

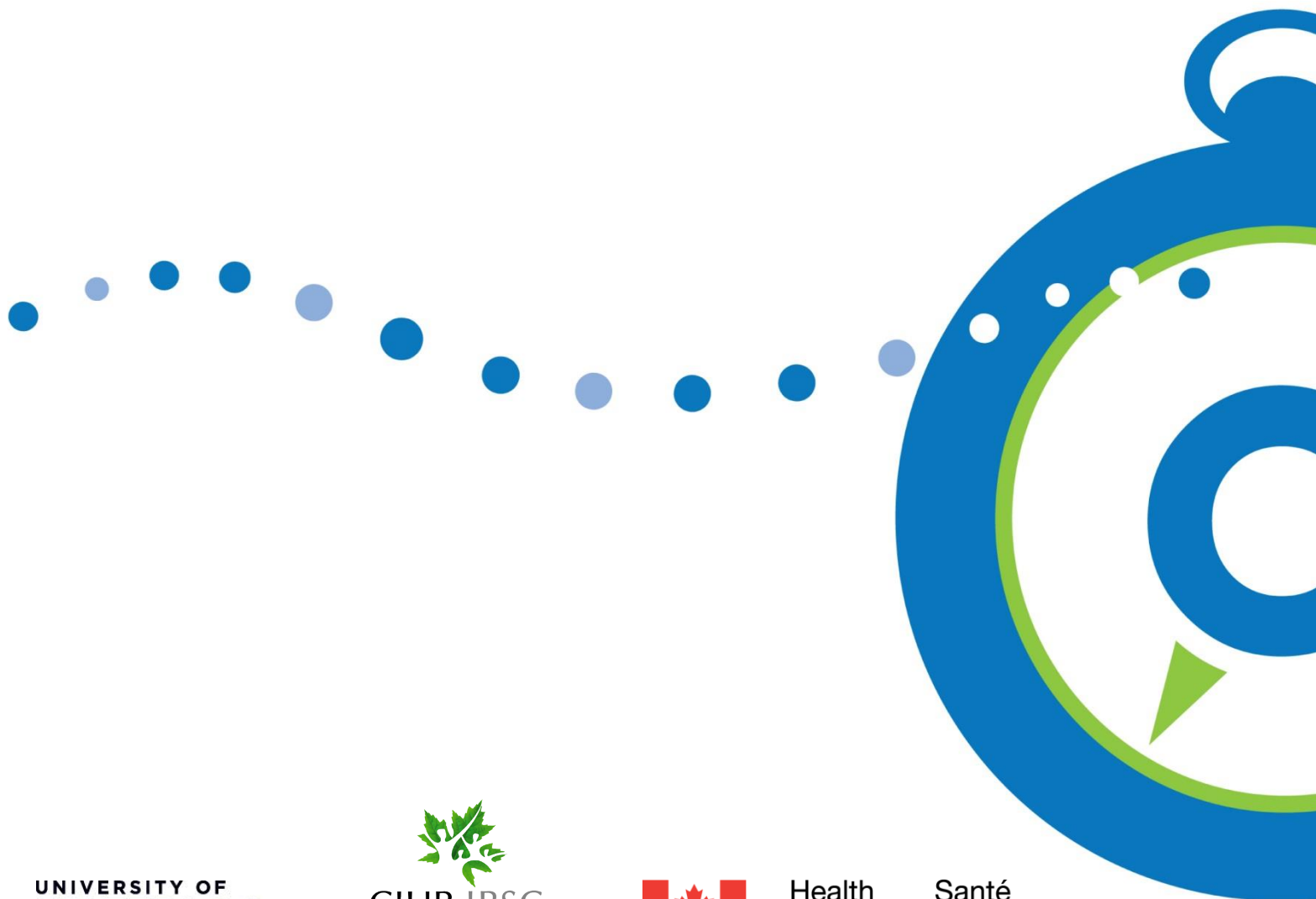


Cohort study evaluating how changes in school programs, policies, and resources impact youth health behaviours

COMPASS Year 5 and 6 School Recruitment and Retention

Compass Technical Report Series, Volume 5, Issue 1

December 2018



**UNIVERSITY OF
WATERLOO**


CIHR IRSC
Canadian Institutes of Health Research
Instituts de recherche en santé du Canada



Health
Canada

Santé
Canada

University of Waterloo

Waterloo, Ontario

December 2018

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Breanne Reel, MPH¹
Chad Bredin, BA¹
Scott T. Leatherdale, PhD¹

1 - School of Public Health and Health Systems, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, ON

Report funded by:

The COMPASS study was supported by a bridge grant from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) Institute of Nutrition, Metabolism and Diabetes (INMD) through the “Obesity – Interventions to Prevent or Treat” priority funding awards (OOP-110788; grant awarded to S. Leatherdale) and an operating grant from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) Institute of Population and Public Health (IPPH) (MOP-114875; grant awarded to S. Leatherdale). The COMPASS expansion to additional jurisdictions was funded by a Health Canada grant through the Substance Use and Addictions Program (SUAP) (1617-HQ-000012).

Suggested citation:

Reel B, Bredin C, Leatherdale ST. *COMPASS Year 5 and 6 School Recruitment and Retention: Technical Report Series*. (2018); 5(1): Waterloo, Ontario: University of Waterloo. Available at: www.compass.uwaterloo.ca.

Contact:

COMPASS Research Team
University of Waterloo
200 University Ave West, BMH 1038
Waterloo, ON Canada N2L 3G1
compass@uwaterloo.ca

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Introduction.....	5
COMPASS Sample in Year 5 (2016 – 2017).....	7
Recruitment in Y5	7
Withdrawals in Y5.....	7
COMPASS Sample in Year 6 (2017 – 2018).....	8
Recruitment in Y6	8
Withdrawals in Y6.....	8
Discussion	9
References.....	10

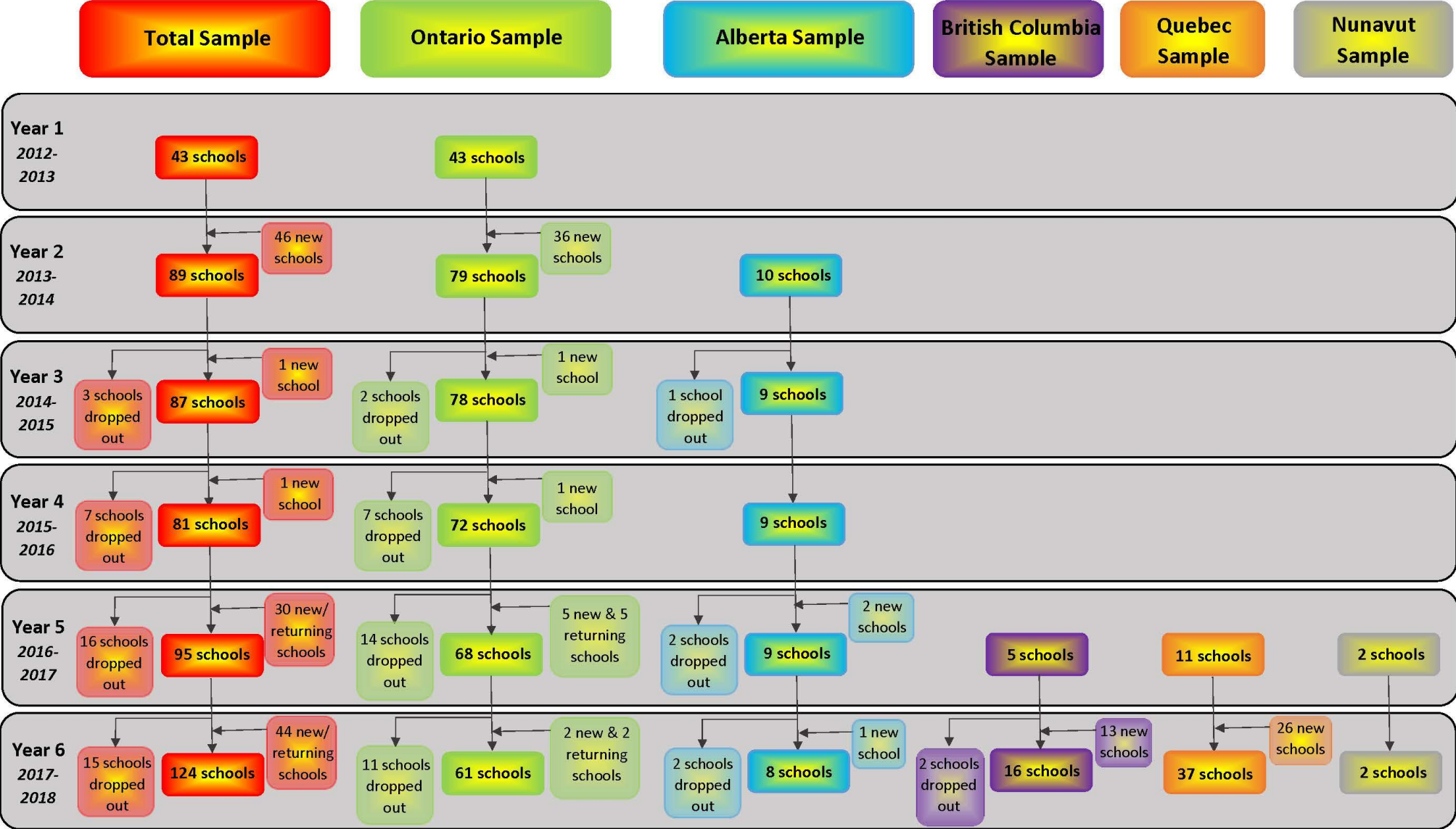
Introduction

COMPASS is a 9-year longitudinal study (starting in 2012-13) designed to follow a prospective cohort of grade 9 to 12 students attending a convenience sample of Canadian secondary schools over several years to understand how changes in school environment characteristics (policies, programs, built environment) and provincial, territorial, and national policies are associated with changes in youth health behaviours [1]. 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 cannabis use, physical activity, sedentary behaviour, school connectedness, bullying, and academic achievement. Based on feedback from participating schools as well as current issues among Canadian youth, COMPASS expanded its topic areas to include mental health, prescription drug use, and gambling. 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 [2-5]. 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/territorial 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).

As previously reported [6], there were 43 Ontario schools that participated in Year 1 (Y1; 2012-2013) of COMPASS. Since the target number for COMPASS was 90 schools, additional recruitment continued in Year 2 (Y2; 2013–2014) of COMPASS. This recruitment process culminated in the addition of 46 new schools, 36 Ontario schools and 10 Alberta schools, and increased the total sample size to 89 schools [7,8]. The addition of Alberta schools allowed the COMPASS researchers to reach their target numbers and provided the additional value of having a provincial comparison to the Ontario schools. In Year 3 (Y3; 2014–2015), COMPASS added one Ontario school upon request and had three schools drop out (two Ontario schools and one Alberta school) [9]. The reasons for these withdrawals varied from insufficient class time or human resources at the schools to prior competing interests. In Year 4 (Y4; 2015-2016), one Ontario school was added upon request and seven Ontario schools dropped out. Many of these withdrawals occurred in Y4 due to labour strife (including work-to-rule action) between the school boards (and, by extension, the Ontario Ministry of Education) and teachers' union locals (and, by extension, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation). In Year 5 (Y5; 2016-2017), COMPASS received a two-year Health Canada grant to further expand the jurisdictions participating given the pending legalization of cannabis nationally. This new Health Canada funding was used to recruit schools in British Columbia, Quebec, and Nunavut for two years of COMPASS data collections.

The purpose of this report is to provide details on school recruitment and retention during Year 5 (Y5; 2016-2017), and Year 6 (Y6; 2017-2018), of the COMPASS study. Figure 1 shows the school sample size over the first 6 years of COMPASS overall and by province/territory, including annual drop out and replenishment totals.

Figure 1: COMPASS School Sample for Years 1-6 (2012/13 to 2017/18)



COMPASS Sample in Year 5 (2016 – 2017)

As shown in Figure 1, 95 schools participated in Y5 of COMPASS. Of the participating schools, 33 participated in four previous data collections (Y1 schools), 35 participated in three previous data collections (Y2 schools), one participated in two previous data collections (Y3 school), one participated in one previous data collection (Y4 school), and 25 participated for the first time (Y5 schools). Of the sample, there were 68 Ontario schools, 9 Alberta schools, 5 British Columbia schools, 11 Quebec schools, and 2 Nunavut schools. The Year 5 sample is different from the previous Year 4 sample due to additional recruitment and attrition that occurred, which are explored below.

Recruitment in Y5

All 81 schools that participated in Y4 were contacted via email and/or phone in September 2016 or January 2017 (depending on when the school participated in the previous year) with the purpose of coordinating a COMPASS data collection date for the upcoming school year (Y5). In addition to the 81 returning schools, there were five new and five returning Ontario schools added to the COMPASS sample during Y5. The returning five schools had withdrawn from the study in Y4 due to labour issues but wanted to participate again in Y5. Moreover, the five new schools were added because administrative changes among schools resulted in five previous COMPASS principals switching schools and asking to have COMPASS implemented at their new schools. To maintain consistent numbers in Alberta in Y5, two new Alberta schools were actively recruited to offset the departure of two schools from the sample.

In addition to the Ontario and Alberta sample, COMPASS received a two-year Health Canada grant to expand its scope across Canada to new provinces and territories. This expansion allowed for active recruitment to begin in Y5 and resulted in the addition of 5 new British Columbia schools, 11 new Quebec schools, and 2 new Nunavut schools. These schools were recruited via cold calls to schools, presentations at the school and board levels, and through partnerships with varying external stakeholders including public health authorities and the Eatfit program (<http://eatfitproject.ca/>).

Withdrawals in Y5

During Y5, 16 schools withdrew from COMPASS – 14 Ontario schools and 2 Alberta schools. Among these schools, eight of them had participated in COMPASS for four consecutive data collections (Y1 schools), and eight had participated for three consecutive data collections (Y2 schools). Similar to previous protocol, we provided these schools with the opportunity to indicate why they were withdrawing from COMPASS. The reasons provided included school board-level refusals (n=1), competing priorities (n=1), school closing (n=1), past the initial four years they had agreed to (n=3), and time constraints (n=1).

COMPASS Sample in Year 6 (2017 – 2018)

As shown in Figure 1, 124 schools participated in Y6 of COMPASS. Of these participating schools, 32 participated in five previous data collections (Y1 schools), 26 participated in four previous data collections (Y2 schools), zero participated in three previous data collections, 1 participated in two previous data collections (Y4 schools), 23 participated in one previous data collection (Y5 school), and 42 participated for the first time in 2017-18 (Y6 schools). Of the sample, 61 schools were in Ontario, 8 schools were in Alberta, 16 schools were in British Columbia, 37 schools were in Quebec, and 2 schools were in Nunavut. The sample had changes in Year 6 due to additional recruitment and attrition in the sample, which are explained below.

Recruitment in Y6

All 95 schools that participated in Y5 were contacted via email and/or phone in September 2017 or January 2018 (depending on when the school participated in the previous year) with the purpose of coordinating a COMPASS data collection date for the upcoming school year (Y6). In addition to the 95 schools from the previous year, there were 2 new and 2 returning Ontario schools added to the COMPASS sample during Y6. One of the new schools and the two returning schools were added as a result of school board recruitment. This newly recruited school board used COMPASS as their climate survey and mandated all schools within their board to participate. COMPASS qualified as a climate survey in 2016 after adding a mental health section (for more information on the mental health section, please reference the “Development of a mental health module for the COMPASS system: Improving youth mental health trajectories” Part 1 and Part 2[10,11]). The remaining new school was added because administrative changes among schools resulted in a previous COMPASS principal switching schools and asking to have COMPASS implemented at their new school.

Active recruitment continued in Alberta, British Columbia, Quebec, and Nunavut to increase sample size in these provinces/territories. Recruitment protocols remained the same as in Y5 and included cold calls to schools, presentations at the school and board levels, and through partnership with external stakeholders. This recruitment resulted in the addition of 1 new Alberta school, 13 new British Columbia schools, and 26 new Quebec schools.

Withdrawals in Y6

In Y6, 15 schools withdrew from COMPASS – 11 Ontario schools, two Alberta schools, and two British Columbia schools. Of these schools, three participated in five consecutive COMPASS data collections (Y1 schools), nine participated in four consecutive data collections (Y2 schools), one participated in three consecutive data collections (Y3 school), and two participated in one previous data collection (Y5 schools). As was done previously, we provided these schools with the opportunity to indicate why they were withdrawing from COMPASS. The reasons provided included competing research priorities, already participated for 4 years and have collected data for one complete cohort, and withdrawal of a school board.

Discussion

As described elsewhere [7,8], the COMPASS school sample increased substantially between Y1 to Y2, with the addition of 46 new schools. There was relatively little change in Years 3 and 4, with only minor additions and withdrawals to the sample [9]. Upon receiving Health Canada funding for the expansion of COMPASS to new territories/provinces in Year 5, there was a large change in the sample with the addition of 30 new/returning schools and the withdrawal of 16 schools. Continuing with the COMPASS expansion in Year 6, there was another large change in the sample with 44 new/returning schools and 15 withdrawals from the study.

With the Health Canada expansion proposal, COMPASS planned to recruit additional schools in British Columbia ($n = 12$), Quebec ($n = 12$), Yukon ($n = 2$), Northwest Territories ($n = 3$), and Nunavut ($n = 6$) [10]. In Y5, COMPASS successfully recruited 5 new BC schools, 11 new Quebec schools, and 2 new Nunavut schools in spite of the fact that grant funding was not finalized until well into the school year, thus delaying the commencement of recruitment activities in these jurisdictions. Despite strong support for COMPASS from the Government of the Northwest Territories' Chief Public Health Officer, the Department of Education, Culture, and Sport declined to have the territory participate in COMPASS, citing the adequateness of existing research infrastructure (i.e., the HBSC study) in their jurisdiction. As such, no schools from NWT ever participated in COMPASS. There was a similar outcome in the Yukon where leadership at Yukon Education declined COMPASS based on the existence of other research infrastructure (again, HBSC) in the territory and, as such, no schools in the territory participated.

At the request of our new stakeholders—given the positive view toward the Y5 COMPASS expansion efforts in BC and Quebec—active recruitment for this expansion project continued in Y6 with 13 new BC schools and 26 new Quebec schools. By the end of Y6, COMPASS exceeded its recruitment expectations in British Columbia and Quebec with 16 and 37 schools respectively. In Nunavut, however, additional recruitment activities were unsuccessful and the sample in the territory remained below target at only 2 schools. Despite not reaching all of its target goals, COMPASS was still able to expand the original COMPASS study to include two additional provinces and one new territory. By increasing the number of jurisdictions represented, we increased the scientific value of the COMPASS study to better evaluate provincial/regional policy changes that occur and expanded the relevance and national scope of COMPASS.

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