

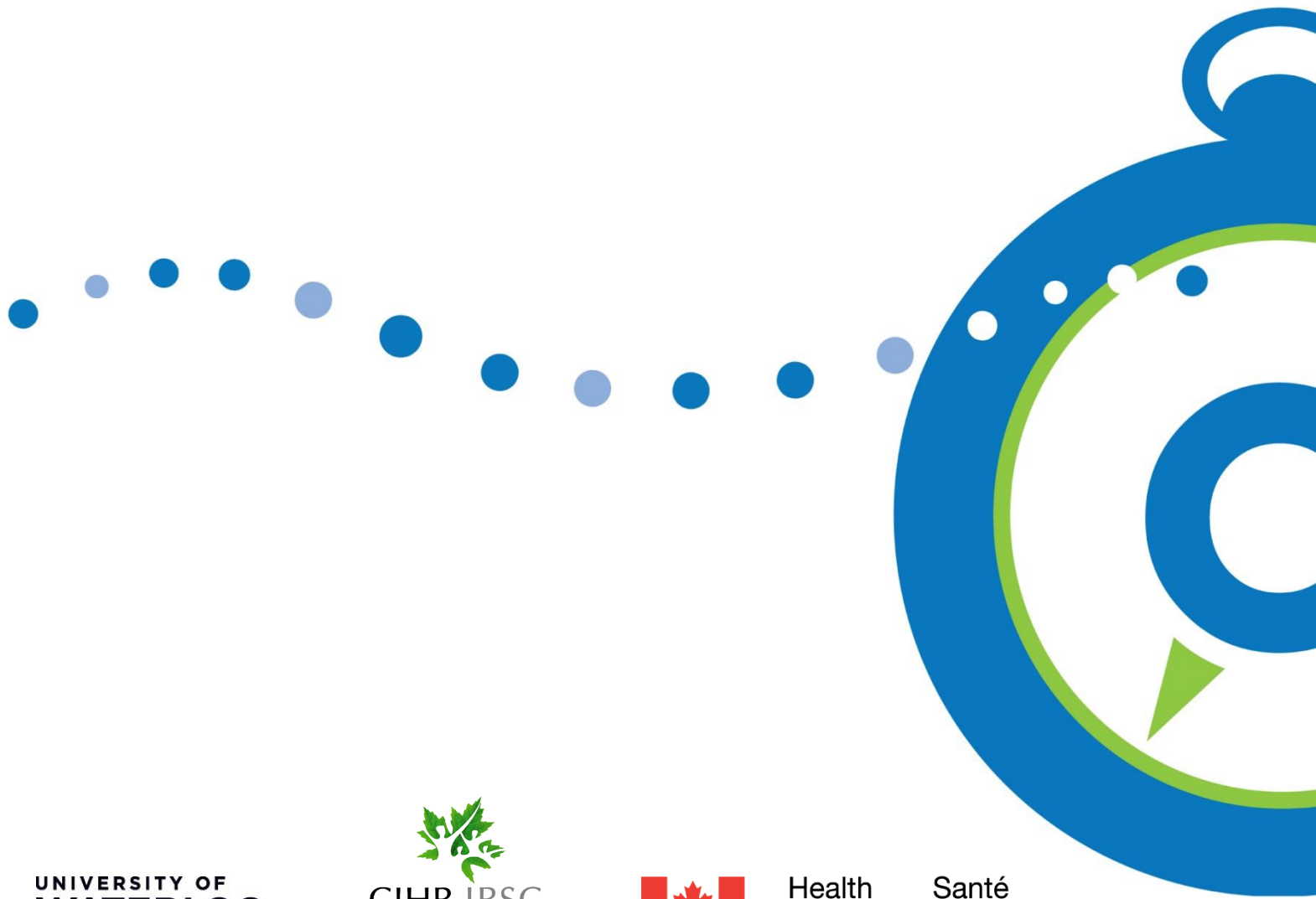


Cohort study evaluating how changes in school programs, policies, and resources impact youth health behaviours

COMPASS Year 7 and 8 Recruitment and Retention

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Introduction

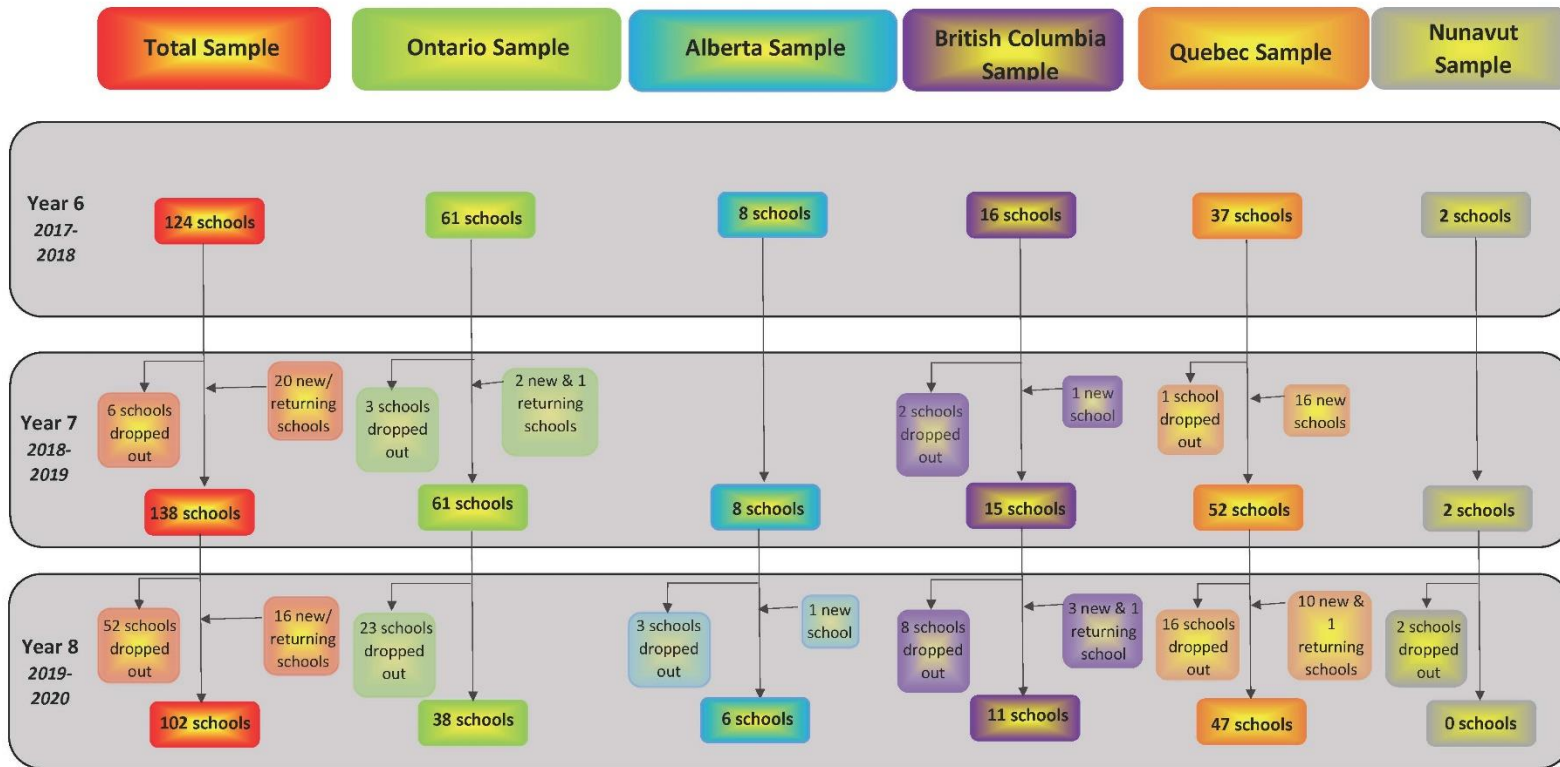
COMPASS is an ongoing longitudinal study (starting in 2012-13) designed to follow a prospective cohort of grade 9 to 12 students attending a convenience sample of Canadian secondary schools over several years to understand how changes in school environment characteristics (policies, programs, built environment) 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 marijuana use, physical activity, sedentary behaviour, school connectedness, bullying, and academic achievement. Based on feedback from participating schools as well as emerging issues in youth health, 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]. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Year 8 (Y8) data collections happening in March 2020 or later were completed online instead of in-class as a function of school closures. Additional details on the transition to an online data collection format for the COMPASS student questionnaire are available [6]. 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 health behaviour 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 [7], 124 schools participated in Year 6 (Y6) of the COMPASS study. 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 addition of new schools in Y6 was predominantly the result of school board recruitment and active recruitment as a means to increase sample size. It was also reported that the withdrawals in Y6 are largely attributed to competing research priorities and the fact that schools had already participated for a number of years and no longer felt the need to continue. For additional information on the recruitment and retention of schools in Y6, please refer to [this technical report](#) [7].

The purpose of this report is to provide details on the school recruitment and retention during Year 7 (Y7; 2019 – 2019) and Year 8 (Y8; 2019 – 2020) of the COMPASS study.

Figure 1: COMPASS School Sample for Year 6 – Year 8 (2017/18 – 2019/20)

Figure 1 shows the school sample size from Y6 to Y8 of COMPASS overall and by province/territory, including annual drop out and replenishment totals. For school sample size for Year 1 to Year 5, please refer to [this technical report](#) [7]



COMPASS Sample in Year 7 (2018 – 2019)

As shown in Figure 1, 138 schools participated in Y7 of COMPASS. Of the participating schools, there were 61 Ontario schools, 8 Alberta schools, 15 British Columbia schools, 52 Quebec schools, and 2 Nunavut schools. Of the sample, 32 schools completed their first COMPASS data collection in 2012/13 (Y1 schools), 24 schools completed their first data collection in 2013/14 (Y2 schools), 1 school completed its first data collection in 2015/16 (Y4 schools), 23 schools completed their first data collection in 2016/17 (Y5 schools), 39 schools completed their first data collection in 2017/18 (Y6 schools), and 19 schools completed their first data collection in 2018/19 (Y7 schools). The Y7 sample is different from the previous Y6 sample due to the additional recruitment and attrition that occurred, which is explored below.

Recruitment in Y7

All 124 schools that participated in Y6 were contacted via email and/or phone in September 2018 to March 2019 (depending on when the school participated in Y6) with the purpose of coordinating a COMPASS data collection date for the upcoming school year (Y7). Within Ontario, in addition to the 61 schools from the previous year, there were 2 new and 1 returning Ontario schools added to the COMPASS sample during Y7. Each of these schools were added to the COMPASS sample in Y7 due to administrative changes at the schools that resulted in the schools contacting the COMPASS team and requesting to have COMPASS implemented at their school. In addition to the Ontario sample, British Columbia (n=1) and Quebec (n=16) also had new schools added to their samples in Y7. These schools were actively recruited via unsolicited calls to schools and presentations at the school and board levels. Alberta and Nunavut did not have any new schools added to their sample in Y7.

Withdrawals in Y7

During Y7, 6 schools withdrew from COMPASS – 3 Ontario schools, 2 British Columbia schools, and 1 Quebec school. Among these schools, one of them had participated in COMPASS for six consecutive data collections, one of them had participated for five consecutive data collections, one of them has participated for four previous data collections, and three of them had participated in one previous data collection. Similar to previous protocol, we provided these schools with the opportunity to indicate why they were withdrawing from COMPASS. The reasons provided included school closure (n=1), competing research priorities (n=1), past the initial four years they had agreed to (n=1), did not expect to see any changes from previous data (n=1), change in administration (n=1), and too much work for the school to administer (n=1).

COMPASS Sample in Year 8 (2019 – 2020)

As shown in Figure 1, 102 schools participated in Y8 of COMPASS. Of the participating schools, there were 38 Ontario schools, 6 Alberta schools, 11 British Columbia schools, 47 Quebec schools, and no Nunavut schools. Of the sample, 21 schools completed their first COMPASS data collection in 2012/13 (Y1 schools), 15 schools completed their first data collection in 2013/14 (Y2 schools), 1 school completed its first data collection in 2015/16 (Y4 school), 10 schools completed their first data collection in 2016/17 (Y5 schools), 27 schools

completed their first data collection in 2017/18 (Y6 schools), 13 schools completed their first data collection in 2018/19 (Y7 schools), and 15 schools completed their first data collection in 2019/20 (Y8 schools).

As previously mentioned, the COVID-19 pandemic hit Canada in Y8, forcing the COMPASS team to change its data collection methods halfway through Y8 from an in-class to an online method. Overall, 51 schools participated in-class and 51 schools participated online. For more information on the method change and province-specific recruitment numbers for the online student survey, please refer to [this technical report](#) [6]. The recruitment and attrition for all Y8 schools (both in-class and online) are explained below.

Recruitment in Y8

All 138 schools that participated in Y7 were contacted via email and/or phone in September 2019 to April 2020 (depending on when the school participated in Y7) with the purpose of coordinating a COMPASS data collection date for the upcoming school year (Y8). In addition to the 138 schools from the previous year, there was 1 returning British Columbia school. This school experienced an administrative change in Y8 resulting in the new school contact reaching out to the COMPASS team and requesting that their school participate in Y8 of COMPASS. In addition to the returning schools, 1 new Alberta school, 3 new British Columbia schools, and 11 new Quebec schools were added to the COMPASS sample during Y8. These schools were added through active recruitment with the goal to increase sample size in these provinces. Recruitment protocols remained the same as in Y7 and included unsolicited calls to schools and presentations at the school, board, and private school federation levels. Active recruitment was largely directed towards boards/schools in territories that already had schools participating in COMPASS. That is, emphasis was placed on achieving census in fewer territories as opposed to actively recruiting boards in new territories.

Withdrawals in Y8

In Y8, a total of 52 schools withdrew from COMPASS – 23 Ontario schools, 3 Alberta schools, 8 British Columbia schools, 16 Quebec schools, and 2 Nunavut schools. The reason for these withdrawals were largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although many schools were keen to participate, and in fact, some had already agreed to participate and had their school's data collection scheduled for in-class, the pandemic and the transition to an online teaching platform made it too challenging to administer the COMPASS study at their schools. Many schools cited being overwhelmed with the transition to the online teaching environment as their reason for not participating in COMPASS in Y8 (n=33). Moreover, there were some schools (n=12) whose boards did not provide approval for the modified survey following the pandemic and therefore were not recruited in Y8. Other reasons for not participating included schools being over-researched (n=1), no response from school (n=3), and school decided to participate in a different survey (n=1). The COMPASS team decided that for schools where their reason for not participating in Y8 was related to the COVID-19 pandemic, these schools would be approached again in Y9 despite missing Y8 data.

In Nunavut, due to the various difficulties with administering an online option in Nunavut – including limited access to internet and electronic devices – schools in this territory did not

proceed with the online version of the COMPASS survey. Although administration of a paper-based questionnaire remained possible in Nunavut (schools were still providing students with physical paper packages containing schoolwork and either delivering them to students or having students pick them up from the school), this option was deemed not feasible by the COMPASS team for various reasons. First, many students in Nunavut live in crowded housing and privacy was a concern. Second, the COMPASS team was not allowed on campus to package the questionnaires. Third, the new Nunavut-specific questionnaire was not yet printed nor mailed. Printing and mailing the questionnaires to Nunavut (where there were no reported cases of coronavirus at the time), was considered an unnecessary risk for spreading the virus by the COMPASS team. Unfortunately, for these reasons, data collections were cancelled in Nunavut for Y8 (n=2). Since the reason for missing Y8 data for these schools was related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the COMPASS team decided to reinstate in Nunavut when feasible.

Conclusion

As outlined above, COMPASS reported an increase in total Y7 sample size, with much of the increase observed in Quebec. In Y8 of COMPASS, there was a sizeable decrease in total sample size with withdrawals occurring in all provinces/territories. The main reason for these withdrawals was due to the COVID-19 pandemic and largely out of the control of the COMPASS recruitment team. The COMPASS team worked quickly to adapt its survey to an online environment when the pandemic hit Canada in Y8 and had many schools participate online. Unfortunately, however, the transition to an online teaching context for high schools made it very challenging for many COMPASS schools to participate in Y8. It is the hope for Y9 data collections that schools will have overcome the challenges associated with a new mode of education delivery and that Y9 COMPASS sample size will return to or exceed the Y7 sample size.

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