



LOOK WHO'S MAKING IT HAPPEN!

Interior Health School Food and Nutrition Policy Project

Winter 2005

Healthy Choices Make Good Business Sense

The closure of the school cafeteria at Rossland Secondary (Rossland) meant that the only food source in the school was from the vending machine. Students and parents were surveyed to determine what students were eating at school and what healthy foods they'd like to see.

As a result, a Food Store in the cafeteria was established to sell veggies and dip; yogurt; cheese and crackers; deli sandwiches; juice boxes; milk; trail mix; nachos and bagels. They plan to start selling fruit smoothies soon.

Food is bought at reduced prices from a local grocer and prepared by parents on Mondays and kept in the cafeteria fridge. Food is sold by student groups as a way of raising money: student groups are booked well into 2005.

To promote the new choices, a healthy choices poster contest was held where students designed posters promoting healthy food and the winners received

prize money. The posters now decorate the school cafeteria.

Initially, the store didn't make much money selling healthy food. Selling pizza each Friday helped cover the losses during the week. Now, however, they are making money on the other days and are noticing more students are coming to the Food Store. Restricting access to the vending machine through the use of a timer on the vending machine during lunch hour has helped.

The Nutrition Committee is currently looking at developing a business plan to expand the Food Store operations to make it self sustaining as well as decorating the area around the Food Store to make it more appealing. "In many ways, it's like starting and operating a small business. You have to get to know your customers and adjust to what they want using the limited resources available to you," says the Project Coordinator.

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The School Food and Nutrition Policy (SFNP) Project, Phase II, is funded by the Interior Health Authority in partnership with the Directorate of Agencies for School Health (DASH).

Students Initiate Healthy Concession

The grade 6/7 student leadership group at Martin Morigeau Elementary (Canal Flats) is a very active group and was keen to take on a project to promote nutrition at their school. It came to their attention that the drink machine at the school is used regularly but the vendor paid very little money in return. It was suggested that they do not renew their contract and organize their own concession stand. Staff were overwhelmingly in support of the student initiative.

They purchased a fridge with the SFNP funds and use it for the concession stand. The staff discussed the school's nutrition policy and made up an initial list of food items that met the policy guidelines. "I am meeting with a group of students this week to come up with a name for our concession stand and to add to the list of food items started by the staff," says the school's Leadership Advisor. Student surveys and a suggestion box at the concession are planned to monitor student satisfaction and progress of their project.

Bridging the Gap: Youth Leader Promotes Healthy Choices

Cache Creek Elementary (Cache Creek) hired a fun-oriented youth leader with experience in school programs to visit classrooms and motivate students to make healthy choices. Each class received four visits on food group themes including food samples. Parent volunteers help the youth leader with food preparation and service.

The first theme was in October on "Milk Products" with a 'bone' theme that tied very well into Halloween. Students had the opportunity to try several different cheeses and yogurt. Other themes included "Breads, Grains and Proteins" and "Fruit and Vegetables". The final visit was a wrap up with frozen berry and organic soy milk smoothies. The students enjoyed the action of the blenders and the fun of making the smoothies right in the classroom.

The youth leader made the nutrition themes fun by wearing costumes and acting in a fun, camp-like style. The success of this was amazing. It seemed that the youth worker could get the kids really enthusiastic and tuned into nutrition. Almost all students tried the food samples, including things like raw cabbage, because the youth worker made it seem so fun.

Teachers are now seeing that, for the first time in many years, their requests for healthy items for class parties are being supported. In one class, students brought only healthy items for their halloween party this year. Staff reports that students are actually starting to brag about having 'healthy' items in their lunch. With help from the youth leader, students are beginning to adopt the attitude that healthy eating is 'cool'.

Place Mats a Novel Teaching Tool

To facilitate the implementation of their School Food and Nutrition Policy, folks at Trout Creek Elementary (Summerland) decided to focus on teaching the students about Canada's Food Guide. They did this through a number of presentations at school assemblies, nutrition questions of the week and the development of a place mat to teach students about and help them to choose foods from all four food groups.

Their place mats were a great success with lots of positive comments from parents, teachers and students. They created three different templates from which teachers could choose. Some teachers chose a place mat that was already cre-



ated and their students coloured and personalized the mat, other teachers chose the blank template and had their students draw or glue on examples of each of the food groups. The place mats were then laminated and used in the classrooms. Students assessed their lunches and determined how many food groups they covered with their lunch. Teachers felt the place mats helped keep students and parents focused on healthy choices from each of the food groups.

"We have found it to be a great learning experience that has resulted in very positive changes within the school and an increased awareness of healthy choices", says the project Coordinator.

Milk Is the Drink of Choice at Columbia Park Elementary

The purchase of a milk fridge with the SFNP funds allowed Columbia Park Elementary (Revelstoke) to start a milk program and sell white and chocolate milk at cost. The school joined BC Dairy's Elementary School Milk Program (ESMP) to be eligible for prizes and incentives based on milk consumption. Two prize draws are done daily and they also had a contest to name their cow mascot made out of plastic milk jugs, "Milkshake".

The entire school cooperates in the milk program's success. Grade 6 students are responsible for selling milk tickets, taking the tickets and distributing the milk while a milk co-ordinator organizes the milk according to due

dates, places orders and records amounts sold each day. The principal organizes student volunteers, makes sure the program is running smoothly, picks up the milk, and communicates with parent volunteers. Parent volunteers organize the contests, do the paperwork for the ESMP, and hand out the milk prizes as needed.

The program nearly runs itself now. Milk consumption has increased and a parent survey showed strong support for the program. Future plans include starting Milkshake Moo's message of the week and improving hot lunches. "Our parent group now assumes that any hot lunches will involve milk," says the school Principal.

Likely Community School Embraces Healthy Eating

At the onset of creating their School Food and Nutrition Policy, Likely Community School (Likely) set out some goals. One of their goals was to make the school snack program consist of more fresh snacks, at least 50% fresh by the end of 2005. They have already exceeded this goal and provide at least 80% fresh fruit or vegetables at recess, despite being over an hour away from the closest grocery store. Students are eating healthier and the amount of wrappers and waste is considerably lower.

Another goal they set was to price healthy foods cheaper than the typical chocolate bar or bag of chips at concessions or other functions where food is sold. "Our intent is not to strictly ban junk food from concessions but to have healthy alternatives," say their project Coordinator, Carol Patton, "by pricing healthy foods cheaper we hope that the children and adults will purchase these items first."

The typical 'hot dog day' has also been changed to a 'hot lunch day'. The PAC now offers healthier choices such as grilled ham & cheese or grilled cheese sandwiches made on whole wheat bread, along with white or chocolate milk. The next hot lunch will be homemade pizzas. The students loved the grilled sandwiches and the parents genuinely seemed to appreciate the healthier choices.

Likely School even supports healthy eating among their students when away for sporting events. They organize a cooler filled with healthy snack choices – parents are asked to provide cut up veggies, fruit, muffins or anything healthy so students have healthy choices on the road.

To celebrate their successes with the SFNP project, the school is planning a student and family healthy lunch in February. The students and staff will get together to plan, prepare, serve and enjoy a meal together.

Local Partnerships Key to School's Success

The local organic grocer contacted the Crawford Bay Elementary Secondary School (Crawford Bay) principal offering to purchase products for their daily Healthy Snack program at cost. This has helped their snack program operate successfully on a cost-recovery, sustainable basis. A large capacity fridge purchased with SFNP funds stores the food for the snack program.

"Kids really appreciate being able to buy juices, fresh fruit and vegetables, and other healthy snacks at the low prices", says the school Principal.

Students in grade 8-10 run the snack program and keep the records. The Principal and a teacher do the ordering and pick up the supplies.

As a result of the snack program's success, staff have be-

come more aware of what kids are choosing and reinforcing these choices by incorporating more nutrition education in their classrooms and putting up nutrition displays throughout the school.

In addition, a local chef volunteer coordinates a lunch program four days per week. The program, funded by Community LINK dollars, provides an excellent lunch for \$2.50. Students who cannot afford to pay get a free lunch and parents or students can make confidential arrangements with the Principal to volunteer in lieu of paying the \$2.50. Over 70% of the student body participate in the lunch program.

This program has been very well received by students, staff and the PAC alike. They've also replaced soda with juice and water in their vending machine.

Students "Go for the Gold" with Healthy Lunches

At Cataline Elementary School (Williams Lake) the spirit of competition was one of the motivators for making healthy choices. Grade five and six classes competed in Lunch-time Olympics by assessing what they brought for lunch and kept track of how healthy their choices were. An objective staff member certified a lunch as healthy and eligible for points. "Students really got into the competition and lunch choices appear to have really improved," says the school Principal.

Grade seven students are also learning valuable lessons about healthy choices by helping run the school canteen and milk program. SFNP funds were used for the initial

purchase of healthy items and to sell them at a reduced cost to promote sales.

The students have been receptive to the healthy choices and more kids seem to be coming to the canteen. Students are involved in deciding which foods to sell, which really helps with acceptance.

*"Lower prices can hook kids on healthy choices."
Principal, Cataline Elem.*

Sharing Healthy Eating Ideas Through Cookbook

To help students and their families make healthier choices, Steeples Community School (Cranbrook) created a cookbook with healthy eating tips, lunch suggestions and recipes submitted by parents, staff and students. The cookbook also contains several healthy suggestions for foods to bring to classroom parties.

The cookbook, funded by the SFNP grant, was given to each family in the school and feedback was overwhelmingly positive. In fact, the student services worker and youth leader adopted the cookbook for use in a program designed to teach kids with behavioural challenges to cook using foods commonly available in low income households.



Teachers at school are also supporting healthy choices by adopting classroom policies that allow students to eat or drink in class but only if the food or beverage is healthy.

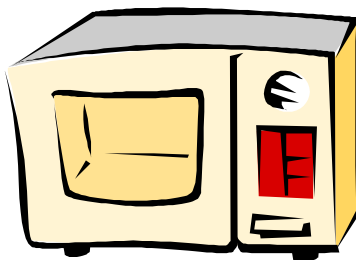
"We're seeing more healthy snacks being brought to school and kids feel more empowered to make the healthy choice," says the Community School Coordinator.

One of their main challenges in improving foods sold and offered at school has been a lack of parent involvement and time. To overcome this challenge, proceeds from their recycling program (\$450-600/year) have been dedicated for an honorarium for a milk program coordinator. This will hopefully provide an incentive and enable a parent to commit the time necessary to run the program.

Microwaves Enable Students to Bring Healthier Lunches

Marie Sharpe Elementary School (Williams Lake) has many characteristics of an inner city school whose families are faced with many challenges in obtaining healthy foods. The school currently offers a daily meal program; however, many students continue to bring pre-packaged foods with little nutritional value for lunch.

To encourage families to send healthier lunches to school with students, the school applied for SFNP funds to purchase microwaves. Having microwaves available would allow students to bring in a wider variety of lunch items



such as leftovers or soup.

It was acknowledged that guidelines for students assisting with microwave use would be important to ensure student safety. Parents were advised that the microwaves are now available at school and encouraged to send healthy lunches student could reheat via their school newsletter. Students appear to be bringing more leftovers for lunch; however, family economics and nutrition education/awareness continue to be a challenge.

IHA School Districts Getting On Board with SFNP

These are very exciting times in Interior Health for creating healthier school environments supportive of healthy eating. The majority of Interior Health school districts are taking a leadership role in food and nutrition policy.

Of the 16 school districts within the Interior Health Authority, two have already adopted and begun implementing district-wide policies or guidelines on school food and nutrition (Kamloops/Thompson and Central Okanagan). Vernon School District has a policy in draft while another ten school districts have begun the dialogue and are moving toward developing district-wide policy (Southeast Kootenay, Rocky Mountain, Kootenay Lake, Kootenay-Columbia, Revelstoke, Boundary, Cariboo-Chilcotin, Okanagan Skaha, Gold Trail and North Okanagan-Shuswap).

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