

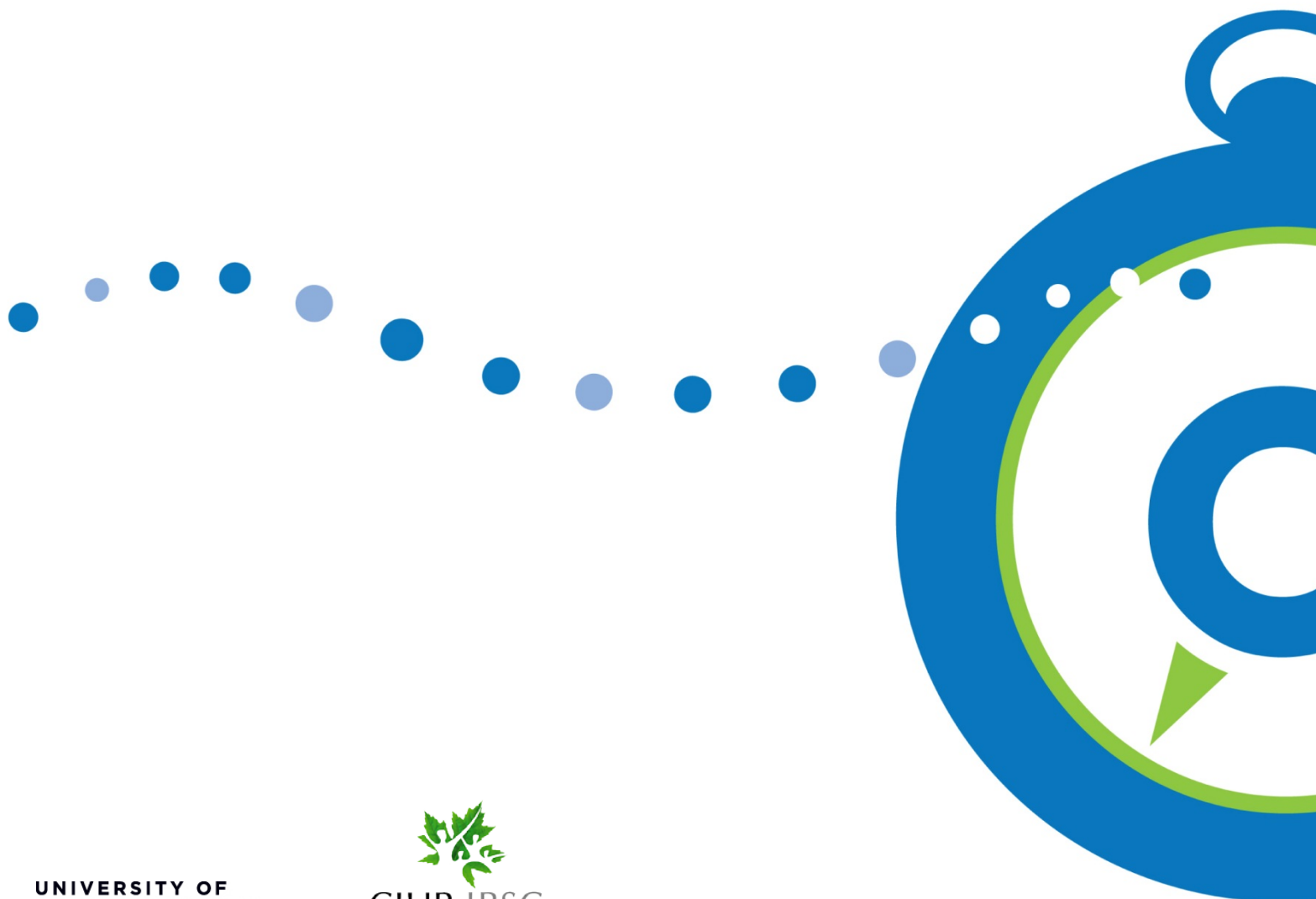


Cohort study evaluating how changes in school programs, policies, and resources impact youth health behaviours

School Board and School Recruitment Procedures

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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).

This technical report provides details on the procedures used to recruit school boards and schools from across Ontario for participation in the baseline sample of COMPASS (2012-2013).

Recruitment Methods

In the province of Ontario, if external researchers are interested in recruiting schools – from either public or separate school boards - for a research study, the first step required is to apply to each individual school board that governs the schools of interest. Once granted permission from a particular board, researchers can then proceed to apply to each individual school for which they have been granted board approval to approach. The protocol is different for private schools as they are independently governed and are not supported by a specific school board, so researchers can approach schools directly with a recruitment package.

Sample

Since the design of the COMPASS study does not require a provincially-representative sample of schools, Ontario school boards were purposefully selected. As such, given the design of COMPASS, 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 finally, permitted the use of active-information passive-consent parental permission protocols. Based on these criteria, the sample was determined using a deductive method, researching every Ontario school board's research guidelines and eliminating those that were French speaking, had no/too small secondary schools or required active consent parental permission protocols. This was done by consulting school board websites, or contacting a member of the administration team to inquire about the board's research policies.

School Board Recruitment

Once a board was identified for being eligible to participate in COMPASS, the procedure for recruiting the board was as follows. First, depending on the requirements outlined by the school board (whether or not the board had their own board-specific research application), the board was either sent a COMPASS board recruitment package or the board specific research application package. Board-specific requirements were determined in advance either on the board's website, or by contacting the board's administration team via email or phone to inquire about their application protocols. All applications included a standard COMPASS board recruitment package that was used to invite Ontario school boards to participate in COMPASS. The standard COMPASS board recruitment package included: a Board Invitation Letter, Project Brochure, Board Response Fax-Back Form, a copy of the COMPASS Student Questionnaire, Student Permission Materials, a copy of the COMPASS School Policies and Practices administrator questionnaire and a sample of the COMPASS School Health Profile. Additional information was included in the recruitment package at the board's request (e.g. board specific application, curriculum vitae of Principal Investigator, ethics certificate).

Recruitment materials were either mailed via courier, or emailed to the school board member/team reviewing applications based on the preferred method requested by the board. While some boards have specific protocols and timelines for external research application submission (e.g., specific dates when applications must be filed), others were more open and thus recruitment packages were sent at a convenient time aligned with the board requirements. Requirements were determined through board websites, or direct contact with the board administration.

The COMPASS recruitment coordinator followed-up with each school board within one week after the information package was sent to ensure that it arrived and the materials were complete. If appropriate, this also gave the COMPASS coordinator the opportunity to ask when the board would be reviewing and making a decision regarding approval/decline. For boards where specific application meetings were already scheduled and known to the recruitment coordinator, this question was not posed. The recruitment coordinator contacted the school board within one week of a known application review date, or bi-weekly should the board not know when the application would be reviewed. In cases where the COMPASS recruitment coordinator was having difficulty reaching the school board, additional follow-up contact occurred in order to secure a decision from the board. The coordinator rotated between phone calls and emails until a decision was communicated or up to a maximum of 10 contacts. If no decision was communicated by this point, the board was considered as having declined to participate in the study.

All school board responses and additional communication (e.g., reasons for declining) were recorded in the Online Survey Implementation System (OSIS) (www.osis.uwaterloo.ca). OSIS is an internal online project management system used when conducting research with schools designed to record quantitative and qualitative data associated with all aspects of the COMPASS study procedures. School boards that granted COMPASS approval were recorded as "recruited" in OSIS so that all of the future details relating to that board could be recorded. Upon approval, school boards were asked to notify their schools that the COMPASS study had been approved. The recruitment coordinator provided an email script to the board for this task. School boards that declined participation were recorded as "refused" in OSIS. If a school board did not provide a reason for declining, the recruitment coordinator made one additional contact to inquire about the reason of refusal. These reasons were recorded in OSIS and included predetermined options: too busy, competing research, active consent required, staff/teacher burden, too late in school year or other. Should "other" be selected, the recruitment

coordinator made note of the reason for decline. Should the school board contact not respond to the recruitment coordinator, the refusal reason was set to “no reason”. School boards that did not provide the recruitment coordinator with an approval and refusal answer after at least 10 contact attempts were recorded as “unable to reach” in OSIS.

School Recruitment

Eligible schools were approached to participate in COMPASS only after their board granted the COMPASS team approval. In cases where the board approved the project in the spring and summer months before the 2012-13 school year began, schools were approached in September of 2012. Schools whose board granted approval once the 2012-13 school year had already begun were approached immediately following approval. Private schools were also included in the sample at this level and were contacted at the beginning of the 2012-13 school year.

The selected schools were sent a standard COMPASS recruitment package. The package was addressed to the principal at each eligible school. The standard school recruitment package included: a School Invitation Letter, Project Brochure, School Response Fax-Back Form, and copies of the Student Questionnaire. If requested, school recruitment packages also included Permission Materials (refer to: www.compass.uwaterloo.ca for copies of this material). Packages were sent via courier to ensure that the COMPASS recruitment coordinator could track that they arrived at the school.

The COMPASS recruitment coordinator followed-up with school principals via phone and/or email approximately one week after the information package arrived, assuming the school had not contacted them first. This initial contact was made to ensure the package had arrived, answer any questions about COMPASS and ideally to obtain a participation status from the school. The COMPASS recruitment coordinator conducted additional follow-up rotating between phone and email in order to secure a decision from the school.

Similar to boards, schools that agreed to participate in COMPASS were recorded as “recruited” in OSIS. Once a school was recruited, the recruitment coordinator worked with them to establish a data collection date and explain all further procedures. Schools that declined participation were recorded as “refused” in OSIS. If a school did not provide a reason for declining, the recruitment coordinator made one additional contact to inquire the reason of refusal. These reasons were recorded in OSIS and included the same predetermined reasons as the board refusal. An “other” option was also included at this level and should it be selected, the recruitment coordinator made note of the specific reason for decline. Should the school contact not respond to the recruitment coordinator, the refusal reason was set to “no reason”. Schools that did not respond to the recruitment coordinator with a participation answer after a minimum of 5 contacts were marked as “unable to reach” in OSIS.

Once a school has agreed to participate in COMPASS, the recruitment coordinator makes contact with the school via phone or email to determine the date the school would like to conduct the within school data collection. After the data collection date is set, the school is mailed a COMPASS Welcome Folder which informs them of the next steps of the project and helps to answer questions the school may have about the data collection procedures.

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