



# Backgrounder on Setting the Right Example

Schools and parents have a shared responsibility to model healthy behaviours taught in the classroom. When unhealthy foods are advertised and sold in school, students get the message that these products are okay.

Research shows that children are influenced by the food choices of their parents and other role models. Daughters of parents who eat fruit and vegetables are more likely to do so themselves.<sup>1</sup> Mothers who drink more milk and less pop influence their daughters to do the same.<sup>2</sup>

Family meals are a time to model healthy behaviours. Children who eat with their

families are more likely to consume fruits, vegetables, grains and calcium-rich foods, and to feel connected to their parents and siblings.<sup>3,4,5</sup>

*“I think [the school nutrition policy] helped because after listening through years of food class and PE [Physical Education] to practice health, the bell would go and you’d just go and have chips and pop. At least now there’s something healthy there...”  
(Grade 12 Student, Osoyoos, BC)*

School staff and families also need to be good role models by eating healthy foods and staying active. They need to consider what they use as rewards for good behaviour. Research shows that using food as a reward can have many negative consequences that go far beyond the short-term benefits of good behaviour

or performance.<sup>6</sup> These include teaching children a preference for the sweet foods that are typically used for rewards, interfering with eating in response to hunger and fullness cues, encouraging over-consumption and contradicting nutrition messages they are taught in the classroom. More appropriate rewards might include non-food prizes like stickers and tattoos or privileges, sitting next to a friend in class, trading cards, pencil toppers, as well as coupons for extra credit, extra reading time, computer time or no homework.

*“Children also need role models, and inspiring surroundings.” (André Picard, Globe and Mail, Sept. 9, 2004)*

<sup>1</sup>“Parental influences on young girls’ fruit and vegetable, micronutrient and fat intakes”. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, Fisher JO, Mitchell DC, Smiciklas-Wright H, Birch LL, 102(1):58-64, Jan 2002.

<sup>2</sup>“Maternal milk consumption predicts the tradeoff between milk and soft drinks in young girls’ diets”. *Journal of Nutrition*, Fisher JO, Mitchell DC, Smiciklas-Wright H, Mannino ML, Birch LL, 131:246-250, 2001.

<sup>3</sup>“Influences on adolescent eating patterns: the importance of family meals”. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, Videon TM, Manning C.K., 32:365-373, 2003.

<sup>4</sup>“Family dinner and diet quality among older children and adolescents”. *Archives of Family Medicine*, Gillman M.W., Rifas-Shiman S.I., Frazier A.L., Rockett H.R., Carmango C.A. Jr, Field A.E., Berkley C.D., Colditz G.A., 9(3):235-40, 2000.

<sup>5</sup>“Family meal patterns: Associations with sociodemographic characteristics with improved dietary intake among adolescents”. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, Neumark-Sztainer D., Hannan P.J., Story M., Croll J., Perry C., 103(3):317-22, March 2003.

<sup>6</sup>“Development of food preferences”. *Annual Review of Nutrition*, Birch L.L., 19:41-62, 1999.