



Question and Answer Guide

The following questions and answers were prepared to provide much of the information you may need as you're familiarizing yourself with the Food and Nutrition Policy for Nova Scotia Public Schools.

QUESTIONS ABOUT HOW THE POLICY WAS DEVELOPED

Q: Where did this policy come from?

A: The policy came from educators, health professionals, parents, and students committed to student health and to improving the food and beverage choices available in schools. School boards and individual schools had already made the move to healthy school food policies and guidelines. As a result, the Department of Education and its partners decided to build on the great work that was already underway. The Food and Nutrition in Nova Scotia Schools Policy Work Group was formed in September 2004, tasked with drafting a provincial school food and nutrition policy.

Q: Who was part of the Policy Work Group?

A: Representatives from several government departments, school boards, and school administration, nutrition professionals, as well as teacher, parent, and public health organizations across the province were part of the Work Group.

Q: What does this policy mean for schools and students?

A: When serving and selling food, Nova Scotia's public schools will emphasize healthy, affordable food and beverage choices that meet established nutrition standards and contribute to health and learning. This policy applies to cafeterias, canteens, vending machines, as well as any school-based breakfast, lunch, or snack programs that take place during the school day.

Q: What is the policy based on?

A: Much of the policy is based on what boards and schools in this province have already done to ensure healthy food and beverages are available in schools. The policy was drafted after in-depth interviews with program directors and principals in 2003; a review of local, national, and international school food and nutrition policies; examination of the health evidence; reflection on experiences working with schools; feedback from public consultation; and on

student, industry, and school board focus groups. The policy was developed in consultation with members of the Food and Nutrition in Nova Scotia Schools Work Group.

Q: Why a school food and nutrition policy?

A: All students need healthy foods to learn, grow, be active, and develop into healthy productive adults. The years students are in school are a critical period of growth and development. There is also much research to confirm what teachers have known for a long time: that health, nutrition, and learning are linked. Healthy, well-nourished students are better able to learn and perform in class. Eating well and being active take more than willpower. A policy that supports healthy food and beverage choices can help ensure that the healthy choice is the easy choice in schools.

Students have access to food and beverages in many places including home, schools, and the larger communities in which they live, learn, work and play. Students tell us that schools are role models that influence their food choices and intakes. Second to the home, schools are the place where students likely spend the most time during their growth years, a time when health habits are formed. Together with the home and other settings, schools can have a positive influence on the food choices and eating habits of students.

Q: Why are the Department of Education and the Department of Health Promotion and Protection introducing this policy now?

A: It is well known that healthy eating contributes to good health and can help reduce the risk of developing diseases later in life. However, for the first time in history, our children and youth are developing nutrition-related diseases like type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure, previously only seen in older adults. Health professionals are now stating that, because of poor nutrition and the early development of nutrition-related diseases, this may be the first generation of children who may not outlive their parents.

We also know from recent studies that one out of every three Nova Scotia children and youth is overweight or obese. Poor nutrition is affecting the health of children and youth across the country and around the world. Ready access to high calorie, nutrient-poor food and drinks is partly to blame for this phenomenon. In a recent Nova Scotia study of 5,200 grade five students, more than half did not meet *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating* recommendations for minimum servings from the four food groups. Additionally, grade 5 students who bought lunch at school were at a greater risk of becoming overweight, compared with those bringing lunch from home.

Q: How does this policy fit with other provincial initiatives for children and youth?

A: This policy shows the government's continued investment in children and youth. The health of children and youth is very important to government, school boards, district health authorities, schools, parents, and students. The policy is a key part of three provincial strategies:

- *Healthy Eating Nova Scotia* (2005), the provincial healthy eating strategy that was developed and is being implemented collaboratively to address nutrition-related health issues of which school nutrition is a priority.
- *Learning for Life II: Brighter Futures Together* (2005), the Department of Education's plan for education of which a major theme is developing healthy active learners
- *Health Promoting Schools Program*, shared by the Departments of Education and Health Promotion and Protection and designed to involve the broader school community in making schools healthy places for learning, working, and playing.

Q: I heard that this policy was the government’s answer to the obesity crisis in children and youth, and was likened to putting kids on a diet.

A: This policy is about contributing to health and education outcomes for all of our students. Its goal is to increase access to healthy food and beverages in schools because schools are such an important role model and influence and because we know that healthy foods help students learn. The policy reflects the healthy eating principles outlined in *Canada’s Food Guide to Healthy Eating*, which recommends a balanced pattern of eating for all Canadians.

Addressing obesity in children, youth, and adults requires a number of combined approaches. Government is addressing these through initiatives and policies designed to increase access to physical activity, affordable healthy foods, and health-promoting environments. *Food and Nutrition Policy for Nova Scotia Public Schools* contributes to the goal of creating healthy Nova Scotians now and in the future.

Q: Who was consulted on the policy?

A: During the development of the policy, many individuals and organizations were consulted. A draft of the policy was released for public consultation between September 15 and October 31, 2005. More than 1000 responses came from parents, students, educators, school boards, school organizations, parent-teacher organizations, food industry, and health professionals. Focus groups were also held with the eight school boards, students, food industry representatives, and public health staff to get recommendations on how to put the policy into action. Information from consultations was reviewed and used by the Work Group to recommend changes to the draft policy.

Q: What was heard in consultations?

A: Most respondents strongly supported the policy’s main goal of getting more nutritious foods and beverages into schools to improve student health and learning. Many agreed that there was a need for nutrition guidelines or policy, but wanted time to put the policy into action. Students reported that they wanted more healthy food choices in school and strongly supported making food and beverages more affordable. Critical comments on the draft included the lack of flexibility for including less nutritious foods at special functions, the emphasis on teachers as role models, concerns around how schools would achieve cost-recovery, and the financial impact of limiting fast food as well as bake sale, chocolate bar, and cookie dough fundraisers.

Q: How has the policy changed since the draft was released in the fall of 2005?

A: Changes made to the policy in response to what was heard during consultation include the following:

- The policy applies to the school day and to evening programs provided by the school for students. Schools are encouraged, but not required, to apply the policy to weekend events.
- The policy has been divided into twelve directives and five guidelines to distinguish between components that are mandated and components that are recommendations.
- The emphasis on teachers as role models has been changed to include others who are encouraged to model healthy eating practices.
- Teachers are encouraged rather than directed to comply with the policy.
- References to cost-recovery have been replaced with a statement that schools “make affordability the primary consideration when setting prices and profit margins” and that meal programs, in particular, be priced with this in mind.

- In response to the request for time to find alternative fundraisers to chocolate bar and cookie dough campaigns, schools have until September 2007 to implement this directive; the directive will be reviewed with principals in Spring 2007.
- In response to the request for flexibility to serve less nutritious foods at special functions, less nutritious foods can now be offered along with healthy items.
- Food and Beverage Guidelines have been re-named *Food and Beverage Standards for Nova Scotia Public Schools* and include three levels of information to help with decision making: specific nutrient criteria (e.g., less than 3 g fat/serving), food for thought (e.g., choose items that say 100% juice), and the Maximum, Moderate and Minimum Nutrition posters containing lists of food and beverages.
- The policy will be phased-in over a three-year period to ensure that schools have time to find new menu options, renegotiate contracts, and examine fundraising alternatives.

QUESTIONS ABOUT WHAT IS IN THE POLICY

Q: When is the policy in effect? Does it apply during evening and weekends?

A: The policy and food and beverage standards are in effect from the time students arrive at school until they leave at the end of the day. The policy and food and beverage standards also apply to evening programs for students provided by the school. Schools are encouraged—but not required—to follow the policy and standards during school-based programs for students taking place on weekends in the school.

Q: To whom do the policy and food and beverage standards apply?

A: The policy and standards apply to all public schools in Nova Scotia. They also apply to visitors (e.g., guest speakers), organizations (e.g., public health, educational groups), and businesses (e.g., contracted cafeteria services, catering) that serve or sell food to students during the school day. The policy does not apply to foods and beverages brought to school as lunches or snacks from home.

Q: What about hot lunch programs run by parents for profit, or volunteer non-profit breakfast or snack programs?

A: The policy and standards apply to breakfast, snack, and hot lunch programs in which food is served or sold to students in school during the school day.

Q: It's clear that the policy applies to canteens, cafeterias, and vending machines. But what about lunches and snacks brought from home?

A: The policy does *not* apply to foods and beverages brought to school as lunches or snacks from home. It is *not* intended as a tool to judge or “police” food and beverages brought from home. Items sent from home as meals or snacks are determined by parents. Many parents have the option of choosing healthier items for their children, and we hope they choose to do so most of the time.

Q: Some parents bring in fast-food meals for their children at lunch hour. Does the policy apply to these meals?

A: Again, that is a decision made by parents and, under the policy, would be interpreted as a lunch brought from home.

Q: Do teachers and other staff members also have to follow the policy?

A: Teachers, administrative staff, volunteers, and guests to the school, as well as community groups that use schools for local events, are encouraged—but not required—to model the policy and standards when choosing food and beverages for themselves. Students tell us that many adults (inside as well as outside of the school) serve as role models. We encourage all adult role models to promote consistent messages about healthy eating to students—to follow the policy and standards.

School staff benefit from healthy eating programs and policies in their workplace. Many workplaces in Nova Scotia, including hospitals, government departments, school board offices, and private businesses, have adopted healthy work place plans and policies that support healthy food and beverages as well as other positive health behaviours.

Q: What about special functions held in schools?

A: The policy recognizes that food is an important part of traditional celebrations and special functions. While the policy promotes healthy food and beverages, it recognizes the need to be flexible in allowing a wider range of food and beverages during times of celebration. For special functions (events that may occur once or twice a month), items like cookies, cakes, and candy can be served along with healthy food and beverages from the Maximum and Moderate Nutrition posters. The Special Functions directive reinforces the concept of moderation: small amounts, once in a while.

The intent with the special functions directive is to encourage more schools to do what many others are already doing: serve healthy food and beverages at special functions and events along with the treats. Many schools have reported success with offering students healthy choices such as vegetables and dip, fruit trays, hummus and pita, popcorn, water, and chocolate milk along with traditional party foods.

Q: Would a classroom birthday party or Christmas party be considered a special function?

A: Teachers have told us that almost every day in school could be considered as a “special day.” In contrast to classroom parties, Special Functions are special events or occasions occurring once or twice a month and involving a large number of students (e.g., Spring Fling, Christmas bake sale). It is up to schools to determine which one or two events a month would be considered Special Functions. A classroom party would not likely be considered a Special Function.

Q: Would a basketball or football game after school be considered a special function?

A: A regular after school or evening basketball game would not be considered a Special Function. Any food and beverages served and sold at after school or evening games would need to follow the policy and food and beverage standards. Schools may choose to treat a playoff game or a winning celebration as one of the two monthly Special Functions.

Q: What is wrong with using food as a reinforcer? Can a fruit tray or pizza party as a reward for good behaviour or a job well-done really be that bad?

A: Using food as a reinforcer can teach children and youth to eat when they are not hungry, instead of responding to their body’s hunger cues. Alternatives to using food to reinforce behaviour are an important part of creating a healthy school environment.

An alternative would be to provide students with pizza as part of a lunchtime celebration, or provide time to participate in a fun physical activity or game.

Q: When the draft policy was released for consultation, there was a lot of concern over the impact on fundraising. Can schools and home and school associations still fund raise using bake sales and chocolate bars?

A: School fundraising contributes valuable programs and opportunities for students. For example, fundraisers that support athletic programs and the purchase of additional equipment help to encourage physical activity. However, health and fitness cannot happen on a diet fuelled by sugar, fat, and salt. Fundraising can support the health of both students and the community by offering healthy food and beverage options or non-food items for sale. This type of fundraising also helps reinforce consistent health messages to students.

Many schools in Nova Scotia have already shown that they can raise money and promote health at the same time. Schools are abandoning chocolate bar campaigns for healthier alternatives. Other schools have moved to healthier items for bake sales.

During consultation, we heard that schools needed time to find health promoting and successful fundraisers to replace chocolate bar campaigns and traditional bake sales. The policy sets September 2007 as the date when fundraising using food and beverages must centre on items from the Maximum and Moderate Nutrition posters. The date for implementation of this policy directive will be re-examined in spring of 2007.

We will be sharing successful, local fundraising ideas with schools to assist them with the move to healthier alternatives.

Q: Can fundraisers like bake sales take place during the school day or after school hours?

A: During the school day when students are present, food and beverages served and sold need to be consistent with the food and beverage standards. Eventually, bake sales and other fundraisers with food of Minimum Nutrition will not be permitted during the school day as defined in the policy (i.e., from the time when students arrive at school to the time they leave at the end of the day and at after-school and evening programs for students provided by the school).

Schools may wish to have a bake sale fundraiser as a Special Function and to include food and beverages of Minimum as well as Maximum and Moderate Nutrition. Alternatively, schools can choose to have a bake sale fundraiser during the school day if they serve and sell foods of Maximum and Moderate Nutrition like whole grain trail mixes, muffins and quick breads made with whole wheat flour and fruit or vegetables (e.g., banana, zucchini), granola and granola bars, biscuits and scones, oatmeal cookies, cereal squares, low fat popcorn, rice cakes, baked chips, and soft pretzels.

Parent or community groups who participate in school fundraising off the school site or outside of the school day are also encouraged to choose non-food items or food and beverages that are of Maximum and Moderate Nutrition. This will help promote healthy, consistent messages to students and the community at large. However, the policy does not restrict the fundraising activities of parent or community groups off the school site or outside of the school day.

Q: The policy states that food and beverage suppliers can't advertise junk food on scoreboards, clocks, and vending machines that run afoul of the new policy. Does that mean schools have to remove scoreboards with fast food or soft drink companies advertised on them?

A: No. Scoreboards and game clocks that predate the policy will not have to be removed. However, any *new* contracts with food and beverage services involving promotional items must comply with the policy and the new food and beverage standards.

Q: Whole wheat pasta, fresh fruit, and pizza topped with mostly vegetables may not be a big draw for a lot of students. This combination could mean a lot less revenue for schools that rely on cafeteria sales for program extras. How are schools supposed to make ends meet if they are losing money?

A: There is the assumption that students will not buy healthy food and beverages. But this has been proven wrong again and again. Student focus groups have consistently asked that more healthy, affordable food and beverage choices be available at school. Some schools that have made the shift to healthier options report seeing revenues dip initially, then recover after the first year or two. Involving students in choosing menu items creates buy-in and greater acceptance of the items offered. For younger students, taste-testing and voting on new healthy menu items is a relatively simple way to get them involved and build support.

Q: Typically healthy items like fresh fruit and vegetables and milk products tend to be more expensive. Will this policy be able to make food more affordable for students?

A: School food and beverages should exist primarily for providing nutrition for learning, growth, physical activity, and health, not money-making or fundraising. In order to ensure that healthy food and beverage choices are accessible to most students, the policy urges schools to make affordability the main consideration when setting prices and profit margins. This is especially important when it comes to the price of meals. As the price increases, fewer students are able to afford to purchase foods they need to be active learners throughout the school day. For some schools, this may mean coming up with alternative fundraising options to ensure the accessibility and affordability of healthy food and beverages. (We will be sharing alternative fundraising ideas with boards and their schools.)

Many things influence the cost of food and beverages. As all schools make the shift to healthier food and beverages, the increased demand for such items will make them more affordable from suppliers. Additionally, we are exploring ways to better co-ordinate school purchasing and delivery, which can mean cost savings for schools. Continued school participation in the Department of Agriculture's School Milk Program helps to ensure that milk remains affordable for all students in public schools. The move to healthy affordable food and beverages will happen over time. We plan to share information with schools that will help them achieve this goal.

Q: Students should have the right to choose whatever they want to eat or drink. If you remove choice and only offer healthy options, how will they ever learn to make good decisions in the real world?

A: Students need to be supported in making wise choices for their health. Making healthy choices requires both knowledge (e.g., the nutrition and health curriculum) and a supportive environment (e.g., the kind of food served, sold, and promoted in school) in order to become habit. Healthy choices need to be just as available and appealing as less healthy choices.

Sadly, in many environments (e.g., convenience stores, restaurants, community centres, arenas, movie theatres), the availability and promotion of nutritionally poor food and beverages is overwhelming. Many schools have started to tip this balance by offering students a variety of healthy choices that support nutrition education in the classroom and reinforce the message that good nutrition is important for learning as well as for long-term health and well-being. Many schools that have made the shift to more nutritious choices recognize that students should have the right to choose healthy food and beverages.

Q: Why can't fast food and junk food still be allowed in school in moderation?

A: During consultation, we had many requests that the policy allow fast food and junk food in moderation. The majority of respondents recognized that these items added taste and enjoyment to eating, but were generally nutritionally poor.

When we asked students, parents, teachers, principals, food industry representatives, and health professionals their opinions of how often fast food and junk food might be offered “in moderation” in the policy, most responded with “once a week,” “every couple of weeks,” or “once or twice a month.” No one suggested that fast foods or junk food should be available for students to choose everyday, all day long. Unfortunately, in some schools they are readily available in this way. When fast food and junk food are available, students tend to choose these items over healthier fare. Increasing and promoting the number of healthy food choices in school can support students in reversing the trend of poor eating habits.

Food and beverages in school should be for the purpose of providing the nutrients and energy needed for learning, growth, and physical activity. While it is true that there are no “good” foods and “bad” foods, there are “most of the time” and “sometimes” foods and beverages. When food and beverages of minimal nutritional value are available and promoted to students at school every day, it becomes difficult to practice moderation. Schools have the option of including foods of Minimum Nutrition one to two times a month as part of Special Functions. We believe this policy answers the call for moderation.

QUESTIONS ABOUT WHEN THE POLICY WILL TAKE EFFECT

Q: Does the policy come into effect immediately?

A: The policy does take effect right away, but it recognizes that schools need time to plan and adjust to the changes. The policy, which allows for flexibility, is being phased in over three years so schools can look over menus and the Maximum, Moderate, and Minimum Nutrition food posters that are part of the Food and Beverage Standards. It also allows time for schools to review any food and beverage contracts they may have with suppliers and to work to involve students in decision-making around school food.

Here are some of the key dates:

- January 2007: Schools should work to increase access to healthy food and beverages on the Maximum and Moderate Nutrition posters. Cafeterias and canteens will no longer serve or sell items listed in the Baked Goods, Snacks or Processed Foods, and Frozen Novelties section of the Minimum Nutrition list (e.g., doughnuts, chips, chocolate bars and ice cream).
- By January 2007: Schools will serve only milk (or nutritious milk alternatives like fortified soy beverage), 100-per cent fruit juice, and water. No more pop, sports drinks, or fruit drinks will be served or sold.
- By January 2007: Schools will no longer be permitted to use deep-fat fryers to prepare food.

- By September 2007: School fundraisers involving food and beverages will centre on items of Maximum and Moderate Nutrition (subject to review in spring 2007).
- By June 2008: Mixed Foods from the Minimum Nutrition poster that do not meet the nutrient criteria will no longer be served or sold (e.g., pepperoni pizzas, hot dogs, chicken fingers, fries).
- By June 2009: All schools will have implemented all of the policy directives and will serve and sell items that meet the food and beverage standards.

Q: Once the policy is in place, do current food and beverage contracts have to be honoured?

A: Any contracts that schools have with food and beverage services can remain until they expire. Schools are encouraged to work with food and beverage suppliers and companies to introduce healthy changes within their current contracts. When they expire, any new contracts will have to meet the terms of the policy and food and beverage standards. Any new contracts that are signed during the implementation schedule must also follow the policy and standards.

Q: Is this policy the last word in what schools can sell and serve?

A: No. The Department of Education and partners will review this policy every two years.

Q: How will the policy be monitored and evaluated to ensure it is working?

A: School boards are required to report to the Department of Education and the Department of Health Promotion and Protection on the use of targeted funding provided to support implementation of the policy. School boards are also responsible for monitoring implementation and participating in a provincial evaluation of the policy, through the provincial Health Promoting Schools program. A provincial evaluation framework is currently being developed in consultation with education and health partners.

Schools are requested to inform parents, students, staff, food service providers, and community partners about the policy and food and beverage standards. Schools are also encouraged to address food, nutrition, and policy implementation issues within a new or existing committee that includes administrators, teachers, food service staff, parents, students, and partners in the community.

Q: What type of supports do schools have as they implement this policy?

A: Schools have a number of supports available to them:

- School boards received funding in 2005–06 (totalling \$250,000 and distributed based on the Department of Education’s funding formula) from the Department of Health Promotion and Protection to help implement the policy. This funding has been provided to school boards again for the 2006–2007 school year.
- Many school boards have committed funds and staff dedicated to the Health Promoting Schools program, which includes support for implementation of the school food and nutrition policy. Health Promoting Schools teams, which include school board and district health authority representatives, parents, and other community members, can assist with policy implementation issues. In 2005–2006, the Department of Health Promotion and Protection provided partnerships of school boards and district health authorities with \$500,000 Health Promoting Schools program grants, with an initial focus on healthy eating and physical activity. For the 2006–2007 school year, the Department of Health Promotion and Protection provided Health Promoting Schools program funding in the amount of \$700,000.

- School Advisory Councils and parent groups (e.g., home and school) are often very keen to be involved in school food activities and programs.
- The province's School Nutritionist and School Health Co-ordinator will support and assist boards and district health authorities with policy implementation, evaluation, and knowledge-sharing.
- The roles and responsibilities of school board Active Healthy Living Consultants and Public Health Nutritionists in the district health authorities include supporting student health and learning.
- Many boards and schools already have strong links with public health services staff (e.g., nutritionists, nurses, dental hygienists) that can provide health and nutrition support.
- School food vendors and suppliers can provide help with food and nutrition decisions. Some employ Registered Dietitians who are familiar with the preferences of students.
- The Department of Education, together with its partners, is preparing a number of resources to assist schools with the policy implementation process, including print resources, on-line resources, and pamphlets for parents and other interested members of school communities.
- Some school boards and schools have already made significant improvements in school food and nutrition. Future plans include sharing best practices and lessons learned through these initiatives with all school boards and schools.
- Education, Health Promotion and Protection, Agriculture and other government partners are also working together to create or streamline systems that will make it easier for schools to access healthy, affordable, local foods, such as discounted group purchasing options.

Q: I understand that *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating* is being revised. How will this affect the policy?

A: *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating* is currently under review and is being revised. A new food guide is expected in the fall of 2006. Any new information that affects the food and nutrition policy or the food and beverage standards will be communicated to school boards and schools.

Q: Why did you decide on a kit folder format for the policy?

A: The *Food and Nutrition Policy for Nova Scotia Public Schools* is organized in a kit folder that contains the main pieces of information schools will need to implement the policy. The folder was designed to meet the needs of a wide variety of users.

The kit folder contains the following items:

- Three booklets:
 - Executive Summary, Introduction, Background, References, and Working Group
 - Policy Directives and Guidelines
 - Food and Beverage Standards for Nova Scotia Public Schools
- Three posters containing nutrient criteria, tips when selecting foods and beverages, and lists of food and beverages:
 - Maximum Nutrition
 - Moderate Nutrition
 - Minimum Nutrition

Individuals can easily identify and pull the information they require, whether it is background research from one booklet, a policy directive from another, or specific nutrient criteria.

Posters were chosen because they can be displayed to both communicate and reinforce the contents of the policy and food and beverage standards. The folder contains space for additional support items, such as the new *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating* once it is released.

Q: How will the policy be distributed? How can I get a copy?

A: Copies of the policy are being distributed to schools and their School Advisory Councils, school boards, student councils, home and schools associations, and Health Promoting Schools Committees. Copies are also being distributed to the Nova Scotia Teachers Union, public health professionals working in district health authorities, food industry partners, and academia. The policy kit will be available in French and distributed to schools and partners. To see a copy of the policy, contact your child's school. If you have access to a computer, you can read or download a copy online from the Department of Education's website <<http://www.EDnet.ns.ca>> or the Department of Health Promotion and Protection's website <<http://www.gov.ns.ca/hpp>>.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE FOOD AND BEVERAGE STANDARDS

Q: What are the Food and Beverage Standards for Nova Scotia Public Schools, and how are they to be used?

A: The standards are intended for all who make decisions about school food: students, parents, teachers, administrators, food service workers, food service companies and suppliers, and food industry professionals, among others. The standards provide three kinds of information that can help schools when making decisions about what to serve and sell. They include nutrient criteria, food for thought advice, and lists of foods and beverages. This information appears in three posters that list options for each category and food group of *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating*. The three poster categories are as follows:

- Maximum Nutrition (can be served and sold daily)
- Moderate Nutrition (can be served and sold no more than 2 times per week or make up no more than 30% of choices at one location)
- Minimum Nutrition (can be served and sold only once or twice a month as part of Special Functions)

Q: What are the Food and Beverage Standards based on?

A: The Food and Beverage Standards for Nova Scotia Public Schools are based upon *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating*, Health Canada's Nutrition Claims, standards set in other provinces, and knowledge and experience with food and beverages in schools.

Q: When and where should the Food and Beverage Standards be used?

A: They should be used when and where food is served and sold to students during the school day: cafeterias, canteens, and vending machines; breakfast, lunch, and snack programs; school fundraisers using food and beverages; school-based sports events; after school and evening programs provided by the school; special functions; and for decisions around promotion or advertising of food and beverages in school.

Q: What are some examples of food and beverages listed in the Maximum, Moderate and Minimum Nutrition posters?

A: Maximum Nutrition (Can be served and sold daily):

Food: whole grain breads, bagels, cereals, crackers, and lower-fat whole grain muffins; fresh, frozen or canned fruit (packed in water or juice), and vegetables; salads; lower fat yogurt and cheese strings; lean hamburgers and eggs; whole wheat vegetarian pizza or pizza with lean deli meats; fruit and milk smoothies; whole wheat pita sandwiches and wraps; stews and chili; burritos and soft tacos; sub sandwiches made with whole grain bread and lean deli meats; and chicken stir fry.

Beverages: milk, including flavoured, lower fat milks (e.g., 2% or less MF chocolate, banana) and milk alternatives (e.g., fortified soy beverage); fruit juice, water.

Moderate Nutrition (Can be sold no more than 2-times per week or make up no more than 30 per cent of choices):

Food: white enriched bread, buns, pancakes, and pita; banana bread, granola bars (not dipped in chocolate or containing candy), and oatmeal cookies; pretzels, and baked chips; applesauce or fruit blends with sugar added; fruit in light syrup; vegetable and noodle soups; oven fries; milk-based pudding; cheese slices; frozen yogurt; ice milk; meatballs; canned fish; macaroni and cheese; sloppy Joes; BLT sandwich; pizza with lean deli-meats; hard tacos; quiche; grilled cheese sandwiches on white bread.

Beverages: Whole milk, hot chocolate (made with milk), yogurt drinks.

Minimum Nutrition (Can be served or sold once or twice a month as part of special functions)

Food: Hot dogs, battered or fried burgers, chicken nuggets, French fries, poutine, chocolate bars, chips, donuts, cupcakes, brownies, pie.

Beverages: pop, sweetened fruit drinks (e.g., punch), flavoured water, sports drinks, coffee, lemonade

Q: How often can schools serve foods and beverages of Moderate Nutrition?

A: These foods can be served and sold no more than two times per week or make up no more than 30 percent of choices at one location. The serving and selling of these foods and beverages have been limited because they are less nutritious than those of Maximum Nutrition.

This description was also chosen to accommodate schools having food services like cafeterias, as well as those with smaller scale meal programs and canteens. For example, schools that have canteens or vending machines that keep items stocked continuously, could stock three out of 10 vending slots or three out of 10 menu items of Moderate Nutrition. A hot lunch program at a school that served one main lunch item each day could serve items of Minimum Nutrition on two of the five days (e.g., grilled cheese on white bread one day, pizza made with lean deli meat on another day). For cafeterias and canteens that offer a large variety of food and beverages, 30% of the choices could come from items listed on the Moderate Nutrition poster.

Q: How can the Maximum, Moderate and Minimum Nutrition posters be used?

A: The posters provide information, tips, and criteria that can be used when deciding what to serve or sell in school. Posters can be placed in the cafeteria, canteen, school office, or anywhere decision-makers might use them. Decision makers include principals, teachers, students, food service staff, food and beverage suppliers, parent volunteers, and others. Depending on the type of food and beverages currently served or sold, schools may choose to display only the Maximum and Moderate Nutrition posters.

Q: Do school breakfast programs have to comply with the policy and food and beverage standards?

A: Yes. Many breakfast programs are well established in schools and have provided nutritionally sound menus for many years.

Q: Why do the food and beverage standards limit caffeine?

A: The food and beverage standards limit caffeine because of the negative effects it has on student behaviour and the ability to learn. Caffeine has the same addictive and stimulating effects on children and teens as it does in adults. It also has similar side effects that include restlessness and difficulty concentrating. Health Canada has set safety limits for caffeine for children and youth and the *Food and Nutrition Policy for Nova Scotia Public Schools* will help to meet these safety limits.

Q: Why do the food and beverage standards allow artificial sweeteners?

A: Health Canada has approved the use of artificial sweeteners in small amounts for school-age children. To reduce the likelihood of children getting used to artificially sweetened items of minimal nutritional value and to prevent excess intakes, the food and beverage standards allow for their use in nutritious foods only. Artificially sweetened beverages like pop and other drinks do not contribute any nutrients and can have significant amounts of artificial sweeteners. For some students, the limited use of artificially sweetened items may be necessary to manage certain medical conditions (e.g., diabetes).

Q: If you get rid of the pop and fruit drinks, won't students be thirsty?

A: Water is the best choice for quenching thirst and meeting the body's need for fluids. Many children and youth are choosing water as the beverage of choice. Schools that have dropped the pop have seen water sales increase in canteens and vending machines. Milk (and nutritious milk alternatives like fortified soy beverage) and 100% juice provide energy as well as important nutrients. Together these three beverage categories can meet students' needs for fluids during the day.

Q: Why do the Standards not allow sports drinks?

A: Sports drinks are nutritionally similar to diluted pop or fruit drinks and tend to be more expensive. They offer little or no nutritional value to students. They are advertised as giving athletes an "edge" when it comes to replacing fluids. However, the majority of students do not participate in the high intensity, continuous exercise for which sports drinks were originally designed. Water, juice, or milk can easily replace the fluid and energy needs of students.

