



Ontario Society of Nutrition
Professionals in Public Health

La société ontarienne des professionnel(le)s
de la nutrition en santé publique

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Dear Ministers Watson and Wynne;

The Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health (OSNPPH) School Nutrition Workgroup applauds the provincial government for its heightened focus on creating healthier schools. We are particularly excited about *Ontario's Action Plan for Healthy Eating and Active Living (HEAL)*, and appreciate the opportunity to participate on the Ministry of Education Healthy Schools Working Table which is establishing the *Healthy Schools Recognition Program*.

The current school nutrition environment continues to be a significant public health concern that requires action at both the local and provincial levels. The development of the *Healthy Schools Recognition Program* is a critical opportunity for the provincial government to provide schools with clear direction to support them in achieving a healthy nutrition environment. The OSNPPH School Nutrition Workgroup considers the following to be fundamental nutrition components of the *Healthy Schools Recognition Program*:

- comprehensive, evidence-based nutrition framework which provides a whole school approach to healthy eating;
- mandatory comprehensive school food standards for all Ontario elementary and secondary schools; and,
- credible public health and community resources to support implementation of the framework and its elements.

In March 2004, the OSNPPH School Nutrition Workgroup released the *Call to Action: Creating a Healthy School Nutrition Environment*. This document provides a comprehensive framework based on nine essential elements to support a healthy school nutrition environment. The rationale for including all nine essential elements within a comprehensive school health model was thoroughly researched. The nine essential elements reflect a whole school approach that not only supports students, teachers and administration but also will influence family members and the surrounding community. A summary of the elements and recommendations are attached for your reference; the full report is available at www.osnpph.on.ca.

Prior to the release of the *Call to Action*, the necessary nutrition framework to guide public health activities in schools did not exist. As of September, 2006, we are aware of twenty-four Health Units that have officially supported and adopted the *Call to Action* as the framework by which they work with their local school communities. A list of the health units that support the *Call to Action* and examples of how the document is being used is attached.

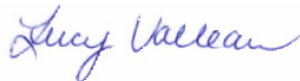
Public health staff have spent a significant amount of time to develop resources and implement activities which assist schools in meeting the recommendations in the *Call to Action*. For example, representatives from 10 health units have formed the *Creating A Healthy School Nutrition Environment* (CHSNE) Health Unit Collaboration to produce a toolkit to support schools with implementing the nine essential elements. This toolkit, *Nutrition Tools for Schools*, has been both piloted and evaluated in 18 schools from across the province. It will be used by participating health units in all future work with schools. An overview of the toolkit is attached for your reference.

Finally, it is imperative that the province establish mandatory, minimum school food standards. Without food standards, schools will continue to struggle to clearly define the acceptable foods and beverages that can be served and/or sold in schools and at school-sponsored functions. Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and British Columbia have, at a provincial level, recently released comprehensive school food standards and some of these provinces have applied the *Call to Action* in the development of their standards. Building on the Ontario Ministry of Education's Policy/Program Memorandum No. 135 *Healthy Foods and Beverages in Elementary School Vending Machine Guidelines* and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services' *Student Nutrition Program Nutrition Guidelines*, the CHSNE Health Unit Collaboration has developed a set of school food standards to support full implementation of the *Call to Action*. These food standards provide clear direction for administration, staff, school councils and lunch providers when making decisions concerning the types of foods and beverages to sell or to use for fundraising. Food standards are the essential foundation by which schools improve their nutrition environment.

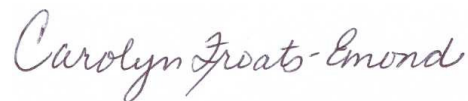
In summary, the *HEAL Action Plan* strategy states that the Ministry of Health Promotion will "improve, coordinate and fund programs", "harness the energy of its partners to coordinate the delivery of complementary, effective programs and to develop stronger, more consistent health promotion messages", and "build on effective programs already in place". The *Call to Action* framework, the activities and resources that are being developed with significant investment by public health and other community organizations (e.g., lunch catering services), and the CHSNE food standards provide sound examples of existing initiatives that support both the Ministry of Health Promotion and Ministry of Education mandates.

We support the Ministry of Health Promotion's vision for a coordinated approach. Given the scope of the *HEAL Action Plan* and its limited resources, it is imperative that the province continues to seek opportunities to avoid duplication, maximize resources and ensure consistency in healthy eating messages. The School Nutrition Workgroup and the CHSNE Health Unit Collaboration strongly encourage consideration of the significant collective action that has already taken place to promote healthy eating in schools as a result of the *Call to Action: Creating a Healthy School Nutrition Environment*.

Yours truly,



Chair, OSNPPH School Nutrition Workgroup



Acting Chair, CHSNE Health Unit Collaboration

c.c. Dr. Ben Levin, Deputy Minister of Education
Elizabeth Harding, Director, Policy and Program Branch, Ministry of Education
Chris Kotz, Policy Analyst, Ministry of Education
Pageen Walsh, Director, Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Ministry of Health Promotion
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Jean Lam, Assistant Deputy Minister, Ministry of Health Promotion
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Sheela Basrur, Chief Medical Officer of Health, ADM Public Health Division
Sarah Lambert, School Health Coordinator
Dianne Oickle, Chair, OSNPPH
Tara Brown, Vice Chair, OSNPPH

Call to Action recommendations based on the Essential Elements of a Healthy School Nutrition Environment

The OSNPPH School Nutrition Workgroup has made nine recommendations based on essential elements of a Healthy School Nutrition Environment. The recommendations, along with suggested actions for provincial ministries, local school boards and local boards of health are:

1. Develop and adopt food and nutrition policies that create and support healthy eating environments in all Ontario schools.
2. Ensure curricula are designed to provide adequate learning opportunities for students to develop knowledge, attitudes and skills for adopting healthy eating behaviours; and that teachers devote sufficient time to teach all of the healthy eating expectations in the curricula.
3. Encourage and support opportunities for teachers to be trained in nutrition education.
4. Ensure all foods available in the school setting are consistent with classroom teaching, reinforce healthy eating messages and are culturally acceptable.
5. Encourage and support school staff in promoting and modelling healthy eating behaviours while at school.
6. Educate parents and the wider community about nutrition, and involve them in activities that promote the practice of healthy eating.
7. Support the development and sustainability of school nourishment programs, including breakfast, lunch and snack programs.
8. Ensure a safe food environment where all students are comfortable and can enjoy eating.
9. Develop recommendations for scheduling nutrition breaks at appropriate times that allow students sufficient time to eat.

**Support for the Call to Action:
Creating A Healthy School Nutrition Environment**

Call to Action: Creating A Healthy School Nutrition Environment has been officially supported by the:

- Canadian Cancer Society-Ontario Division
- Canadian Diabetes Association
- Dietitians of Canada
- Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario
- Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition
- Ontario Physical and Health Education Association
- Ontario Public Health Association
- Breakfast for Learning
- Canadian Living Foundation
- Toronto Food Policy Council

Additionally, the *Call to Action* has received acclaim at national and international events, including the International Congress of Dietetics (Chicago, May 2004) and the Canadian School Board Association Congress (Toronto, July 2004).

Source: City of Hamilton Health and Community Services Report, October 12th, 2004

Boards of Health who have officially supported the Call to Action: Creating a Healthy School Nutrition Environment.

1. Algoma Public Health Department
2. Brant County Health Unit
3. Chatham-Kent Public Health Services
4. Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit
5. Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit
6. Halton Region Health Department
7. City of Hamilton Public Health Services
8. Hastings & Prince Edward Counties Health Unit
9. Huron County Health Unit
10. Kingston, Frontenac and Lennox & Addington Public Health
11. Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit
12. Middlesex-London Health Unit
13. Muskoka Parry Sound Health Unit (former)
14. Regional Niagara Health Department
15. North Bay, Parry Sound District Health Unit
16. Northwestern Health Unit
17. Regional Municipality of Peel Health Department
18. Peterborough County-City Health Unit
19. Sudbury & District Health Unit
20. Thunder Bay District Health Unit
21. Timiskaming Health Unit
22. Toronto Public Health
23. Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health
24. York Region Health Services Department

Some examples of health unit activities that support the Call to Action framework

Brant County Health Department

The Call to Action information is used in Day Care Centre cook's networks, community agencies and after school programs. In the next 2 years we are hoping for nutrition guidelines/policies to be developed as part of a high school 'nutrition action plan' in conjunction with the Eat Smart! Program. In the next few years, when the school board's existing policies need to be revised we will be using the Call to Action framework to guide our work.

Halton Region Department of Health

The Call to Action document was used to create our own toolkit which is entitled, "Healthy Eating in Halton Schools, A Guide to Creating a Healthy School Nutrition Environment". This document was created over a 2 year time span by a committee with representatives from both our school boards, community dietitians, health dept. representatives and interested community members. In addition, to bring our document to life, we have, through Choices 4 Health, secured funding to provide schools in our community with nutrition action grant funds to implement recommendations within our Guide.

City of Hamilton Public Health Services

A committee called the *Healthy Eating in Hamilton Schools Action Group* was formed as a result of both school boards formally acknowledging the Call to Action document. Currently both school boards are working on nutrition policies based on the framework from the Call to Action.

Hastings & Prince Edward Counties Health Unit

The Call to Action, is frequently used when working with schools as one of our main references. A set of nutrition guidelines has been developed for our public school board based on the Call to Action. We are now working on a joint policy with KFL&A for the Algonquin Lakeshore Catholic District School Board which will also be based on the Call to Action. We're very grateful to have such a wonderful resource!

Middlesex-London Health Unit

The 9 essential elements in the Call to Action are criteria for a local award that is used to promote a healthier nutrition environment in elementary schools - the award is called Healthy Eating Champions. The Call to Action has also been used to guide a pilot vending project for secondary schools that will kick off this fall.

Regional Niagara Health Department

The public health dietitian is on a committee with the Niagara Catholic District School Board to develop a nutrition policy for their entire board (elementary and secondary) to be implemented in 2005-2006. The Committee embraced the Call to Action and will base the policy on the nine essential elements of a healthy school nutrition environment. The committee also plans to follow many of the recommendations outlined in Table 5 of the Call to Action report i.e. recommended and suggested actions for provincial ministries, school boards and boards of health.

North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit

Worked with the Near North District School Board and used to the Call to Action Food Standards to develop the school board's request for proposal for cafeteria food services.

Timiskaming Health Unit

The Call to Action is being used to guide discussion and priorities for local school champions and healthy active schools committee. It is also used as a local Resource Guide for schools – all resources are linked to how they help meet one of the nine-essential elements. The Call to Action document is used to support any discussion with parents or key stakeholders about the school nutrition environment.

Regional Municipality of Peel Health Department

The Call to Action was used in the development of a toolkit for school communities. All nine elements are addressed.

Porcupine Health Unit

The framework is used to guide work in schools. It has been referenced in a Nutrition article for newsletters to school and was used as reference in developing the questions in our Physical Activity and Nutrition Questionnaire for the school

Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health

The Call to Action framework is used to guide the work with schools. For example:

- it is great to have an "official" document with you when meeting with local Boards of Education
- have used it to encourage healthy eating components to school cafeteria RFP's.
- have used the document in meeting with local Recreation and Parks staff re: including healthy choices in vending machines and tuck shops (rationale - they are not schools but should still be held to a higher standard than something like a mall or private health club since they are funded by government).

Also, it is a useful background document when preparing in house reports.

York Region Health Services Department

In York Region, the school team has launched a "Healthy Schools" program based on the comprehensive school health model. If a school chooses nutrition as a health topic to work on, public health staff use the 9 essential elements from the Call to Action framework to guide their work with schools. Each school will complete a school nutrition checklist, and develop an action plan to address each essential element over time.

School board policies based on the Call to Action framework

1. London District Catholic School Board
2. Thames Valley School Board- currently being used as a framework for nutrition policy development
3. Algonquin Lakeshore Catholic District School Board – currently working with Kingston, Frontenac and Lennox & Addington Health Unit to develop policy based on CTA
4. Kingston, Frontenac and Lennox & Addington Health Unit
5. Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board has passed a School Nutrition Policy based on CTA framework. This policy is undergoing final formatting and is expected to be formally communicated to schools later this Fall.
6. Hamilton-Wentworth Public District School Board is following close behind, although they are hesitant to include secondary schools in this policy.

Description of *Nutrition Tools for Schools* Toolkit

The *Nutrition Tools for Schools* toolkit was conceived following the March 2004 release of the report entitled, *Call to Action: Creating a Healthy School Nutrition Environment* from the Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health (OSNPPH).

What is the purpose of the Toolkit?

The development of *Nutrition Tools for Schools* is a project of 10 Ontario public health units. It is designed to help elementary schools to take action on the nine essential elements outlined in the *Call to Action* document. These elements fit within the comprehensive school health model as follows:

Health Instruction	Support Services	Supportive Social Environment	Healthy Physical Environment
Nutrition education for students Nutrition education for staff	Parent, student and community involvement and education about healthy eating	Student Nutrition Programs Food and nutrition policies Positive role modeling by staff Appropriate scheduling nutrition breaks	Healthy, culturally appropriate food choices Safe food environment

Who should use the Toolkit?

The toolkit is intended for use by anyone connected to an elementary school, including: school councils, parents, students, school administrators, teachers, education assistants, interested community members, and school volunteers.

What does the Toolkit contain?

The toolkit aims to help school communities' work through a step-by-step process of creating a healthy school nutrition environment. Practical tools and resources are included to help the school to carry out many different activities that support healthy eating in classrooms, schools and within the community external to the school.

The toolkit contains four main components:

- **How-To Guide** – outlines how to gain interest, form a committee, review the current situation, make and carry out action plans to work towards an environment that supports children, staff and parents in healthy eating. Includes worksheets, factsheets and sample agendas for each activity.
- Three Action Guides:
 - **In the Classroom Action Guide** – provides tools and information to help teachers include healthy eating education in all areas of the Ontario Curriculum
 - **In the School Action Guide** – information and resources to support healthy eating throughout the school e.g., vending machines, tuck shops/canteens, “special food days”, school council meetings

- ***In Homes and In the Community Action Guide*** – information and tools to assist with promoting healthy eating to families and to work with the community external to the school.

Pilot Evaluation Overview

The *Nutrition Tools for Schools* evaluation plan is based on the three phases: Phase I – Development and buy-in; Phase II – Pre-testing the toolkit; and Phase III – Pilot test evaluation. An evaluation consultant from The Health Communication Unit (THCU) provided significant time and expertise to assist the CHSNE Health Unit Collaboration with developing the key components of the evaluation plan for both the Phase II pre-test and the Phase III pilot evaluation framework (including objectives, process indicators, target audience/selection criteria & activities).

Over ninety representatives within 8 of the ten CHSNE Health Unit jurisdictions and ? key stakeholders from across the province participated in Phase II – Pre-testing. Feedback was collated and used to inform a significant review and revisions to the How-to Guide and Action Guides over the summer in 2005 in preparation for phase III – pilot evaluation.

Description and Objectives of Phase III – Pilot Test Evaluation

Pilot testing of the *Nutrition Tools for Schools* initiative began in the fall of 2005 and concluded in June 2006. Eighteen schools within eight of the nine CHSNE Health Unit jurisdictions participated. All participating pilot schools received a copy of the toolkit and support throughout the pilot testing from a public health dietitian and/or nurse. The goal of the pilot test was to inform the development and future implementation of the Nutrition Tools for Schools toolkit. The objectives of the pilot test evaluation are:

- To identify enabling factors to implementation of *Nutrition Tools for Schools*
- To identify barriers to implementation of *Nutrition Tools for Schools*
- To highlight changes needed to enhance the usefulness of *Nutrition Tools for Schools*
- To provide information to guide the future expanded implementation of *Nutrition Tools for Schools* within participating health unit jurisdictions

An external consultant was hired toward the end of the pilot to analyze data and to write a summary report of the findings. The report is set to be released mid October, 2006.

Next steps

Currently the *Nutrition Tools for Schools* toolkit is being revised based on the feedback received from the pilot evaluation. Once complete, it will be edited and professionally designed. The finalized toolkit will be shared with all public health nutritionists and nurses working in the area of school nutrition. This toolkit will be used as the supporting document to create a healthy school nutrition environment by all participating health unit staff.