



Employment and
Social Development Canada

Emploi et
Développement social Canada

Canada



What We Heard Report Findings

Webinar: What's New in School
Food, Canada and International

November 29, 2023

Engagement Overview

Recognizing that a School Food Policy needs to reflect the diverse realities of children, their families and schools, and should elevate local knowledge and lessons learned on school food, we engaged directly with provinces, territories and Indigenous partners, and stakeholders.

Sessions

- Online consultation questionnaire yielded 5,200+ responses, and a further 76 individuals and organizations provided written submissions;
- More than 130 stakeholders took part in our five stakeholder roundtables;
- Engagement with Indigenous partners, including Modern Treaty and Self-Governing Nations and National Indigenous Organizations;
- In partnership with Children First Canada, we conducted three engagement sessions with children and youth;
- The National Advisory Council on Poverty led engagement sessions with persons with lived experience of poverty and/or food insecurity; and
- We met with each provincial and territorial ministry responsible for school food



What We Heard Report

Overview

- Summarizes the findings from our federal engagement on school food since January 2022
- Organized across seven themes:
 - Support for a National School Food Policy
 - Universality and reducing stigma
 - Health and nutrition
 - Food literacy, education and student involvement
 - Local food systems and community development
 - Program delivery challenges
 - Indigenous school food programming

“We are committed to continue working with all levels of government and stakeholders to develop a National School Food Policy, and explore how more children in Canada can receive nutritious food at school. We know a national approach to school food programming has the potential to improve the overall health and well-being of our children as they learn, leading to better futures for them and for Canada.”

– Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Jenna Sudds



What We Heard Report

Sample of key findings

Though stakeholders had varied perspectives on school food, the following recurring themes emerged across engagements:

- Acknowledgement of the varied benefits of school food programs, including for children and families across socio-economic situations, though especially for those that are marginalized;
- Support for universally available, culturally safe programming and pay-what-you-can models to help reduce stigma and increase accessibility;
- The many opportunities for school food programs to support aims related to students' food-related knowledge, skills and attitudes;
 - Ex. Increasing their exposure to and interest in food across different cultures, understanding of local food production and larger food systems, awareness of career opportunities related to food, supporting healthy relationships with food, etc.
- School food programs' potential to have broader, societal-level impacts, including in areas such as food waste and local food economies;
- The importance of Indigenous governments' and other stakeholders' leadership role in the planning and provision of school food to Indigenous students;
- Facilitating access to traditional food and knowledge for Indigenous children; and
- Note of the various challenges in delivering school food programming.
 - Ex. Limited infrastructure, personnel shortages, limited data to inform programming, etc.



What We Heard Report

Sample of key findings (cont.)

Stakeholders highlighted that a National School Food Policy should:

- Aim to maximize the varied student, family, community and societal level benefits of school food programs;
- Offer flexibility, reflecting an appreciation for the diversity of existing school food programs, including their unique contexts, challenges and facilitators;
- Allow schools to continue exploring new ways to deliver programming; and
- Work to mitigate the stigma surrounding school food that serves as a barrier to program participation.

Children and youth offered their own unique perspectives on school food. For example, they:

- Described how eating healthy allows them to stay focused and energized in school;
- Outlined the various reasons why students may be hungry at school;
- Expressed their awareness of/concern about the stigma around school food programs;
- Noted the shortcomings of school food programs in their schools; and
- Highlighted the importance of children and youth being meaningfully engaged in the planning, operation and evaluation of school food programs.



Next Steps

- Reflect insights from What We Heard Report to inform the development of the National School Food Policy;
- Continued engagement with the provinces/territories, Indigenous organizations and stakeholders; and,
- Working with other federal departments to ensure alignment of federal food-related activities.

Questions and comments?

