 % of girls were overweight
- 1996: 28.8% of boys and 23.6 % of girls were overweight

(Tremblay and Willms, 2000)

- Obesity described as an epidemic
- Similar to other industrialized countries

(Lau, 1999)

Background

Children are insufficiently active

- Declines in energy expenditure are a likely cause of overweight
  (Hill and Melanson, 1999)

- Only 44% of Canadian children were sufficiently active to attain health
  (Cragg, et al., 1999)

Background

Policies Affecting Physical Activity of Children

- Schools are an ideal setting to increase physical activity (PA)
- Children attend school 200 days/year
- The policy environment of schools impacts levels of PA
  i.e. curriculum, facilities, teachers, parent participation

Background

PA in the school setting:

- Physical Education is mandatory in Alberta schools in K-10
- Various intra-mural and extra-curricular activities

- Daily Physical Activity Initiative adopted in 2005
- Mandated 30 minutes of physical activity each school day

- Active Transportation to School, i.e. walking or bicycling
- Organized Walk-to-School (WTS) initiatives exist

  i.e., Walking School Bus, Walking Wednesdays, etc.

Objective of Research

☑ Daily Physical Activity

☒ Walk-to-School Initiatives

- To explore the public policy processes that have resulted in decision-makers in Alberta choosing to add Daily Physical Activity to the school curriculum and not adopting active transportation initiatives such as the Walking School Bus.

- Research limited to Edmonton and Calgary
- Focused on elementary schools, Kindergarten to Grade 6

Study Design

Part 1

- Gathered information about organizations influencing public policy affecting PA in schools

  i.e. mission statements, organizational charts, position statements

Part 2

- Conducted 20 semi-structured one-on-one interviews with key stakeholders and decision-makers
- Collected qualitative data about the policy processes
- Analyzed using NUD*IST N6 based on conceptual framework

Conceptual Framework

1. Composition and Nature of Policy Communities

   (Pross, 1992; Skogstad and Coleman, 1990)

2. Policy Networks

   (Pross, 1992; Skogstad and Coleman, 1990; Lindquist, 1992)

3. Policy Cycle

   (Howlett and Ramesh, 1995; Kingdon, 1995)

4. Interests, Ideas, Institutions

   (Goldstein, 1993; Lavis, et al., 2000)

Conceptual Framework

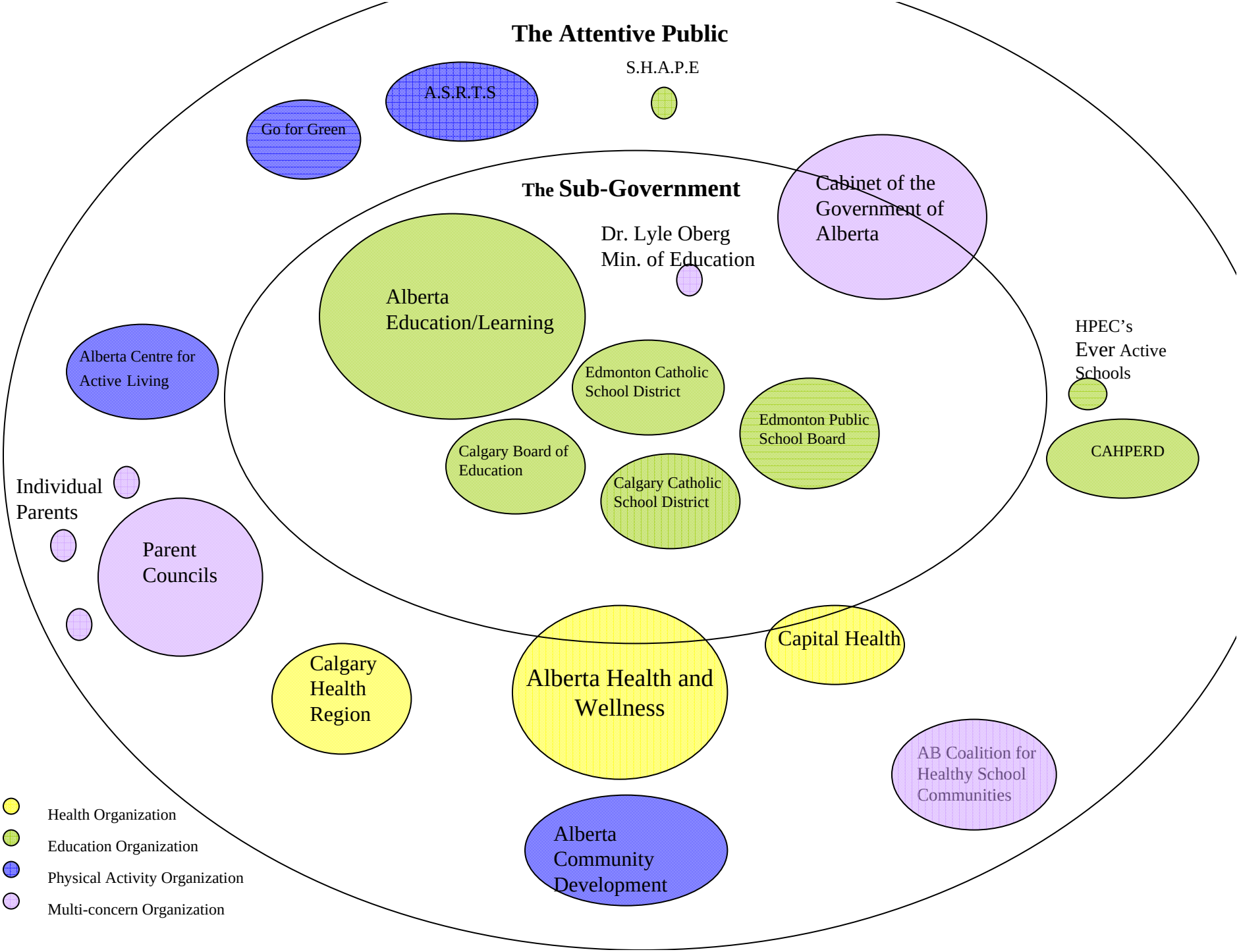
- Kingdon's 3 Streams Model
  (Kingdon, 1995)

- 3 Streams: Problem, Solution, Politics
- 3 streams can evolve concurrently, but independently
- Policy change most likely when streams become 'coupled'
- Forces that couple streams are the interests, ideas, and institutions of the actors

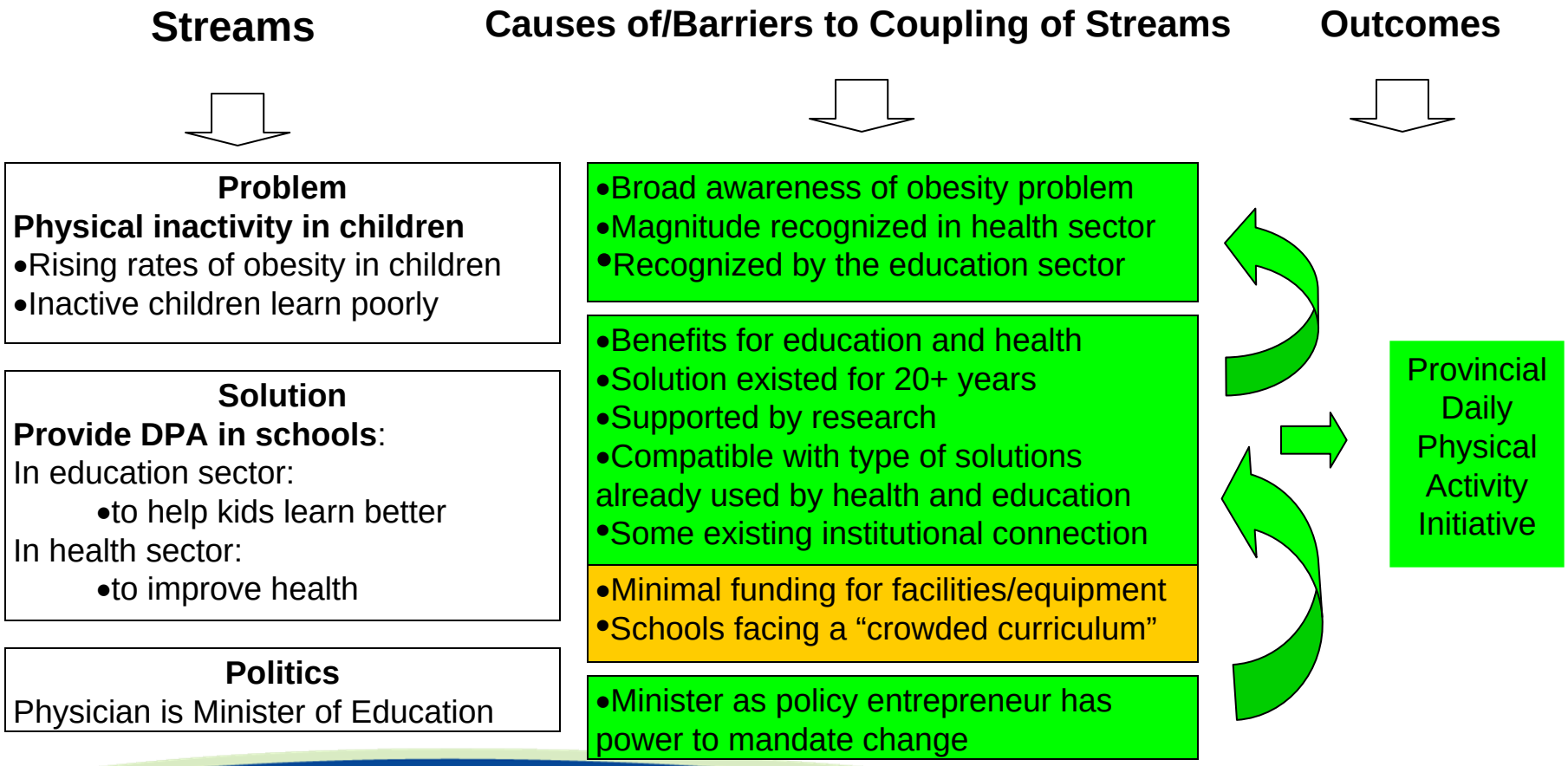
Alberta's Policy Community Surrounding PA in Schools

- Illustrated in Pross's Bubble Diagram
  (Pross, 1992)

- Shows the Sub-Government and the Attentive Public


The Attentive Public
S.H.A.P.E
A.S.R.T.S
Go for Green
The Sub-Government
Cabinet of the Government of Alberta
Dr. Lyle Oberg
Min. of Education
Alberta Education/Learning
Alberta Centre for Active Living
Edmonton Catholic School District
Edmonton Public School Board
HPEC's
Ever Active Schools
CAHPERD
Calgary Board of Education
Calgary Catholic School District
Individual Parents
Parent Councils
Capital Health
Calgary Health Region
Alberta Health and Wellness
AB Coalition for Healthy School Communities
Alberta Community Development
Health Organization
Education Organization
Physical Activity Organization
Multi-concern Organization

Kingdon's Streams: Why DPA was Adopted



Kingdon's Streams: Why WTS Wasn't Adopted

Problem

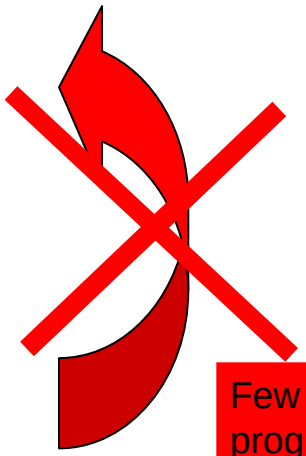
Physical inactivity in children

- Rising rates of obesity in children
- Inactive children learn poorly
- Car congestion, safety risks at schools
- Environmental (air pollution) concerns

- Recognition of obesity problem in health
- value of physical activity recognized in education sector

- Obesity a secondary concern of schools
- traffic safety recognized at local level

- Fragmented description of problem is not salient to key decision-makers
- Air pollution not considered a problem of education sector



Few WTS programs at schools

Solution

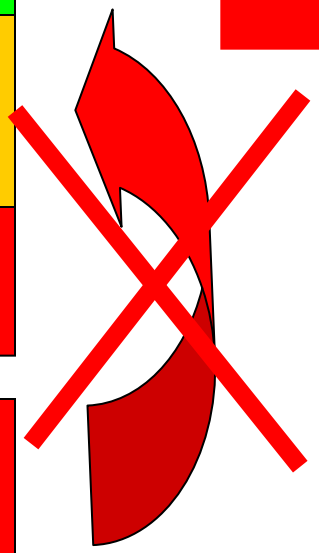
Parent-organized active transportation initiatives

- organized by individual schools

- Few hard costs associated with solution

- Solution is not universally feasible for all students
- Requires development of grassroots commitment

- No clear responsibility for solving problem
- Solution not clearly linked to problem by research



Politics

Advocacy by non-profit organizations

- Non-profits involved are weak politically
- No political activity surrounding the problem as it is framed
- No well-placed policy entrepreneur

Discussion

Research and beliefs supported DPA

- Health and Phys. Ed. teachers promoting DPA since 1979
- Incorporated new evidence of PA increasing academics
- All educators interviewed believed DPA improved learning
- Therefore teachers' union was not opposed to DPA

Discussion

Neither Research nor Values support WTS

- Need for research to show benefits of WTS that are valued by:
  - Parents: well-being of children, but specifically education
  - Teachers: learning outcomes
  - Students: fun, socializing
  - Society: ideas in good currency, i.e. reducing GHG
- Build evidence over time to support a proposed policy solution, it could take years
- Walking is not valued in Alberta

Discussion

Enhancing WTS as a Solution:

- Circulate the proposed policy solution within communities of interest so it is refined and has improved feasibility
- Make benefits accrue to those who must implement the solution i.e. parents, school boards

Working the Political Stream

- Identify and recruit a champion or policy entrepreneur
- Be prepared for the opening of a policy window, either political or problem
- Conduct research to understand the values and beliefs of the decision-makers, don't make assumptions

Thank you for your interest

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