

Say Yes! to Good Healthy Food in Schools

Key Messages

Whether you're planning to meet with policy staff at the provincial level, present at a meeting of school trustees, or ask questions when your municipal candidate comes to your door it's critical to have your 2-3 priority messages at your fingertips.

Here are some **key messages** that you can use to make your case for good healthy food in schools:

- **The vision: a healthy school food environment for all children and youth.** This includes a universal student nutrition program in every school across the province as well as opportunities for hands-on food literacy education.
- **Momentum is building for good healthy food in schools.** Recommendation 2.8 of Ontario's Healthy Kids Strategy, which was released in March 2013, suggests establishing a universal student nutrition program for all publicly funded schools across Ontario along with complementary food literacy education.
- When children establish healthy eating patterns, they are less likely to experiencing chronic diseases later in life. **Evidence suggests that the patterns we develop in early childhood tend to be sustained into adulthood.**
- **Children may come to school hungry for a number of reasons** including lengthy commutes, early morning practices, not being hungry when they wake up, and busy family routines in the morning. **A Universal program makes it so that all children can eat at least one healthy meal or snack each day and that they are ready to learn when they come into the classroom.**
- **School meals can make an almost immediate difference in academic achievement as well as attendance and class behaviour.**
- **Student Nutrition Programs rely on support from parents and caregivers, municipalities, corporate sponsors, farmers, local charities, community organizations and many others to make them happen.** While the Government of Ontario has made a significant investment in Student Nutrition Programs, this contribution can only go so far. These funds support up to 15% of a program's costs, and this funding only goes to select priority neighbourhoods and schools. This means that many schools don't have meal programs and those that do receive government support still need to fundraise for the rest of the program's costs (85%).

- While meal programs allow children and youth to achieve greater academic excellence and adopt healthy eating habits, **they can also provide opportunities for supportive food literacy education that can engage students to learn skills that will enable them to make healthy food choices throughout their lives.**

Food literacy education can be advanced through school gardens, cooking programs, learning about food and nutrition during classroom lessons, taking part in farm tours, and other hands-on activities.

An example of how Student Nutrition Programs and Food Literacy can complement one another is that hands-on food skills education can be integrated into meal and snack programs by involving children and youth in planning, preparing, serving, and sharing food and beverages.

Food literacy programs can also amplify the benefits of student meals by getting students excited about choosing, trying and eating healthy options.

- **Building a strong school food program will require support from everyone** including parents, community volunteers, teachers, school staff and boards, farmers, local businesses, community organizations, governments
- **What are you doing to Say Yes to good healthy food in schools?**

Visit sustainontario.com/work/edible-education/say-yes/ for more *Say Yes! to Good Healthy Food in Schools* resources.