

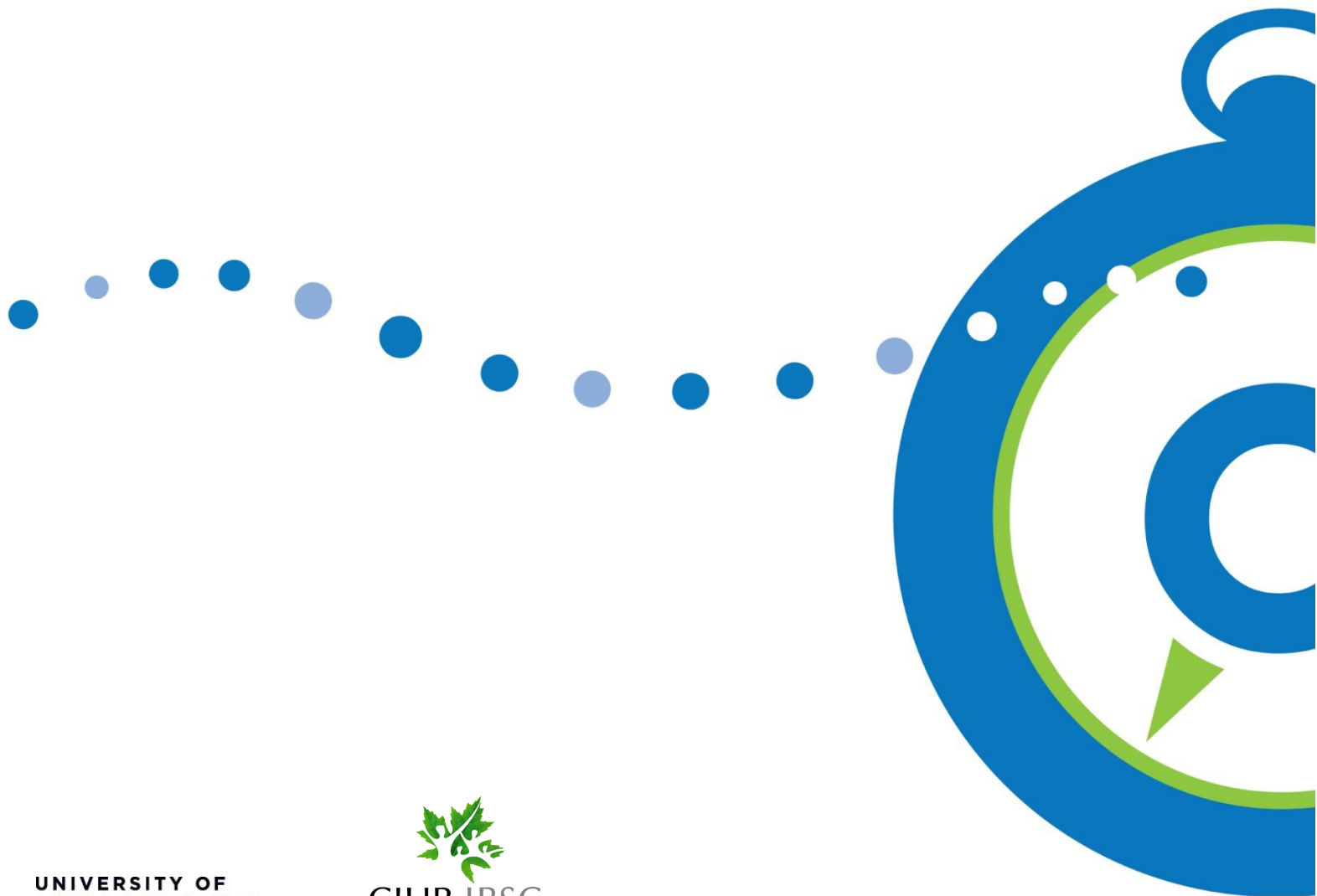


*Cohort study evaluating how changes in school programs, policies, and resources impact youth health behaviours*

## Baseline Sampling and Recruitment Results

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## Introduction

COMPASS is a longitudinal study (starting in 2012-13) designed to follow a cohort of grade 9 to 12 students attending a convenience sample of Ontario secondary schools for four years to understand how changes in school environment characteristics (policies, programs, built environment) are associated with changes in youth health behaviours. COMPASS originated to provide school stakeholders with the evidence to guide and evaluate school-based interventions related to obesity, healthy eating, tobacco use, alcohol and marijuana use, physical activity, sedentary behaviour, school connectedness, bullying, and academic achievement. COMPASS has been designed to facilitate multiple large-scale school-based data collections and uses in-class whole-school sampling data collection methods consistent with previous research [1-4]. COMPASS also facilitates knowledge transfer and exchange by annually providing each participating school with a school-specific feedback report that highlights the school-specific prevalence for each outcome, comparisons to provincial and national norms or guidelines, and provides evidence-based suggestions for school-based interventions (programs and/or policies) designed to address the outcomes covered in the feedback report (refer to: [www.compass.uwaterloo.ca](http://www.compass.uwaterloo.ca)).

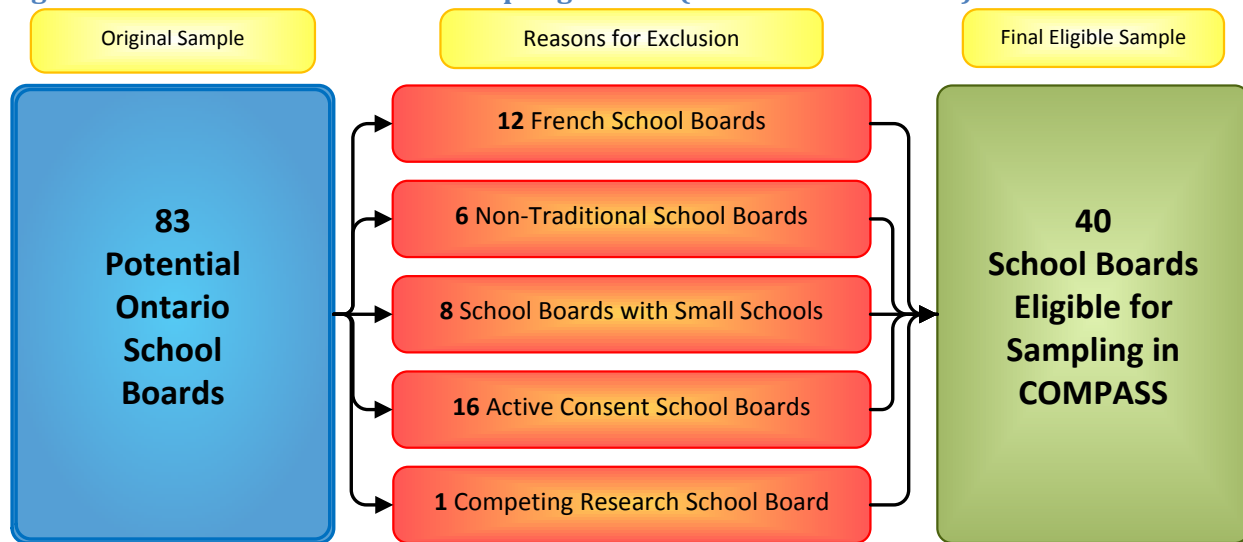
This technical report provides details on the school board and school recruitment results for the baseline sample of COMPASS (2012-2013).

## Determining the Eligible School Boards for the Baseline Sample

As the COMPASS study does not require a provincially-representative sample of schools, Ontario school boards were purposefully selected for this study. As described previously [5], the inclusion criteria included all English speaking school boards that had secondary schools with grades 9 through 12 and a student population of at least 100 students or greater per grade level; had schools that operated in a standard school/classroom settings; and, permitted the use of active-information passive-consent parental permission protocols. The school board sampling results for the COMPASS baseline sample are presented in Figure 1.

As shown in Figure 1, of the 83 school boards in Ontario [6]: a) 12 French speaking boards were removed from the sample due to budgetary considerations associated with having to translate all of the COMPASS materials from English into French; b) 6 school boards were removed from the sample because they are comprised of schools that do not take place in traditional or standard school/classroom settings (i.e., in hospitals or special education centres); c) 8 school boards from remote settings were removed from the sample because the student population within each secondary school in the board was too small to allow for robust analytical models; d) 15 school boards were removed from the sample due to mandatory active consent procedures which would not allow us to have representative student data at the school level that are required for the COMPASS knowledge transfer activities [7] and for answering the program and policy related research questions in COMPASS; and, e) 1 school board was excluded as we were aware that the secondary schools located in the board were already sampled for participation in another study and we did not want to burden that school board with additional research requests (i.e., being good research citizens). This resulted in a COMPASS school board baseline sample of 40 eligible school boards.

**Figure 1: COMPASS school board sampling results (Baseline 2012-2013)**



## School Board and School Recruitment

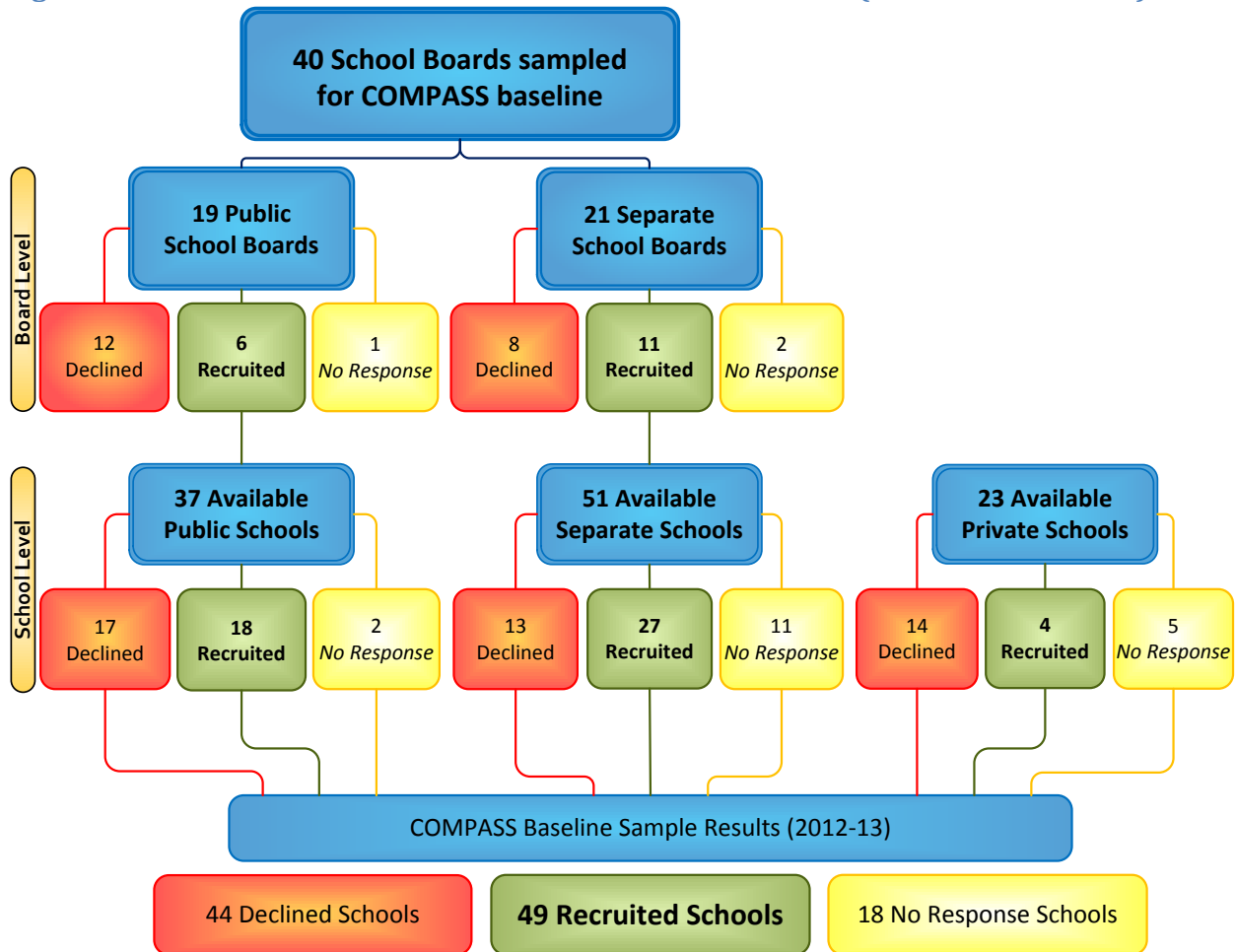
The 40 school boards eligible for COMPASS were contacted between March and September 2012 to ensure that approved schools from consenting boards could be approached at the beginning of the 2012-13 school year. As described previously [5], each eligible board was either sent a COMPASS board recruitment package or the board specific research application package. Eligible schools were approached to participate in COMPASS only after their board granted the COMPASS team approval. The school board and school recruitment results for the COMPASS baseline sample are presented in Figure 2.

### School Board Recruitment

Of the 40 eligible school boards, there were 19 Public school boards and 21 Separate school boards approached to participate in COMPASS. Among the 19 Public school boards approached, 6 (32%) boards agreed to participate, 12 (63%) boards declined to participate, and 1 board did not provide a response. Among the 21 Separate school boards approached, 11 (52%) boards agreed to participate, 8 (38%) boards declined to participate, and 2 boards did not provide a response. This resulted in a final sample of 17 school boards in Ontario who approved the COMPASS study.

During the school board recruitment procedures, COMPASS staff provided school boards who declined to participate with the opportunity to provide one or more reasons for their refusal decision if they felt so inclined. This was done so that the team could identify if there were any methodological concerns associated with the study that could be improved. Among the boards that provided one or more reasons for their refusal, the most common responses were that their schools were already involved in competing research, that the board had some concerns about active-information passive-consent procedures, or that the board was “too busy”. In addition, a common response specific to the Public school boards was in relation to the teacher labour issues that were happening in Ontario public school boards as a result the provincial government’s Bill 115 at the time of the board recruitment.

Figure 2: COMPASS school board and school recruitment results (Baseline 2012-2013)



### School Recruitment

Based on the inclusion criteria for COMPASS [5], there were 37 eligible Public schools within the 6 recruited Public school boards and 51 eligible Separate schools within the 11 recruited Separate school boards. Among the 37 Public schools approached, 18 (49%) schools agreed to participate, 17 (46%) schools declined to participate, and 2 schools did not provide a response. Among the 51 Separate schools approached, 27 (53%) schools agreed to participate, 13 (27%) schools declined to participate, and 11 schools did not provide a response. Private schools were also added at this phase of the recruitment for COMPASS since they are independently operated and thus do not fall under any specific board jurisdiction. The COMPASS team identified and approached 23 eligible Private schools to participate. Among those 23 Private schools approached, 4 (17%) schools agreed to participate, 14 (61%) schools declined to participate, and 5 schools did not provide a response. This resulted in a final sample of 49 recruited secondary schools in Ontario who approved the COMPASS study.

Similar to the board recruitment procedures, during the school recruitment procedures, we provided schools that declined to participate with the opportunity to provide one or more reasons for their refusal decision if they felt so inclined. Among the schools that provided one or more reasons for their refusal, the most common responses were that the school was “too busy” or that “they were already

involved in competing research”. In addition, a common response specific to schools within the Public school boards was in relation to the teacher labour issues that were happening in Ontario public schools as a result the provincial government’s Bill 115 at the time of the school recruitment.

## Discussion

COMPASS board and school recruitment protocols were developed based on the COMPASS team’s previous experience conducting research in school settings. Since 2000, members of the team have used these methods in all provinces across Canada recruiting more than 2000 schools for various projects. While these methods have proven effective in both board and school recruitment historically, COMPASS recruitment for the baseline sample at both the board and school level proved to be difficult and resulted in lower than expected participation rates. Two unique events that were beyond the COMPASS team’s control played an important role in the lower than expected baseline recruitment rates; the Ontario government’s Bill 115 and competing cross-sectional school-based health surveys being conducted in Ontario schools in 2012-13.

Given the issues associated with Bill 115 (Putting Students First) [8] in public secondary schools during the 2012-13 school year, recruitment rates were noticeably lower than anticipated. In our conversations with Public school boards and principals during the baseline recruitment, school board review committees and school principals were hesitant to ask their teachers to conduct COMPASS in such a tense circumstance. This is reflected in both the board and school recruitment rate differences presented in Figure 2. During the 2012-13 school year COMPASS also had to compete with other well-recognized and ongoing health related surveys being implemented in various schools across Ontario [including but not limited to the Youth Smoking Survey (YSS - [www.yss.uwaterloo.ca](http://www.yss.uwaterloo.ca)) and the Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey (OSDUHS - [www.camh.net/research/osdus](http://www.camh.net/research/osdus))]. Additional surveys from other competing groups (e.g., the Halton Youth Survey, the Ministry of Education Survey on Violence) were also being conducted in specific boards that were in the sample, impacting recruitment rates. Since the goal of COMPASS is not to be provincially representative but rather to track a cohort of schools and students over time, the slightly lower than expected board and school recruitment rates do not compromise the potential methodological rigour of the COMPASS study.



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