

*Nutrition in
Manitoba schools
consultation
Report*

**“What schools
told us”**

Prepared for
Manitoba Health & Healthy Living
by: Dietitians of Canada
Spring 2006

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Background and Rationale

Most Canadian provinces and territories are investigating policy options related to improving school environments in relation to health, and Manitoba is no different. In June 2005 the Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures All-Party Task Force released the *Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures Task Force Report*. The report makes recommendations in 10 key areas of school health. The province has made a commitment to take action on all recommendations.

Five specific recommendations address food in schools. The Task Force recommends that the provincial government increase access to nutritious foods in schools, specifically that:

- the provincial government require all schools to have a written school food and nutrition policy as part of their school plan
- the provincial government provide model policy statements as examples, to help schools or school divisions to develop specifics to suit local needs and circumstances
- the provincial government provide “Guidelines for Foods Served at Schools” as well as a series of tools and resources that schools could access to help them take action in this area
- schools report annually to parent advisory councils and Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth on actions taken regarding written school food and nutrition policies
- these recommendations be phased in over a period of two years beginning in the 2006/2007 school year for grades K-6 with remaining grades to follow in the 2007/2008 school year.

Dietitians of Canada was contracted by Manitoba Health & Healthy Living to assist in developing food and nutrition guidelines for use in all K-12 publicly

funded schools throughout the province. The goal of such guidelines is to provide useful, practical and supportive materials that reflect the interests, concerns and capacities of communities and schools locally. In order to do this successfully, it is critical that we understand what school staff, students, parents, and volunteers will be looking for in guidelines and what additional materials should be available to support positive change in the food and nutrition environment in schools.

As a first step in this process, a series of consultation meetings with schools across the province was undertaken. The goal was not to represent every school division or region but to talk to a sample of schools across the province to develop an understanding of the issues, barriers and success factors which may influence the implementation of nutrition guidelines.

A Picture of the Schools Consulted

From November 18, 2005 to January 18, 2006, 24 schools in the Province of Manitoba were consulted to help us understand what school administrators, teachers, parents, students, food preparation staff and volunteers will be looking for in guidelines, and to identify other materials that will support positive change in the food and nutrition environment in schools.

Schools were selected to provide a mix of urban, rural and northern locations in Manitoba; elementary, junior and senior high schools; and schools known to be at different stages of thinking about or taking action on food and nutrition. Colony schools, a Francophone school, a publicly funded independent school and an institutional school were also consulted. See Appendix V for a full list of schools consulted.

School administrators were invited to assemble a group of interested people

“What schools told us”

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The goal of developing food and nutrition guidelines is to provide useful, practical and supportive materials that reflect the interests, concerns and capacities of communities and schools locally.

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Consultation feedback revealed that schools generally support the implementation of written food and nutrition guidelines.

within their school community to address the consultation questions (see Appendix III). The mix of each group consulted was different; we met with administrators, parents, students, teachers, educational assistants, and food preparation staff. Interviews were conducted either in-person or by telephone as access and time allowed.

All schools consulted did serve or sell food. During the consultation we did not gather information regarding food which students or staff brought from home, only the food served and sold in schools. The type of food avenues provided by the schools varied, and the most common included:

- nourishment programs
- milk programs
- canteens
- cafeterias
- special lunch events
- food and drink vending machines
- school stores
- emergency lunches
- special events such as family events, sports days, BBQ's, feasts, dances, sleigh rides, bake sales, birthday parties, classroom parties

Key Findings

Consultation feedback revealed that schools generally support the implementation of written food and nutrition guidelines. A majority of schools involved in the consultations were implementing the nutrition outcomes in the *K-S4 Physical Education/Health Education MB Curriculum Framework of Outcomes for Active Healthy Lifestyles*. Many schools are also proactively extending the curriculum outcomes by creating opportunities for students to put their skills into practice. Schools have been

very creative with initiatives to promote nutrition and wellness, clearly demonstrating a sense of enthusiasm and commitment.

What schools had to say about nutrition policy ...

- The majority of schools consulted did not have comprehensive written food and nutrition policies in place as part of their school plans; however, many schools had committed to creating change in their school environment.
- For the most part, schools indicated they could see many benefits in having written food and nutrition policies and guidelines, including improved educational outcomes.
- Schools identified the need to model good behaviours of all kinds, including health behaviours, and support in practice what is taught in the school curriculum. Through modelling and availability, schools believed that they could influence the food choices of those who are part of the school community and reinforce classroom learning.
- There were some concerns expressed about implementing nutrition policies and guidelines. A small number of schools felt that there would be no benefits to having food and nutrition policies or guidelines in place. Other more specific concerns included loss of freedom of choice, compromised student safety should students choose to leave school property to obtain food not available at the school, loss of revenue, and increased food costs.
- Schools told us that providing good nutrition within the school was valuable; however, taking on additional tasks to achieve this was time-consuming, and at most schools expertise in the area of nutrition was limited. A paid person within the

school or district to co-ordinate planning and practical implementation and who could also act as a resource would be valuable.

- Strong partnerships with local and provincial nutrition and food service vendors would be important. A majority of consultation respondents agreed that Manitoba Health, Manitoba Healthy Living, Manitoba Education Citizenship and Youth, all levels of school administration, food service and parents need to work towards the same end—the provision of nutritious food for students so they can learn well and be healthy rather than an emphasis on revenue generation.
- Consultation feedback indicates that schools which have been successful in changing their food environments have actively sought out and used a wide array of resources. Access to local dietitians or home economists, the Manitoba Council on Child Nutrition, Dairy Farmers of Manitoba (DFM) and the annual Manitoba Nutrition Forum hosted by DFM, Frontier School Division Healthy Foods Policy and other provincial policies, Healthy Schools Grant Dollars, and school district health and physical education consultants was extremely valuable and assisted in making sustained change.
- Schools that have been successful in undertaking change found that in most cases it is easier to write guidelines than it is to follow them. The challenges seem greater in schools that offer a wide variety of food services and require more revenue generation, often senior high schools. School communities must remain focused on the goal of better nutrition for better educational outcomes as the pressure to bend is substantial and change takes time.
- The majority of schools consulted agreed that schools should be required to communicate in brief with the division and parents regarding the work being done to implement the guidelines

on an annual or ongoing basis. In some cases change happened when schools were monitored and held accountable by a structure outside themselves. Other schools were successful when the impetus for change came from within the local school community.

- A built-in evaluation with time for trial and feedback on proposed guidelines would be preferred and would allow for successful, sustainable change tailored to unique school situations.

What schools had to say about Guidelines for Foods Available in Schools . . .

- The guidelines should include a clear direction or goal, including reasons for the guidelines and parent information.
- The guidelines need to be flexible and provide a defined range of food choices, allowing schools to make decisions to fit with local needs.
- The guidelines should be reasonable—focused on healthy foods, consistent with Canada’s Food Guide for Healthy Eating and meeting national standards with the concept of balance, moderation and variety. Sample menus and “quick and easy” healthy food suggestions, particularly for special events, need to be included.
- Schools asked for a set of practical guidelines that outlines a simple set of standards regarding foods served and sold in schools. Consultation feedback revealed that most schools were in the early stages of making change, and as a result, specific information regarding food products would serve as a great support. Comments included requests for specific product choices that fit with the guidelines, vendor information and cost. A system for schools to share this information, as well as student response to products and marketing ideas, would be valuable.

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Strong partnerships with local and provincial nutrition and food service vendors would be important.

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The guidelines should be adapted to the health concerns, food preferences, food availability, food accessibility and dietary practices of different ethnic and cultural groups represented in the province.

- The guidelines should be adapted to the health concerns, food preferences, food availability, food accessibility and dietary practices of different ethnic and cultural groups represented in the province. The guidelines should not suggest foods that are expensive or would not be available to rural, inner city, remote or northern schools in the province.
- The guidelines need to be modular in design so schools only need to read what applies to them. For example, if a school only provides foods for special events, respondents agreed they don't want to sift through detailed information regarding vending, fundraising and canteens.
- Support materials, including print and electronic materials, that could be modified and individualized at the school level to reflect the culture of a particular school for students, parents, educators and administrators regarding nutrition education and promotion would be valued.

Next Steps

These findings provide valuable insights and considerations that will influence the preliminary design of Guidelines for

Foods Served in Manitoba Schools. The consultation comments, together with existing research literature and anecdotal experiences from other jurisdictions, will shape the draft guidelines and supporting materials.

It is expected that there will be several opportunities for community consultation on the proposed drafts between mid-March and the end of May 2006. Focus groups with educators, students, nutritionists and dietitians, and industry are planned. It is also expected that the materials will be made available electronically for the general public's review and comments. Revised materials for use in schools during the 2006/07 school year will be ready by October 2006. Further feedback will be solicited during that school year and revisions made to the guidelines and supporting pieces for the following school year.

In addition, a provincewide survey of existing food practices and food availability will be conducted in the spring of 2006 and repeated in the future to assess change in the food environments in schools.

Appendix 1

Letter to Superintendents

To:

Re: Request for consultation on school food and nutrition

November 2005

Dear,

In June 2005 the Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures All-Party Task Force released the *Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures Task Force Report*. The report makes recommendations in ten key areas. You recently received a letter from Peter Bjornson, Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth and Theresa Oswald, Minister of Healthy Living alerting you to the government's intent to take action on the recommendations, particularly in the areas of nutrition and physical activity in schools.

As a support to the province, Dietitians of Canada has been contracted by Manitoba Health and Healthy Living to develop food and nutrition guidelines for use in all K-12 public schools throughout the province. Our ultimate goal is to provide useful, practical and supportive materials that reflect the interests, concerns and capacities of communities and schools locally. In order to do this successfully, it is critical that we understand what school administrators, teachers, parents, students, food preparation staff and volunteers will be looking for in guidelines and other materials that will help to support positive change in the food and nutrition environment in schools.

Our first step is to undertake a series of consultation meetings with schools across the province. Criteria for selecting schools required that we included a mix of schools in urban, rural and northern Manitoba; elementary, junior and senior high schools; and schools known to be at different stages of thinking about or taking action on food and nutrition. A Colony school, a Francophone school, a publicly funded independent school and an institutional school will also be consulted. The goal is not to represent every school division or region but develop an understanding of the possible issues, barriers and success factors which will influence the implementation of nutrition guidelines.

Maxine Meadows, Registered Dietitian with the Nutrition in School Project, would like to contact xxxx to set up an appointment for a consultation. Please find attached the letter and discussion questions we would like to send. Interviews may be conducted either in-person or by telephone as access and time allows. Ideally, we would like to complete the consultation phase over the next three weeks but certainly before the Christmas break as we are planning to release draft guidelines for discussion and further input in the early spring.

If you have any questions or concerns about this request, please feel free to contact Maxine by telephone at XXXXXXX or by e-mail at XXXXXXX or myself at XXXXX.

Thank you in advance for your assistance and support with this important project. Your involvement will help shape all school nutrition policy and guidelines in Manitoba in the coming years.

Sincerely,

Corinne Eisenbraun, MA, RD
Regional Executive Director
Dietitians of Canada

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Appendix II
Letter to School Principals

Attention:

Re: Request for consultation on school food and nutrition

November 2005

Dear,

In June 2005 the Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures All-Party Task Force released the *Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures Task Force Report*. The report makes recommendations in ten key areas. You recently received a letter from Peter Bjornson, Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth and Theresa Oswald, Minister of Healthy Living alerting you to the government's intent to take action on the recommendations, particularly in the areas of nutrition and physical activity in schools. The five nutrition recommendations are listed below for your reference.

As a support to the province, Dietitians of Canada has been contracted by Manitoba Health and Healthy Living to develop food and nutrition guidelines for use in all K-12 public schools throughout the province. Our ultimate goal is to provide useful, practical and supportive materials that reflect the interests, concerns and capacities of communities and schools locally. In order to do this successfully, it is critical that we understand what school administrators, teachers, parents, students, food preparation staff and volunteers will be looking for in guidelines and other materials that will help to support positive change in the food and nutrition environment in schools.

Your school has been recommended as a key source of information. We have sought permission from your Superintendent to contact you to **request a 1–1.5 hour meeting with key school informants who are or will be involved with implementing school nutrition policies and activities**. This might include any or all of the people mentioned above. I hope that you will agree to participate in this consultation phase. I will follow up with you shortly to schedule a meeting which would ideally take place during the weeks of November 21st or November 28th at a time convenient to you and other key informants. Discussion questions are attached for your consideration.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me either by telephone at xxxxx or by e-mail at xxxxx. Thank you in advance for your assistance with this important project. Your input will help shape all school nutrition policy and guidelines in Manitoba in the coming years.

Sincerely,

Maxine Meadows, Registered Dietitian
Nutrition in Schools Project

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Task Force recommendations on school food and nutrition

In June 2005 the Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures All-Party Task Force released the *Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures Task Force Report*. The province has made a commitment to take action on all recommendations. The Task Force recommends that the provincial government increase access to nutritious foods in schools, specifically that:

- the provincial government require all schools to have a written school food and nutrition policy as part of their school plan
- the provincial government provide model policy statements as examples, to help schools or school divisions to develop specifics to suit local needs and circumstances
- the provincial government provide “Guidelines for Foods Served at Schools” as well as a series of tools and resources that schools could access to help them take action in this area
- schools report annually to parent advisory councils and Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth on actions taken regarding written school food and nutrition policies
- these recommendations be phased in over a period of two years beginning in the 2006/2007 school year for grades K-6 with remaining grades to follow in the 2007/2008 school year.

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Appendix III

Consultation Interview Questions

Consultation Interview (In-person or Telephone)

School Name:

Date:

Background

In June 2005 the Province of Manitoba released the *Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures Task Force Report*. The report makes recommendations in 10 key areas, one of which is nutrition in schools. The government has made a commitment to take action on all recommendations, including increasing access to nutritious foods in schools:

1. The provincial government will require all schools to have a written school food and nutrition policy as part of their school plan.
2. The provincial government will provide model policy statements as examples to help schools or school divisions to develop specifics to suit local needs and circumstances.
3. The provincial government will provide “Guidelines for Foods Served at Schools” as well as a series of tools and resources that schools could access to help them take action in this area.
4. Schools will report annually to parent advisory councils and Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth on actions taken regarding written school food and nutrition policies.
5. These recommendations will be phased in over a period of two years beginning in the 2006/2007 school year for grades K-6 with remaining grades to follow in the 2007/2008 school year.

Part A

1. Were you aware of the Task Force report?
2. Were you aware of the recommendations on school food and nutrition?
3. Were you aware that the Province has committed to take action on these recommendations?
4. Has your school recently discussed or undertaken changes related to food served or available in the school?

Part B

1. Do you have any written policies or guidelines in place regarding food served or available in the school? What topic areas does your policy cover (allergies, fundraising, vending machines, lunch program, etc.)?

If answer to Q#1 above is YES please discuss the following questions:

1. When was the policy implemented? How long did it take to plan your actions prior to implementation?
2. When you were developing the policy what was most helpful (either in terms of supporting materials or people)?
3. Were there barriers or problems?
4. Who was involved in developing the policy?

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5. Who is responsible for implementing, communicating and evaluating how the policy is working in your school?
6. What persuaded you a policy was needed?
7. Would you say the policy is successful, and in what aspects?
8. What are areas that could use a change or more work?
9. Are there any tools that you are looking for or that you think would support your actions?

If the answer to Q#1 above is NO please discuss the following questions.

1. Has any work been done in your school to promote healthy eating and nutrition other than classroom or curriculum requirements?
2. What do you think the possible barriers are for your school in developing a food and nutrition policy?
3. What might assist you in overcoming any barriers?
4. Do you see any opportunities or benefits that would come out of having a school food and nutrition policy or guidelines? What might those be? Any negative implications?
5. Who in your school community would be involved in developing, implementing, communicating about and evaluating a food and nutrition policy?

Part C

A number of other provinces have developed guidelines to assist schools in offering healthy food choices to students and in developing food and nutrition policies. Dietitians of Canada has been contracted by the Province to assist in developing similar guidelines for Manitoba. We want to make sure that our guidelines are practical and make sense in the Manitoba context.

1. What do you think should be included in school food and nutrition guidelines?
2. Once guidelines are available, what do you think will be needed to help you implement them (ex: print/electronic materials, support from nutrition professionals, etc.)?

Part D

1. Do you have any other comments that might help inform or direct this project?
2. Is anyone else involved with or interested in this topic at your school that should be consulted who wasn't able to be here today?

Thank you for your time and input! The information you've provided today will inform the development of provincial school food and nutrition guidelines. We very much appreciate your participation at this critical juncture in the project. In the spring a more extensive survey will be sent to all schools in the province to complete and will consider questions on both nutrition and physical activities. I would encourage you to make sure your school completes the survey as it will provide important baseline information for future use.

Names and positions of persons involved in the discussion.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

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Appendix IV
Consultation Facilitators

Corinne Eisenbraun, MA, RD

Helene Fernandez, RD – French Language Facilitator

Maxine Meadows, RD

Vivian Schultz, MSc

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Appendix V

Location of Consultations

Argyle Alternative High School –
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Winnipeg School Division

College Louis-Riel – Winnipeg, Manitoba
Division Scolaire Franco-Manitobaine

Colony Schools – Bon Homme, James
Valley, Miami, Point School, Rosebank,
Skyview, Starlight – Elm Creek, Manitoba
Prairie Rose School Division

Cormorant Lake School –
Cormorant, Manitoba
Frontier School Division

Dauphin Regional Comprehensive
Secondary Ecole Secondaire Reg De
Dauphin – Dauphin, Manitoba
Mountain View School Division

Ecole Robert Browning –
Winnipeg, Manitoba
St. James Assiniboia School Division

Edward Schreyer School Ecole Edward-
Schreyer – Beausejour, Manitoba
Sunrise School Division

Elm Creek School – Elm Creek, Manitoba
Prairie Rose School Division

Elmwood Elementary – Altona, Manitoba
Border Land School Division

Gordon Bell High – Winnipeg, Manitoba
Winnipeg School Division

Hamiota Collegiate – Hamiota, Manitoba
Park West School Division

Helen Betty Osborne Ininiw Edu. Res.
Centre – Norway House, Manitoba
Frontier School Division

Manitoba School for the Deaf –
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Institutional School

Maple Leaf School – Winnipeg, Manitoba
River East Transcona School Division

Mulvey School – Winnipeg, Manitoba
Winnipeg School Division

New Era School – Ecole New Era –
Brandon, Manitoba
Brandon School Division

R.D. Parker Collegiate Inst. Coll. R.D.
Parker – Thompson, Manitoba
Mystery Lake School Division

River Heights School Ecole River Heights –
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Winnipeg School Division

St. Mary’s Academy – Winnipeg, MB
Funded Independent School

Ste. Anne Collegiate –
Ste. Anne, Manitoba
Seine River School Division

Stevenson Island School –
Stevenson Island, Manitoba
Frontier School Division

Sun Valley Ecole Sun Valley –
Winnipeg, Manitoba
River East Transcona School Division

Victoria School –
Portage la Prairie, Manitoba
Portage la Prairie School Division

William Whyte – Winnipeg, Manitoba
Winnipeg School Division

Windsor School – Winnipeg, Manitoba
Louis Riel School Division

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Acknowledgements

Dietitians of Canada – Nutrition in Manitoba Schools Project would like to thank all the schools, parents, students, food service employees, teachers and administration that participated as well as the following agencies for their support with the consultation project.

Dairy Farmers of Manitoba – Nutrition Education Department

Manitoba Council on Child Nutrition

Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth

Manitoba Health

Manitoba Healthy Living

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