

Child Nutrition Council of Manitoba

Manitoba's Commission on Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education Submission

May 2019

Recommendations

Area of Focus: Student Learning

Recommendation 1:

Increase and sustain an annual investment for universal school breakfast, snack and lunch programs, available for any school-age student at no cost regardless of perceived need. The investment would expand existing nourishment programs; enable existing programs to further improve the nutritional quality of the food served; and provide support to programs in new schools.

Recommendation 2:

Facilitate a collaborative approach to addressing a health-promoting, school meal program, involving multiple stakeholders and government departments, with a mandate to improve access to nutritious food for Manitoba students. The Council should be part of this discussion.

The Child Nutrition Council of Manitoba is a charitable organization dedicated to helping school children learn, grow, and succeed by supporting school breakfast, snack, and lunch programs. Since 2001, the work of the Council has facilitated learning by ensuring access to long-term, regular nourishment. We receive funding and support from the Province of Manitoba which

allows us to leverage additional, much needed funds from foundations and the business community.

The Council has and continues to build a team of passionate qualified professionals including dietitians and volunteer board members that are all determined to work hard to ensure school nutrition programs in Manitoba provide nutritious snacks and meals. Our dietitians visit programs to gain insight into the challenges faced by program coordinators and schools. The Council stays in touch with programs to answer questions, help solve problems, offer new ideas and ensure accountability by tracking finances and statistics. To further support programs, the Council provides food skills and nutrition education workshops for program coordinators to facilitate healthy menu choices.

This submission focuses on Student Learning – What are the conditions required to achieve excellence in student achievement and outcomes in Manitoba. Throughout this submission there are narratives shared by schools, to provide further context to the realities faced by students and communities, as well as to support current research.

Children and Food Insecurity

Canada

Nearly 3.2 million individuals in Canada are living in a food insecure household, including nearly 1 million children under the age of 18 (Tarasuk et al., 2016). In 2014, provinces and territories indicated that 1 in 6 Canadian children are affected by household insecurity (Tarasuk et al., 2016). Twenty-five percent of grade 6 children surveyed by the Public Health Agency of Canada stated that they sometimes went to bed hungry because there was not enough food in the house (Ke & Ford-Jones, 2015). Rates of food insecurity have been found to be higher among

Indigenous children than non-Indigenous children. Moderate and severe food insecurity rates in Canada range from 22% to 63% in Indigenous households (Health Canada, n.d.).

Manitoba

Manitoba continues to have one of the highest poverty rates at 27.5% (Campaign 2000, 2017).

Food Bank Canada's most recent HungerCount 2018 reported over 68,000 individuals accessed food banks in Manitoba in March 2018. Of these reported visits, 42.6% were serving children. (Food Banks Canada, 2019).

Until we address that need [poverty] and address how we're going to remove those barriers that are put in place for children and families due to poverty, we're gonna continue to have low test scores, we're gonna to continue to have struggling students
CBC News- Teachers, Parents Give Their Take on What Manitoba's School System Needs April, 2019

Children who experience food insecurity are at a higher risk for poor nutritional status, higher rates of mental health problems and lower educational outcomes. Food insecure youth have a lower consumption of vegetables, fruits and milk products, which can result in vitamin and mineral deficiencies such as vitamin A and C, calcium, magnesium and zinc (Dietitians of Canada, 2016). The prevalence of mental disorders is three times higher in children living in poverty, including hyperactivity, depression and suicidal ideation (Tarasuk et al., 2016). Research has demonstrated that nutritionally deprived children experience more health problems including anemia, weight loss, colds, and infections, and have more school absences and learning problems than food-secure children (Howard & Edge, 2013). However, it's not just vulnerable youth who are lacking healthy food. A lack of time and capacity means that even families who are not experiencing food insecurity are struggling to provide healthy food to their kids.

The student population of Alonsa Community School is generally drawn from homes with financial challenges. Rates of unemployment and underemployment are fairly high in the local area. All of these at home and community issues reflect on student successes within school academics as well as the overall social, emotional and physical health of the students.

Alonsa Community School

Brooklands School resides in the northeast end of St. James-Assiniboia School Division. Demographically this area has fallen significantly below the Division norms on the EDI results. The areas of greatest concern have been in the a) Physical health and well-being, b) Social competency, c) Emotional maturity, and d) Communication skills and general knowledge. These deficits have impacted negatively on school success.

Brooklands School

Impact of School Nourishment Programs

Addressing hunger issues at school with universal nourishment programs has been shown to improve access, quantity, quality and sustainability of foods for school-aged children and youth (Hernandez, et al.,2018). However, Canada is one of the only industrialized countries without a national school food program and was recently ranked 37th of 41 countries around providing healthy food for kids (Coalition for Healthy School Food, n.d.).

As we know, not every student starts from the same place, so having no questions asked nutrition programming available for all of our students is very important to us and also important for our community.

Elwick Community School

Student Attendance

Food insecurity impacting a child's hunger and access to nutrition, has consistently been found to have a large impact on a child's rate of attendance at school. Children from low-income households consistently fall behind their peers in test scores, graduation rates, college enrollment, and other measures of academic success (Howard & Edge, 2013). Poor nutrition can leave students' susceptible to illness or lead to headaches and stomachaches, resulting in school absences (Brown, et al.,2008). In a Toronto study, students who ate morning meals most

days were less likely to be absent than students who ate morning meals on fewer days in a school week or never ate them (Toronto School Board, 2012).

Some students that can't afford to bring food to school choose not to attend because they don't want that situation noticed by schools. By having the programs available to all children it takes that stigma away and knowing that families face difficulties and need support along the way we can help get the kids what they need to have a productive day at school and give them what they need to grow.

École Swan River South School

Students used to try to ask to go home because they were hungry or had headaches from not eating. Parents used to not send their kids to school because they had no lunch to send with them. Since the inception of this program we have seen considerable increase in attendance of the kids who need the help.

Strathclair Community School

Academic Performance

Poorly nourished children are less likely to attend school, as well as have a decreased ability to concentrate and perform well at school, thus threatening their opportunity to gain an education and vital skills for life. A 2-year pilot school meal program with grades 6 to 8 in Toronto, was found to have the following benefits on student's learning outcomes: improved learning skills and class participation, better scores in mathematics, reading, and science, less likelihood of being suspended from school due to discipline or student behavior, and a decrease in absenteeism (Toronto School Board, 2012).

In a study by Hanning et al. (2011) teachers reported that school nutrition programs in remote Ontario First Nations communities improved classroom behavior on days when food was provided, including increased alertness, motivation and attentiveness.

When my students have a snack, I notice that concentration and focus is much better but more importantly the mood of my students improves. They are very grateful for the boost and I know I am grateful for the help because it is much easier to teach students that are feeling happier.

Victor Mager School

As we complete the second year of our program, we appreciate the significant impact it has made on students, and, subsequently on learning. As a school with a high number of children in care and other children who are often worried about the availability of food, the program has provided a sense of security that school is a safe and nurturing place that will support all of their needs during the school day.

R.F. Morrison School

School Climate

As outlined in the updated 2019 Canada's Dietary Guidelines, eating together can help reinforce and model positive eating habits, giving children an opportunity to learn about food and share food cultures. Nourishment programs give children this opportunity, by creating a safe space where children of all socioeconomic backgrounds can find encouragement, get to know friendly adults, learn about nutrition, gain food skills and volunteer credits, and build relationships with other students of various ages and backgrounds. Research has also established a link between nutrition and behavior. Studies have found that access to nutrition can enhance a student's psychosocial well-being, reduce aggression and school suspensions, and decrease discipline problems (Brown et al., 2008).

Based on a school wide survey we conducted students told us about the impact of having a healthy and nutritious snack readily available. Students mentioned they were able to concentrate better and focus more on their studies knowing they could grab something to eat at school if needed. The school climate improved as well as our program became primarily student led. Students continually mentioned how grateful they were to have such programming in place!

Glenlawn Collegiate

Investment in Students and School Communities

It is critical that funding be available so that universally, food is available to any school-age student at no cost to the student regardless of perceived need. We know that by addressing

hunger, there is a significant impact on a student's health, wellbeing, and academic success. Programs need to be unique to each school, so each school community can ensure their students' needs are met in order to level the playing field for students who have come to school without having had enough to eat.

Submitted by,

Board of Directors
Child Nutrition Council of Manitoba
191 Provencher Boulevard
Winnipeg, MB R2H 0G4
Tel (voicemail): (204) 202-1233
info@childnutritioncouncil.com

References

Brown, L., Beardslee, W., & Prothrow-Stith, D. (2008). Impact Of School Breakfast On Children's Health And Learning: An Analysis Of The Scientific Research. Retrieved from http://us.stop-hunger.org/files/live/sites/stop-hunger-us/files/HungerPdf/Impact%20of%20School%20Breakfast%20Study_tcm150-212606.pdf

Campaign 2000. (2017). Manitoba Child and Family Report Card 2017. Retrieved from https://campaign2000.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/2017-MB_ChildFamilyPovReportCard_FINAL.pdf

Coalition for Healthy School Food. (n.d.). For a Universal Healthy School Food Program. Retrieved from https://foodsecurecanada.org/sites/foodsecurecanada.org/files/coalitionforhealthyschoolfood.sm_.pdf

Dietitians of Canada. (2016). Prevalence, Severity and Impact of Household Food Insecurity: A Serious Public Health Issue: Background Paper Dietitians of Canada. Retrieved from <https://www.dietitians.ca/Dietitians-Views/Food-Security/Household-Food-Insecurity.aspx>

Food Banks Canada (2019). HungerCount 2018. Retrieved from https://12150r2wpmcf42rvn2agp7n-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/HungerCount_2018-1.pdf

Hanning, R., Skinner, K., Gates, M., Gates, A., Tsuji, L. (2011) School nutrition programs in remote First Nation communities of the western James Bay region: impact, challenges and opportunities. Retrieved from <http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/43475.html#s6>

Health Canada. (n.d.) Household food insecurity in Canada statistics and graphic (2011 to 2012). Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/nutrition-science-research/food-security/household-food-security-statistics-2011-2012.html#s6>

Hernandez, K., Engler-Stringer, R., Kirk, S., Wittman, H., & McNicholl, S. (2018). The case for a Canadian national school food program. *Canadian Food Studies*, 5 (3), 208-229.

Howard, A., Edge, J., (2013). Enough for All: Household Food Security in Canada. Retrieved from https://www.conferenceboard.ca/temp/4df71390-8f2d-4daa-aeb1-852cfca97815/14-058_EnoughForAll_CFIC.pdf

Ke, J., & Ford-Jones, E. (2015). Food Insecurity and Hunger: A review of the Effects on Children's Health and Behavior. *Paediatrics & Child Health*, 20(2), 89–91.

Petz, S. (2018, April 27). Teachers, Parents Give Their Take on What Manitoba's School System Needs. CBC News. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/manitoba-commission-education-review-public-workshop-1.5114082>

Tarasuk, V, Mitchell, A, Dachner, N. (2016). Household food insecurity in Canada, 2014: Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF). Retrieved from <http://proof.utoronto.ca>

Toronto School Board. (2012). Feeding our future: The first- and second-year evaluation. Toronto District School Board. Retrieved from https://beta.images.theglobeandmail.com/archive/01405/Feeding_Our_Future_1405357a.pdf