

Food and Nutrition Policy for Nova Scotia Public Schools

Provincial Breakfast Program Standards



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Introduction

Julie, Grade 3



“We are very proud of the continuous developments in our Breakfast Program. Breakfast and healthy eating is a priority in our school. The positive results we have seen have proven its value and worth beyond words.”

Provincial Breakfast Program Standards are intended to ensure quality breakfast programs in Nova Scotia public schools. The primary function of breakfast programs is to provide nourishment to students. However, programs can also provide opportunities for nutrition education, leadership, and socialization, as well as for building relationships and self-esteem. Breakfast programs encourage community, parental, and student engagement and foster a culture of caring and well-being within the school community.

Starting the day with a healthy breakfast is important for many reasons. Breakfast improves nutritional status and supports healthy living, by providing approximately 25 per cent of daily nutrition needs. Studies clearly indicate that a healthy breakfast positively affects student performance. Well-nourished students are ready to learn. They have more energy and are less distracted by hunger.

Even though breakfast provides the energy required to complete morning tasks, many students skip breakfast, for a variety of reasons. Poverty provides one explanation; however, an ample family income does not guarantee that children and youth will be well nourished. Students may not feel like eating when they first wake up. Early mornings and long bus rides may mean that students arrive at school hungry even if they have eaten before leaving home. In many homes, both parents work, and sometimes students are required to look after themselves before school. Another reason students may skip breakfast is that many do not yet have the food preparation skills necessary to provide nutritious meals for themselves.

School breakfast programs are not intended to replace nourishment at home, but rather to support parents/guardians who are the primary providers. Children and youth spend a large part of their day in school, making schools an important environment to reinforce the connection among nutrition, health, and education. The availability of school breakfast programs increases the probability that students will eat breakfast and, in turn, improve their learning.





Denver, Grade 5



The Provincial Breakfast Program was established in 2005, to support the Department of Education's *Learning for Life II, Brighter Futures Together* initiative. The Department of Education in partnership with the Department of Health Promotion and Protection engaged experts in breakfast program delivery for guidance. Breakfast for Learning, being the recognized leader in the field, was invited to partner in the initiative to support the development and implementation of the Provincial Breakfast Program.

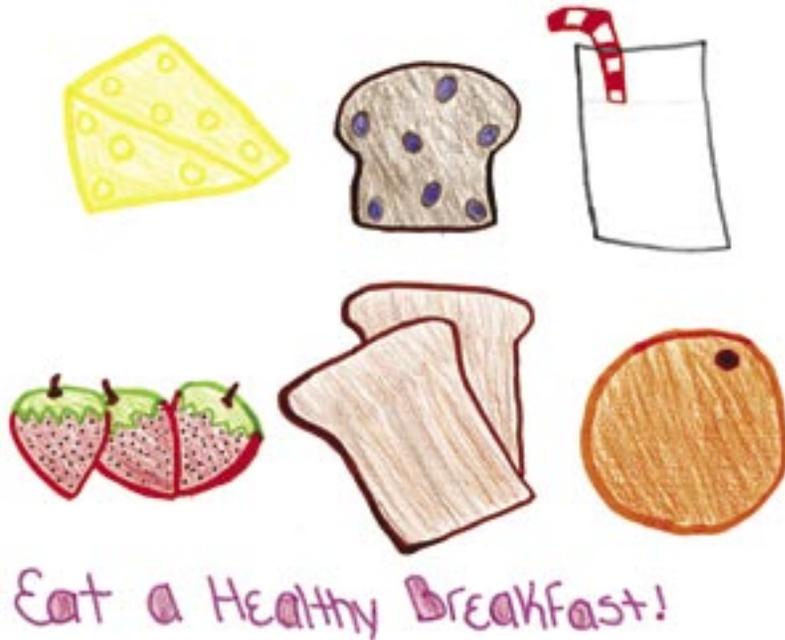
Breakfast for Learning is a national not-for-profit organization solely dedicated to supporting child nutrition programs across Canada. The vision of Breakfast for Learning is that all children in Canada attend school well nourished and ready to learn. In addition to expertise and funding support, Breakfast for Learning provides tools such as start-up kits, volunteer recognition materials, and nutrition education resources. Breakfast for Learning also advocates to increase education and awareness regarding child nutrition programs and contributes to a growing body of research and evaluation on the topic, including development of best practice standards.

The Provincial Breakfast Program supports, and is supported by, *Food and Nutrition Policy for Nova Scotia Public Schools* (2006) and the Nova Scotia Health Promoting Schools program. Together these initiatives help create an environment where students can become engaged learners and healthier Nova Scotians for life.

"The breakfast program gives all our children the opportunity to start his/her day on a more even playing field, enabling each to work to reach their full potential."



Melanie, Grade 6



“Being able to offer a Breakfast Program in our school has many benefits, which extend beyond the need to provide a healthy breakfast. The children start off their day in a calm, happy environment. They have an opportunity to talk with their peers, or an adult, about anything that might be bothering them, before starting their school day.”

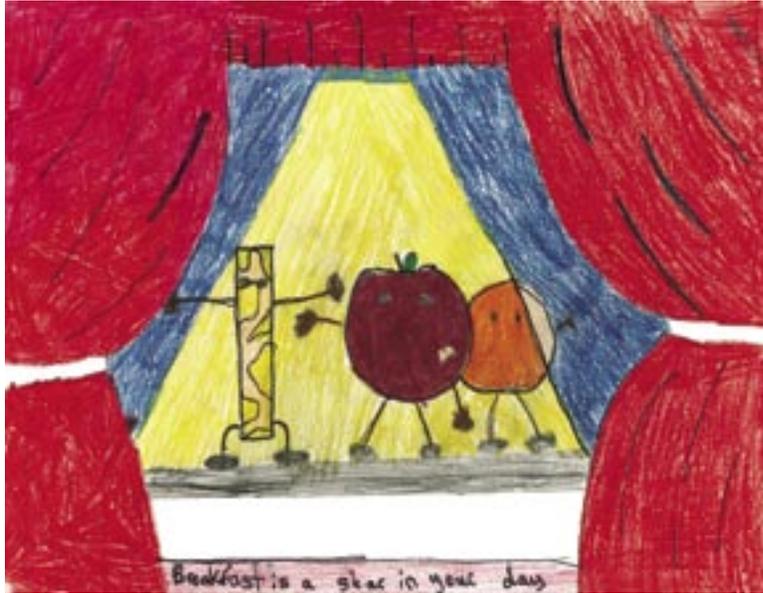
In early 2000, Breakfast for Learning invited Canadians to participate in a discussion to build consensus around best practices in community food and child nutrition programs. A best practice is defined as a key characteristic of a successful initiative, based on empirical data from actual practice. In other words, it is something that is known to work based on practice, case studies, and evaluation.

Key objectives of the cross-Canada consultation were to identify successful initiatives, draw on the lessons learned from their success, and share these lessons with student nutrition programs across the country. The consultation process began with a review of studies on the link between child nutrition and learning. In the months that followed, eight regional workshops were held across the country involving over 500 people. In addition, about 200 informal community dialogues encouraged all interested groups and individuals to participate in the identification of best practices. Because most student nutrition programs in Canada operate in isolation, there had not previously been an opportunity to share their knowledge and experience—and their successes and challenges.

The final step in the consultation process was a national meeting in Ottawa in October 2000. Representatives from across Canada met to determine how to best support nutritional health for all children and youth in community and school nutrition programs, by reviewing quality standards and guidelines presented from various communities. From the cross-Canada consultation, principles, observations, values, and best practice standards were derived.



Lydia, Grade 3



“To say that this program makes a difference in the lives of the children who attend would be an understatement. This is an essential part of their day and it is the reason that many of our students are successful, despite the many challenges they face.”

Building on the expertise and inclusive process used to develop Breakfast for Learning’s Best Practice Standards, the Nova Scotia Departments of Education and Health Promotion and Protection agreed to adapt these standards for use in the Provincial Breakfast Program. In addition to using Breakfast for Learning’s Best Practice Standards, *Keys to Success*, Provincial Breakfast Program funding guidelines and criteria were used in the development of the *Provincial Breakfast Program Standards*.

The Department of Education, Department of Health Promotion and Protection, Breakfast for Learning Nova Scotia Advisory Council, school boards, and district health authorities were involved in guiding the development and validation of the *Provincial Breakfast Program Standards*. The standards will support the health of Nova Scotia students by ensuring the quality of breakfast programs within Nova Scotia public schools and in community settings that have established partnerships with schools.

Programs supported by funding from the Provincial Breakfast Program will achieve or maintain the following standards with the goal of accomplishing all seven *Provincial Breakfast Program Standards*, in a progressive manner, over time. The Provincial Breakfast Program defines breakfast as food served before instructional time begins.



Anthony, Grade 5



“Our breakfast program has improved the overall nutritional well-being and educational readiness of the students at our school. The Breakfast Program is a valuable part of our school culture. It has significantly improved the attendance of students and has improved the nutritional intake of the students. It has expanded the children’s food choices by exposing them to different foods.”

Menu for Learning

To enhance learning and health, breakfast programs must be effective in meeting the nutritional needs of students. Using *Food and Nutrition Policy for Nova Scotia Public Schools* (2006) to guide menu planning will serve to strengthen programs and increase access to and enjoyment of health-promoting, safe, and affordable food and beverages within the school. Breakfast programs can offer a supportive environment where students’ food choices and eating habits are positively influenced through role modelling, informal education opportunities, and healthy food selection.

1.1 Nutritious Food and Menu Planning

Food and beverages served in the Provincial Breakfast Program follow the directives as described in *Food and Nutrition Policy for Nova Scotia Public Schools* (2006). In addition, breakfast should provide foods from at least three of the four food groups from *Eating Well with Canada’s Food Guide* (Health Canada 2007).

1.2 Food Safety

Schools follow *Nova Scotia Food Safety Guidelines for Breakfast Programs* (2006). Safe breakfast programs require at least one person on site who has certification from the two-hour, volunteer-orientated Food Handlers Course developed by the Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture.

1.3 Allergy

Breakfast programs ensure that food and beverages served are in alignment with school board anaphylaxis policy, *Anaphylaxis in Schools and Other Settings* (2005), or peanut aware policies and guidelines as stated in directive 9.4 of the *Food and Nutrition Policy for Nova Scotia Public Schools* (2006).

1.4 Nutrition Education

Breakfast programs provide opportunity for positive role modelling and informal nutrition education. Breakfast programs give students an authentic opportunity to put into practice knowledge gained through curriculum and related health-promoting school initiatives.



Shauntel, Grade 5



“The breakfast program has contributed to our school’s sense of community and inclusion. Our students are realizing the power and possibility of volunteerism.”

Standard Two

Staff and Volunteers

Breakfast program coordination is essential to provide continuity and key functions for program operation. Creating partnerships for the program in the early stages of planning is important for building a solid funding and volunteer base. Successful programs are those that build in a system to recognize volunteers and supporters and ensure program sustainability.

2.1 Coordination

Breakfast programs are coordinated, in consultation with the school principal, by a qualified individual who plays the central role of organizing volunteers, managing budgets, and acting as a community liaison.

2.2 Resources

Staff, students, and other volunteers who work within the breakfast program participate in training and professional development opportunities. These opportunities are facilitated by schools, school boards, and the Departments of Education and Health Promotion and Protection, with support and input from Breakfast for Learning.

2.3 Recognition and Acknowledgment

Breakfast programs recognize contributions made by volunteers and other supporters in the community. Volunteers are acknowledged using recognition methods such as certificates of appreciation and thank you letters.

2.4 Volunteer Recruitment

Breakfast programs follow the *Model Framework: Protection from Child Abuse, Discrimination and Sexual Harassment* (Nova Scotia Department of Education 2003) on matters pertaining to volunteer recruitment and volunteer management.



Brayden, Grade 3



“This program has made a big difference for many students. They know that they have access to healthy food any day they need it. They are more settled in the classroom because they aren’t hungry.”

Effective Program Management

Breakfast programs that involve parents every step of the way are successful. Parental involvement fosters a sense of program ownership and endorsement and helps to create a positive environment for children and youth. Programs with a coordinating committee that includes students, parents, school staff, community members, volunteers, and the local business sector have taken the first step towards sustainability. A collaborative approach to program delivery contributes to a sense of community ownership for programs. Details of program operation are kept on file by school administration and the breakfast program coordinating committee to help sustain the program if school administration and/or program leadership changes. It also serves to clarify responsibilities.

3.1 Parental Involvement and Support

- a) Schools ensure that parents are aware of the breakfast program.
- b) Breakfast programs provide parents an opportunity to contribute as they are able, through donations of time, money, or expertise.

3.2 Coordinating Program Committee

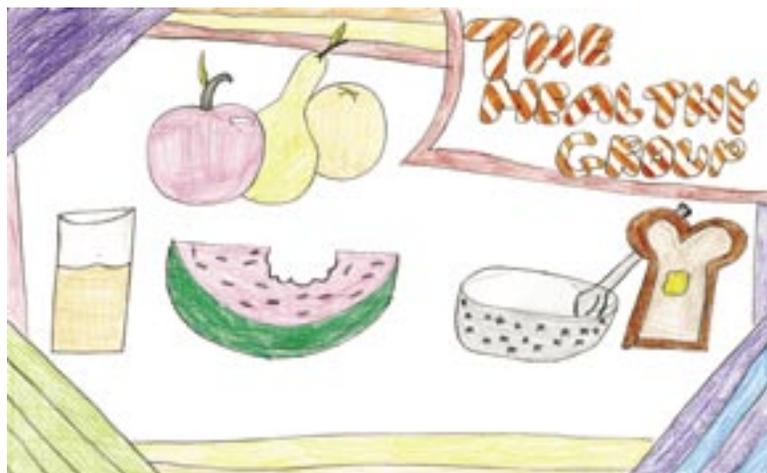
A breakfast program committee provides leadership to the program and reflects community collaboration and diverse partnerships of parents, community members, students, and volunteers. In addition, the committee includes a member of the school administration staff or designate. This committee may be newly formed or already exist as part of other health-promoting initiatives or activities.

3.3 Program Continuity

To ensure program continuity, a file should be created by the school principal and the breakfast program coordinator detailing program operations, including location, timing, volunteers, funds, and use of school equipment. This file provides a record of how the breakfast program functions if school and/or program leadership change.



Nick, Grade 5



“The breakfast club provides a warm, safe environment for students, staff and volunteers to eat and socialize and start their day in a positive way.”

Who Is Served—Access and Participation

A nutrition program in which any student in the school community may participate is said to be “universally accessible.” Evaluation has shown that programs targeting specific groups of students experience lower participation rates than those programs that are universal. Providing an open and universal program is effective in addressing the perceptions of social stigma that may be associated with breakfast programs. Breakfast programs are not merely a response to poverty, and in fact, research has shown that ample family income does not guarantee that students come to school well nourished and ready to learn. Universal breakfast programs reach a greater number of students who need the program.

4.1 Universal Program

Breakfast programs welcome all students in the school community.

4.2 Program Operation

Breakfast programs are offered before instructional time begins a minimum of three times a week during the school year.

4.3 Participation

Participation in breakfast programs is promoted to the entire school population.



Taylor, Grade 4



“One of the greatest things we have found is the ‘good feeling’ that permeates throughout the building as students stand around the foyer in the morning and chat while munching on breakfast. The program adds so much to the positive climate of the school.”

Standards Five and Six

Creating a Safe Environment

Providing a safe and inviting environment for breakfast programs encourages program participation. A healthy environment promotes opportunities for students to build supportive relationships with adults and also allows for positive social interaction with adults and peers.

5.1 Supervision

Breakfast programs have adult supervision to ensure both a safe and a welcoming environment for students.

5.2 First Aid

Breakfast programs adhere to school policy regarding handling of medical emergencies.

5.3 Facility

Breakfast programs operate in a clean and sanitary physical environment according to *Nova Scotia Food Safety Guidelines for Breakfast Programs*.

Money Matters—Financial Accountability

Successful and well-managed programs engage various funding partners to ensure financial sustainability. Budgeting and fiscal accountability are integral to program management.

6.1 Key Partnerships

Breakfast programs establish and maintain partnerships within the school and wider community to ensure program and financial sustainability.

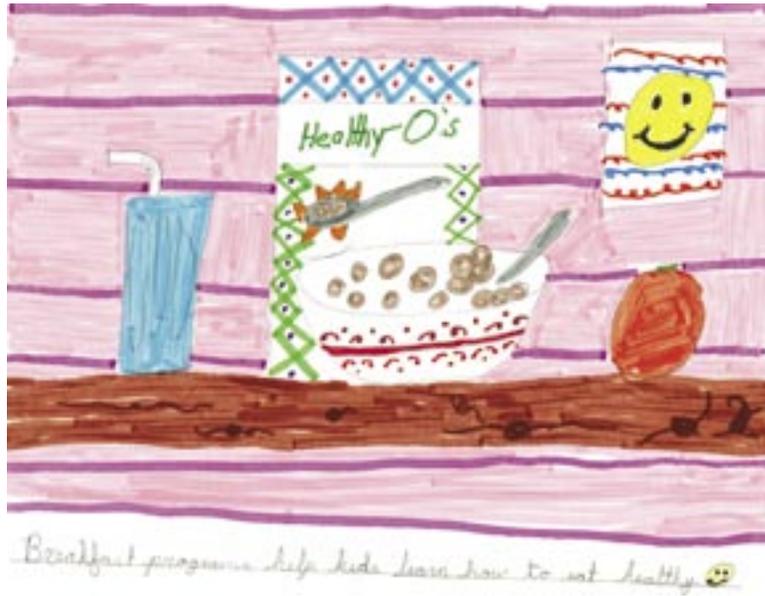
6.2 Accounting

Breakfast programs have a system in place to ensure

- budgeting for effective program delivery
- bookkeeping for fiscal accountability
- cost-effective purchasing practices



Michael, Grade 5



“Right away there was, and has continued to be, a significant reduction in the number of behavior issues in the classroom and office referrals. The teachers have reported that the children are more attentive and engaged in learning since the program began.”

Measuring Success—Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are key components of effective program management. Monitoring and evaluation provide quantitative and qualitative data to inform future development of the Provincial Breakfast Program and other nutrition programs operating within the community.

7.1 Monitoring and Evaluation

- a) Schools work progressively through the *Provincial Breakfast Program Standards* with the goal of accomplishing all seven standards. Schools report this information to school boards using reporting templates.
- b) School boards will monitor and support implementation of the *Provincial Breakfast Program Standards* in schools and will report this information to the Departments of Education and Health Promotion and Protection using reporting templates.
- c) Breakfast programs participate in provincial monitoring and evaluation of the Provincial Breakfast Program. In addition, programs contribute to the provincial evaluation of the Health Promoting Schools program.



Jeslynn, Grade 6



“Students are ready and able to turn their attention on learning rather than being hungry. Students know it’s for all – risk free and no judgments.”

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