



## Take Action: SCHOOL MEAL PROVIDERS

School food services can be 'learning laboratories' where students have the opportunity to learn about, experiment with and develop skills for healthy eating.

### Did you know?

- Nearly half of all teenage girls do not eat the minimum number of servings from any of the four food groups.<sup>1</sup>
- More than half of all teenage boys do not eat the minimum number of servings of vegetables and fruit or milk products.<sup>1</sup>
- Students say the major barriers to healthy eating at school are the lack of available, affordable and appealing foods.<sup>2,3,4,5</sup>
- Overall diet quality, specifically fruit and vegetable consumption and lower fat intake, are important to academic performance.<sup>6</sup>

### What can YOU do to support a healthy school nutrition environment?

#### Make the healthy choice the easy choice.

- Provide a variety of healthy foods and beverages that are tasty and appealing and reflect students' preferences and cultural backgrounds.
- Offer healthy choices from the four food groups from *Canada's Food Guide*.
- Use recipes from *Bake Better Bites* when making muffins, scones, cookies, squares, cakes, cupcakes, breads and pancakes.
- Offer quick "to-go" specials that reflect all four food groups (e.g. subs with cheese; greens and chicken on a whole grain bun with a piece of fresh fruit and water; rice bowl with a stir-fry and yogurt for dessert).
- Make healthy foods and beverages more visible by placing them at eye level.
- Provide appropriate serving sizes; don't 'super-size'. Items like cookies and muffins are often double or triple the portion size recommended in *Canada's Food Guide*.
- Offer salad dressings on the side.



### Support what your colleagues are teaching in nutrition and physical education.

- Coordinate activities with teachers and offer foods that promote healthy eating.
- Decorate eating areas with educational posters and table tents.
- Conduct promotions and events that support healthy choices.
- Post “Nutrition Facts” about foods served (<http://www.healthyeatinginstore.ca>).

### Provide opportunities for students, families and staff to get involved.

- When you have a new menu item, involve business teachers and students in marketing it through posters, contests and school announcements.
- Involve students and parents in selecting and evaluating provided foods and beverages.
- Establish a student advisory council to taste-test new foods and recipes, to suggest how to improve the meals and eating areas, and to offer ideas for attracting more customers.

For more ideas and resources on healthy food and beverage choices to offer to schools, visit: [www.healthyeatingatschool.ca](http://www.healthyeatingatschool.ca)

1 “Food Habits of Canadians: Food Sources of Nutrients for the Adolescent Sample”. Canadian Journal of Dietetic Practice and Research, Phillips S, Jacobs Starkey L and Gray-Donald K., 65 (2): 81-84, Summer 2004.

2 “Barriers and Enablers to Healthy Eating and Active Living in Children: Key Findings in 6 Nova Scotia Communities”, Canadian Diabetes Association, December 2002.

3 “Healthy active living for children and youth”. Pediatric Child Health, LeBlanc C., 7(5):339-345, 2002.

4 “Why do kids eat healthful food? Perceived benefits and barriers to healthful eating and physical activity among children and adolescents”. Journal of the American Dietetic Association, O’Dea J., 103 (4):497-501, April 2003.

5 “Individual and environmental influences on adolescent eating behaviours”. Journal of the American Dietetic Association, Story M, Neumark-Sztainer D, French S., 102(3 Suppl): S40-51, March 2002.

6 “Diet quality and academic performance”. Journal of School Health, Florence MD , Asbridge M, Veugelers PJ , 78 (4): 209-215, April 2008.