



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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The Honorable Cynthia Morton  
Deputy Minister of Health Promotion  
777 Bay Street, 18<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Toronto, ON M7A 1S5

Dear Deputy Minister Morton,

I am writing to thank you for the opportunity to participate in the Ministry's Stakeholder meeting last week to learn about the Child and Youth Wellness Strategy. As discussed, I am sending you the attached OSNPPH School Nutrition Workgroup *Summary of Recommendations for After-school Programming*.

The Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health (OSNPPH) is a provincial group of Registered Dietitians who work in Public Health Units across Ontario. The society's mission is to provide a leadership forum and official voice for public health nutrition practice in Ontario. The OSNPPH School Nutrition Workgroup (SNWG) believes that the health and wellbeing of school-age children are profoundly affected by dietary intake and the maintenance of a healthy weight. It believes that the five key practices outlined in the *Summary of Recommendations* are critical to developing after-school programs to support healthy eating and physical activity.

OSNPPH members are keen to provide input into the development of the nutrition education component for the After-school Strategy. We look forward to opportunities for further collaboration and consultation.

Sincerely,

Barb Bartle, RD  
Co-Chair, OSNPPH

Carolyn Froats-Emond, RD  
Chair, OSNPPH School Nutrition Workgroup

Attachment:

C. Mary Beth Valentine, Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Policy, Planning and Corporate Services  
Jean Lam, Assistant Deputy Minister, Health Promotion Programs  
Domenica Ozarka, Director Strategic Policy and Planning Branch  
Connie Uetrecht, Executive Director, Ontario Public Health Association  
Erica DiRuggiero, Chair, Ontario Collaborative Group on Healthy Eating and Physical Activity  
Dr. Charles Gardner, Chair, Council of Medical Officers of Health  
Medical Officers of Health

**Attachment:**

**OSNPPH School Nutrition Workgroup  
Summary of Recommendations for After-school Programming**

The OSNPPH School Nutrition Workgroup believes that the following six practices are critical to developing after-school programming to support healthy eating and physical activity.

***Practice #1: Approach Program Development in Nutrition and Physical Activity with Provincial Vision***

Develop after-school programs that focus on promoting physical activity and nutrition through well organized and engaging activities. Critical components include establishing a clear vision and goals from the start; providing strong directed leadership; and, ensuring sustained training and support to all staff.

- Establish a powerful, compelling vision at the provincial level that aligns with the public health mandate and directs local community level planning and implementation.
- Ensure that after-school programs are based on sound science, reflect best practices and build on existing, local and evaluated Ontario programs (e.g., public health after-school cooking programs and/or parks and recreation physical activity programming).
- Design programs to facilitate access to and sustained participation in programs to improve positive outcomes for children and youth.
- Ensure that all local program staff have the necessary skills and training to understand the relationship between nutrition, physical activity and health AND are able to translate this knowledge into daily program activities.

**To approach program development with provincial vision, OSNPPH recommends:**

- Establish a provincial advisory committee with representation from public health and Ontario agencies (e.g., OSNPPH School Nutrition Workgroup, Ontario Collaborative Group on Healthy Eating and Physical Activity, OPHEA) to develop an overriding provincial strategic plan that defines clear expectations within which all local programs operate. Link local program activities to desired provincial outcomes and measure and manage the progress toward their achievement to ensure accountability for the funding. For example, how is the Ministry planning to ensure that local programs are designed to impact eating habits and physical well-being of children (e.g., is the intention that local programs would define clear, achievable goals and prepare operational plans that align with overall Ministry level goals?)
- Ensure that after-school programs reflect the needs, interests and issues of youth and provide a wide variety of enriching opportunities to promote and sustain youth participation.
- Establish a clear evaluation and accountability framework, including a process for regular assessment of programs, and engage public health units and community partners in this process.

*Practice #2: Integrate nutrition, physical activity and positive self-esteem approaches with youth development principles.*

- The Ministry must ensure that after-school programs create environments in which children and youth feel physically and emotionally secure and valued regardless of their eating patterns, weight, food preferences or physical fitness. It is critical that programs reflect an approach that preserves self-esteem and incorporates nutrition activities that promote a positive body image. As well, plans must include providing the necessary training with program staff to ensure they 'do no harm' within this approach.
- Ensure local program leaders are well-prepared to understand youth development and have the appropriate attitudes, knowledge and skills (e.g., demonstrate respect for differences in abilities, appearances and skills of children and youth) and recognize the importance of being positive role models for healthy eating, physical activity and positive body image.
- Principles of youth engagement should be incorporated in all program development.

**To align approaches with youth development principles, OSNPPH recommends:**

- Linking with Dr. Gail McVey (Director, Ontario Community Outreach Program for Eating Disorders) for her expertise in establishing programming that promotes positive self-esteem and healthy body image.
- Supporting children and youth development by providing them with opportunities to assess what is working and what could be improved with the physical activity and nutrition education activities in which they are participating.
- Using evidence-informed recommendations to identify effective strategies for after-school programs (e.g., plan longer duration interventions > 16 weeks, use clear messages about specific behaviour changes).

*Practice #3: Design after-school programs to reflect a comprehensive program (i.e., Foundations for a Healthy School, Ministry of Education).*

Establish a model for the after-school program that aligns with and reinforces existing health frameworks, in particular addressing the Ministry of Education's *Foundations for a Healthy School*. Within the Foundations, integrating the essential elements outlined in the Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health (OSNPPH) *Call to Action: Creating a Healthy School Nutrition Environment* will ensure a comprehensive approach for nutrition.

The Foundation components which provide an appropriate and comprehensive organizational framework for discussing the rationale for nutrition recommendations include:

- A. Quality Instruction and Programs
- B. Safe and Healthy Physical Environments
- C. Supportive Social Environments
- D. Community Partnerships

## A. Quality Instruction and Programs

- After-school programs provide the ideal opportunity to align nutrition activities with academic content, offering a powerful reinforcement and enhancement of what students learn in the classroom. For example, gardening projects can reinforce science curriculum. Cooking clubs which focus on measuring ingredients, changing recipe quantities or learning about chemical reactions that take place in cooking help children and youth to build 'real life' skills with math and science curriculum reinforcement. Children can develop nutrition literacy skills by learning to read food labels or by creating healthy recipe booklets to take home to their families.
- Nutrition activities must be appropriately challenging, meaningful and exciting to allow children and youth to develop skills, gain a sense of personal mastery and competence. Nutrition education principles must be defined to ensure that the healthy eating component of after-school programs achieves these.

### **For quality instruction and programs, OSNPPH recommends that the Ministry ensures after-school nutrition programming that reflects the following:**

- Reviewing the forthcoming OHPE curriculum to identify interactive, skill-building opportunities that could enhance/reinforce student learning (but which cannot be carried out within the classroom because of lack of time, facilities, teacher training, etc) and to incorporate these into the after-school program objectives.
- Establishing specific and intentional objectives at the provincial level that define the type of nutrition education that must be provided as part of local after-school programs.
- Incorporating hands-on, experiential learning that is age-appropriate and culturally sensitive (e.g., recognition and celebration of cultural diversity to increase appreciation for other cultures).
- Integrating nutrition and physical activity into programs using evidence-informed, practical, skill-based opportunities to learn about healthy eating (e.g., moving beyond the "guest speaker" in nutrition to offering cooking classes featuring healthy recipes and providing an opportunity for taste-testing in a positive social environment).
- Ensuring opportunities for every child to build leadership skills, including the capacity to influence the eating environment around them and be agents for positive change (e.g., advocate for healthy food choices at their school).

## B. Safe and Healthy Physical Environments

- All foods and beverages offered at the after-school programs should contribute to children and youth's nutritional well-being and the prevention of disease making them uniquely positioned to model and reinforce healthful eating behaviours.
- It is incumbent upon the Ontario government to foster healthy eating habits and to protect students from the influence of those who profit from children's consumption of foods with Minimum Nutritional Value.
- It is important that these programs align with existing public health efforts to create healthy nutrition environments i.e., children and youth get the same messages about food, nutrition

and healthy eating wherever food is served – in the classroom, in the school and in the community.

- Ensure an allergy safe environment.
- It is important that the environment used to prepare foods for cooking classes and cooking demonstrations meets safety and sanitation requirements.

**To create safe and healthy physical environments, OSNPPH recommends the following:**

- Implementing mandatory food standards to define foods and beverages which are appropriate to serve and/or sell within after-school programs. These standards need to align with existing food standards. *Nutrition Tools for Schools*® Food Standards provide direction on the types of foods and beverages to offer at school. After-school programs should use the same food standards as schools because children and youth are more likely to adopt healthy eating behaviours if they receive a consistent message at home, at school and in the community. Capacity (in terms of implementation resources, training workshops offered by public health, school familiarity with the standards) already exists and should not be disregarded. These standards were taken into consideration and incorporated in the Ministry of Children and Youth (MCYS) Student Nutrition Programs Nutrition Guidelines.
- All meals/foods/beverages offered as part of the after-school program (e.g., special events, celebrations, food preparation activities) emphasize foods and beverages with Maximum Nutritional Value (i.e., based on *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide*) and do not include foods with Minimum Nutritional Value.
- Food is not used as a reward to modify behaviour.
- Access to vending machines, stores, snack shops or other venues that contain foods with Minimum Nutritional Value and could compete with the healthy choices offered is limited. Ensure that only healthy snacks and foods are available in these venues if children and youth are able to access them.
- Programs are offered in locations where access to a free, safe, clean water supply allows children and youth to drink ample amounts of water during physical activity.
- Programs take steps to ensure that all students can be accommodated in safe pleasant surroundings that reflect the value of the positive social aspects of eating.
- Setting standards that define 'adequate facilities' for these programs to ensure minimum space, safety, hygiene, cleanliness, and equipment requirements.

**C. Supportive Social Environment**

- A supportive social environment supports and reinforces the healthy eating messages that students are learning in the classroom.
- Examples needed to achieve this include:
  - Promoting and encouraging positive role modeling by program staff.
  - Ensuring appropriate scheduling of nutrition breaks in relationship to timing of program with family dinner hour and/or physical activity.
  - Encouraging family involvement in nutrition and physical activities and sharing educational resources with families.
  - Providing opportunities for students to share in the preparing and eating of snacks and meals and to be engaged in the positive social aspects of eating.

**To achieve a supportive social environment, OSNPPH recommends that the Ministry:**

- Establishes a comprehensive food and nutrition policy for after-school programs based on the framework outlined in the OSNPPH *Call to Action*.
- Partner with public health units to access existing, credible resources and initiatives (e.g., *You're the Chef* Grade 6, 7 and 8 after-school cooking program, *Paint Your Plate! Create a Masterpiece*. Vegetables and Fruit Action Guide for Schools) to integrate a consistent healthy eating program as part of the curriculum.

**D. Community Partnerships**

- High quality after-school programs effectively leverage partnerships with a variety of stakeholders, especially family, schools and community agencies. After-school programs should build on the well-established relationships between public health units and their local school communities. Appreciate that existing joint programs (e.g., Healthy School programs) have already defined messages, activities, partnerships and mechanisms for public health, communities and schools to collaborate. After-school programs provide the opportunity to enhance these partnerships and strengthen joint programs.
- Critically assess the consequences of introducing programs that may not reflect the Ontario curriculum, existing legislation, etc. Using non-Canadian programming may create confusion and undermine the substantial investments by public health units to develop quality programming.

Examples of community partnerships include:

- Having students help out at community food security initiatives such as a neighborhood community garden project or collective kitchen.
- Increasing students' familiarity with healthy options by taking a field trip to the local grocery store.
- Connecting children and youth to where food comes from by visiting farmers and their farms.
- Involving families and community members in nutrition and physical activities as resources e.g., leading a cooking lesson as a guest chef.
- Working closely with public health units to have a Registered Dietitian review program menus or assist with implementation of foods standards

**To ensure community partnerships, OSNPPH recommends that the Ministry:**

- Create opportunities for community service
- Expose students to a variety of off-site learning experiences
- Partner with secondary schools to engage to engage high school students in volunteer opportunities (e.g., acting as mentors for the youth cooking clubs).
- Engage and establish on-going dialogue with public health units, schools, community organizations with different interests and perspectives that could support after-school programs.

**To facilitate community partnerships, OSNPPH recommends that the Ministry:**

- Facilitate inter-ministerial collaboration to enhance after-school programming (e.g., consulting with the Ministry of Education to reinforce the OHPE curriculum expectations for physical activity and healthy eating).
- Build into the provincial model for after-school programs specific expectations to effectively develop, utilize and sustain partnerships with a variety of stakeholders (e.g., families, schools and communities). Mandate that all after-school programs establish an advisory group with at a minimum representation from public health.
- Investigate and utilize existing public health community-based programs and resources (e.g., Paint Your Plate! Create a Masterpiece. Vegetables and Fruit Action Guide for Schools, Nutrition Tools for Schools®, You're the Chef).
- Explore the feasibility of partnering with public health units to refine existing after-school cooking programs to create a healthy eating initiative within the after-school model.

*Practice #4 Ensure after-school programs are universally accessible*

- Children may face a set of challenges and environmental conditions that influence their eating patterns and ability to be physically active. It is important that after-school program staff are supported to understand the connection between poverty, healthy eating, and physical activity.
- Some children participating in after-school programs will live in low-income households, therefore strategies that are sensitive to the determinants of health need to be incorporated when designing the after-school program model.

**To acknowledge local food insecurity, OSNPPH strongly recommends that the Ministry considers the following implications for program planning and development:**

- Staff training to ensure a common understanding of food security and other barriers that may impact accessing and participating in after-school programs (e.g., transportation) and the need for sensitivity when interacting with children and youth.
- Knowledge of the local community food and other program resources and supports (e.g., student nutrition program, sources of free sporting equipment) that are available to support families.
- Deliver programs that are low cost or no cost as much as possible. If needed, integrate cost recovery initiatives into programming and provide subsidy to those children in need.
- Nutritious, culturally-appropriate snacks provided free of charge with an emphasis on vegetables and fruit.
- Physical activities are culturally and developmentally appropriate, and achieve Health Canada's recommendations.

## *Practice #5 Ensure Adequate and Sustainable Funding*

The previous practices and recommendations are primary factors that are critical for creating constructive after-school programs that can achieve positive youth outcomes. Considered together, they can define a quality program. Well planned after-school programs have the potential to create positive futures for young people; however, adequate and sustainable funding is a fundamental requirement.

### **To ensure adequate and sustainable funding, OSNPPH recommends:**

- There is significant potential for a piecemeal approach to after-school programming that will have little impact on children's health yet uses up scarce resources if the practices outlined above are not considered. Limited resources are used more effectively by defining a best practice model for after-school programs, including a focused, intentional nutrition component. Focusing our efforts to improve healthy eating by using a high-quality, skill-based **cooking program** that builds on existing public health initiatives and addresses a gap in the school curriculum will be, in the long run, a more cost effective approach to impact eating behaviours of children. Adequately resource and support these to be implemented across the province, recognizing the need for local flexibility and choice within this model. Cooking clubs provide an excellent opportunity to build capacity for healthy eating through skill-based learning; address a prominent gap in current curriculum; and, maximize limited programming dollars. OSNPPH recommends striking a provincial advisory committee with public health dietitian representation from all health unit regions to investigate the feasibility of implementation.
- Building in a sustainability plan to ensure that programs can develop and evolve over time with adequate funding, but also to ensure that local level programs are sustainable (e.g., not just a one-time or irregularly implemented event).

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