

**OCGHEPA/OSNPPH Meeting with Robert Coombs, Sr. Policy Advisor, Minister's Office,
and Chris Kotz, Sr. Policy Analyst, Policy Development and Implementation Unit,
Ministry of Education**

Thursday, July 31, 2008
10:00 – 10:45AM
Mowat Block, 777 Bay Street, 22nd Floor

OCGHEPA Members in attendance: Mary-Jo Makarchuk, Larry Ketcheson, Danielle Paterson

OSNPPH Member in attendance: Mary Ellen Prange

MEETING SUMMARY

This meeting was scheduled in follow-up to the joint letter from OSNPPH, OCGHEPA and the OCDPA to the Minister of Education in December 2007 soon after Bill 8 was announced (refer to letter posted on members-only side of the OSNPPH web site).

Rob's comments regarding the Healthy Food for Healthy Schools (HFHS) Act:

- The Ministry of Education (MEDU) has completed its consultations on the nutrition standards for the HFHS Act [both OSNPPH and OCGHEPA participated on the Nutrition Standards for Schools Committee (NSSC) which was convened twice in April/May 2008]
- These consultations informed the development of the Trans Fat Regulation which comes into effect on September 1 and will inform the development of comprehensive nutrition standards
- Communication to all school boards on the Trans Fat regulation was disseminated to all Directors of Education and Principals in mid-June; MEDU felt it was important to have this regulation in place first and then they will work on comprehensive nutrition standards that will supersede the Trans Fat Standards Regulation
- A plan for development of comprehensive nutrition standards for the HFHS Act is currently going through the approval process within MEDU; the plan includes an RFP for expert(s) to develop the nutrition standards
- It is anticipated that the nutrition standards will be developed in the fall 2008 and will come into effect for September 1, 2009, although this timeframe is unconfirmed
- A process for consultation following the development of the nutrition standards has not been determined; the NSSC may be re-convened and it has not been determined whether more widespread consultations will be undertaken
- MEDU anticipates that implementation will present challenges but does recognize that public health will play a key role (OCGHEPA and OSNPPH recommended engaging students in the process; student-led healthy eating initiatives facilitated by public health have shown success, particularly at the secondary level)
- It was clarified that under the Trans Fat Regulation for the 2008-09 school year, up to ten special event days can be designated (where schools are exempt the Trans Fat Regulation); at all other times, schools must comply with the regulation for all foods sold to students; foods provided at no cost to students, such as cupcakes brought in by a parent for a classroom celebration, or food products, like cookie dough, sold by students for a fundraising campaign are not applicable under this regulation

Comments in response from OCGHEPA and OSNPPH:

- Engaging with school councils (at the elementary level) and student councils (at the secondary level) were suggested as channels through which OCGHEPA could assist in facilitating changes to ensure that the Regulation is being implemented
- The importance of further consultation was emphasized and our organizations would welcome the opportunity to provide feedback once the nutrition standards are drafted; a broader consultation process that would include student input is recommended

- It is important to make the health of students the number one priority and not be swayed by industry demands; reassurance was given that both the Minister and Deputy Minister do recognize that health is the primary focus
- Public health dietitians are implementing provincial nutrition programs that have established nutrition standards:
 - The **Student Nutrition Program** in elementary and secondary schools (MCYS has drafted a revised set of Nutrition Guidelines);
 - **Nutrition Tools for Schools** which includes a “Food Standards Reference Guide” developed by public health dietitians, has been widely adopted by the majority of Ontario public health units for implementation with elementary schools; and
 - The **Eat Smart! School Program** (applicable in secondary schools) for which the nutrition standard for cafeterias has been recently revised by the Nutrition Resource Centre and a new set of standards for vending and tuck shop will be integrated in January 2009.

Additionally, other Canadian provinces and the U.S. IOM have developed sets of nutrition standards for schools. The Ministry of Education is urged to give strong consideration to the standards that are currently being implemented in Ontario and be aware of standards from other jurisdictions in the process of creating comprehensive nutrition standard for the HFHS Act
- The importance of monitoring and evaluating the implementation was emphasized; public health could play a key role in these areas as well as facilitating engagement of the whole school community, including parents and students in promoting healthy eating and the new nutrition standards

Other items discussed:

- **Health & Physical Education Curriculum Review**
 OCGHEPA has made a submission highlighting important factors to consider when revising curriculum for physical activity and healthy education; a key consideration is that health curriculum will be more effective if it is reinforced by healthy policies in the school and by parent and student engagement. Rob asked whether the importance of buying local food was included in OCGHEPA’s submission. OCGHEPA’s submission did encourage the reinstatement of Family Studies as part of the Ontario Curriculum, in particular food skill development; buying local food, as an aspect of food selection, would be covered in food skill development.

Robert indicated that the new Social Sciences curriculum will be released this fall; aspects related to food and nutrition are included in this curriculum.

- **Ministerial Collaboration between MHP and MEDU**
 The importance of MEDU working in close collaboration with MHP was highlighted. OCGHEPA suggested that they could play a role in bridging Ministries together and to consider an expanded membership on the Healthy Schools Working Table. In British Columbia, it has been possible to make health a priority for all Ministries.

Robert agreed that collaboration is important and provided the example that a joint senior staff meeting between MEDU and MHP occurred the day before to clarify their roles with respect to the Childhood Obesity Strategy.

Follow-Up Actions:

- A thank-you letter will be forwarded from OCGHEPA and OSNPPH to Robert Coombs and Chris Kotz
- As requested by Robert Coombs, copies of the nutrition standards documents that were shared in the meeting will be forwarded by Mary Ellen Prange to Chris Kotz