

School Food and Nutrition Policy

Approval Date: April 2024

Effective Date: September 2024

1. Policy Statement and Objectives

Schools provide an ideal setting for children and youth to make healthy choices and establish a foundation for lifelong healthy eating habits. Nova Scotia's *School Food and Nutrition Policy* focuses on ensuring that food sold, served, and available on-site in schools reinforces this foundation, thereby promoting health and well-being for all students. The accompanying *School Food and Beverage Standards* offer clear instructions about what constitutes healthy food.

For school activities that take place away from school grounds, the policy acknowledges the diverse food choices present in society. Schools have less control of what food is sold, served, and available at off-site settings but can still promote the importance of selecting the healthiest options available.

The policy also clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of key educational partners, including the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD), Regional Centres for Education (RCEs), the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP), school staff, and School Advisory Councils (SACs). They are all integral in fostering and maintaining a healthy food environment in schools and guiding students towards healthier choices in all contexts.

2. Definitions

school food environment: All the spaces on-site at the school where foods and beverages are sold, served, and available during the school day and the extension of the school day, such as: school, team/group, or classroom activities, and school-wide events and/or school sanctioned events (including weekend events), before and after school programs, school sports, and after-school and evening activities. The environment also includes all the information available, marketing, advertisements, branding, food labels, packages, promotions, and the pricing of foods and beverages.

school-wide event: An event where the entire school population is involved. This may include, for example, a spring fling event or a school spirit day.

School Food and Beverage Standards: The *School Food and Beverage Standards* is a provincial document that supports school staff/volunteers and food service providers to determine which foods and beverages may be sold, served, and made available in the school food environment.

3. Guiding Principles

- 3.1 A variety of healthy food and beverage choices are essential components to support student achievement and well-being.
- 3.2 Students and pre-primary children deserve equitable access to healthy foods in a non-stigmatizing manner.
- 3.3 Food is an integral part of student and pre-primary children's identity and foundational to their sense of social belonging. Traditional and culturally relevant foods and beverages need to be considered in the school food environment.
- 3.4 Schools and food service providers strive to offer food and beverages that are grown, produced, or manufactured in Nova Scotia, Atlantic Canada, or Canada, whenever possible.
- 3.5 Schools should consider consumer and food waste and support recycling and composting options in the school food environment.
- 3.6 We demonstrate valuing user voice and experience by including student and pre-primary children's input in the planning of healthy school food (i.e., student feedback from Student Success Survey, focus groups).
- 3.7 A healthy school food environment provides students and pre-primary children with opportunities to learn about health and nutrition. Creating a healthy school food environment is a shared responsibility and everyone in the school community has a role to play.

4. Application

This policy applies to


- all students and pre-primary children attending a public school in Nova Scotia
- all teachers, school administrators, other school staff, RCEs, the CSAP, and all Nova Scotia public schools
- individuals, volunteers, vendors, and businesses selling, serving, or making foods and beverages available on-site at the school

This policy does not apply to food and beverages brought to school by students, pre-primary children, and staff for their personal consumption.

5. Policy Directives

- 5.1 Food and Beverages Sold, Served, and Available On-site at Schools
 - 5.1.1 Food and beverages sold, served, and available in the school food environment will be consistent with the *School Food and Beverage Standards* except where noted in this policy.
 - 5.1.2 Schools must ensure that students, pre-primary children and staff have access to potable drinking water and will facilitate this by allowing re-usable water bottles in classrooms and learning spaces.
 - 5.1.3 Schools can continue to participate in healthy food and beverage programs, such as the School Milk Program.

- 5.1.4 Foods and beverages prepared or served as part of teaching curriculum outcomes in high school courses associated with food and nutrition may not always align with the *School Food and Beverage Standards*.
 - 5.1.5 Food or beverages at an on-site school-wide event must align with the *School Food and Beverage Standards*.
 - 5.1.6 At the administrator's approval up to ten times a year, food or beverages that do not align with the *School Food and Beverage Standards* may be included at a school-wide event.
- 5.2 Foods and Beverages Sold, Served and Available at Off-site School Activities and Events
- 5.2.1 For off-site school activities and events, schools should strive to align food and beverages sold, served and available with the *School Food and Beverage Standards* where possible. In situations where adherence is not possible, the priority will be to select the healthiest available options.
- 5.3 Inclusive Food Environments
- 5.3.1 Traditional and culturally relevant foods and beverages, and foods and beverages that honour the religious and spiritual beliefs of the populations a school serves, will be considered within the school food environment and may not always align with the *School Food and Beverage Standards*. However, food and beverages that do align with the *School Food and Beverage Standards* must also be made available.
 - 5.3.2 Schools will work with students, pre-primary children, and families to ensure that school staff and volunteers are aware of food allergies and ensure that any food and beverages sold, served, and available in schools are aligned with any provincial or RCE/CSAP guidance on allergies and/or anaphylaxis.
 - 5.3.3 Schools will ensure plans are in place for supporting children and youth with food-related chronic diseases or conditions (e.g., diabetes, celiac disease). This includes students with a Health Plan of Care requiring food or beverages that do not align with the *School Food and Beverage Standards*.
- 5.4 School Food Programming Practices
- 5.4.1 Schools will ensure that students, pre-primary children, and families are aware of any breakfast, lunch, and snack programs that are offered in or through the school.
 - 5.4.2 Schools will support students and pre-primary children requiring food and beverages in a non-stigmatizing manner and ensure there is equitable access for all.
 - 5.4.3 Schools will make affordability the primary consideration when selling prices are set for food and beverages. Food and beverages will be priced with equitable access in mind for all students and pre-primary children.
 - 5.4.4 Contracts with third-party food service providers will include clauses requiring compliance with the policy and allowing for compliance audits to confirm that the vendor is following the policy.

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- 5.4.5 Education entities and schools will follow the School Food and Nutrition Procurement Strategy.
 - 5.5 Scheduling of Lunch Period
 - 5.5.1 Within the lunch period, schools will allow students and pre-primary children time to sanitize or wash their hands and a minimum of 20 minutes to sit and eat lunch with others. Where possible, physical activity should be scheduled prior to the time allotted for eating.
 - 5.6 Fundraising and Donations
 - 5.6.1 Any fundraising organized by or through the school that involves students, pre-primary children, school staff, school teams/groups, or any school-affiliated group such as Home and School Groups or Parent-Teacher Groups that includes foods or beverages, must align with the *School Food and Beverage Standards*.
 - 5.6.2 Administrators may accept food or beverage donations that align with the *School Food and Beverage Standards*.
 - 5.6.3 Fundraising with food or beverages that takes place at an exempted school-wide event does not have to align with the *School Food and Beverage Standards*. (Please note alcohol and cannabis may never be used to fundraise.)
 - 5.6.4 For an exempt school-wide event, administrators may accept donations that do not align with the *School Food and Beverage Standards*.
 - 5.6.5 For programs supporting food security (e.g., food pantries or after the bell programs), administrators may accept donations that do not align with the *School Food and Beverage Standards*.
 - 5.7 Marketing
 - 5.7.1 Schools and RCEs/CSAP will not allow materials or items into the school environment, nor enter into any partnerships and/or agreements, that include the marketing of foods and beverages.
 - 5.8 Food and Beverages Not Used as Reinforcement
 - 5.8.1 School staff and volunteers will not offer food or beverages as a positive reinforcer nor withhold food or beverages from students or pre-primary children as a consequence.
 - 5.8.2 Through the Student Planning Team process, exceptions may be made for students with documented and approved behaviour or communication programming to allow foods or beverages that do not align with the *School Food and Beverage Standards* when required to successfully support the individual student.
 - 5.9 Food Safety
 - 5.9.1 Schools are required to comply with the [Health Protection Act](#), in accordance with the [Food Safety Regulations](#) and the [Nova Scotia Food Retail and Food Services Code](#) to prepare, serve and to transport all foods, in all activities.
 - 5.9.2 When prepared food is purchased, donated, or prepared by a food establishment, that food establishment must hold a Food Establishment Permit.

6. Roles and Responsibilities

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

- communicate the policy and associated materials to the RCEs and CSAP
- support implementation and maintain informative resources to support the policy
- ensure food and nutrition education in the curriculum supports the *School Food and Nutrition Policy*
- monitor the implementation of the policy, in collaboration with the RCEs and CSAP

Regional Centres for Education and the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial

- communicate the policy and associated materials to schools
- ensure that all school administrators have the required information to effectively implement the policy
- monitor the implementation of the policy, in collaboration with EECD, including through student voice (e.g., Student Success Survey, student consultations etc), as well as seeking advice from the regional student advisory committee and the regional school advisory council (RCEs only)
- monitor compliance with the policy
- annually attest that third party food service provider contracts are signed, up to date, and in compliance with the policy, and submit this attestation to EECD

School Administrators

- uphold the policy's guiding principles and follow policy directives
- maintain an inclusive, non-stigmatizing school food environment, including modelling positive attitudes and behaviours towards food and nutrition and avoiding judgement of student food needs and preferences
- communicate the policy and associated materials to all school staff, volunteers, food service workers, and school food vendors
- monitor compliance and implementation of the policy in their school, including through student voice (e.g., Student Success Survey, student consultations)
- communicate with families about the policy and its implications for school-related programs and all activities, including fundraising and the availability of food programs
- ensure plans are in place for supporting children and youth with food-related chronic diseases or conditions

School Advisory Councils

- advise their school administrator(s) and RCE/CSAP on the implementation of the policy in their school(s), including through student voice (e.g., Student Success Survey, student consultations), as appropriate

School Staff

- uphold the policy’s guiding principles and follow policy directives
- communicate the policy and associated materials to students, pre-primary children, and families as needed to support school administrators.
- model positive attitudes and behaviours towards food and nutrition, including avoiding judgement of student food needs and preferences

7. References

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- Nova Scotia Teachers Union
- Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP) and Regional Centres for Education (RCEs) Staff
- Minister's Student Advisory Council
- School Advisory Councils of Nova Scotia Public Schools
- Council on African Canadian Education
- Mi'kmaw Services Branch, EECD
- Mi'kmaw Elders
- Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness
- Nova Scotia Health, Public Health