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Benefits of a School Food Program

Food Literacy Cards

We all intuitively know that we can better show up for our daily activities when our bellies are full. This is especially true for students at school.



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Benefits to Learning

When children attend school hungry or undernourished their energy levels, memory, problem-solving skills, creativity, concentration, and other cognitive functions are all negatively impacted.



In addition to all of this, evidence shows that when school staff take the time to offer students the space to take a breath and eat a nourishing snack or meal, they feel like they belong. They feel loved. They feel cared for. This can be a powerful way to build positive relationships with peers and educators, which can support and foster learning.



Additional benefits of a school food program

We take great care to provide food sourced from local food producers, farmers and fishers. When school food programs focus on local procurement, they support the local economy.



There is strong evidence showing that school food programs support diverse positive impacts on student's mental health, including reductions in:

- ◆ Behavioral and emotional problems
- ◆ Bullying and aggression
- ◆ Anxiety and depression
- ◆ Visits to the school nurse

Students who eat breakfast are sick less often, have fewer problems associated with hunger, such as dizziness, lethargy, headaches, stomachaches and earaches, and do significantly better than their peers in terms of cooperation, discipline, and interpersonal relationships.



The mind withers away and sheds intellect and confidence like the falling leaves of an uncared for plant.

Thoughtfully sourced school food has significant environmental and climate impacts, helping to reduce our ecological footprint and providing meaningful examples of solutions oriented work inside our schools. By considering where our food comes from, and learning about the social and ecological impacts of our food, students can be empowered to see positive solutions to some of our biggest societal challenges.

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School food is vitally important to creating a culture of care and compassion in our community.

We want all students to thrive, and, in order to do that, we need to make sure food is available to all students, without stigma.



 **Flourish!** staff guiding a student at Pexsisen Elementary on how to grow their own food with care.

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Supporting Healthy Habits

Food Literacy Cards

Setting up a nurturing, positive space for kids to explore their own food choices is a great way to help children develop confidence and comfort around new foods.



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Supporting Healthy Habits

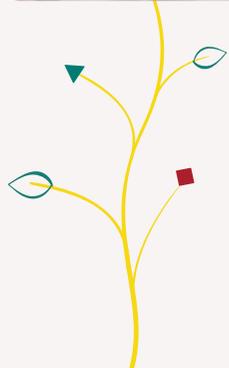
The way we talk about and present food can leave a lasting impact on young people. It's important that we facilitate nurturing environments where students can feel comfortable to choose what they want to eat without judgment.

Eating Competence

At the core of having a good relationship with food is the principle of Eating Competence. As defined by dietitian Ellyn Satter, Eating Competence is being positive, comfortable, and flexible with eating as well as matter-of-fact and reliable about getting enough to eat of personally enjoyable, nourishing food. Developing Eating Competence early sets us on a lifelong path of wellness.

What is our role?

It is our role as adults to provide options and set the times for eating. It is the kids' role to choose what and how much they want to eat. It's important that we give our kids this opportunity to be in control of what and



how much they eat. All children know how much to eat: the large child and the small child, the big eater and the small eater. Trusting and supporting students to make these choices for themselves sets them up for a healthy lifelong relationship with food.

Make an effort to eat together in the classroom.

Setting times where everyone can come together and enjoy a meal creates an atmosphere of enjoyment and togetherness. As adults, we can help students develop Eating Competence by role modeling healthy relationships to food. When students see others eating and enjoying a diversity of food, it gives them permission to do so too.



A young student clears his Flourish! home cooked meal at lunch.

Try not to use terms such as “healthy” or “unhealthy” when describing foods. Telling students that they must eat a certain way to “be healthy” can lead to stress and anxiety, particularly if they have not yet learned to accept those foods. Healthy and unhealthy implies good and bad, and food is not a moral imperative. In fact, it can be good to eat a cookie once in a while. Instead you can talk about eating in balance, or trying to eat a rainbow of different colors and foods.

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Eating together

Getting hands on and familiar with a variety of foods is one of the best ways to develop nutrition education and support students to feel positive about eating. Consistently offering diverse, nourishing options and letting students choose what and how much they want to eat allows students to learn to enjoy nutritious foods, over time and at their own pace.

That being said, trying new foods can be intimidating for students! These feelings are valid, and we shouldn't shame students for not liking things or having negative reactions. Instead of focusing on a strong reaction, try to get students to ...

“Taste like a chef”

We want kids to consider and identify exactly **what** they might like or dislike about a particular food without labeling it as good or bad. This is what is called “tasting like a chef”, it encourages kids to step into the creative role of the chef so that they can explore their senses with a fun mindset without the fear of failure stopping them. **This can only be done with practice!** We encourage kids to try and describe the items that they taste using some of the following example identifiers, these are by no means set in stone, the point is to expand their **sense perception** vocabulary by exploring words that match what they experience emotionally. The following adjectives will help you get started:



“Fuzzy?!”

“Spicy!”

“Mmm, Earthly!”



Inspire wonder! Did you know that we taste with our noses? Try it and see. Ask children if they can still taste their food while holding their nose.

Texture 

- Smooth
- Rough
- Fuzzy
- Crunchy
- Pebbled
- Abrasive
- Slippery

Taste 

- Sour
- Sweet
- Bitter
- Spicy
- Acidic
- Acrid
- Nectarious
- Warm

Scent 

- Herbaceous
- Smoky
- Woody
- Fresh
- Floral
- Delicate
- Lemony
- Earthly

It's the same sense but experienced from a different perspective!

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Cultural Inclusion through School Food

Food Literacy Cards

Food is a grand connector.

Serving culturally appropriate foods in schools is an important way to ensure all students feel connected with and a part of the school and broader community.



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Why is it important?

Offering meals from diverse cultures ensures all students can choose foods that they are familiar with and prefer eating.

Additionally, students from other cultural backgrounds have the opportunity to learn about cuisines that are different from their own in a welcoming and celebratory environment. This can lead to a more accepting and culturally aware school community. Something we can all agree is an integral part of the student learning experience.

Culturally responsive practices like cultural humility and competence can result in helping to build authentic relationships with students, engage with and address the needs and perspectives of students from diverse communities, and advance more inclusive, equitable health outcomes for our school community. As our schools grow in cultural diversity, offering cultural foods is an important way to help newcomer families feel welcomed and included in our community.

What is our role?

It's important that we compassionately offer diverse cuisines without judgment. Our schools are home to a wide diversity of students. By providing diverse options we ensure students feel a sense of connection and familiarity with our food and school. This increases student participation and positively impacts the health and wellbeing of our student community.



Trying new foods with different ingredients and flavours can be an overwhelming experience for young people who have heightened taste buds. While these feelings are valid, a lot of harm can be done to students from that cultural background if they hear others trying their cultural foods for the first time suggesting that it's "gross" or "weird". Encourage students to be open minded. Instead of using negative words, appeal to student's sense of creativity and exploration by inviting them to "taste like a chef" and describe the flavors and textures of their food. (more on that detailed in our Healthy Habits card).

"Eww, Weird!" → "Hmm, different, new?"

By principle alone, anything new and different from the norm will be instinctively sensed as weird and odd. It's a different rhythm. If we encourage our kids to understand this part of human nature by expanding their vocabulary then they will be better equipped to welcome our culturally diverse society.

If a student has a negative reaction or doesn't want to try something, don't force it or focus too much on it. If students are hungry, they'll eat what they are comfortable with on the plate and get filled up for lunch. The more that we provide foods from different cuisines in a caring environment, the more comfortable students will be with trying new things over time. Patience and a warm, non-judgmental attitude is important for encouraging students to try new things over time.

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Scent

Did you know that we taste with our noses? It's the same sense but experienced from a different perspective.



Taste

What is “Culturally Appropriate Food”?

Food is a central part of culture. Culturally appropriate foods meet the diverse tastes and needs of communities based on their cultural identities. Culturally appropriate food does not only refer to the food itself, but also recognizes the cultural practices around the preparation and sharing of the food, considering where, how, when, and with whom it is eaten.



Flourish chefs preparing a special meal for the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. We try to share stories about the cultural foods we prepare, with the hope that you will share these stories with students.

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Household Food Insecurity

Food Literacy Cards

More people than ever are turning to food banks and other community food resources to get by. Families are increasingly forced to make impossible decisions about whether to pay their bills or feed their family.



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These stressors, and more, exist in every school community.

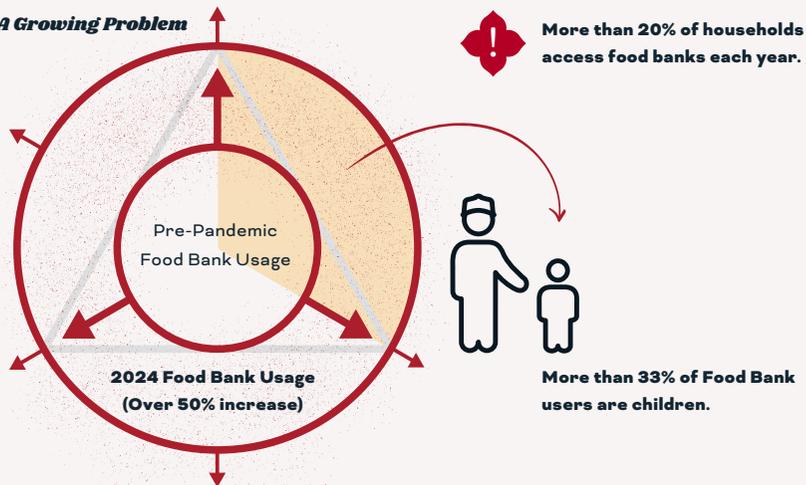
In Our Community

- ◆ 13% of people experience food insecurity
- ◆ 11% of adolescents self report going to bed hungry at least sometimes because there is not enough money for food at home
- ◆ 30% of adolescents do not eat breakfast
(up from 18% five years ago)

What is Food Insecurity?

A person is food insecure when they lack regular access to enough safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active and healthy life. This may be due to unavailability of food and/or lack of resources to obtain food.

A Growing Problem

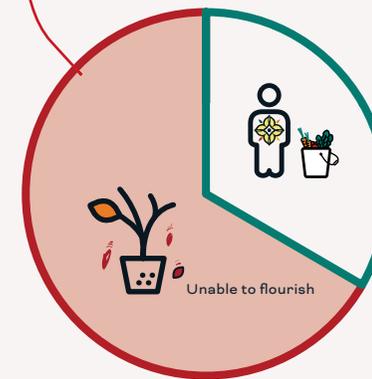


Data from the McCreary 2023 Adolescent Health Survey and Food Banks Hunger Counts.

Not Just a Problem of Economics

Many students would benefit from nourishing school food programs. It's not just those economically vulnerable families who stand to benefit.

- ◆ Only about one-third of children between the ages of 4 and 13 years eat five or more servings of vegetables and fruit daily.



- ◆ About one-quarter of children's calorie intakes are from food products not recommended in Canada's Food Guide.
- ◆ One-third of students in elementary schools and two-thirds of students in secondary schools do not eat a nutritious breakfast before school.

No community is untouched by these challenges.

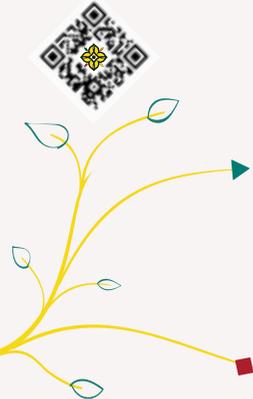


Flourish! is working with many partners to ensure students have consistent, stigma free access to food at school, to ensure hunger is not a barrier to learning.

Where to go for help?

There are a number of organizations and individuals who work tirelessly to provide food in our community.

For an up-to-date listing of what is available for families, please refer to "**Food Security Resources**" listed on our website's Food Literacy resource page (you can follow the QR code in this card). →



Family Stress

Parents will endure a lot of stress before allowing their children to go without. Even students coming to school with food may benefit profoundly from school food programs. Supporting families and helping ease the strain of having to provide through challenging economic times can make a meaningful impact on household stress.

It's not our role to decide who does and doesn't need food.

Only students and staff themselves know if they need food that day. Making sure we have it to offer can make a big difference.