



# Backgrounder on School Nutrition Policy

A policy is a brief statement of philosophy and belief—a direction for action. Guidelines spell out the details of a policy. Schools, students and parents all benefit when a school develops a nutrition policy.

Schools benefit because:

- Healthy choices enhance student attendance, concentration, behaviour and school achievement.
- Messages taught in class are reinforced throughout the school environment.

Students benefit because:

- It's easier to make healthy food choices leading to better health and academic performance.
- They are exposed to positive role models for healthy eating.

Parents benefit because:

- Schools don't undermine their attempts to feed their children healthy foods.
- Positive role modelling affects food choices at home.
- Parents of children with health issues such as diabetes don't have to be as concerned by available food choices.

It can be overwhelming to create a nutrition policy from scratch. You may prefer to focus on a single component such as:

- Foods/beverages sold in school stores and vending machines
- Meal and snack programs
- Nutrition education for students/staff
- Using food as a classroom reward



To become an active and healthy part of the community, schools need to develop and nurture a culture that<sup>1</sup>:

- Understands the importance of health for successful learning
- Values physical activity
- Values nutrition
- Values democracy, participation, inclusion and equity
- Includes students in decision-making
- Supports professional development of educators and school staff
- Bases decision-making on research and feedback
- Undergoes ongoing monitoring and evaluation
- Supports and encourages ongoing, lifelong learning
- Adapts to changing needs and responsibilities

The *Guidelines for Food and Beverage Sales in BC Schools* is the overarching provincial policy.

“Having a school committee in place to promote healthy eating has a positive impact on food and beverage choices.” (School Food Sales and Policies Provincial Report II, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health, 2007)

Building a supportive environment that emphasizes healthy foods and reinforces positive messages requires the efforts of many people at many levels. To encourage discussion and action, schools need to engage as many stakeholder groups as possible, including parents, teachers, school district administrators, students and community health professionals.

By getting all stakeholders on board and involved in developing and monitoring policies and programs, the importance of nutrition will become second nature and the message to students will be powerful and consistent.

<sup>1</sup>“Principles for an Active Healthy School Community”, Physical & Health Education Journal, p.9-11, Spring 2004.