



Student Nutrition Program:

A Guide to Getting Started

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With files from:

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Toronto Public Health (Appendices D & E)

& the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (Appendix F)

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Student Nutrition Program: A Guide to Getting Started

Introduction

You should be commended for your interest in starting a Student Nutrition Program (SNP) at your school! You are about to become involved in a very rewarding program that has such positive benefits for children and youth. This handbook is intended to support you every step of the way in the development of your SNP.

The purpose of a SNP is to provide nutritious food, including breakfast, lunch and/or snacks to children and youth. The central objectives of the program are to support the healthy development of children, and having children attending school ready to learn. The SNP must adopt a universal approach by providing all children and youth with the opportunity to participate regardless of socioeconomic status. Every participant of the program should be made to feel welcome.

There are many reasons why students participate in nutrition programs, including:

- long bus rides to school
- insufficient food in the home
- hurried morning routines are becoming more common
- lack of parental supervision at mealtime
- child is not hungry before leaving for school
- child likes the social aspects of eating with their friends

Offering children and youth nourishing food is a fundamental component to enhancing their healthy development and ability to learn. Research shows the many benefits attributed to participating in a SNP including improved academic performance, higher rates of school attendance, fewer classroom disruptions, improved student behavior and a more nutritious and healthy diet. Therefore, participation in a SNP can play a consequential role in improving student success and the healthy development of children and youth.

Some financial support for food and other program costs is available from the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, administered by the Peterborough Family Resource Centre – the lead agency in Ontario Central East. Your local Student Nutrition Program Coordinator can help you complete the necessary application. The funding available is calculated with consideration to a number of factors, including: rural areas and the higher cost of food in these regions; vulnerable children and youth; regions with widely distributed populations; varying income levels; and areas expected to experience high population growth. Other factors considered are the type of meal offered i.e.: breakfast, snack or lunch; the number of children participating; the number of serving days, in-kind contributions including the number of volunteers, the total number of volunteer hours as well as parental contributions, fundraising events, food, supplies, equipment, non-consumables and cash donations. Each school receives a percentage, which varies each year, of the total cost of running their program.

At this time, it would be a good idea for the school principal to read the letter in **Appendix A** which describes the background, purpose and accountability mechanisms for the Student Nutrition Program.

Step 1: Contact your Local Student Nutrition Program Coordinator

Your Local SNP Coordinator can assist with:

- Safe food handling practices to prevent food borne illnesses
- Menu planning to ensure adequate calories and nutrients in menus
- Application completion
- Visits to Student Nutrition Programs in other schools

Local Student Nutrition Coordinators Contact Information

Durham's Child Nutrition Project

Ana Mazhar

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Step 2: Gain Support for a SNP & Determine the Right Program for Your School

Supporters, partners and allies are key to developing a successful Student Nutrition Program. The more parents, guardians, school staff and interested community members who are aware of and support the benefits of a SNP – including improved academic performance, higher rates of school attendance, fewer classroom disruptions, improved student behavior and a more nutritious and healthy diet – the more successful your program will be.

Discuss with parents, guardians, school staff and interested community members the type and delivery model of Student Nutrition Program that will best serve your students:

A. Types of Programs

There are *four* types of programs.

1. **Breakfast** – A meal served to children and youth **before the start of the school day**. It should contain at least one serving from a **minimum of 3 out of the 4 food groups** of Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating with at least one serving from the vegetables and fruit food group and at least one serving from the milk and alternatives food group.
2. **Morning Meal** – A meal is served to children and youth **in the first part of the school day** once school has officially started. It should contain at least one serving from a **minimum of 3 out of the 4 food groups** of Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating with at least one serving from the vegetables and fruit food group and at least one serving from the milk and alternatives food group. A morning meal is not a snack program.
3. **Lunch** – It should contain at least one serving from a **minimum of 3 out of the 4 food groups** of Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating with at least one serving from the vegetables and fruit food group and at least one serving from the milk and alternatives food group.
4. **Snack** - A snack contains at least one serving from a **minimum of 2 food groups** of Canada's Food Guide with at least one serving from the vegetables and fruit food group.

B. Delivery Model

There are *three* delivery models which can be used for a breakfast, morning meal, snack or lunch program.

- **Bin Model** - This popular model consists of providing a bin (usually a plastic bin about 8" high by 12" wide and 24" long) to each classroom which contains either their snack, breakfast or lunch servings. The bin can be picked up from the kitchen and returned by a student monitor. The servings may be distributed according to the teacher's discretion. The bin could be passed around by either the teacher or a student while students are working quietly, or it could be left on a table for students to help themselves. This model can serve a large number of students.
- **Grab n' Go** - This model is becoming popular in the high schools. Usually, a table of servings is provided on a table at the entrance to the school, supervised and replenished by volunteer(s). When students enter, they may help themselves to the servings. Individual servings can be served in "baggies". This model can serve a large number of students.
- **Sit Down** - This model varies according to the school facilities. An example would be a breakfast program served by volunteers in an empty classroom or gym. This program usually requires more teacher supervision.

Nutrition programs vary from one school to the next. For example, one school may serve a breakfast program using the bin model. Yet, another school may serve a sit-down breakfast or a grab n' go snack.

Initial feedback can come from staff, parents/guardians and School Councils through discussion of SNPs and the types of program that will best serve your students. A **sample cover letter and survey** to parents/guardians to gain support for the program, financial contributions and to recruit volunteers are provided in **Appendix B**.

Step 3: Set up Student Nutrition Advisory Committee

The purpose of this committee is to review the results of the survey and establish and monitor the effectiveness of the nutrition program. Include interested teaching staff, support staff, parents/guardians, Public Health nurses or nutritionists, students where appropriate and perhaps community persons who are interested in child nutrition i.e. local businesses, service clubs, interfaith group.

It is helpful for the Student Nutrition Advisory Committee to develop an **action plan** to implement the SNP that addresses the issues of:

- **Location** - A safe, clean comfortable space for the SNP within the school or other suitable venue that meets fire regulations and room capacity restrictions. Programs are conducted in classrooms, cafeterias, gymnasiums and some in staff rooms. The custodian will need to be on board due to the impact of the program on their work.
- **Site Coordinator** – A School Coordinator or Site Coordinator should be identified to supervise the day-to-day program operation and coordinate volunteers.
- **Research** – Your Local SNP Coordinator can make arrangements for you to visit other breakfast/snack/lunch programs.
- **Type of meal(s)** to be served i.e. breakfast, morning meal, snack or lunch.
- **Delivery model** – Which of the 3 delivery models will you adopt - 'sit down', 'bin' or 'grab n'go'? You need to ensure that your program is universal. All children should have the opportunity to participate in the program without being stigmatized or singled out. Every participant of the program should be made to feel welcome.
- **Menu** – Refer to the *Nutrition Guidelines – June 2008* at www.studentnutritionprogram.ca. A basic two week menu (see **Appendix C**) should be nutritious, well-balanced and varied. Start simple. Your Local SNP Coordinator will be able to assist schools with menu planning and food costing. See **Appendix D** for a quick reference guide to nutrition.
- **Food Safety Guidelines** – Check with your Local SNP Coordinator to ensure safe food handling guidelines are followed.
- **Budget** – Expenditures and deposits will need to be recorded. All receipts must be kept. An accounting report of expenditures of food or paper products up the amount of the grant needs to be provided semi-annually to the Local Student Nutrition Program Coordinator (end of January and June). (**Appendix E**)
- **Receipt of contributions and fundraising opportunities** – To operate successfully, the SNP requires support from a variety of contributors including parents/caregivers, municipalities,

schools, school councils, volunteers, local businesses, service clubs, local churches, and community organizations. Parental support is an important part of a successful nutrition program. You will need to determine how you are going to collect financial support from parents.

- Community support will need to be established including the availability of staff and volunteers. Volunteers will be needed to assist the Site Coordinator on a scheduled basis. You will need to discuss your school's volunteer policies with your school principal.
- Monthly Report – Participating schools are required to provide a monthly report which can be found in **Appendix F**.

Step 4: Apply for Funding

Complete and submit the SNP Funding Application form found in **Appendix G** in consultation with your Local Student Nutrition Program Coordinator. In addition to funding available through the MCYS Student Nutrition Program, schools are expected to fundraise and develop partnerships with potential sponsors in order to increase the funding base of their Student Nutrition Program.

Step 5: Keep the Communication Flowing

You are well on your way to establishing your program. It is a good time to update your school community on the description of your new student nutrition program. A sample letter is included in **Appendix I** which describes the program, indicates the cost per child, the time of day the program will occur and an information form.

It is a good idea to keep parents and volunteers informed at School Council meetings, parent and teacher night displays and newsletters.

Students can be informed and included by:

- having senior students help the younger students with their breakfast, morning meal, snack or lunch
- having poster and display contests for students
- planning menus
- having a contest to name the program in your school
- inviting students to experience foods from other cultures

Let parents/guardians, suppliers, local community groups, media and other advocacy organizations know how well your nutrition program is run and the benefits realized by the children. This will be very helpful when recruiting volunteers and seeking community contributions.