

# Nourished Kitchen

Dietitian Consulting



**Final Report  
Submitted to:**

Prince Edward Island Home and School Federation

January 30, 2017

# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	3
Executive Summary.....	4
Background.....	6
Methodology.....	7
School Food Survey.....	7
School Lunch Program Assessment.....	7
Results.....	9
School Food Survey Findings.....	9
School Lunch Program Assessment Findings.....	10
Success Stories.....	14
Conclusion.....	19

## **Acknowledgements**

Nourished Kitchen wishes to acknowledge the support provided by the PEI Home and School Federation. Financial support from this organization enabled Nourished Kitchen to successfully scan the complex current food environment in Prince Edward Island Public School Branch Schools. In addition to financial support, Nourished Kitchen wishes to also recognize the personal support from the PEI Home and School Federation staff and board who helped guide the work as the overall goals and objectives for a Universal School Lunch Program moved forward at a fast pace.

## **Executive Summary**

Through a variety of work and activities, Nourished Kitchen Dietitian Consulting (NK) has successfully completed activities and deliverables outlined in the contract created by the PEI Home and School Federation (PEIHSF).

NK assisted the PEIHSF with the development of a report on food served and sold in schools on Prince Edward Island. This report includes information collected on the: frequency and manner foods are served in schools; nutritional quality of the food as it relates to the PEI School Nutrition Policy (SNP); reliance on volunteers; financial revenue from programs; and the degree in which schools have a choice in foods served in their schools. NK also continued to engage partners and key stakeholders within schools and in the community to help improve the eating environment within the schools.

NK attended a number of PEIHSF meetings and events to support the Universal Provincial School Lunch Program initiative. This included a number of meetings with the PEIHSF board members to assist with planning events and for strategic school lunch data collection planning. NK attended the PEIHSF public screening of the documentary “Cafeteria Man” and was available to answer questions relating to the current school food environment for participants. NK also attended the PEIHSF semi-annual meeting and took part in each session by contributing to the conversation around school food and providing background information regarding the current school food environment. NK and the PEIHSF attended the Food Secure Canada conference in October 2016. Jointly, both organizations represented PEI at the Coalition for Healthy School Food committee meeting and at the larger conference sessions. A great amount of insight and information was learned from this conference, mainly around best practices and information sharing. In many sessions, PEI was positioned as the ideal province to implement the first province-wide universal healthy school lunch program with a

number of organizations and individuals agreeing to help support the PEIHSF's efforts in any way possible.

Prior to chef Tony Geraci's visit to PEI, NK reached out to a number of schools where school food programs could be highlighted during Mr. Geraci's visit and could serve as potential success stories for the written factsheet on school food. NK met with administration and staff at 2 schools (East Wiltshire Intermediate and Gulf Shore Consolidated) to learn about positive school food practices taking place at each location. Both schools were interested in being included in Mr. Geraci's visit and were willing to provide content for the PEIHSF video. NK attended a school visit (Colonel Gray Senior High) with Mr. Geraci during his visit and provided content for the video relating to the school lunch assessment findings.

NK was provided with the PEIHSF's School Food Survey result spreadsheet. Information priorities were set by PEIHSF and additional data was collected by NK to fill gaps in the survey. NK also collected and assessed school lunch menus to determine adherence to the SNP. In total, 52 (93%) schools completed the PEIHSF survey and 29 (52%) school lunch menus were collected and assessed to determine adherence to the SNP. From the information collected, NK provided the PEIHSF board with a 6 page document containing potential factsheet statements. The board prioritized information from this document to be included on the final 2 page school food factsheet and provided a layout template. NK completed the factsheet and submitted it to the PEIHSF (Appendix A). NK was advised by the PEIHSF not to contribute to the Good Food Basket report, as this was no longer a priority for this contract.

NK thoroughly enjoyed working with the PEIHSF on this project and is excited to see this initiative gain traction.

## **Background**

The PEIHSF contracted NK in June 2016 to assist with the development of a report on school food in Prince Edward Island. Information collected over the course of the contract is part of a larger picture of school food on PEI. The intended use of the information collected is to provide insight and background information into the current school food environment and to determine next steps towards the goal of implementing a Universal School Food Program on PEI. This information will also aid in the future evaluation of changes to the Public School Branch (PSB) school food environment.

A Universal School Lunch Program resolution was passed during the PEIHSF annual general meeting in April 2015. After the passing of the resolution, the PEIHSF identified a need for an environmental scan of the current school food environment focusing largely on school lunch programs. A comprehensive survey was developed and distributed by PEIHSF to local Home & School committees and school administration to collect data in 2015 and 2016. Information gaps were identified and as a result, the PEIHSF contracted a dietitian consultant through NK with school nutrition experience to collect additional information relating to school food.

The accessibility of healthy foods in school is paramount to student success and achievement. Schools offer a unique community environment that includes a variety of audiences; students, teachers, administrators, parents/guardians, support staff and community volunteers. Schools are found in most PEI communities and are not only education environments, but they also bring communities together by supporting community connectedness and wellness. Schools across Prince Edward Island have a need for a universal healthy school lunch program to ensure optimal health of the students.

## **Methodology**

### **School Food Survey**

School food data collection was completed through the distribution of a survey by the PEIHSF in 2015/2016. An online tool called Survey Monkey was used to collect data from PSB school contacts. Surveys distributed by PEIHSF were completed by a variety of key contacts within the PSB schools on PEI including: administration, teachers, parent volunteers, Home and School representatives, other school staff, and school health and nutrition committee members. School contacts answered the survey to the best of their abilities; this information was then compiled into a spreadsheet by PEIHSF and provided to NK for further follow up. Direction from the PEIHSF indicated a number of areas where further information was needed and gaps were identified. This included: number of schools offering breakfast/snack programs; number of schools offering lunch programs; number of volunteer hours needed to run school food programs and an estimated amount of profit earned through school food programs at each school. Where possible, information gaps were filled by NK through phone and email communication mainly to school administration.

### **School Lunch Program Assessment**

NK collected detailed school lunch menus by scanning all PSB school websites, contacting vendors, parents and school administration. This method of collecting menus is similar in nature to the Make Menus Matter project in New Brunswick, which was a joint partnership between Dietitians in Action and the New Brunswick Medical Society. More information on this project can be found at <http://www.nbms.nb.ca/leadership-and-advocacy/helping-new-brunswickers-live-healthier-lives/make-menus-matter-2/>.

NK assessed each collected menu based on the SNP food lists to determine adherence, to identify trends and highlight potential success stories. School lunch menus were assessed based on food lists only as NK did not have access

to vendor nutrient information (i.e. serving size, grams of fat, sugar, fibre, etc.). Assumptions were consistently made where detail was not provided. Assumptions were recorded on each assessment form (see attachment). Lunch items were assessed as a whole meal offering while optional add-ons or optional side dishes were assessed as separate items.



## **Results**

In total, 52 (93%) schools completed the PEIHSF survey and 29 (52%) school lunch menus were collected and assessed to determine adherence to the SNP. Three PSB schools submitted school food success stories for the PEI School Food factsheet (Appendix A) representing schools from kindergarten through to grade 12 in both urban and rural settings.

### **School Food Survey Findings**

It was determined that 54/56 schools (96%) offer a school lunch program at least 1 day/week to students. Two schools on PEI currently do not offer a lunch program to their students. According to a representative from the Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture (DEELC), there are currently 51/56 schools (91%) recorded within the PSB who are offering a breakfast or snack program (and receiving provincial funding). This number has increased from past years with the additional funding provided to schools from the province and program support from the PEI Healthy Eating Alliance.

It was difficult to determine the number of volunteer hours dedicated to school food programs at each school. Many school contacts could not estimate the number of volunteer hours required to support these programs as programs often operate separately from one another within each school (i.e. breakfast programs, snack programs and lunch programs). Only 24/51 (47%) school contacts that completed the survey were able to provide an estimate of volunteer hours. These estimates are provided below:

<b>Estimated Number of Volunteer Hours per Week</b>	<b>Number of Schools</b>
<1	6
2-5	6
5-10	7
10-15	2
15-20	2
20-30	0
30-40	1

A limitation to the results was the self-reported nature of the survey. This impacts the reliability and accuracy of the information collected. In some cases, the school contact responsible for answering the survey questions was not privy to details needed to provide accurate information. As a result, NK followed up with several schools to ensure the information was accurate. In many cases, the information provided in the original survey was not accurate or consistent, with regards to volunteer hours, profits from school food programs and whether the school offered food programs (breakfast, snack or lunch). It was difficult to get a reliable sample from PSB schools regarding volunteer hours and profits made from school food programs. Profits gained from school food programs were generally not shared with NK and in some cases, was not known by the school contact. This is an area where follow up is needed by the DEELC or from PSB staff who may have the authority to access this information freely and to insist on transparency.

### **School Lunch Assessment Findings**

School lunch menus were assessed to determine: current school lunch offerings; adherence to the SNP; type of foodservice; and cultural diversity of the meals offered within PSB schools from kindergarten to grade 12.

The SNP applies to all PSB schools on Prince Edward Island. The SNP has 3 main categories:

- Foods to Serve Most Often
  - *These foods can be offered daily*
  - Foods in this category are nutritious foods prepared with little to no added fat, sugar or salt.
- Foods to Serve Sometimes
  - *No more than 2 foods from each group should be offered per week*
  - Sometimes food groups include:
    - Sometimes Grain Products
    - Sometimes Vegetables and Fruit
    - Sometimes Milk and Alternatives
    - Sometimes Meat and Alternatives
    - Sometimes Combination
- Foods to Serve Least Often
  - *No more than 2 foods from this category should be offered per month*
  - Foods in this category have little to no nutritional value.

Foods are categorized based on food lists and specific nutrient criteria. Most foods offered “fit” into a category based on the specific criteria. Adherence is generally determined based on the frequency in which foods are offered to students.

From these assessments, it was determined that 0% of schools assessed adhere to the SNP.

- 100% schools assessed offer too many *Least Often* choices which tend to be lower in nutritional value and higher in sugar, fat and salt (i.e. ice cream, chips, pop, pepperoni, hot dogs)
- 93% of schools assessed offer too many *Sometimes Combination* choices offered per week

- 24% of schools assessed offered 0 *Most Often* food choices/week to students. Most often choices are prepared with little to no added fat, sugar or salt and have higher nutritional value
- 45% of schools assessed ran a school based non-cafeteria lunch program
- 55% of schools assessed ran a cafeteria based lunch program

Schools without cafeteria facilities (mostly elementary level schools) rely on outside food vendors who cater to the school. School administration, staff or parent volunteers often coordinate this type of non-cafeteria based program. Many schools have moved to an online ordering platform ([hotlunches.net](http://hotlunches.net)) to relieve the time demands placed on lunch program coordinators. These schools tend to have authority to choose which vendors will supply food to the school and have a choice in whether those foods adhere to the SNP or not.

Most intermediate and high schools have cafeteria facilities within the school. Lunch programs in these schools are often serviced through the cafeteria, either by an independent company chosen by the school or by a company contracted by the PSB. School administration doesn't seem to have the same autonomy over which foods are offered in the cafeteria when the contract is negotiated at the PSB level.

There is a noted difference in the quantity of foods offered when comparing a non-cafeteria and cafeteria based program:

- On average, non-cafeteria school lunch menus assessed offer:
  - o 25 *Least Often* choices/month
    - SNP states no more than 2 *Least Often* choices/month
  - o 5 *Sometimes Combination* choices/week
    - SNP states no more than 2 *Sometimes Combination* choices/week
  - o 3 *Most Often* choices/week
    - There is no limit to the number of *Most Often* choices offered

- On average, cafeteria school lunch menus assessed offer:
  - 112 *Least Often* choices/month
    - SNP states no more than 2 *Least Often* choices/month
  - 49 *Sometimes Combination* choices/week
    - SNP states no more than 2 *Sometimes Combination* choices/week)
  - 28 *Most Often* choices/week
    - There is no limit to the number of *Most Often* choices offered

From these findings, it is clear that a shift needs to happen from offering less nutritious foods to more nutritious foods. Least Often foods are meant to serve as an occasional treat but often represent the majority of menu items/week.

Examples of these choices include: chicken nuggets, pepperoni pizza, donair subs, fries, garlic fingers, poutine, sugar sweetened beverages, ice cream, cake, cookies, pastries, frozen yogurt, slushies, etc.

Currently, students are exposed to many unhealthy foods each week during the school year. In addition to this, there tends to be limited exposure to healthy choices (depending on the school). Although each school menu is unique, results from the school lunch assessments showed 100% of schools assessed offered pizza at least 1 time/week. While the nutrition quality of the pizza ranged from healthier options (chicken and vegetable pizza on whole wheat crust) to less healthy options (pepperoni pizza on white crust), this is still of concern. Given the fact that the majority of Island students spend 13 years in the public education system, the types of foods offered at school could begin to influence lifelong eating habits – either positively or negatively.

Another trend identified is the lack of local foods in schools and the resulting lack of connection to PEI's local food systems. A disconnect exists between schools and PEI's growing food industry as the majority of school lunch vendors do not use local Island foods in their meals. School food holds a great market

opportunity to link Island producers to the education system for both education and food consumption. Incorporating more Island foods into schools would also provide students with a chance to learn about the Island's robust and deeply engrained food culture. Some vendors across PEI work with schools to provide local foods to students at competitive prices. These could serve as best practice examples for future school food programming.

Results from the school lunch assessments showed a lack of culturally diverse foods available in schools. This was surprising given the increase in cultural diversity on Prince Edward Island resulting in growing diversity in the school system. In conversations with students, administrators, parents and teachers, there appears to be a growing want for more globally diverse food items in all schools. Exposure to culturally diverse foods in school is a positive way to introduce Island students to different cultures and to help all students feel welcome and represented.

A limitation in this assessment was that school lunch nutrient data and serving size information was not accessible for evaluation. Assumptions were made for certain menu items listed without enough detail. Any assumptions made were consistent for each school (ex. "pizza" was assumed as "cheese pizza on white crust with regular fat cheese"). Although consistency in assumptions was applied to all menus, this could have an impact on the outcome of the assessment (either to increase or decrease adherence to the SNP).

### **Success Stories**

A number of schools were reached out to for school food success story submissions to be considered for the PEI School Food factsheet (Appendix A). Three schools responded with submissions highlighting their unique school food successes.

## **Gulfshore Consolidated School**

**Submitted by: Mary Jane Ready, Principal**

*Each year Gulf Shore Consolidated (GSC) staff and students work with the community in support of healthy eating. This includes: a deeper understanding of food and where it comes from; supporting local business; and supporting sustainable communities. This year GSC has planted some new seeds in the area of food in the school, both educationally and nutritionally.*

*The kindergarten class works each year on a project related to food and nutrition. This year, children planted, tended and harvested vegetables as part of the garden project. The students then prepared a healthy hamburger soup and delivered it to the Early Years Center for their lunch. Children from kindergarten and grade one prepared vegetables for mustard pickle preserves to take home and serve at Thanksgiving dinner. Grade one children acted as experts and mentored kindergarten students in harvesting and preparing the food.*

*Kindergarten students also grew potatoes in outdoor planters this year. The children planted, watered, monitored growth, and learned about plant cycles. As a celebration, the students got to eat the potatoes after they were prepared in a variety of ways.*

*GSC's Home and School parent group has moved school lunch ordering to the [hotlunches.net](http://hotlunches.net) platform. A local catering company operated by Mike and Jennifer Levy provides lunch options. These options are healthy and sourced locally (as much as possible). Parents are pleased with the convenience of ordering online and the nutritional quality of the food while students love the flavour and look forward to the variety of menu options. The village of North Rustico is pleased to have this business running year round.*

*Not all students come to school with lunches, or have eaten breakfast. With the help of the local Food Market and the Cymbria Lionettes, the school's Food For Thought Program has grown. The Food Committee from GSC's Home and*

*School group stock the shelves with good food, so that students have access to healthy food that is necessary to learning and growing. The owner of the store has provided all of the funding for the food cupboards and the Lionettes have generously donated a full sized refrigerator to keep perishable items and freezer storage. Without the support from the community and the work of the Home and School, this program would not be the success it is.*

*GSC is always looking at ways to learn about food, sustainability the importance of a healthy local diet. The seeds for this have been planted. They are now nurturing and tending to this work so that it continues to grow and thrive for years to come.*

### **East Wiltshire Intermediate School**

**Submitted by: Windsor Wight, Principal**

*East Wiltshire (EWS) breakfast program has been running for a number of years supported by staff, students and community. The breakfast program runs five days a week and supports approximately 100 students per day. The program offers a wide variety of options including fruit, juices, cereals (cold and hot), bagels, grilled cheese, and breakfast sandwiches (some days). The breakfast program has been a highly successful program at EWS. Leftovers from the breakfast program are offered to students as an option for those who need a lunch later in the day.*

*The EWS snack program was introduced to the school within the past couple of years. This program offers students a healthy snack during their morning break. The Home Economics department staff and student leaders run this program. There are a variety of homemade items that are very popular with both the students and staff.*

*Now and then, students will make suggestions for different lunch options for the school cafeteria. Recently, some student council representatives suggested*



*trying more diverse international food options to represent the growing diversity in the school. EWS worked with local vendors to offer an international culinary experience, this was a huge success.*

*Administration continues to work closely with the cafeteria staff and students in trying to provide healthy choices and good food options each day. One example was the recent addition of a slush drink machine in the school that did not fit into the School Nutrition Policy. Administration worked to find a healthier option for the school.*

*Another healthy eating initiative at EWS is a healthy snack machine that is filled each day by some of the students in the school's Special Needs Program. This machine is accessible to students any time during the day to increase their access to healthier choices.*

### **Kinkora Regional School**

**Submitted by: Jaime Cole, Principal**

*Kinkora Regional High School is embracing many student driven initiatives around healthy eating, food security and the local food movement. By using their new Culinary 801 class and utilizing their outdoor classroom and garden, they have been demonstrating the importance of food production and eating healthy. Their school garden was established two years ago along with the building of an outdoor classroom. Hannah Larsen, an Academy Diploma Program in Agriculture & Bioscience student completed her Agriculture Co-op credit this summer by planting and maintaining the school garden. During the summer, the produce was donated to community members and then last fall the new culinary class was able to use the produce in their healthy and locally sourced lunches for students at a reduced cost.*

*The school boasts a daily breakfast program and offers chicken quesadillas on Mondays, baked potatoes on Tuesdays and a meal from the culinary class on*

*Wednesday or Thursday. Students prepare all meals! The school also provides healthy snacks throughout the term. Taco salads, veggie and fruit trays, and yogurt parfaits are all big hits with students.*

*This year the Culinary 801 class offered meal service to the staff, students and a number of seniors once a week. Each meal was sourced as locally as possible. Some of the meals featured were homemade spaghetti, lasagna, fresh salads, soups, chowders, stir-fries, shepherd's pie and even a turkey dinner. Their last meal of the semester will be a PEI Roast Beef dinner featuring Island beef, potatoes, turnip, and carrots. This is just the beginning. The school has big plans to increase their own food production and utilize the light tables in the agriscience class next term. They hope to grow micro greens and begin transplants to be used in the garden this spring. They also hope to offer another culinary class next year to continue to build on the skills students have developed this term.*

## Conclusion

In conclusion, results from school lunch assessments demonstrate a need for a greater proportion of healthy versus unhealthy options in schools. Over the years, the pendulum has swung the wrong way with regards to the availability of healthy foods in schools. The PSB should hold vendors accountable by ensuring companies who are serving and selling foods in schools adhere to the SNP. Ongoing monitoring, assessment and evaluation of school food by trained dietitians with authority to enforce the SNP is critical. School food programs should aim to offer locally produced foods supplied by local vendors as much as possible. There should also be an emphasis on expanding the cultural diversity of menu items to represent and celebrate PEI's increasing diversity. Offering diverse foods may help new students feel welcome and will introduce students to different cultures through food at school.

It is important to note the difficulties of a "patchwork" system with respect to school food programs. Each school develops and implements systems independently in somewhat of a silo with little opportunity to share best practices. School success story sharing is an important tool to encourage and support best practice sharing among schools. Both internal and public communications of school food successes should be encouraged by the PSB. The current system also allows for large discrepancies in the availability of healthy food offerings between schools. While students at school A have access to healthy choices, students at school B have little to no access. This should be avoided to ensure all students on PEI have access to affordable healthy foods at school to help them learn and grow to the best of their abilities and to encourage healthy food habits for life. While consistency is important, there should also be regional flexibility with regards to healthy food choices. A province-wide food program would aim to decrease the workload placed on administration, staff and volunteers by streamlining school food systems and allow for school-level input on implementation to best fit each school.

## **Appendix**

PEI School Food Fact Sheet..... A

## **Attachments**

School Lunch Assessment Spreadsheet.....Email Attachment

School Food Survey Spreadsheet.....Email Attachment