



Nutrition Update Newsletter

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A NEWSLETTER FOR PROFESSIONALS

How to Implement a Nutrition Policy

Food is an integral part of school life. Many children eat at least one meal at school. Food is also part of many school events, celebrations and fundraisers. Evidence shows that good nutrition enhances academic success, however, not all children have access to healthy foods daily (1, 2).

In Saskatchewan, about 1 in 5 students in grades 6-10 reported going hungry sometimes (1). Many unhealthy foods and drinks are offered or sold in schools. Schools have a role in ensuring the food environment helps support all children to have access to the healthy food they need to grow and learn.

Comprehensive School Community Health (CSCH) is a framework used to support healthy foods in schools. CSCH is a collaborative approach that invites the school, family and community to work together to enhance the health and well-being of all students. One focus of CSCH is effective policies and administrative procedures (APs).

Healthy school APs shape the culture of the school by defining values, beliefs and acceptable standards and actions. Effective APs should address all areas of a CSCH approach including nutrition learning opportunities as well as the physical and social food environment, including the use of the provincial nutrition standards (3).

To get a nutrition AP started, look to your school health and wellness team. If you don't have a team, start one. The committee should be a small group of

people, and include school administration, teachers, school staff, parents and students.

To help get your school team started, check out [Steps for Building Healthy School Communities](#). The team would complete an assessment of the school nutrition environment with one of these tools: [School Nutrition Environment Assessment Tool](#) or the [Healthy School Planner](#).

After the assessment, the team can choose priority areas to improve the school food environment and develop an action plan for the school year. Start with small goals, evaluate impact and celebrate success through the school year.

Creating an AP will help to ensure the practices implemented will continue into the future. The school team would work together to create a draft of the policy that builds on the current practices for school nutrition. The draft would then incorporate feedback from students, parents, school staff and community partners, such as public health nutritionists.

Nutrition APs can guide schools in implementing practices to support and maintain school nutrition initiatives for years to come.

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Ask A NUTRITION Expert

Our school offers a fast food hot lunch monthly as a way to make money for activities. How can we offer healthy food and make a profit?

Many schools rely on fundraisers and often unhealthy foods, such as fast food, are used. Although it may seem that these events happen infrequently, other foods offered in the school day, such as classroom celebrations, candy rewards and bake sales, have cumulative effects on the health and learning of children (4, 5).

Selling unhealthy food in schools undermines parents' efforts to feed their children healthfully and contradicts nutrition education by sending the message that good nutrition is unimportant (5).

Research shows that non-food or healthy food fundraisers can produce the same or greater profits than unhealthy food fundraisers (7).

When looking at making changes, set up a team with school administration, staff, volunteers, parents and students to help plan the changes. Ask students and parents what foods they are willing to purchase and

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suggested prices. Try taste testing small portions of foods before selling them.

For more ideas and step-by-step suggestions, check out the following resources or contact your local public health nutritionist.

- [Improving the Nutrition Information Through Changing Concession Stand Options: Eight Steps to Making Healthy Improvements](#) (University of Iowa)
- [Healthy Food Fundraising](#) (Government of Alberta)

I have been told that I should not use food as a reward in the classroom. I have done this for years. Why should I change now?

The use of food as a reward is a common practice in both home and school settings

(8). Reward foods are often high in sugar and calories, and low in nutritional value.

It is tempting to use food as a reward as it may have the desired effect in the short term (9). However, there are long-term consequences that result from the use of food as a reward (10). Children may:

- Develop a preference for less healthy foods instead of more nutritious foods.
- Learn to use food as an emotional comfort.
- Lose the ability to interpret appetite and hunger cues.
- Lose intrinsic motivation to do good things, which leads to poorer academic outcomes and student health (11).

These consequences can contribute to problems with self-regulation of food intake, disordered eating patterns and the child's relationship to food and their body (12, 9).

There is evidence to suggest that tangible rewards, such as a sticker, a pencil or eraser,

extra recess, or a trip to the park is effective and should be used in place of food rewards (13).

Consistency is key when using rewards to foster a new behaviour. The ultimate goal of rewarding children is to help them internalize positive behaviours so they will not need a reward. (14)

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Nourishing Minds: Eat Well – Learn Well – Live Well (2019) is a Ministry of Education policy document that uses a CSCH approach to help boards of education and school divisions develop or renew effective APs related to nutrition. *Planning Healthy Menus for my School, Food Safety for my School* and *Healthy Foods for my School* help school staff and volunteers select, prepare and offer healthy foods in Saskatchewan Schools. www.saskatchewan.ca/government/education-and-child-care/facility-administration/services-for-school-administrators/student-wellness-and-wellbeing/nutrition

The Cost of Meals and Snacks: This tool can be used by schools, child care facilities and community organizations to budget for child nutrition programs. The tool identifies the average costs for healthy meals and snacks for each child per day. The 2018 report will be available soon. In the meantime, the 2015 report is available here: www.saskatchewan.ca/government/government-structure/ministries/health/other-reports/a-report-on-the-cost-of-healthy-food-in-saskatchewan

Teaching Nutrition in Saskatchewan: Nutrition Concepts and Resources documents provide credible Canadian-based nutrition information and resources for the learning community for Health Education grades 1-8, Phys Ed 20 and 30, and Health Science 20 in English and French. www.rqhealth.ca/department/health-promotion/nutrition-and-healthy-eating

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