



A NEWSLETTER FOR PROFESSIONALS

Food Security in the School Setting

At least 19% of children in Saskatchewan are food insecure (1).

Early experience with food insecurity is associated with childhood mental health problems, such as hyperactivity and inattention (2). Experiences of hunger in childhood also increase the risk of depression, anxiety, social isolation and suicidal thoughts in adolescence and early adulthood (3, 4, 5).

Poverty is the strongest predictor of food insecurity (1). Strategies geared towards improving the overall financial status of households will ultimately be more effective in helping to improve food insecurity rather than short-term help such as food banks, food assistance programs and nutrition education (6).

Although poverty is the strongest indicator of food insecurity, nutrition programs in school continue to be important for supporting healthy growth and development. Healthy eating patterns in childhood support intellectual development and may prevent long-term health problems. Research has consistently shown that nutrition programs that offer healthy foods and beverages can influence the health and educational outcomes of children and youth. Children who eat enough healthy foods:

- have better attendance in school,
- do better at math, science and English,
- are more alert, have improved memory, and
- behave better (7).

School food programs that offer healthy foods contribute to students' physical and mental health, as well as productivity at school, and community connectedness. When school food programs are in place, it has been shown that students have increased intake of healthy foods, like vegetables and fruit, and also have better learning and success at school (8).

There are various programs and supports that can help schools offer healthy choices throughout the school days.

References

1. Tarasuk V, Mitchell A, Dachner N. Household food insecurity in Canada, 2014. Available from: proof.utoronto
2. Melchior M, Chastang, JF, Falissard B, Galera C, Tremblay RE, Cote, SM, Boivin M. Food insecurity and children's mental health: A prospective birth cohort study. 2012. Available from: journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0052615
3. McIntyre L, Williams JVA, Lavoroto DH, Patten S. Depression and suicide ideation in late adolescence and early adulthood are an outcome of child hunger. 2012. Journal of Affective Disorders. Available from: www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0165032712007823

Nutrition Update Newsletter

October 2018

4. McIntyre L, Wu X, Kwok C, Patten SB. The pervasive effect of youth self-report of hunger on depression over 6 years of follow up. Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology. 2017. Available from: link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2F500127-017-1361-5
5. Dietitians of Canada. Individual and household food insecurity in Canada: Position of Dietitians of Canada. 2005. Available from: www.dietitians.ca/Downloads/Public/householdfoodsec-position-paper.aspx
6. Tarasuk V. Implications of a basic income guarantee for household food insecurity. 2017. Available from: proof.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Paper-Tarasuk-BIG-EN-17.06.13-1712.pdf
7. The Cost of Healthy Meals and Snacks for Children and Youth in Saskatchewan 2015. Available from: publications.gov.sk.ca/documents/13/10530SK%20Cost%20of%20Meals%20and%20Snacks%20for%20Children%20Final%20October%202016.pdf.
8. The Coalition for Healthy School Food. For a universal healthy school food program. foodsecurecanada.org/sites/foodsecurecanada.org/files/coalitionforhealthyschoolfood.sm_.pdf

REGISTERED DIETITIANS (RD) WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THIS ISSUE:

Jill Aussant, RD
 Audrey Boyer, RD
 Chelsea Brown, RD
 Cathy Knox, RD
 Barb Wright, RD

Ask A

NUTRITION

Expert



Most students at our school bring their lunches from home. On any day there could be 4 or 5 students who do not have a lunch. Staff offer food from their personal lunches or from their own classroom stashes for these situations. Where is there funding for food in these situations?

Students who come to school without lunches or snacks could be experiencing food insecurity at home. Consider what organizations and services are available for these families in your community, such as food banks or organizations that provide food hampers and do work to support child nutrition. Often these organizations are willing to provide funding or donated food for schools as well. Community groups, service clubs and faith organizations may also donate food or money for food. Discuss concerns with the school administration, staff, and School Community Council to consider creating a breakfast or snack program run by volunteers at the school.

We know that students need healthy foods to grow and learn well. However, we have noticed that students' lunches often contain unhealthy foods. How

can we help parents provide healthy foods in school lunches?

Parents, students and schools all have different roles when it comes to supporting students to eat well. It is the parent's role to decide *what* foods are available to pack in school lunches; it is the school's role to decide *when* and *where* students eat at school; and it is the student's role to decide *whether* or not to eat, *how much* to eat, and *in what order* to eat foods from what has been provided. If parents send cookies or chips for snacks, it is *not* the role of school staff or volunteers to take the food away or tell students they cannot eat it because it is deemed "unhealthy". It is worse for children to doubt their parents' choices than it is for them to eat these foods (1). Some families struggle to purchase enough food, so snacks and meals can be based on what is available and acceptable to the student. For example, a student may bring granola bars to school for snacks because these have been given to the family from a friend or charity. It is important to create a school environment where students feel safe and respected, not judged or shamed. The school community can also support students to eat well in other ways too. Try some of these ideas:

- Provide information to students and families about healthy food options for snacks and lunches. Contact your local public health nutritionist or community Dietitian for ideas or create your own using [Healthy Foods for My School](#) (2).

- Encourage parents to send a vegetable or fruit with each snack and lunch, but also have fruit available for students for free or for a very low cost.
- Serve or sell only healthy foods in the school and during school events. This includes meal and snack programs, canteens, vending machines and for classroom celebrations and sport events.

If you have students who are new to Canada or who struggle with English, contact your local public health nutritionist for handouts with pictures of healthy eating practices. Some communities have organizations that provide services to these families and may have suggestions as well.

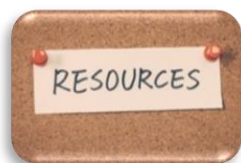
References

1. Satter, E. Healthy Eating At school [cited 2018 June 19]. Available from: www.ellynsatterinstitute.org/resources-and-links-for-the-public/
2. Government of Saskatchewan. Healthy Foods for my School [cited 2018 June 19]. Available from: www.saskatchewan.ca/government/education-and-child-care-facility-administration/services-for-school-administrators/student-wellness-and-wellbeing

PUBLIC HEALTH NUTRITIONISTS OF SASKATCHEWAN WORKING GROUP

Distributed by:

Stacey Wiens, Public Health Nutritionist
Saskatchewan Health Authority
North Battleford, Lloydminster,
Meadow Lake and surrounding areas
stacey.wiens@saskhealthauthority.ca



Poverty Education Resources for Grades 6-9 Saskatchewan Health Authority (Formerly Saskatoon Health Region). www.saskatoonhealthregion.ca/locations_services/Services/health-promotion/Pages/TheresMoreToPovertyThenMeetsTheEye.aspx

PROOF Fact Sheets Find out the quick facts about food insecurity in Canada in these easy to read fact sheets showing the causes, possible solutions, who's affected, what impact it can have, and more. Available here: proof.utoronto.ca/resources/fact-sheets/

The Cost of Meals and Snacks A tool that can be used by schools, child care facilities and community organizations to budget for child nutrition programs to help ensure that they have the appropriate resources available to purchase and prepare healthy foods for their meal programs. The tool identifies the average costs for healthy meals and snacks for each child per day. Available here: www.saskatchewan.ca/government/government-structure/ministries/health/other-reports/a-report-on-the-cost-of-healthy-food-in-saskatchewan