

Starting a Student Nutrition Program

Making the case for a student nutrition program

Children need to eat well to learn well; however, they may not come to school well-nourished for many reasons. Almost half of school-aged children in Canada may not be eating a balanced breakfast. Nutrients missed at breakfast probably won't be made up for at other meals. The evidence is clear; well-nourished children perform better in class and are more successful in achieving their educational goals! Providing healthy breakfasts, snacks or lunches at school can help all students to do their best.

What is a student nutrition program?

A well-designed daily student nutrition program is fully accessible (eg, cost and/or transportation schedules are not a barrier to participation). The program provides nutritious breakfasts, snacks and/or lunches based on the *Student Nutrition Program – Nutrition Guidelines* released by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services.

By providing healthy food choices, we give children access to the nutritious food they need to grow and learn to their full potential.

Benefits of student nutrition programs

Offering a student nutrition program benefits the whole school community:

Nutrition Tools for Schools

Students:

- Learn which foods make up healthy meals and snacks
- Enjoy healthy foods
- Avoid being hungry
- Learn to share and develop manners
- Learn to try new foods
- Gain energy and are ready to learn
- Have fun in a caring, clean and safe place

Parents:

- Know their children are eating well
- Like the convenience
- Appreciate the economy (or affordability) of the program
- Appreciate the opportunity for their children to learn social skills and healthy eating habits

Schools:

- See the benefit of students who attend class ready and able to learn
- Enjoy the energy and spirit the programs bring to the school
- Like giving children the opportunity to practise the healthy eating knowledge and skills they learn in class
- Like giving children who volunteer in the program the opportunity to learn responsibility



Success to share

Pine Glen Public School in Huntsville was introducing the start-up of its new breakfast club. Instead of making a PA announcement or reading the announcement at an assembly the principal and a teacher decided to present the information in a skit at a school-wide assembly. To students' delight, the teacher and the principal became two little girls sitting on a school bus discussing the new breakfast program.

They covered all of the key information about the program (eg, open to everyone, where it is located, when it is open, what they serve, how good it makes them feel to eat something before class, etc).

Every student got the information they needed to check out the new *Breakfast Club* the following Monday!

Submitted by Mary Ellen Deane, Public Health Dietitian, Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit

Contacts for more information

Local public health unit/department

Many public health units/departments have developed resources and start-up kits to help schools start a nutrition program. Public health dietitians can provide advice and support or direct you to a local organization that coordinates student nutrition programs. Public health inspectors provide information and advice on sanitation and the requirements for safe storage, preparation and serving of food.

Regional office of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS)

The Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) directs provincial government funding for the Ontario Student Nutrition Program through nine regional offices. Contact your local regional MCYS office (www.children.gov.on.ca/CS/en/regOffices) to obtain the contact information for Student Nutrition Program funding in your area.

Breakfast for Learning (BFL)

BFL is a non-profit organization that offers resources (eg, Nutrition Program Start-up Kit, recipes, menu planner, program management tools and educational materials), fundraising ideas and financial grants to support student nutrition programs across Canada. For more information, call 1-800-627-7922 or visit www.breakfastforlearning.ca.

Adapted from materials produced by York Region Food for Learning and the Northern Healthy Eating Project

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	<p>Does your school offer healthy, reasonably priced and culturally-appropriate food choices? For example does your school have:</p> <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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