

A 'Whole School' Food and Nutrition Policy

**Nutrition Tools
for Schools**

Making the case for a 'whole school' food and nutrition policy

Policy development is used in the school setting to guide decision making by providing standards for the school community to follow. Such standards clarify expectations, provide justification for decisions and support behaviours that school leaders often find difficult to enforce. Schools have many existing policies such as zero tolerance for bullying and violence, dress codes or standards for teacher qualification. A school food and nutrition policy:

- Makes healthy food choices the easier choices
- Ensures that good nutrition is promoted, both in theory and in practice
- Provides direction for action
- Guides decision making



What is a 'whole school' food and nutrition policy?

A 'whole school' food and nutrition policy supports each of the essential elements of a Healthy School Nutrition Environment. A policy could be created for each of the eight elements, or a 'whole school' policy would include all eight essential elements, which would include:

1. Nutrition education for all students from Kindergarten to Grade 8
2. Nutrition education for all teaching staff provided by registered dietitians
3. Healthy, reasonably priced and culturally appropriate food choices available in schools
4. Role modelling of healthy eating by school staff
5. Student, parent and community education about healthy eating
6. Universal student nutrition programs
7. Safe food handling practices and an allergy-safe environment
8. Appropriate scheduling of nutrition breaks

A 'whole school' food and nutrition policy benefits

How is a school food and nutrition policy different from a school nutrition guideline?

Policies have clear consequences for non-compliance and some method of enforcement.

Guidelines are similar to policies but may be viewed as less formal and may be a less sensitive term to use. They also are neither enforced nor mandatory. If you decide to use the term guideline initially, consider how you can move towards policy over time.

Benefits of a school food and nutrition policy

A 'whole school' food and nutrition policy benefits:

Schools

- Shows parents and the local community that the school takes the health of its students seriously
- Improves student learning potential and may reduce behaviour problems
- Reinforces the classroom healthy eating education
- Takes the guesswork out of choosing food for school

Parents

- Ensures healthy food choices will be offered by the school
- Offers parents consistent messages about what to send for classroom celebrations
- Helps parents learn about healthy eating through the school and their own children
- Supports families in making healthy choices at home

Students

- Increases availability of nutritious foods
- Exposes students to positive role models for healthy eating
- Delivers consistent messages that reinforce classroom learning
- Provides students with the opportunity to develop skills in making healthy food choices

Whether it is called a policy or guideline, a written policy clearly communicates to existing and new school community members that the school values health and nutrition. Not only is it important to develop a strong policy, but it is also crucial to ensure its implementation so that good nutrition is promoted in both theory and practice. For information on how to develop a 'whole school' food and nutrition policy, please refer to *Nutrition Tools for Schools – School Food and Nutrition Policy Action Guide*.

Does your school have a Healthy School Nutrition Environment?

A Healthy School Nutrition Environment exists when a school promotes healthy eating through words *and* actions. Students get the same message about food, nutrition and healthy eating wherever food is served – in the classroom, in the school and at home. The following nine Essential Elements¹ are recommended for a school to have a healthy nutrition environment.

| Whole School Approach | Essential Elements |
|---|--|
| In the School | Does your school offer healthy, reasonably priced and culturally-appropriate food choices? For example does your school have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • healthy fundraising? • a school milk program? • a healthy tuck shop? • healthy 'special food' days? • non-food rewards in the classroom? • healthy classroom celebrations? • healthy refreshments at school meetings and events? |
| | Do parents, teachers and volunteers role model healthy eating and body image behaviours at school? |
| | Does your school have a Student Nutrition Program (eg, breakfast, snack and lunch)? |
| | Does your school practise safe food practices and have an allergy-safe environment? |
| | Are nutrition breaks at school appropriately scheduled? |
| | Does your school have a food and nutrition policy? |
| | In the Classroom |
| Do teachers have up-to-date nutrition resources to support the healthy eating expectations in the curriculum? | |
| In Homes and In the Community | Does your school provide student, parent and community education about healthy eating? |

¹ Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health School Nutrition Workgroup. 2004 *Call to Action: Creating a Healthy School Nutrition Environment*.

Need more information?

Public health offers *Nutrition Tools for Schools - a toolkit for elementary schools*. Whether you're a teacher, parent, school administrator or volunteer, this toolkit will lead you through a step-by-step process to creating a healthy nutrition environment in your school. *Nutrition Tools for Schools* contains a variety of resources and tools to implement the nine Essential Elements listed above. For more information about this toolkit, please contact your public health unit/department.

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