

Healthy Eating in Schools

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and Nova Scotia Health

Key Messages

- Majority of schools tested are not complying with the provincial School Food and Nutrition policy
- Third-party food service providers operate over half of the province's school cafeterias but only 9% of those tested are following the policy
- The Department does not know if healthy foods are being served in schools
- The level of healthy food served to students varies between Regional Centres for Education
- The Provincial School Food and Nutrition Policy is based on the Canada Food Guide from 30 years ago
- Audit noted many good practices at South Shore Regional Centre for Education

Why We Did This Audit

- Healthy food choices can have a significant effect on learning readiness and academic success
- Some students' exposure to healthy eating choices only happens at school
- Some students may not eat during the school day if not provided food by the school
- Obesity rates among children and youth in Canada have nearly tripled in the last 30 years
- Nova Scotia youth overweight/obese rate trending higher than national rate (2015-2020)
- If not addressed, ultimate healthcare costs forecasted to be in the billions of dollars

Provincial School Food and Nutrition Policy Has Not Been Updated for 16 years

- The provincial School Food and Nutrition Policy for Nova Scotia Public Schools is outdated.
- The policy is based on the 1992 Canada Food Guide from 30 years ago, even though the guide has had two major updates (in 2007 and again in 2019).

Lunch Service Needs Improvement While Breakfast Program a Success

- Only 40% of schools we visited complied with the nutritional policy requirements for lunch service.
- Only 9% of third-party food service providers tested complied with the nutrition policy, while 83% of cafeterias run centrally by the Regional Centre for Education complied.
- In half of schools we visited, healthier lunch food was priced higher than less healthy alternatives.
- There is no consistent province-wide approach to provide lunch to students who can't afford to pay.
- A free breakfast program is offered in 98% of schools and schools we visited generally offered healthy foods.

Inadequate Monitoring of Food Served in Schools

- The Department has delegated policy monitoring to the Regional Centres for Education.
- Regional Centres for Education are not monitoring schools to ensure they are complying with the Food and Nutrition Policy.
- Three of seven Regional Centres for Education do not have a dedicated nutritionist or dietitian on staff.
- South Shore and Annapolis Valley Regional Centres for Education have good practices relating to food services.