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## School Breakfast and Lunch Programs

### A patchwork of programs...

Breakfast and lunch programs are viewed as a social event for all students. It was acknowledged that they need to be inclusive and not set up in a way that may stigmatize some individuals. The breakfast program is a social thing as much as a service. Children do not want children to be excluded socially.

A few schools have large breakfast programs every school day that serve 100 -150 kids in 15 to 20 minutes. In these programs, the kids sit at tables and eat buffet style. For example, one school serves scrambled eggs and fruit (utilizing egg subsidy) on Monday and Wednesday, yogurt, fruit, cheese, and whole-wheat toast on Tuesday and Thursday and a combination of these items on Friday.

Some schools send trays out to each classroom that have approximately 20 items on each tray, including apples, bananas, and yogurt tubes. One school serves approximately 240 kids that way and they noted that all the food gets used. Some schools have smaller breakfast programs that are designed to serve only the kids who missed breakfast, or Healthy snacks are offered through the “food cupboard” to kids who can grab and go.

Quite a few schools noted that they have increased the size of their food programs over the past few years, including adding more days or increasing the number of students served, or the number of hot breakfasts that include all four food groups.

Use of the *hotlunches.net* program has been a great success in many schools. Other schools are experiencing resistance from staff over the desire to move to an online ordering program.

Time and space for offering a breakfast program, especially at the elementary school level can be a challenge and varies between schools. One participant noted that 15 minutes is available for the program in their school, but time is an issue in most schools.

Participants wondered how to deal with food waste when kids are not used to the “healthy options”? It was suggested that coordinators work with early learning centres, which are used to working with the Canada food guide and developing meal plans. They hide vegetables in everything and anything (i.e. grated vegetables in sauce that then break down and blend in). Participants also suggested that providing alternatives for those who have allergies or dietary concerns is important so that they can also be included.

Ideas on how to execute a successful breakfast program are needed.

### Many people are involved...

Many people are involved in providing food to children in Prince Edward Island schools. Participants recommended tapping into the community to find volunteers because more volunteers makes the responsibility lighter for all. One participant suggested that it is important to have a head volunteer coordinating many volunteers. This reduces the burden on everyone. Someone suggested using a *Google* document to organize the volunteer schedule so everyone can see and can sign up for particular jobs they are able to help with. “It is important to thank Volunteers!”

In one school, parents organize the program but the custodian does all the food preparation, serving and clean up. In other schools there are paid staff positions to help provide food to students. One participant noted that they are concerned about tapping out volunteer resources and are considering paying someone to take over the program to keep it running smoothly. Some participants wondered if there is an opportunity through *SkillsPEI* to hire people who may work as cooks or in kitchens in during the tourist season, but are looking for opportunity in the winter months.

The support of the school administration is important for running food programs in schools. They don't have to be involved in the actual day-to-day running of programs, but they must support them. Many participants acknowledged that it is a struggle to find enough volunteers to run the school food programs. Teachers are often involved and helping in order to make the program successful. In Montague High School the students run the breakfast program.

One school has a breakfast program that utilizes both teachers and parent volunteers, and they have also engaged the community (grandparents, businesses, Women's Institute, emergency services people, etc.). However, because of the shortage of volunteers, they are only able to offer the program 2 days per week. This means they are not able to access the *Healthy Eating Alliance* grants since 3 days per week service is required.

### Funding sources?

Some school food programs are accessing grants from the Healthy Eating Alliance, Breakfast for Learning or community organizations such as Rotary and grants such as *Ford DriveOne 4UR School* for financial support. However, healthy and nutritious foods are often sacrificed because of cost. In the *hotlunches.net* online ordering system, there is a line for donations that parents can provide a monetary donation to the breakfast program. Working with local businesses to develop a menu allows and encourages them to donate and contribute, although accessing healthy food can be a challenge when accepting donations. There was concern among participants over how the cuts to the *Healthy Eating Alliance* will impact breakfast and lunch programs.

### Success Stories!

Queen Elizabeth Elementary School Lunch Program came out of a generation of engaged kindergarten parents. A mom who is a professional chef developed a business model for providing a healthy lunch program 5 days per week. Meals are cooked at the school and delivered to classes and the program is serving between 80 and 250 students per day. Typical foods include soups, casseroles, baked potatoes, pasta and “fun meals” on Friday. Parents and students use *hotlunches.net* to order meals, and *Paypal* is set up to make payment simple and safe. The average item costs \$3 and the school receives \$0.25 per order. The remainder of the profit goes to the chef, which she says covers her costs and pays her salary. The home and school association purchased an additional fridge and a freezer to help support the businesses. Don’t hesitate to ask for help from a professional chef!

The *Kids Eat Smart* programs have been running in Newfoundland for the past 10 years and they are a huge success. They have a gala fundraiser to help support the program, and the provincial government provides a grant that matches donations dollar for dollar. Kids indicate when they will eat, and payment is by a voluntary donation of about \$5 per meal. There is no stigmatization because the students bring in a sealed envelope and the other students do not see who has or has not donated money. This successful “hot lunch program” is not-for-profit and volunteers are key to its success. Reach out to the community around the school as well as to students looking for volunteer hours.

## Influencing Educational Policy

Participants noted that there are significant challenges in the schools including socio-economic challenges, oversimplification of metrics, infrastructure issues and help for newcomers. Some participants noted that resources are needed for enrichment opportunities. Most participants agreed that parents should make their priorities for education known.

Who has influence in Education?

- Parents
- Home and School
- Non-profits
- PEI Council of Disabilities
- Canadian Parents for French
- Holland College
- UPEI
- Newcomers association

Some suggestion for communication included talking to local MLA's or inviting them to the school for a meeting or a tour, by lobbying or writing letters. "MLA's are a great voice for your community!" One participant recommended that parents have a good relationship with the Minister of Education and that they need to be partners and have an "ongoing dialogue". Communications is important! Another participant noted that having movie nights and other events at the school will bring good publicity and the government will take notice.

Some participants recommended that parents take part in the development of school policies and noted that home and school resolutions are part of this. It was noted that students can also have influence and that they could be taught to influence policy as well. It was acknowledged that home and school could provide a better communication and coordination mechanism so that parents are presented with better information from the Department.

One participant recommended collaboration with the private sector in order to identify gaps in education or skills development that are important to employers. Another referred to the Career Exploration course that is already offered. It was suggested that collaboration with other Maritime provinces would add strength to the parent voice.

## Building Better Playgrounds

Many schools have made a collaborative effort to improve their school playgrounds, including adding walking tracks, buddy benches, and outdoor classrooms with gazebos or different vertical levels. “The kids are talking about it!”

Schools have installed flowerbeds, rock gardens, trees and gardens and the kids help with planting. [\*Arlington Orchards\*](#) was given an example for ideas for incorporating nature in playgrounds. “They are kid friendly!” Parents see these playgrounds as low maintenance and stimulating for kids but some wondered about vandalism?

Other playgrounds are designed to be natural playscapes or adventure playgrounds, incorporating piles of dirt or recycled tires. [\*Strathgartney Provincial Park\*](#) was given as an example. Some schools have moved back to basic playground equipment or invested in smaller items like jump ropes and Frisbees.

In many cases volunteers and communities have come together to build school playgrounds. One school partnered with Rotary and [\*Let Them Be Kids\*](#), others were successful in securing large grants. Participants saw the involvement of parents and the community in the fundraising as adding to the feeling of ownership of the playground. Some schools have managed to raise the funds for a playground in just one year. Other schools struggle to have adequate playground equipment at the school and put many hours into fundraising.

## **Parent Leadership Grants**

People around the table in each session shared ideas around sessions they have offered at their school using the parent leadership grant money. Participants asked for increased communication about the grant and more assistance with the application process. Participants would like to see examples to follow posted on the website as well as a place where success stories could be shared.

## **Success story from the 2015-2016 round...**

### **Central Queens Elementary School**

#### ***“Camp Read S’more” – a Literacy night for Parents and Students***

There was a lineup to get in. Kids in pajamas clutched books and pencils, ready to join in the fun. There was a lot of chatter “What do you think we will see?” “This is going to be SO fun!” “Can we stay here all night, Momma?”

We arrive inside to see the gym at CQES transformed into a giant camping experience, complete with critters and a fishing pond. There are tents and sleeping bags, and several “fires” to sit around. This is not a Brownies or Guides event; this is family literacy engagement! And everyone is having a ball!

There are several learning stations set up in the gym – you can go fishing for words, make binoculars and then spy around for animals hidden and in plain sight, reading nooks in tents, and the grand finale - a read-along story on the big screen, under dimmed lights and starlight in the ceiling. It was a magical night of learning. Each station was not only fun and engaging for both parent and student, but was directly linked to literacy outcomes, carefully constructed to meet the abilities of the K-6 population. Often the same activity had several levels of difficulty, to ensure everyone had success. The fish in the pond each had a word on them, and students had to sound out and write down each word they “caught”. The animals in the room were part of an alphabet scavenger hunt – find an animal in the room starting with each letter of the alphabet. They used taxidermied animals for the Dept. of Wildlife – such a great touch of realism.

There was a storytelling and word ordering station, all with a camping theme. Parents were equally engaged as the students, working beside and with their kids to figure out a riddle or to sound out letters and words. The gym was packed with people and smiles – no one wanted to leave!



## Making our Schools Greener

### Learning outside!

Some schools have outdoor classrooms. In the woods! One school started a Green Club and developed a walking trail along the river. One parent asserted that "we could do a better job of getting kids outside and exploring immediate areas - watersheds, streams, etc." Some schools participated in tree-planting with [\*MacPhail Woods\*](#) where they walked through the tree nursery and brought home seeds for planting. There was a suggestion that local watersheds could hold an engagement night that people could attend to learn about them. Twenty schools have participated in the [\*Abegweit Fisheries\*](#) Fish Friend educational program.

### Growing Food

A lot of people had "liked and shared" a Facebook meme "like and share if you think your kids should learn how to grow food." Montague has a school community garden to grow food and another school applied for a [\*Jane Goodall Roots & Shoots Grant\*](#) and are building a memorial garden. Some schools hold events to gather food to be donated to food banks.

### Recycling

Some participants suggested that students should be educated about reduce, reuse and recycle. In some schools, classes are being encouraged to sort and they are trying to promote recycling throughout the school. One student at Birchwood bought reusable cutlery to lunch at school instead of throw away plastic. Some people are trying to move to paperless communication.

One school invested \$700 into the "Green Team" and fundraised to get Green Bins. *Superior Sanitation* came in with bin signs and the members of the green team stood by bins to help teach about recycling to other students. The result was less garbage and with proper sorting the school is making up to \$200 per month. There was a considerable reduction in trash in the parking lots and the project was not time consuming. This project was fun to learn and teach, and it encouraged engagement from students, teachers and parents. There is money to be made from recyclables!

### Safety

Participants suggested that trees be planted around the school to act as a buffer zone for pesticide spraying. Participants wondered if it is possible to test soil or air samples for pesticides near schools? Someone noted that there is an agri-science program for grades 10-12 where they test for pesticides.

### How can we make schools greener?

Earth Day is great time to clean up schoolyards and turn out lights! One participant suggested a program in Toronto that encouraged a "culture" of green schools (gold, silver, and bronze programs with standards for the entire province) and wondered if the PEI Home and School Federation could run a similar program?

## Fundraising

There were many success stories from local home and school members about profitable fundraising. Participants mentioned the organizations and businesses that support fundraising and suggested that local associations reach out to business community to support particular purchases. They noted that it was important to have a clear focus.

*Scotia Bank* has a program that will match funds raised during an event. Many schools have run successful *Ford Drive One 4UR School* events and participants suggested that there are competitors who offer similar programs. Some schools have benefited from Indigo book grants. Other ideas include:

### Sales:

- Poinsettias – greenhouses donated
- Calendars
- T-shirts with school logo, hats, shopping bags
- Best Seat in the House and DVD sales for Christmas Concert
- Fall fair, silent auction, variety show, bake sales, movie nights
- Christmas craft fairs or flea market
- Chocolate bars

### Tickets:

- Straight 50/50 – September until Christmas
- Hockey Pools, Walk-a-thons and BINGO
- Hockey game (with Scotiabank)
- Staycation fundraiser
- Open exercise groups with fees
- End of Year Ceremony - \$2000 to have creative ideas to raise money over summer

### Grants and Donations:

- Music Counts grants
- Tips for Toast – use of *hotlunches.net* application
- Lions Club, Rotary Club, other community organizations
- Parking cars at Alberton exhibition
- TD Grant - Evergreen

There were some suggestions about areas where the federation could help local home and school associations to do their fundraising. For example, they could help search for and advertise grants and they could provide grant and proposal writing workshops.

Participants acknowledged that there was considerable competition within the school for fundraising and that there are many groups competing for the same resources. They also noted that it was best to go beyond the school for fundraising because parents are tapped out.

There was recognition that some of the inequality in resources between our schools is the result of the capacity of parents and school staff to prepare grants and coordinate fundraisers.

## **Building Engagement in Home and School**

Most local home and school associations hold monthly or bi-monthly meetings that are attended by about 5-10 people, including the principal or one teacher. Some larger schools hold meetings that are attended by up to 40 people, while smaller schools may have only one or two active members. Sometimes meeting attendance starts large and declines over the course of the year. The average meeting lasts about 2 hours.

Participants acknowledged that there is a great degree of support from parents in other ways, but that most don't come to meetings. Fundraising for a particular purpose usually brings the volunteers out.

Home and school is seen as an opportunity to talk about issues at school, to bring speakers in to talk about topics, and to educate parents on home and school engagement.

## Engaging Volunteers

Participants had a wide variety of suggestions to help engage volunteers in the work of local home and school associations. Some suggestions for communicating with volunteers included:

- Sign up sheets at meet the teacher night
- Facebook, email, Twitter, newsletter, etc.
- Peer pressure
- Word of mouth
- Use [signupgenius.com](http://signupgenius.com)
- Use online Google Docs
- Use the volunteer function in *hotlunches.net*

There was general agreement that there would be considerable benefit to engaging men in home and school and participants suggested that they may be more willing to contribute if tasks were broken down into smaller, hands on task that are physical or take place outside. They noted that it was important to be specific about what is expected and that tasks should be assigned based on the skills of the volunteers. Holding more family events would encourage more participation from all members of the family!

Getting the students in the school excited about upcoming events will encourage family members to help out as well. Students in grades 6-9 could be able to volunteer if needed and high school students could earn bursary hours if they help out. Parents will want to be more engaged if they are shown what is happening in the school, what the home and school is doing, the items that have been purchased, or the programs that have been put in place. Let them know that the home and school is not just about fundraising!

Volunteers from other community groups could collaborate on projects to ease the load and strengthen the bonds within the community. Many communities have a great resource in their seniors and they are often looking for ways to be more involved in community events.

## **Working with our Principals**

### **Collaboration**

Participants recognized the importance of the Principal as the school leader and that having the Principal on board with your home and school association is key for success. Principals are in sync with the various needs of the school and can bring something to the attention of the home and school when they identify a concern or school need. Discussion centred around the idea of the home and school working in collaboration with the principal to construct a shared vision for the school. This vision would help direct the focus of grant applications, funding and engagement nights.

### **Communication**

Communication is key! Regular emails, weekly meetings, and an open door policy can facilitate communication and foster a welcoming and collaborative environment in the school. Many principals attend the home and school meetings and time is allotted on the schedule for the Principal at each meeting. Some home and school associations meet with the principal in early September to discuss what their “wish list” will be for the year. Some Principals have their staff present their “wish list” at an early fall home and school meeting.

It was noted it would be helpful for home and school’s to present an annual report to their principal in the fall of the past year activities. This may be very helpful when a new principal has joined the school. They may not be aware of the level of activity of the local H&S and it may help to review the successes of the past year. It was suggested it that may be helpful for home and school’s that are attempting to build new and positive relationship with a principal to have a sheet of tips on how to approach a topic or problem. The language that is used in communication is vital for success.

### **Engagement with School Community**

Many participants noted the importance of the role of the school secretary in the business of home and school. It was suggested that staff members be invited to meeting on a revolving basis in an effort to engage with more staff beyond the administrative roles. Some participants noted that there is a change in the relationship between home and school associations and schools as you move out of elementary level and into junior and senior high levels.

### **Recognition**

Many of the people in the discussions had wonderful reviews of their principals and asked if we had a way to locally thank and recognize our principals. Perhaps we should consider a principal of the year award for Prince Edward Island.