

## **Investing in School Healthy Eating Could Improve Academic Success and Avoid Future Healthcare Costs: AG**

*For release September 20* -- Nova Scotia needs to do a better job serving healthy food in its 366 public schools or risk spending billions of dollars in future healthcare costs, says Nova Scotia Auditor General Kim Adair.

“The province has a crucial role to play because healthy food choices can have a significant effect on learning readiness and academic success, and they can also help set the stage for a lifetime of healthy eating,” says Auditor General Kim Adair in her new report.

The obesity rates among children and youth in Canada have nearly tripled in the last three decades, and Nova Scotia’s rate is trending higher than the national average. Overweight or obese children are at greater risk for several chronic diseases and physical health conditions in adulthood.

“This emphasizes the importance of taking preventive action early in childhood. Providing healthy food to students at school can help influence future eating habits, which should ultimately lead to healthier adults,” says Adair.

Schools can help model healthy eating because that’s where kids, from four to 18 years, spend most of their day. For some students, the only exposure to healthy eating choices happens at school.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development created the first Food and Nutrition Policy for Nova Scotia Public Schools in 2006 to provide guidelines and directives to ensure food served in public schools is healthy and in line with Canada’s Food Guide.

The policy needs a major update: The Provincial School Food and Nutrition Policy is based on the 1992 Canada Food Guide, even though new versions of the Food Guide were released in 2007 and 2019.

The 2006 provincial policy was also earmarked for an update every two years, but so far none has been completed.

On a positive note, the audit found almost all schools offer a free, generally healthy breakfast program.

However, when it comes to the lunch program, the majority of schools tested are not complying with the nutritional policy. The department doesn’t know if healthy foods are served in schools because of the lack of monitoring.

The audit noted many good practices in place at South Shore Regional Centre for Education. We recommend the department and the other Regional Centres for Education examine South Shore’s practices to see which ones could be implemented across the province.

Our audit period covered September 1, 2018 to June 30, 2021. We selected a sample of 26 schools to visit in four Regional Centres for Education – Halifax, Chignecto-Central, South Shore and Annapolis Valley. The RCEs were selected based on their makeup of food service types and their location.

The 10 audit recommendations, including updating and regularly evaluating the provincial school nutrition policy, have been accepted by both the department and Nova Scotia Health, with plans for implementation getting underway in the fall.

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