

Where to Eat in New Brunswick Schools

**MAKE MENUS
MATTER**



New Brunswick
Medical
Society



Société
Médicale
du Nouveau-Brunswick

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Introduction

"Serving our children and youth healthy food everyday is an incredible amount of work - and it's a thankless job."

That's the view of one principal who contacted the Medical Society last year about our project related to foods served in schools, Make Menus Matter. They were one of the few schools we found across the province who provided very healthy food options to their students every day of the week. And their comments were precisely right.

The provincial policy that outlines what foods should be served in schools is called Policy 711. It sets a high bar; complying with this policy can be difficult, and the evidence we've found suggests that many schools simply do not. Schools which do comply with the policy are not recognised for exemplary food offerings, and the school leaders who make this happen do it because it's the right thing for their students, not because it's easy.

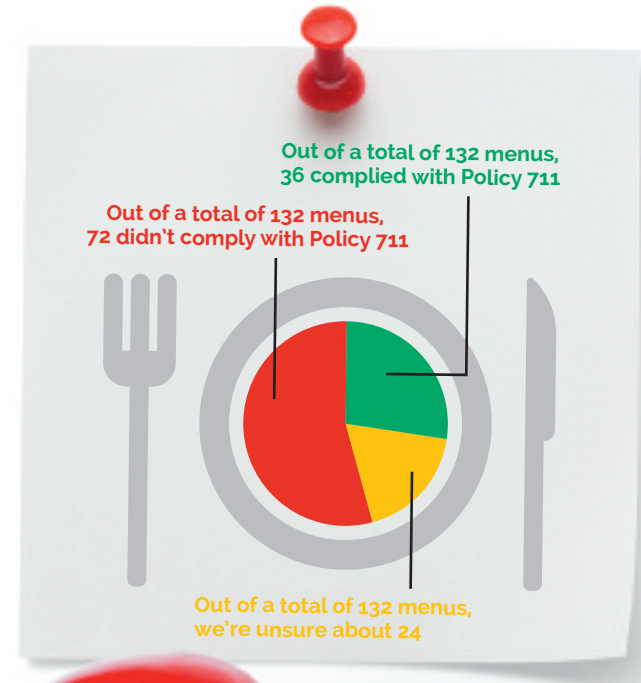
The "Where to Eat in New Brunswick Schools" guide, modelled after the acclaim offered to restaurants by award-giving organisations across the country, is our own. It's designed to recognise providers who offer excellent food to students, and focus on their stories of success. It can help answer questions and overcome frequently-cited barriers: How do schools in rural areas with little in the way of cafeteria facilities offer excellent food? How can some schools maintain low prices for healthy food, where others cannot? Above all, what can we learn from each other?

It's safe to say the schools listed here did not volunteer to be in this guide. They do not endorse our broader Make Menus Matter project, receive no funding from us, and want no acclaim. Quite frankly, we pestered them to allow us to profile them because they offer inspiration. They deserve recognition and attention.

We thank these schools, on behalf of dietitians and doctors in the province, for the excellent work that they do. It is a lot of work - but it's no longer thankless.

Camille Haddad, MD
President, New Brunswick Medical Society

Vanessa Yurchesyn, RD
New Brunswick Dietitians in Action



About Réseau des cafétérias communautaires

Of all of the stories we've found of people very passionate about improving the quality of food served to students, the story of the Réseau des cafétérias communautaires has to be one of the most inspiring.

Starting from a pilot project in École Blanche-Bourgeois de Cocagne in September 2011, the concept of an entrepreneurial cafeteria saw immediate success. In May 2013, the Réseau was formed and the Francophone South School District handed over the management of food services for 20 schools. The Réseau now serves food to thousands of students every day and operates in almost thirty schools. The Réseau exists to satisfy four key principles: sustainable development, education, health, and entrepreneurship. Having figured out the operation, management, and delivery of food to students in such a short period of time can only be done with a large community of support and some dedicated leadership.

There's no doubt that the schools, the families, and the communities support the Réseau. Rachel Schofield Martin, visionary of the project and Coordinator of Healthy Food and Social Entrepreneurship in the Francophone South School District was responsible for the education component of the project. Rachel Allain, Managing Director of the Réseau, handles its operations. The pair embody the passion required to get this project off the ground.

When the New Brunswick Medical Society and the New Brunswick Dietitians in Action worked to deliver the original Make Menus Matter project in 2013, we were pointed to the Réseau as an example of a group doing amazing things with food and students. After visiting one of their facilities, meeting with them, and understanding their approach to food, it was clear that their goals go far beyond the core interest of providing healthy food to children. They also encourage children to learn about food and where it comes from in innovative ways, like creating an alphabet out of the foods served with barcodes to point children to where the food comes from. (A is for apples, by the way, and they come from a farm a few kilometres away.) Farmers come and visit to explain how they grow the food and how it arrives on their plates.

Not only does the food purchased by students in cafeterias financially benefit the community by supporting local farmers (over half the food is purchased locally), but the Francophone South School District works with the Réseau to develop entrepreneurial projects for students that highlight healthy foods. To accomplish this goal, students create small businesses that sell smoothies, dried apples, and more. These projects help students understand the business side of food.

The Réseau has been supported financial backers in their communities, and by provincial and national grants – but they are a self-sustaining, not-for-profit operation. The Réseau is seeing increased attention thanks to the support of Farm to Cafeteria Canada and Food Secure Canada.

We find the Réseau to be one of the many stories in New Brunswick of passionate people doing great work in their communities. It's the story of New Brunswick, really – a small group of people doing big things. We congratulate them and the number of other schools, food providers, and educational leaders featured in this Guide.

Réseau des cafétérias communautaires

The largest provider of healthy school meals in the province, the Réseau des cafétérias communautaires, provides the food for 26 school cafeterias in the Francophone South School District. The Réseau serves over 8,800 students ranging in age from kindergarten to grade 12, plus school staff, in schools from Memramcook to Miramichi, along with a new school in Quispamsis.

Despite its impressive geographic spread, the Réseau is only in its second year of operation. Created to address the poor quality of school cafeteria food and improve the health of the students eating it, the Réseau focuses on serving local, sometimes organic, and always wholesome foods. Fall and winter menus highlight seasonal produce.

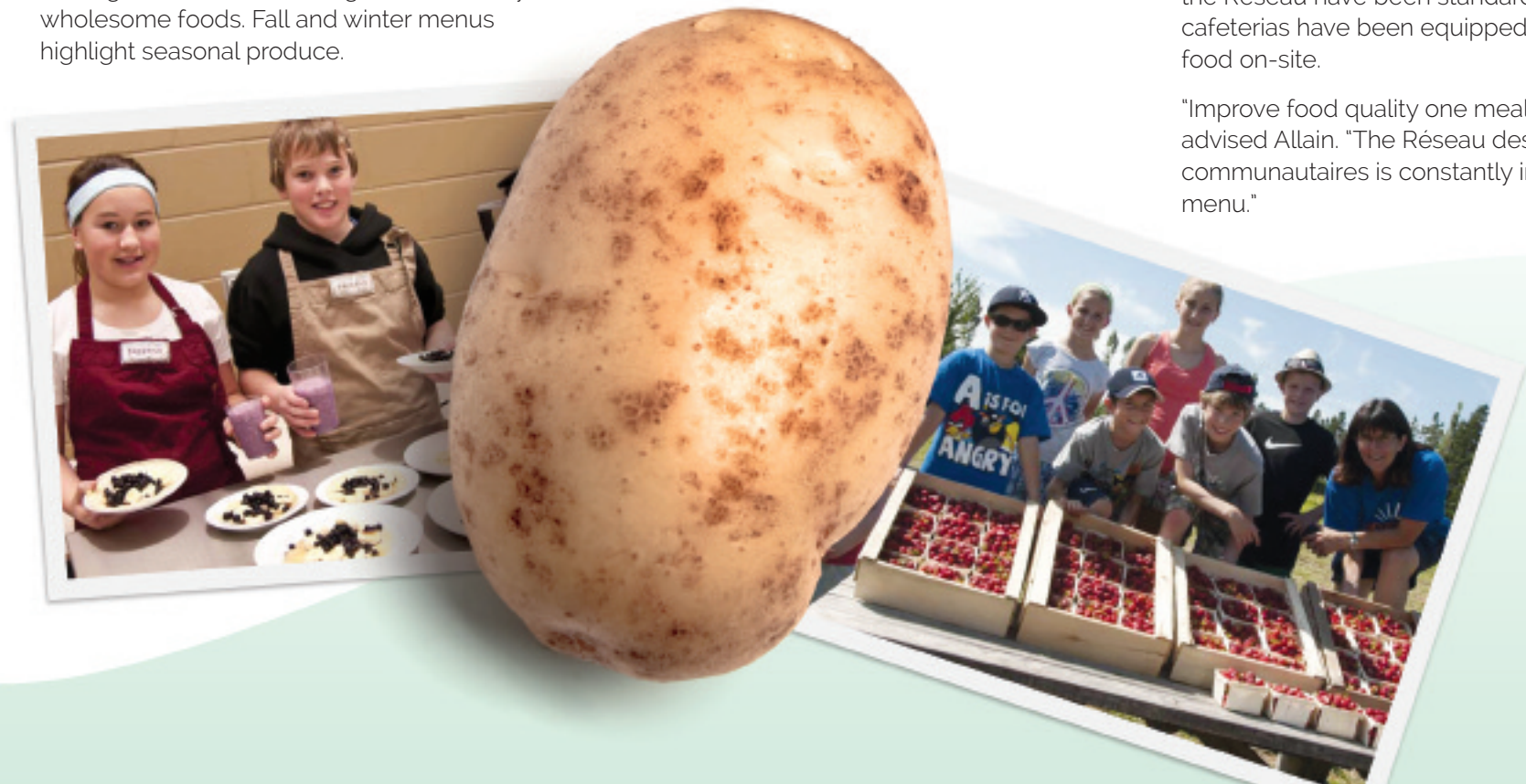
“Menus were well received by the children, the parents and the school,” said Rachel Allain, the Réseau’s general director. “People can taste the difference.”

Menus and recipes are created in collaboration with Public Health dietitians, and the Réseau has formed strong partnerships with the farmers and bakeries that provide much of their food. Whole-grain, unprocessed foods are promoted, and high school students are routinely surveyed for input to improve meal and snack options.

The Réseau has also prioritized their menu changes. During their first year of operation, they focused on the quality of their main courses. This year, they’ve improved their desserts.

The “second choice” – an unhealthy but commonly-offered alternative to the main meal – has been removed from the menu. Foods and portions served in all schools throughout the Réseau have been standardized, and cafeterias have been equipped to process food on-site.

“Improve food quality one meal at a time,” advised Allain. “The Réseau des cafétérias communautaires is constantly improving its menu.”



Cambridge-Narrows Community School

The small size of Cambridge-Narrows Community School belies its impressive food programs. Around 140 students attend the school, and the close-knit community of students and staff has nurtured a culture of nutrition and food education.

“We know our students very well and we have dedicated staff,” said Nelson Arsenault, the school’s principal. “You really need to get the staff on board.”

The school boasts three healthy meal programs. A breakfast program is available four days a week to elementary-aged children and three days a week for older students, with the school’s staff often making the grocery runs for ingredients and preparing the day’s breakfast themselves.

“We know that students that eat nutritious food have healthier and more alert minds,” said Arsenault.

The school also has a Farm to School program through the New Brunswick Food Security Action Network, which provides meals made from fresh, local ingredients including a salad bar with seasonal produce.

The Farm to School program runs every Tuesday and some Fridays out of the school’s home economics room, and has become so popular that Tuesday is now a highly anticipated day of the week by both students and teachers.

“The idea is to provide fresh food for children on as local of a basis as possible,” said Arsenault. “Students, if provided with healthy food, will eat it.”

The school has benefitted from thousands of dollars in grants, thanks to applications submitted by one of their vice-principals and the efforts of their on-staff community school coordinator.

“It’s just a matter of taking the initiative,” said Arsenault. “Don’t wait for things to come to you. Take advantage of offers.”

The school’s DISH (Delicious Ingredients Served Here) program is run by middle-level students and overseen by the community school coordinator. Once a month, interested students prepare food for their classmates and teachers. Other students sit on the DISH program’s Board of Directors.

“We’re very proud of these types of initiatives taking place,” said Arsenault. “We are not aiming to make a profit. Our goal is for every child to have a healthy meal.”

Emma Vail and Nicholas Orchard-Belyea serving students.



CÉD'ICI

CÉD'ICI was created in response to complaints from both students and parents about the quality of food available for purchase in school cafeterias. Three years later, CÉD'ICI now provides food to three francophone schools in the Capital Region – École des Bâisseurs and École Sainte-Anne in Fredericton, and École Arc-En-Ciel in Oromocto. In the fall, they will also provide meals to a new francophone school on Fredericton's north side.

“The biggest step we took was to get into a culture of cooking everything from scratch,” said Stéphane Sirois, CÉD'ICI's Executive Director. “It's all based on the principle of local, fresh, made-from-scratch food... We source much of our produce locally.”

Around 1500 students in total attend CÉD'ICI's three schools, ranging from kindergarten to grade 12. The same menu is available to all students.

Sirois acknowledges some bumps in the road in the transition to a different menu. It took some time for cafeteria staff to adjust to the change, and some students are still wary of unfamiliar foods.

“It takes time to change behaviours,” said Sirois, adding that the changes have been well-received by parents and most students.

The cafeteria changes have focused not just on improving nutrition, but also on educating students about the origins of the food on their plates.

“It's been a gradual process ... We've seen a big shift in the past year and a half with students interested in where their food comes from.”



Eel Ground First Nation School

Chad Duplessie, coordinator for the Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds, and Healthy Spirits project at Eel Ground First Nation, doesn't hesitate when asked how he would advise those looking to improve their school's menu.

"Consult the students," he said. "We are consistently impressed with the students' understanding of healthy meals and their ability to make the right choices."

Staff of Eel Ground First Nation School have worked hard to create a healthy culture among the student body and greater educational community. Their breakfast and lunch program, offered in partnership with Canadian Feed the Children since the 2006-2007 school year, was developed with the support of dietitians. Their meal program focuses on wholesome, made-from-scratch foods such as homemade lean meatballs with whole grain rice. School cooks are supported by local chefs to develop their skills.

"We always hear the adage 'making food with love in it' and it can only happen if the people making the meals love the change and love their job," said Duplessie, adding that the program would not be successful without the efforts of the school's cooks. "Make the students part of the process, and create ownership for the people preparing the meals."

Eel Ground First Nation is located just outside the city of Miramichi. Around 80 students attend the school. The school's meal program serves both breakfast and lunch every day, and was created to deal with issues of food security in the community.

"Students who are hungry in class have difficulty learning and controlling their behaviours while in class," said Duplessie.

The change in food offered was not entirely seamless at first. There was resistance when transitioning from white to whole wheat bread and pasta, but now when students are surveyed they prefer whole wheat.

"This also gives the parents an opportunity to replicate what changes in diet are being made in the school at home," said Duplessie.

Since first partnering with Canadian Feed the Children, the school has worked to consistently improve the quality and nutritional value of the meals. They plan to eventually move the program out of the community hall, where it has always been run, to the new school and fully equipped industrial cafeteria.

"The goal is to create a comfortable environment for the students in which they can enjoy tasty, scratch-made, and nutritious meals," said Duplessie.

Rayken Power



Owen Henderson Ward

Macdonald Consolidated School

The administration of Macdonald Consolidated School in Kingston knew the food they were serving to students wasn't the best. Almost everything arrived pre-made to the school. Soups came dry, with cafeteria staff adding water and heat. Other foods arrived already prepared or frozen, and were warmed before being served to students. The school's administration and Parent School Support Committee were concerned about the high levels of sodium in much of the food, and with what they thought were high prices compared to the quality being delivered.

"The Parent School Support Committee decided we'd rather have no cafeteria than having our students not eating real food," said Ellen Whittaker-Brown, the school's principal.

During September of the 2014-2015 school year, the school of around 200 students served no food at all. Then the Support Committee heard that Kredl's Corner Market, a small market in nearby Hampton specializing in local, organic produce and meats, was delivering bagged lunches to another school in the area.

Kredl's owner Dave Wolpin was contacted to see about arranging a bagged lunch program for the school as well. When Wolpin visited the school and saw the cafeteria facilities, he suggested preparing the meals on-site.

"The only foods to serve in schools are foods that are undeniably good for you. The alternative is not an option," said Wolpin, who also speaks at schools in the area to educate students about food.

The new menu has been well-received by students. The school's Caesar salad is a particular favourite, and is made every day from scratch, including the dressing. The desserts disguise vegetables such as spinach or sweet potatoes, and students who buy more than one dessert must also purchase fruit. Water is a popular drink, but 100 per cent fruit juice is also sold. Chocolate milk is deliberately more expensive than white.

"It really doesn't cost any more to buy real ingredients, if you're not in it to make money," said Whittaker-Brown.

The school's program has the support of the parents and the larger community, which Whittaker-Brown said makes a difference. The new cafeteria employs people from the area who care about the quality of food being served to students.

"They serve things that are simple. Everything is homemade. It does take a little bit of time but I think that cuts down on cost."



École Marguerite Bourgeoys

by Dr. Linda Dalpé

About Dr. Linda Dalpé

Dr. Linda Dalpé is a family physician based in Caraquet who is passionate about ensuring New Brunswick's children are given the support they need to live healthier lives. As a parent herself, she took action to improve the food served at her own children's school. She has shared her story with us, in the hope that it will help guide any parents who find themselves in a similar situation.

"For a number of years, when the school cafeteria menu of my children was made available at the start of the school year, I used to cross out what I considered unhealthy for my children. Two years ago, I thought that this wasn't fair for the children whose parents, for various reasons, didn't do the same thing. Since I could no longer bear to see poutine on the regular school menu, I decided to get involved.

I became a member of the PSSC of my daughters' school. I learned the menu was determined by the cook and the school management, and consequently, they are the ones who must be knowledgeable in the field of nutrition in order to determine if their menu is consistent with the nutrition policy. I told them I was ready to help, as I

saw they did not comply with Policy 711. But the school management disagreed, thinking they had a good understanding of Policy 711 and were complying. This wasn't bad faith on their part. They are devoted people who love our children.

My next step was to learn about how to challenge this government policy. I took part in a Webinar given by the government on this hot topic. First, you have to know and understand Policy 711. Then, you contact the school management to express your disagreement. If this fails, you talk to the School District. Again, if this fails, you contact the Education Council. And if this fails, you talk directly to the Education Department.



The following year, a new management team gave me a fresh opportunity to monitor this issue that was very important to me. They were provided with an assessment done by a dietitian appointed by the Education Council saying that none of the schools of the North-East Francophone School District complied with the nutrition policy, which has certainly helped me make my case.

They accepted my help and the support of a volunteer dietitian. In particular, we focused on carbohydrate portions and vegetable quantities, introduced colour variety in each plate and worked on controlling the salt, sugar and fat contents, including those of multiple desserts.

The new menu looks great, is tasty and is definitely healthier and affordable, and the children love it!

Departments must open their hearts and share their budget envelopes to improve the health of our children and share their knowledge and expertise to ensure our children have all the tools to grow and develop to their full fullest potential. In our high schools, dietitians are as essential as the sexual health nurses."





Organisations changing the way students eat in New Brunswick

The following four organisations are excellent sources for information and show true leadership in the area of healthy eating in New Brunswick. New Brunswick's doctors and dietitians have consistently stated, and we reiterate, that many ideas and voices will be necessary to ensure all schools can meet and exceed the nutritional benchmarks outlined in Policy 711. We believe these organisations have shown leadership in this area and would be excellent sources of information. It should be noted that none of these organisations endorse, made active contributions to, sponsor, fund, or otherwise formally support the Make Menus Matter initiative in any way. We thank them for their inspiration and the work they do to improve the food offered to children and youth in schools.

The New Brunswick Food Security Action Network

The Food Security Action Network has a vision of ensuring that all New Brunswickers have access to food that is local, healthy, and sustainable produced. They have a number of programs which influence how food is consumed in New Brunswick and work to create groups of Community Food Mentors, promote Community Gardens and Community Kitchens, work with the Farm to Cafeteria Program, and work with many food banks. They can be found at <http://www.nbfoodsecurity.ca>.

The Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Coalition of New Brunswick

HEPAC is a network of government departments and non-government organisational who share common goals of healthy eating and living for all New Brunswickers. Last year, HEPAC did an informative piece on Policy 711, which brought the issues of healthy eating to light for many parents and New Brunswickers by simply presenting the information available in an accessible way. Disclosure: the NBMS is one of many groups represented at HEPAC. They can be found at <http://hepac.ca>.

Farm to School New Brunswick

Eight schools in the province are benefitting from small grants provided by federal and provincial partners to develop cafeteria salad bars, stocked with produce from local farmers. The schools also provide some food-related education, such as cooking classes, field trips to farms, or garden spaces. The demand for the program is very high in a number of schools. More can be learned at <http://www.farmtocafeteriacanada.ca/2014/10/farm-to-school-new-brunswick-launches-in-good-company/>

The University of New Brunswick's Faculty of Kinesiology

The University of New Brunswick maintains an active research interest in the area of food-related policy, nutrition and healthy eating. Professor Mary McKenna teaches wellness, nutrition, and health promotion, and has worked at many provincial, national and international tables on the subject of food policy. Peer reviewed publications which relate to lessons for food served in New Brunswick's schools can be found at <http://www.unb.ca/fredericton/kinesiology/research/profiles/mmckenna.html>.