

# Measuring Success: Series Report on Manitoba Healthy Food in Schools

2009 Manitoba School Nutrition Survey Report



**Manitoba** 

## Our Story

In 2004 the provincial government launched the *Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures All-Party Task Force* to engage Manitobans across the province in talking about how to promote healthy eating and active living for young people.

The task force report was released in June 2005. As one strategy to address healthy eating, the task force recommended that the provincial government increase access to nutritious foods in schools.

Specifically it called on government to require all schools to have a written school food and nutrition policy as part of the school plan, to be phased in over a period of 3-4 years. This process was to begin in 2006-2007 for kindergarten to grade six and the following year for grades seven through twelve.

## Why School Nutrition Policy?

It can promote patterns of eating that focus on balance, variety and moderation and are consistent with what is taught in the school curriculum.

It can foster an environment that values and role-models the importance of healthy eating.

It provides opportunities for learning, practicing and establishing healthy eating habits for a lifetime.



## Why Focus on Schools?

### Over the course of a school year a student may...

- eat up to 200 lunches at school
- receive food at parties, dances & cultural events
- buy food and beverages from vending machines and cafeterias
- attend a breakfast or snack program
- receive food as a classroom reward
- sell food for fundraising

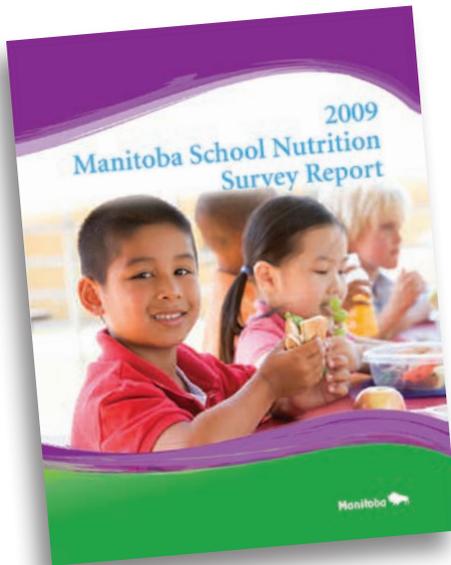
### ...Offering and promoting

healthy food and drink choices throughout the school day is, therefore, a BIG step towards improving the nutrition of children.

## Did You Know..?

- Recent research supports claims that poor nutrition is associated with poorer learning outcomes.
- Educators have linked decreased attention spans and poor student performance to hunger and missed meals.
- Poor nutrition can put young people at risk of developing childhood obesity, malnutrition, disordered eating, type 2 diabetes, iron-deficiency anemia and dental cavities.
- When poor eating habits are established in childhood, they often carry on to adulthood, where heart disease, diabetes and several types of cancer can develop as a result.





## Manitoba School Nutrition Survey

In 2006, prior to the province-wide implementation of the school nutrition policy recommendations, a base-line survey was sent to all publicly funded schools in Manitoba to learn about their food and nutrition environments.

The purpose of the 2009 follow-up survey was to determine what has changed in schools since the recommendation for school nutrition policy. Specifically, the survey examined changes to foods sold and served in schools, and changes to the nutrition and food environments in schools.

### How We Used the Survey to Measure Change

#### What We Looked For

The Manitoba School Food and Nutrition Survey (2009) was designed to obtain information about:

- school food-service facilities and arrangements
- types of foods sold in schools
- food-related policies and guidelines that were in place in Manitoba schools in 2009.

#### How We Looked For It

We used a written, self-administered questionnaire.

We made sure it was similar to the questionnaire used in the 2006 Manitoba School Nutrition Survey to allow for comparison between surveys.

We sent it to the administrators of every publicly funded school (686) in Manitoba.

We asked the administrators to assign an individual within their school community to co-ordinate the completion of the survey, and return it within a four-week period.

We controlled the quality of responses by manually checking each returned survey for completeness and conducting follow-up discussions by telephone when responses were not complete or were unclear.

#### How We Can Use Survey Results

- To provide information on progress in the development and implementation of school nutrition policies.
- To create a snapshot of the school food and nutrition environment and practices.
- To document the changes that occurred between 2006 and 2009, and serve as one means of assessing the impact of school nutrition policy in promoting healthy food choices at school.



## What We Learned

### The Sale Of Food In Schools

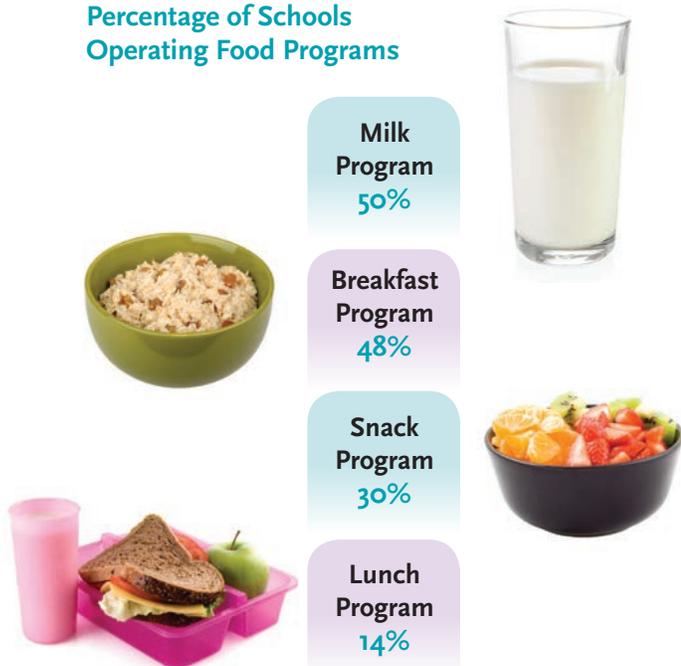
Of the 535 schools that responded:

- **1 in 5 schools** operated a cafeteria
- **1 in 3 schools** operated a canteen
- **1 in 2 schools** had a vending machine
- Elementary, elementary/middle and k-12 schools were more likely to operate a canteen/ tuck shop.
- Middle/high schools were more likely to operate a cafeteria.
- Almost half of all schools had neither a cafeteria nor a canteen/tuck-shop.

### School Food Programs

School food programs continued to flourish in the school system as a response to concerns about children not getting enough food to eat, or not eating properly.

#### Percentage of Schools Operating Food Programs



### Availability of Equipment For Storing and Preparing Food

- A large majority of schools had refrigerators, microwaves and ovens.
- One-half to two-thirds of schools had freezers, stoves and double sinks.
- K-12 schools appeared to be least equipped overall.
- 89% of schools indicated having adequate refrigeration to meet their needs. However, this means 1 in 10 schools still had insufficient refrigeration.
- Survey results show the availability of food handling equipment continues to increase.



Surveys Given to Schools:

**686**

Surveys completed and returned by schools:

**535**

*That's a 78% Response Rate!*



## Content of School Nutrition Policies

- In 2006 few schools had nutrition policies in place.
- In 2009, 95% of schools had nutrition policies.
- (As of 2010 all schools in the province had instituted nutrition policies).

## Main Focus of Nutrition Policy has Broadened...

### 2006

Food allergies  
Time for lunch

### 2009

Vending machines  
School functions  
Classroom practice  
Breakfast programs  
Snack programs  
Fundraising



*In 2009 close to 7 of every 10 schools reported having a committee in place to promote healthy eating.*

*The number of nutrition/health committees in place had almost doubled since 2006.*

## What Do These Findings Mean?

### Food in Schools

What is sold in the cafeteria or canteen can support or contradict healthy eating messages rooted in the curriculum and can have a direct impact on the range of healthy, and less healthy choices available for students to purchase. There were significant changes in the profile of “top 10 foods” sales between 2006 and 2009 suggesting that the introduction of school nutrition policy may be having a positive effect on foods sold and served in schools.

### Facilities and equipment

The availability of food handling equipment had increased yet it is concerning that one in 10 schools still had insufficient refrigeration to meet their needs, which may limit their ability to increase the range of nutritious foods offered or sold in schools. Nutritious foods generally need refrigeration; for example, vegetables and fruit for snack programs.

### Fundraising

It is encouraging that schools were now considering nutritional value when making fundraising decisions however, less healthy options such as chocolate bars continued to be a popular fundraising choice (though its popularity had decreased). A balance needs to be struck between what is going to be a popular sell and what promotes an environment that fosters healthy food choices.

### Food as Reward

Rewarding a child with food that does not have good nutritional value may not be supporting that child to make healthy food choices when opportunities arise. A decline in food being used as class rewards may be a reflection of positive changes toward a healthier school environment.

### School Food Programs

School food programs continued to flourish in the school system. Educators increasingly recognize that having food programs can help to offset the negative effect hunger can have on learning and ability to focus.

## Where Did We Go From Here?

- A *Healthy Food in Schools* website and toll free school nutrition information line have been created to assist schools with maintaining a school environment that supports healthy eating.
- As of 2010, the *Manitoba Farm to School Fundraiser* has been successfully operating, offering bundles of fresh, local vegetables as a fundraising option, so the fundraising picture may further change in the future.
- A *Vegetable and Fruit Snack Pilot Program* was implemented in at-risk schools and after-school programs in Manitoba to support school food and nutrition environments.

## Conclusion

The results of the 2009 *Manitoba School Nutrition Survey* showed that food remains an important part of school life. The high response rate to the survey also indicates that student health and nutrition is valued. Schools have made great strides in creating environments that promote and foster healthy eating. However, schools may still require support in some areas including healthy options for fundraisers, support for school food programs, and access to food handling equipment. *Healthy Food in Schools* continues to support schools toward achieving this goal.



### Monitoring and Reporting

This survey is one component of a wide-ranging evaluation of school nutrition policy and programs in Manitoba. For other reports in the series, please visit

[manitoba.ca/healthyschools/foodinschools](http://manitoba.ca/healthyschools/foodinschools)

To access a detailed 2009 Manitoba School Nutrition Survey Report or to obtain information about Manitoba Healthy Food in Schools please visit [manitoba.ca/healthyschools/foodinschools](http://manitoba.ca/healthyschools/foodinschools)

For enquiries please send email to [healthyschools@gov.mb.ca](mailto:healthyschools@gov.mb.ca)

For information on Manitoba Healthy Food in Schools visit [manitoba.ca/healthyschools/foodinschools](http://manitoba.ca/healthyschools/foodinschools)

August 2015