

Measuring Success: Series Report on Manitoba Healthy Food in Schools

Content Analysis of School
Division Nutrition Policies



Manitoba 

Our Story

In 2004 the provincial government launched the *Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures All-Party Task Force* to engage Manitobans across the province in talking about how to promote healthy eating and active living for young people.

The task force report was released in June 2005. As one strategy to address healthy eating, the task force recommended that the provincial government increase access to nutritious foods in schools.

Specifically it called on government to require all schools to have a written school food and nutrition policy as part of the school plan, to be phased in over a period of 3-4 years. This process was to begin in 2006-2007 for kindergarten to grade six and the following year for grades seven through twelve.

Why School Nutrition Policy?

It can promote patterns of eating that focus on balance, variety and moderation and are consistent with what is taught in the school curriculum.

It can foster an environment that values and role-models the importance of healthy eating.

It provides opportunities for learning, practicing and establishing healthy eating habits for a lifetime.



Why Focus on Schools?

Over the course of a school year a student may...

- eat up to 200 lunches at school
- receive food at parties, dances & cultural events
- buy food and beverages from vending machines and cafeterias
- attend a breakfast or snack program
- receive food as a classroom reward
- sell food for fundraising

Offering and promoting...

healthy food and drink choices throughout the school day is, therefore, a BIG step towards improving the nutrition of children.

Did You Know..?

- Recent research supports claims that poor nutrition is associated with poorer learning outcomes.
- Educators have linked decreased attention spans and poor student performance to hunger and missed meals.
- Poor nutrition can put young people at risk of developing childhood obesity, malnutrition, disordered eating, type 2 diabetes, iron-deficiency anemia and dental cavities.
- When poor eating habits are established in childhood, they often carry on to adulthood, where heart disease, diabetes and several types of cancer can develop as a result.



Why Look at Content of School Division Nutrition Policies?

To assist School Divisions with the creation of nutrition policies the provincial government created the Manitoba School Nutrition Handbook containing guidelines for developing nutrition policies

This content analysis study was undertaken to learn how and to what extent the handbook was used in the creation of nutrition policies. Specifically, we wanted to answer:

1. How have school divisions used the handbook?
2. Which policy components have been widely supported?
3. What components were not widely used?
4. How can we help divisions improve nutrition policies?



What We Looked At

Components of policy, including: mission or vision, purpose, scope, plan for communication, accountability, and specification of healthy eating practices and guidelines.

We asked:

1. Have these components been incorporated?
2. What is the level of detail used?

How We Looked At It

We obtained all school division nutrition policies.

We thoroughly examined each division policy.

We made a list of all components found within each policy.

We calculated the number of times each section and sub-section was mentioned after reviewing all policies.

We controlled quality by having a second researcher review and confirm findings.

How We Evaluated the Results

We determined the number of divisions that included each individual component in their nutrition policy.

Under each specific procedure and protocol we recorded what type and how often specific sub-categories were used.

What We Learned

Length, Breadth and Depth of Policies

- The length of division nutrition policies varied widely from a single paragraph to extensive 4 to 5 page documents.
- The depth and breadth of divisional nutrition policies also varied. A few policies contained only a mission statement or mission and vision statement. Most policies also contained specific procedures and protocols to be followed and some policies contained guidelines for accountability, communication, evaluation and monitoring.

In 12 of 38 school division policies it was stated that schools within the division were to develop individual in-depth nutrition policies.

Accountability

61%

of school divisions included a plan for monitoring and accountability within their policy.

52%

of policies indicated the person[s] accountable for monitoring policy implementation.

Examples of Accountability Statements taken from Divisional Nutrition Policies:

“The Superintendent shall review the annual school plans and school reports to monitor the implementation of the nutrition policy”

“Each school...shall form a Healthy Foods Committee... each school year. The Healthy Foods Committee shall meet on a regular basis to monitor implementation of the Healthy Foods Policy in the school. Provide ongoing evaluation/ comments to the Division’s Health and Wellness Coordinator.”

Communication

86%

of divisions included a plan for communication

60%

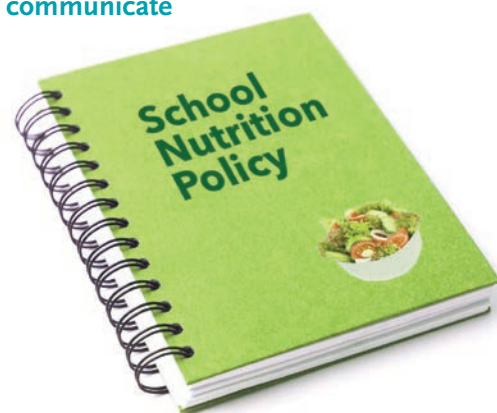
had a plan to communicate to staff

55%

to parents

55%

to students



Most of these policies stipulated that communication would occur via the school plan.

Healthy Eating Practices

33 of 38 school division policies contained guidelines for healthy eating practices in schools.

Most school divisions used examples from the handbook when developing their policy.

The following depicts how many school divisions included each of the suggestions for specific healthy eating action areas outlined in the *Manitoba School Nutrition Handbook*:

- 81% Fundraising
- 78% Cafeterias and Canteens
- 75% Vending Machines
- 79% defining nutritious and non- nutritious food
- 72% Special events
- 56% Teachers and Parents as leaders
- 41% Food allergies and food-related chronic disease
- 39% Classroom rewards
- 33% pricing and promotion
- 33% Eating Environment
- 30% Food Safety
- 17% Food security
- 14% food service contracts
- 3% Local food producers and suppliers
- 0% Food packaging and waste



Examples of Action Statements from Divisional Nutrition Policies

“No school is to use chocolate bars, chocolate covered products, or candy in its fundraising activities. Principals should encourage food related fundraisers to be directed at nutritious, healthy choices.”

“School will chose alternatives to food for incentive programs and rewards.”

“Meal periods are long enough for students to eat and socialize (25 minutes recommended)... eating areas are attractive and clean. Eating areas have sufficient seating...”

“Beverage vending machines will only offer milk and milk products (e.g. low fat yogurt drinks), nutritionally equivalent milk alternatives, 100% juice and water”.



“Catering contracts with external food service companies shall follow the guidelines as outlined in the Manitoba School Nutrition Handbook”

What Do These Findings Mean?

It is encouraging that many school divisions have chosen to create extensive nutrition policies containing several procedures and protocols. This suggests that school divisions value the importance of fostering healthy eating environments in schools.

Some school divisions stipulated that schools were to create individualized policies. This may account for the shortness of some division policies and possibly for the decision, by some divisions, to forgo the inclusion of procedures and protocol.

Some procedures and protocol topics were commonly referenced in the policies while other topics, contained in the Manitoba School Nutrition Handbook, were rarely mentioned. It is possible that some topics may be included within other school policies (such as allergy policies) and some topics may not be relevant to certain divisions.

Communicating the existence of school nutrition policy by way of the school plan is already a requirement by the Manitoba government. Few divisional policies specified additional means of nutrition policy communication beyond the school plan.



Where Do We Go From Here?

Divisions should be made aware of the rationale for and importance of implementing the infrequently mentioned topics from the Manitoba School Nutrition Handbook such as food waste and packaging, food service contracts, local food producers and distributors and food security.

To be effective, nutrition policies must be successfully implemented and supported. Schools should be encouraged to create a plan for monitoring policy implementation which clearly indicates the person[s] responsible for implementation and monitoring.

Schools should be encouraged to communicate their nutrition policy to parents, students and teachers on a regular basis using a variety of approaches such as newsletters, the school handbook, and division and school websites.



Monitoring and Reporting

This survey is one component of a wide-ranging evaluation of school nutrition policy and programs in Manitoba. For other reports in the series, please visit

manitoba.ca/healthyschools/foodinschools

**For enquiries please send email to
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**For information on Manitoba Healthy Food in Schools visit
manitoba.ca/healthyschools/foodinschools**

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