Shade for Kids
A Policy Primer for School Boards
It's 11:00 a.m. Children are restless, hot and sticky. It's sizzling out there, and even hotter in the classroom. All thoughts are on lunch and playing outside. At last, the bell rings. Students charge out of their desks and onto the school ground. Heat waves lick the legs of little bodies. The tarmac is bubbling. The playing field offers little relief. The children squint longingly at the only tree at the back edge of the school property that’s off-limits. If only there were a cool place to play, sit, read and laugh with friends.

Trees dot the school ground. Shade sails soar above the climbing structure. Vines cling to the school building. Trees and awnings shade the classroom windows, providing cool relief from the early summer heat. The lunch bell rings. Laughter. Bouncing balls. Hopscotch. Rustling mulch under little feet. Birds chirping. These are the sounds of a natural school ground offering shade for kids as they go about the work of their day – learning, exploring and developing.
Shade.
It’s about our children’s health. What is your school board doing to safeguard their future?

Schools have a unique role and responsibility in providing protection from ultraviolet radiation (UVR). After all, they are places where the primary target of prevention campaigns – children – can be reached on a sustained basis.

Schools are also places where individual and community efforts to protect children from UVR can be integrated into policy, into the curriculum and into the outdoor environment where children congregate.

But individual schools can only do so much. Board-wide policies are needed to ensure a safe and healthy environment for staff and students at their schools.
What Can Your Board Do?
Follow these six steps to create a shade strategy:

1. **Adopt and implement a board-wide sun-smart policy**
   Right now, sun-smart policies are left to the discretion of individual schools. And the responsibility for enforcing the policy is not always clear. Parents can send their children to school with hats and sunscreen, but they are not there to enforce their use. And hats and sunscreen are only part of the remedy.

   A board-wide policy outlining the key elements of a sun-smart policy for schools is needed, including:

   i) **Protection**
   - Mandating the provision of shade through the planting of shade trees, building of shade structures and placement of seating in shade.
   - Conducting shade audits to measure progress.
   - Enforcing measures such as wearing hats, sunscreen, sunglasses and appropriate clothing.

   ii) **Education**
   - Working with parents, trustees, administrators and the wider community to build awareness about sun safety and promote a healthy school environment.
   - Encouraging lasting change by supporting school communities in planting shade trees and undertaking shade audits.
   - Developing links to curriculum on sun safety.

   **SUNSMART IN THE UK**
   *SunSmart* is a national skin cancer prevention campaign run by Cancer Research UK. The five key *SunSmart* skin cancer prevention messages are:
   - Stay in the shade 11-3
   - Make sure you never burn
   - Always cover up – wear a T-shirt, hat and wrap-around sunglasses
   - Remember children burn more easily
   - Then use factor 15+ sunscreen

   “Sun protection is a health and safety issue and schools have a responsibility to protect children from sunburn.” Cancer Society of New Zealand. June 2003
2 Do a sample assessment

Just as with sun-smart policies, schools can undertake shade audits at their own discretion. A shade audit involves measuring the shade in the morning, at noon and after school. It is the best way to determine how much shade is on a school ground and where more shade is needed. Audits also help to measure progress made toward providing shade.

Board-mandated and supported shade audits, as part of a board-wide sun-smart strategy, will ensure every school has adequate shade within your board. Tracking the amount of shade at each school will provide a snapshot of the shade in your board and help monitor progress toward board-wide shade targets.

Grounds staff can play a key role in supporting schools in undertaking the audits. As well, organizations like Evergreen can provide support to schools through resources and hands-on support.

3 Design for shade

i) Existing schools

Existing schools can design for shade by assessing the grounds and determining where they have shade and where they need it – around playing fields, seating areas and playground equipment. Encouraging tree planting in active and passive play areas, redesigning “out-of-bounds” areas for seating and outdoor classrooms, and removing asphalt to plant trees will help protect children from harmful UVR.

ii) New or retrofit schools

New and retrofit schools have an exciting opportunity to rethink shade on school grounds. Board architects and facilities staff can actually design for shade. Engage the school community, understand where students and teachers use the site, and plant trees in these locations. Shade for kids. It’s that simple.

4 Budget for shade

Current school budgets consider costs for indoor maintenance such as replacing light bulbs and purchasing cleaning supplies. The school ground needs to be part of the maintenance picture, too. Dead and damaged trees do not provide shade.

In a school setting, trees require three things to keep them healthy: water, mulch and protection. A maintenance budget that includes trees, water, mulch and protection for trees will ensure the success of school shade strategies within your board.

The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) is leading the way on this in Canada. It has approved a $250,000 budget for a mulching program to maintain the health of the trees planted on schools within the board. The TDSB is home to almost 600 schools, with approximately 200 working on greening projects.
5 **Educate about shade**

Meaningful programming is needed to alter students’ behaviour toward shade. Research shows that HOW students are taught is the key to creating lasting change. One-off presentations and information flyers do not create the change in behaviour required to protect children from sun damage. We need multi-faceted programs that are linked with curriculum lessons. Doing shade audits and planting trees offer students opportunities to see first-hand what sun protection is about.

### HELP FOR TEACHERS: UK AND AUSTRALIA LEAD THE WAY

**SunSmart Teaching Resources**

Cancer Research UK, as part of its SunSmart campaign, has created teaching resources to link sun protection education with the curriculum.

[www.cancerresearchuk.org/sunsmart/schoolsandchildren/teachingresources](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/sunsmart/schoolsandchildren/teachingresources)

**Tattoo: A Sun Protection Resource**

This is an innovative, new teaching resource for secondary school teachers of Health and Physical Education, Media Studies, English and Personal Development. It was developed in response to evidence that an increasing number of young Australians want a tan and think they’re safe if they tan, as long as they don’t burn. [www.sunsmart.com.au](http://www.sunsmart.com.au)

---

6 **Work with Evergreen to provide a school ground design consultant**

Since 2002, the Toyota Evergreen Learning Grounds Program has developed partnerships with seven school boards and now offers hand-on expertise in eight major cities across Canada to support schools in their greening efforts.

**We can help by:**

- Articulating a greening policy
- Guiding the creation of design standards
- Providing hands-on planning and design support to schools
- Delivering workshops and community forums on school ground greening and designing for shade.
Why Shade?

The Canadian Dermatology Association estimates that one in seven Canadian children born today will develop skin cancer later in life. Why? Because of over-exposure to harmful UVR. In fact, one blistering sunburn during childhood can double the risk of getting cancer. UVR has also been linked to cataracts, suppression of the body’s immune system and the development of allergies.

Children are at school during the highest risk period of the day – between 10 am and 4 pm. They spend a significant amount of this time outdoors (one to three hours per day) for recess, lunch, physical education, field trips, outdoor education and extracurricular activities. In most cases, they have little choice about exposure to the sun.

We want children to be outside. We know it’s important for their physical and mental health, and that hands-on, outdoor learning confers huge educational benefits. But we also want them to be safe.

A study conducted at a school in southern Ontario found that on a fall day when the air temperature was just under 27°C, the unshaded surface temperature of the school ground was a scorching 52.8°C. The nearby shaded surface was 20°C cooler (Moogk-Soulis 2002).

It’s clear that one of the most effective and equitable ways of protecting students and staff from UVR and wilting temperatures is to plant shade trees where people congregate – around playground equipment, benches and tables, and along sports fields to offer refuge for spectators, players and officials.

FACTS:
• Damage to the skin from the sun’s rays is cumulative and irreversible.
• 80 percent of our lifetime exposure to the sun occurs during childhood.
Resources


*Cancer Research UK SunSmart campaign*. Ideas for implementing a shade strategy, teacher resources and links.
www.cancerresearchuk.org

1998, Sydney: NSW Cancer Council and NSW Health Department.


*SunSafe in the Middle School Years*. National Cancer Institute skin cancer prevention research project for adolescents. Includes teacher activities. www.sunsafe.dartmouth.edu

*SunSmart*. The Cancer Council Victoria's skin cancer prevention program. Includes information on sun protection, skin cancer, research and statistics, creating a school shade policy, and teacher resources for educating about sun safety. www.sunsmart.com.au

This project was generously funded by

For what matters.

Printed on paper recycled from 100% post-consumer waste that is processed chlorine free (PCF), acid free and with environmentally sound dyes.

www.evergreen.ca
1-888-426-3138