



New Brunswick / Nouveau-Brunswick

Position Statement: School Food Programming in New Brunswick

Our Position: New Brunswick needs a comprehensive school food program that is universal, and sufficiently funded with resources, staffing, and healthy nutritious foods.

The Case for School Food Programming in New Brunswick

In New Brunswick, 1 in 5 children, the equivalent of 375 school buses, arrive at school from food insecure households (Tarasuk et al., 2014). Though recently some provincial funds have been allocated to help feed children in school, more work needs to be done to ensure a comprehensive solution exists where all New Brunswick children have access to healthy foods and develop nutrition literacy.

In all other provinces, school food programs have been created because of evidence which clearly demonstrates the link between improving children's access to healthy foods and improvements to childhood food insecurity, health, and education outcomes. In a province with high rates of childhood food insecurity, chronic disease, and low provincial testing, the need for a school food program in New Brunswick is obvious. Providing New Brunswick children with access to nutritious foods is addressing one of their basic human rights.

Implementing a School Food Programming in New Brunswick

It is essential that a school food program for New Brunswick be rooted in the needs of New Brunswick schools. Today, many schools have made some efforts to piece together a school food program based on their own unique needs and by leveraging community resources. These programs were born out of the need to nourish students, recognizing the link between health and education outcomes. However, in the absence of a provincial system, schools are left without the necessary resources to fully support programming. What is needed is a provincial system that compliments/ enhances current efforts, to ensure equity among schools, and where universal resources, and best practice recommendations are provided to schools to help them find the most effective model for use in their community.

Honouring schools for their efforts, supporting schools with resources, and providing schools with enhancement funds for their pre-existing programs should be at the center of a comprehensive model for New Brunswick. Recognizing the diversity between schools, will ensure that each school has the opportunity to make decisions that best meet the needs of their school community and does not take away opportunities for funding/resources already leveraged. Each school should be given autonomy to make choices within a system based on evidence informed practice, and be supported with professional expertise in the area of food and nutrition.



A Proposed School Food Model for New Brunswick

In order for school food programming to have the best impact and the greatest return on investments, efforts need to be made to ensure a comprehensive approach to programming. A robust school food program would be complete with **nutritious foods**, would be **sufficiently funded**, would be **fully staffed/ volunteered**, have access to **nutrition experts** and would be **accessible to all**.

A robust school food program should strive to meet best practice standards across 5 key pillars.

Table A: 5 Pillars of Robust School Food Programming



Address Food Insecurity

In New Brunswick, 20% of children live in food insecure households (Tarasuk et al., 2014). Most concerning, is that 30% of students report coming to school hungry and/or without eating breakfast. (NBHC, 2017 & 2018).

Although school food programs cannot fix all the systemic problems that lead to food insecurity, providing reliable access to healthy foods, while at school, can support all children with improved health and wellness, and education outcomes as a result, including those who come from food insecure households.

Stigma, that can be associated with living in poverty, can have a negative effect on a child's mental health. Ensuring school food programs are provided in a universal context, for all students, is supported as best practice. Efforts should be made to create and enable systems where barriers, perceived or real, preventing accessing to school food programming are removed for all students, including those living in food insecure households.

Provide Healthy Foods

The Joint Consortium of Health's Comprehensive School Health Framework, adopted by the New Brunswick provincial government, states academic success and health as interdependent. Healthy students perform better in academics and educated students make better healthy eating choices (JCSH, 2016). Though presently, our children and youth do not consume adequate amounts of vegetables and fruits, they are consuming too many sugary drinks, and many are coming to school hungry - critical indicators to positive health and nutrition outcomes (NBHC, 2017). It is also known that New Brunswick schools have some of the lowest test scores in the country in regards to three critical pillars; reading, science, and mathematics (CMEC, 2015).

School food programs need to offer healthy foods that comply with policy 711, to maximize impacts to education and health. Providing children with access to adequate nutrition, is meeting their basic needs for growth and development. If school food programs exist, healthy/nutritious foods should be prioritized.

Include Access to Experts

Dietitians are the leading experts in food and nutrition science, and exist as the only registered nutrition professionals in New Brunswick. Registered Dietitians use evidence-informed practice guidelines, models, and standards to ensure their interventions meet the needs of the populations they serve.

When school food programs are led by Registered Dietitians, best practices around nutrition standards, food systems and population health are prioritized.

Foster Nutrition Literacy

Nutrition literacy is a tool that can help prevent chronic disease and promote healthy growth and development (Vidgen, 2014 ; Gov of Canada, 2021). While diet is an important factor for living a healthy lifestyle, basic food skill abilities have been declining in our Canadian population. This “deskilling” is mostly due to the lack of exposure and opportunities for learning both at home and in school environments (York U, 2020). Re-introducing the teaching of basic nutrition literacy at school is critical for our children to grow into healthy adults. The nutrition literacy pillar also encourages the learning of growing and harvesting food. This component encourages sustainability and local procurement of food.

Facilitate Partnerships

It is essential that a school food program for New Brunswick compliments and leverages existing opportunities in the community. Program models should allow for a gathering of resources within the province which will increase each school’s capacity to provide school food programming. By allowing for a tailored programming approach, schools will be able to take an asset based approach where local partnerships and vendors can be leveraged. A designated school food coordinator at the centre of this model would be able to assist schools to access as many resources as possible.

Conclusion

“Based on the understanding that health, well-being and learning are intimately connected, schools have the potential to make a dramatic difference in the lives of New Brunswick children and youth. In order to accomplish this, schools require effective policies and dedicated funding for programs that promote healthy eating” (Heart & Stroke, 2013).

Many New Brunswick children and youth are faced today with learning, succeeding, and thriving on an empty stomach. It is necessary to provide funding which will support healthy school food programs, leading to better health and learning outcomes. An investment into school food is an investment into our children’s health and into our provinces prosperous future. Above all else, one thing is clear – New Brunswick children and youth are hungry for school food.



Recommendations

Parents, Guardians, and Teachers

- Advocate for school food programming which meets best practice standards across each of the five pillars of comprehensive school food programming.
- Encourage and support schools to implement school food programs, nutrition policies, and nutrition-related education for children and youth.(Heart & Stroke, 2013)
- Request access to nutrition expertise by a Registered Dietitian

Municipal Government

- Provide resources and support for the establishment of school and community gardens (Heart & Stroke, 2013).
- Establish policies designed to increase access to local vendors selling healthy and affordable food near schools

Provincial Government

- Allocate sustained funding to a provincial school food program
- Be accountable to a provincial school food program which supports improvements to each of the 5 pillars of comprehensive school food programming.
- Approve and support a public private partnership model for the funding of school food programming which will leverage and stretch government dollars.
- Continue to develop, implement and monitor school food policies that increase access to affordable healthy food and beverages while decreasing access to unhealthy choices. (Heart & Stroke, 2013)
- Continue to restrict the marketing/selling of unhealthy food and beverages at schools (Heart & Stroke, 2013)

Community Stakeholders

- Advocate for school food programs which meet all 5 pillars of comprehensive school food programming.
- Continue to support schools with opportunities for program funding and volunteers

Food Industry

- Improve the nutritional quality of foods and beverages that are available in school environments and provide appropriate portion sizes (Heart & Stroke, 2013).
- Ensure that food options available to schools comply with policy 711



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