A green graphic of a sun with a semi-circular base and several rays of varying lengths extending upwards.

Section
2

The Policy Explained

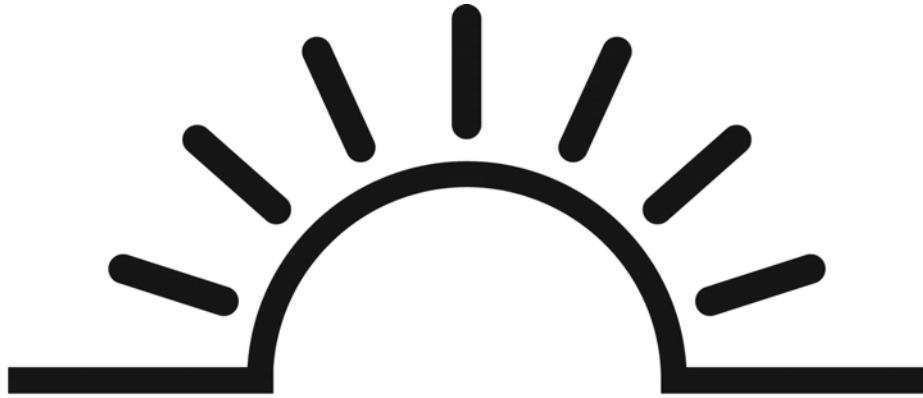


Section 2 The Policy Explained

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What Role Can Policy
Partners Play?



Key Points

What Role Can Policy Partners Play?

- Policy partners include the Healthy Eating Alliance (HEA), the school board/district, school administrators, teachers, staff, parents and students. All are very important to the success of the policy.
- Partner roles are:
 - **HEA:** to provide support to schools by providing this toolkit, information on healthy eating and conducting healthy eating activities.
 - **School Board/District:** to be responsible for developing an implementation plan for the policy, ensuring that schools comply with the policy and regulations, and supporting schools as they implement the policy.
 - **School Administrators:** to ensure that the policy is implemented in their school; communicating to staff, parents and children that healthy eating matters and that the policy is important.
 - **Teachers:** to act as positive role models by discussing why healthy eating is important for them personally, taking healthy choices for their snacks and lunches. Involve children in learning activities which encourage healthy eating.
 - **Parents:** to make healthy choices available at home and send healthy foods for school snacks and lunches from the Guide to Food Choices. Have positive attitude towards healthy eating.
 - **Students:** to learn about the policy and try their best to follow it, have positive attitudes towards healthy eating, help educate their parents/guardians and other family members.

What Role Can Policy Partners Play?

Overview

No one person or partner has sole responsibility for helping children to eat healthy. Everyone- the school board/district, school administrators, teachers, staff, parents and students-are “policy partners” in that they can help make this happen and are vitally important to the success of the policy. The roles that each of these “policy partners” can play are described in the following pages.

In Prince Edward Island, rates of obesity and preventable nutrition related diseases like heart disease, cancer and diabetes are higher than in many other areas of Canada. It is therefore very important to help children establish healthy eating habits by making healthy choices available and educating children about the importance of healthy eating. Healthy eating policies at school provide PEI children and youth with opportunities to develop life long healthy eating habits.

PEI Healthy Eating Alliance

Since June 2003, the PEI Healthy Eating Alliance (HEA) has worked with 17 “lead” elementary and consolidated schools to develop draft healthy eating policies in each of three school boards/districts in PEI.

Now that the draft language has been developed and has been adopted (or is being considered for adoption) at the school district level, the School Healthy Eating Policy Working Group of the HEA will be providing support to schools as they implement the new policies by providing this toolkit, other information on healthy eating, conducting healthy eating activities and by facilitating communication among schools with our Healthy EatS Newsbites newsletter. We also hope to support the PEI Department of Education as they develop and implement a revised nutrition component of the health curriculum.

School District/Board

The school district/board has adopted (or is considering the adoption of) a healthy eating policy and regulations for children attending elementary and consolidated schools. This sends a clear message to schools, parents, students and the broader community that they believe healthy eating is important for children’s growth and development and for optimal learning in the classroom. Good nutrition and exercise in childhood is also essential to reduce the risk of diseases such as heart disease, cancer, diabetes and osteoporosis. The school district/board is responsible for developing an implementation plan for the policy, and for ensuring that schools comply with the policy and regulations. It is also important that the board/district support schools as much as possible in obtaining resources to help them implement the policy.

School Administrators (Principals and Vice Principals)

Once children go to school, establishing healthy eating habits in children requires a cooperative effort between the home and the school. Since students spend more time in school than in almost any other environment and may consume 40% of their daily food intake at school, the school setting can have a tremendous and positive impact on the foods children eat, student health and learning. It has been the practice that principals and vice principals are responsible for ensuring that all school district/board policies are implemented in their school, and the healthy eating policy is no exception. School administrators are vital to the success of the policy in that they play a key leadership role. They can increase its effectiveness by communicating to staff, parents and children that healthy eating matters and that the policy is important. This may involve many activities that are already taking place in schools, such as making some changes to foods sold at school, distributing education and other supportive materials from the PEI Healthy Eating Alliance and other sources, and encouraging staff to set a good example by carrying out their own healthy eating activities and eating healthy themselves.

School Staff (Teachers and other staff)

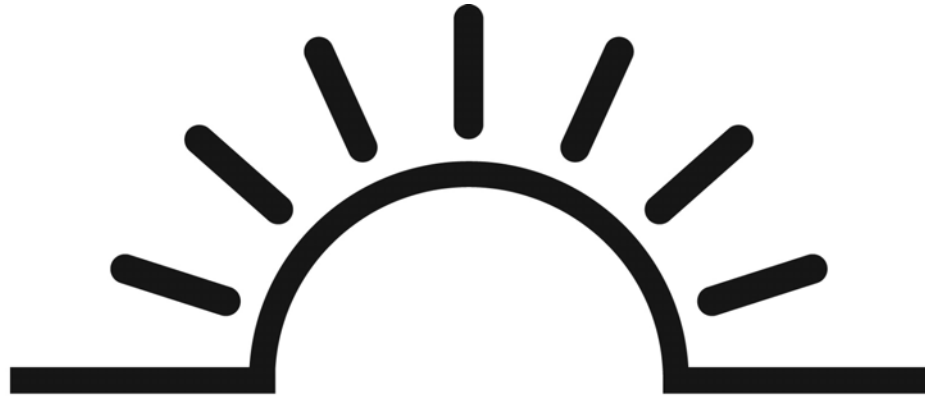
Teachers have more contact with children than anyone except parents, and their role in encouraging and supporting healthy eating is of utmost importance. Teachers can be positive role models by discussing why healthy eating is important for them personally and by taking healthy choices for their snacks and lunches. They can also involve children in learning activities which encourage healthy eating (see Section 6 “Nutrition in the Classroom: Teacher Resources” in this toolkit for suggestions). It is also a great idea to use positive reinforcement in the classroom when children make healthy choices, and to use non-food or healthy foods for rewards. Finally, when opportunities arise, teachers can encourage parents to help their children eat better.

Parents

Parents are the first and the most important influence in shaping childrens’ eating habits from infancy onward. Parents are key to the success of the policy by making healthy food choices available and encouraging their consumption at home and sending healthy foods for school snacks and lunches. The Guide to Food Choices which accompanies the policy is a useful tool to use in choosing foods for children to eat at home and school. It is important that parents eat healthy too, so children can see that healthy eating matters at home, and can be delicious and fun. Learning about how to eat well and having positive attitudes towards healthy eating are also very important. The Healthy Eating Alliance will be working to provide information and tips for parents through presentations, the media and other means.

Students

Students are the centre of attention in our healthy eating policy, and it is very important that they learn about the policy and try their best to follow it. The Healthy Eating Alliance is willing to work with schools to educate students about the policy and identify programs and other incentives to help make this happen. They can also act as positive role models with their peers by discussing why healthy eating is important for them personally and by taking healthy choices for their snacks and lunches. Having positive attitudes towards healthy eating, and learning about how to eat well is also very important. Students can also play a valuable role in educating their parents/guardians and other family members.



Frequently Asked
Questions and
Common Concerns



Key Points

Frequently Asked Questions and Common Concerns

- Schools, parents, students and community members may have questions about the Healthy Eating Policy. We have tried to anticipate some of these questions and common concerns, and have included answers in the following section.
- Examples of questions included in this section are:
 - Why have a healthy eating policy at school? Aren't parents responsible for feeding their children?
 - What's wrong with selling chocolate bars? It's only once a year.
 - How can we start a breakfast or snack program at our school?
 - Where do we find healthy eating resource materials?

Frequently Asked Questions and Common Concerns

Schools, parents, students and community members may have questions about the Healthy Eating Policy. We have tried to anticipate some of these questions and common concerns, and have included answers in the following section.

Q1: Why have a healthy eating policy at school? Aren't parents responsible for feeding their children?

A: We agree that parents are the first and most important influence on children's eating habits. However, once children go to school, cooperation between home and school is important in order to establish healthy eating patterns in children. Since students spend more time in school than in almost any other environment and may consume 40% of their daily food at school, schools can play a very important role in helping children to eat healthy. We recognize that parents are key to the success of the policy by making healthy choices available and encouraging their consumption at home and sending healthy foods for school snacks and lunches. A healthy school policy can also serve to remind and educate parents about the important role of nutrition in their children's health and well being.

Q2: Aren't you banning unhealthy foods at school?

A: Foods are not banned in this policy. This is because dietitians have always maintained that "all foods can fit" into a healthy diet as long as we eat healthy foods *regularly* and we eat less healthy foods in *moderation*. Research also shows that when we restrict foods from children and enforce the consumption of only healthy foods, they often end up liking the less healthy food more and the healthy food less.

Therefore, the policy specifies that foods sold or made available for breakfast, lunch, canteen and snack programs will be selected from lists of *Foods to Serve Most Often* (daily) and *Foods to Serve Sometimes* (2-3 times per week). These lists include healthy choices such as vegetables, fruit, low fat milk, whole grain products, lean meats, foods prepared with little or no fat, and foods low in sugar, salt and caffeine.

The policy also includes less healthy foods which tend to be high in fat, sugar, calories or offer little nutritional value in a *Foods to Serve Least Often* list, which means that they should be sold or made available infrequently (no more than 1-2 times per month). These foods should be avoided most of the time, but can fit once in a while in a healthy diet.

Q3: They usually have healthy food at home. What is wrong with having chicken nuggets or hot dogs for lunch or a treat at school?

A: It is important to remember that not all children have access to healthy foods at home. Making healthy choices available at school is a good way to reinforce the message that healthy eating is important and helps ensure that students will establish healthy eating habits for their entire life. Hot dogs and chicken nuggets typically served in Island elementary schools are high in fat and sodium. These foods therefore fall into the *Foods to Serve Least Often* list (see Q2). Healthier versions of these foods are available, and some schools are trying these out.

Q4: Isn't it contradictory to have less healthy choices for celebrations?

A: The policy recognizes the reality that food and celebrations are part of our culture. It is acceptable for schools to have flexibility to offer treats on special days as long as they offer healthy choices too.

Q5: What's wrong with selling chocolate bars? It's only once a year.

A: Fundraising activities are another tool to show students that healthy choices can be easy to make. Fundraising sales without unhealthy items can be as successful and will be consistent with the message taught in nutrition class and in the school environment. (See Section 3 for a list of fundraising ideas).

Q6: It is hard to make money selling nutritious foods because students won't buy them.

A: Both research studies, and experience with schools, have shown that students will purchase healthy foods when they are offered, particularly if they are not competing with less expensive unhealthy foods, and that profits can be maintained and even increased when healthy foods are sold. Promoting healthy foods (taste tests, specials, theme days) can also help you to sell them.

Q7: What's wrong with using candy and other less healthy foods as a reward for good behaviour or academic achievement?

A: When unhealthy foods are being used as treats or rewards, it makes these foods seem more desirable, and children like them more. Healthy foods, extra activity or recess time, or story time can also be used as rewards for good behaviour or academic achievement.

Q8: What does it mean by "pricing approaches which encourage students

to choose healthy foods over less healthy foods”?

A: This means that healthy foods are not more expensive than less healthy foods. Research suggests that lowering the price of healthy foods (e.g. vegetables and dip) and increasing prices of less healthy foods (potato chips) will increase sales of the healthy choices, decrease sales of the less healthy choices and will encourage students to choose healthy foods more often.

Q9: Why is it important to limit ads for less healthy foods?

A: Advertising in schools comes along with an implied product endorsement from the school. When these products are advertised and sold in schools, students get the message that these products are acceptable to schools and are okay to include in their daily diets.

Q10: Why is a minimum of 20 minutes for students to eat lunch specified in the policy?

A: 20 minutes is considered by leaders in school health issues in the United States and Canada as the minimum amount of time for children to eat a healthy lunch. We understand that some children may finish lunch in less than 20 minutes. See below how eating after outside play can help schools achieve the 20 minute minimum lunch time.

Q11: Why eat after outside play? What about children who are hungry or those with diabetes?

A: Eating after outside play is one strategy to reduce children rushing through their lunch in order to play outside. Research suggests that playing outside first can improve children’s appetite and the amount eaten at lunch. Some schools find that using a silent reading period once children return can ensure that all children have the minimum 20 minutes for lunch. This recommendation does not apply to children who have special needs such as diabetes: they should eat at regular times which have been established in consultation with the child’s parents.

Q12: Students have the right to choose whatever foods they want.

A: Yes, students have the right to choose, and can choose what they take to school in their lunches and snacks. However, schools have the responsibility to make sure there is a real choice when foods are sold at school. If only unhealthy foods are being sold, or healthy foods are too expensive, students are not being given real options. Healthy choices need to be available, attractive and affordable in order to encourage students to make wise choices. We need to limit how often less healthy choices are offered, and the number of unhealthy choices which are available.

Q13: What about safety and microwave use? Aren't microwaves encouraging the use of unhealthy convenience foods?

A: Not all schools have microwaves, and microwaves are not required in classrooms under this policy. While we have included guidelines for microwave safety for those schools who do, schools are ultimately responsible for ensuring safety when using microwaves in the classroom. It is true that not all microwave foods are created equal: some soups are quite healthy; other foods such as some pasta or noodle dishes can be high in fat and salt. It is important to educate parents, students and teachers about reading labels and making healthy microwave choices.

Q14: What is an "emergency food cupboard"? Why is it important for schools to stock an "emergency food cupboard"?

A: Many elementary schools in PEI have non-perishable foods on hand to give to children who come to school without enough food for the day. This may be because the child forgot their recess and/or lunch; they spilled, upset or lost their lunch; or did not come with enough lunch because of the family's financial situation. Foods may include cheese and crackers, fruit, juice, peanut butter (if allowed), and other non-perishable foods. This food does not solve the overall problem of hunger in schools, but can help out an individual child and make them more ready to learn.

Q15: What is "Breakfast For Learning"?

A: Breakfast for Learning is a national charitable organization whose mission is to ensure that all children attend school well-nourished and ready to learn. They are a major funder of school food programs in Canada.

Q16: How can we start a breakfast or snack program at our school?

A: Contact the provincial coordinator, Charmaine Campbell at cecampbell@edu.pe.ca for information and funding sources.

Q17: What does it mean "when a need is identified" for breakfast programs?

A: In order to avoid programs being started unnecessarily and ensure that programs can make a difference in the number of children who eat breakfast, experts recommend that schools do not begin a breakfast program without first establishing that there is a need for the program. This may be as simple as school administrators and staff seeing breakfast skipping as a problem in their students based on their observations. It could involve estimating how many children are missing breakfast regularly: the Healthy Eating Alliance has some short surveys which have been used for this

purpose. It is also important to find out if members of the school community, including parents, are supportive, since their involvement is critical in order for a program to be successful.

Q18: Why does the program need to be open to all students? Wouldn't it be more affordable if it was only for students who can't afford breakfast?

A: Breakfast For Learning requires that programs be universally available to all students as a condition of funding. This is because studies show that when students are selected for programs based on financial need, the program is viewed as something for "poor children", which can cause children who do go to feel ashamed or to be teased. Not surprisingly, participation rates are low for these types of programs, and they are viewed as less effective. This is too high a price to pay, even though it may be initially less expensive to offer the program only to students from low income families.

Q19: Why should we have breakfast programs? It takes responsibility away from parents, where it should be.

A: As noted in Q1, we recognize that it is important for parents to provide healthy food for their children, and breakfast is no exception to that. However, children miss breakfast for a variety of reasons, such as a lack of time, scheduling problems or for financial reasons. Breakfast programs are intended for any child in the community who wants to drop by for a meal, regardless of the reason. Having a breakfast program helps ensure that every child attends school well nourished and ready to learn. Families who are able routinely contribute to school food programs through donations of time and/or money.

Q20: Where do we find healthy eating resource materials?

A: There are some resource materials included in this toolkit - Section 6 and Section 7 have some great examples. The PEI Healthy Eating Alliance has lists of websites and also has some printed resource materials available, which can be accessed through Sherry O'Keefe (sherry@healthyeatingpei.ca), 620-3672 or through the HEA Website at www.healthyeatingpei.ca. These materials, however, cannot substitute for a current effective healthy eating curriculum, which we hope will be available in the near future.

Q21: What kinds of activities does the Healthy Eating Alliance have? How do I find out about them?

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A: Every year, the activities of the HEA are summarized in a progress report. Activities are accomplished through working groups, which include Nutrition Education and Promotion, Access to Safe and Healthy Food, School Healthy Eating Policy and Research and Evaluation. The 2004 progress report is available through Pat Charlton (pccharlton@ihis.org) or online at www.healthyeatingpei.ca.

For information on current activities, you can visit our website or contact Pat Charlton or Co-chairs Bob Gray (rjgray@edu.pe.ca) or Wendy MacDonald (wendymac@isn.net)

Q21: How do I find out more about safe food handling?

A: Contact Environmental Health Services at The Department of Health and Social Services at 1-800-954-6400 or www.gov.pe.ca/environmentalhealth. There are also very good resources at: Fight Bac!™ from www.canfightbac.ca.

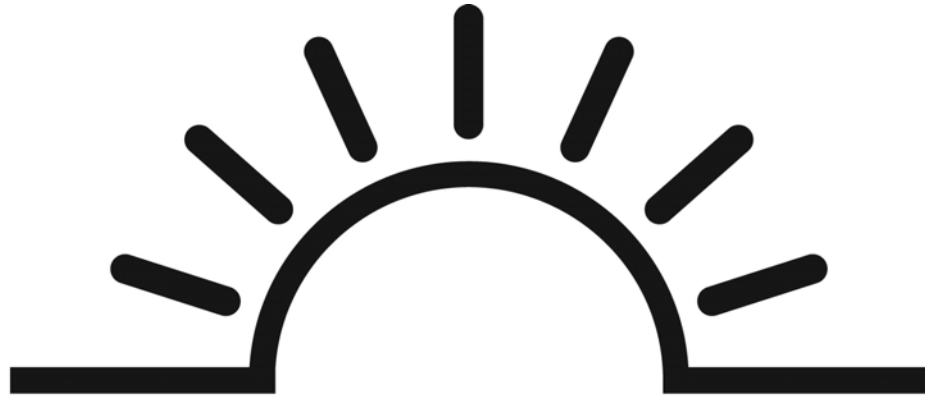
Q22: Where do I get the Information Handbook on Anaphylactic Shock?
How can I get more information?

A: The handbook is available through the Department of Health and Social Services or electronically at http://www.gov.pe.ca/photos/original/ed_anaphylactic.pdf. At the time of printing, the handbook was under review.

Some material adapted from:

“How to Deal With Arguments” by the School Nutrition Advisory Coalition, Feeding the Future: School Nutrition Handbook

“Dealing With Opposition” by the Public Health Nutritionists of Saskatchewan Working Group, Nutrition Guidelines for Schools, August 2004



Letter to Parents
Explaining Policy



Letter to Parents Explaining Policy

Dear Parents,

Our school has begun to change some of the foods and beverages that we are offering to students so that they can eat healthily at school. We want to make sure that our children are as healthy and ready to learn as possible. We know that in order for students to make healthy food choices and to be more active, we need to work with parents so that our students can be the best that they can be.

We are following the policy that the school board/district (has passed/is considering) for school nutrition. This healthy eating policy was made by parents, teachers, and principals from across the (board/district), working with the PEI Healthy Eating Alliance. It includes lists of foods which can be served most often (daily), which are healthy choices, foods which can be served sometimes (2-3 times per week), which are nutritious but higher in fat or sugar, and foods which can be served least often (1-2 times per month or less), because they are not very nutritious and are high in fat and/or sugar.

The foods that we will be offering regularly at school will be healthy foods from the “daily” and “sometimes” lists. You will be noticing that we are no longer offering some foods like _____ that are higher in fat and salt. Together, we will be trying to make sure that our students get into the habit of eating healthy foods every day at school. Once in a while, we will certainly have treats for celebrations (like Halloween and Valentine’s Day) and we will make sure that there will be some healthy foods offered as well as traditional cookies and candy.

At school we will be supporting your efforts to send healthy foods to school for your children. However, the policy says that teachers will not be “food police” who check the lunches that come from home. Also, no foods are ‘banned’ from school because people have found that when children aren’t allowed to have a food, they want it even more. Instead, we’ll be trying to get them into the habit of eating healthy choices most of the time.

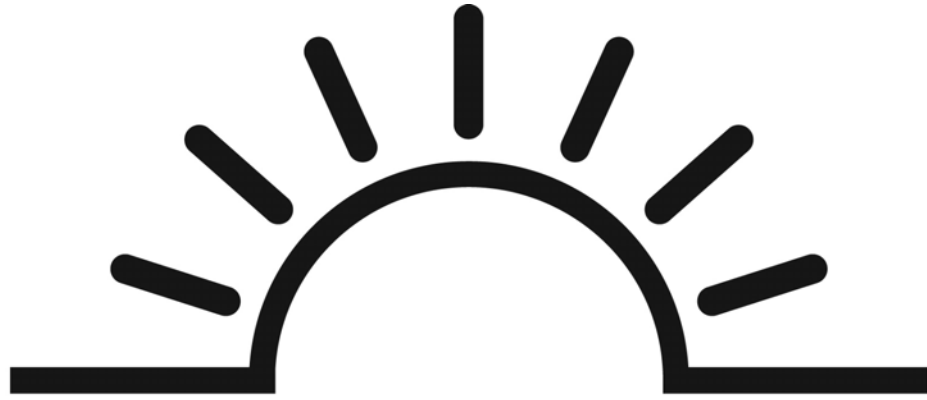
This will be a learning experience for students, teachers, and parents alike as we make this change together. We will be happy to use our connections with the PEI Healthy Eating Alliance to help parents, teachers, and students learn as much as we can about healthy eating.

Thank you for your support, help, and cooperation as we make this important change together. Please feel free to contact the school at any time with questions or comments.

Sincerely

March 2005





Summary of Policy
for School
Newsletters and
Handbooks



Summary of Policy for School Newsletter and School Handbooks

We will be following the new School Healthy Eating Policy which (has been passed/is under consideration) by the School (Board/District). You will notice a change in the foods that are offered every week by the school for lunch or snacks. We will be trying to offer healthy foods so that our students are as healthy and ready to learn as they can be, and so that our children can learn to eat healthy at school as well as at home. This will be a learning experience for students, teachers, and parents alike as we make this change together. We appreciate your questions and comments, and look forward to working with you.