



ONTARIO SOCIETY OF NUTRITION
PROFESSIONALS IN PUBLIC HEALTH

Submission to the Standing Committee on Social Policy
Re: Bill 8
Healthy Food for Healthy Schools Act, 2007

Tuesday, April 8, 2008

Presented by:

Sielen Raoufi, MHSc, RD

Mary Ellen Prange, MHSc, RD

Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health Response to Bill 8 – *Healthy Food for Healthy Schools Act, 2007*

Background:

In March 2004, the Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health (OSNPPH) School Nutrition Workgroup released *Call to Action: Creating a Healthy School Nutrition Environment*¹ identifying nine essential elements of a healthy nutrition environment for Ontario schools. For each essential element, the *Call to Action* offers specific recommendations and suggested actions for the Ontario government, local boards of health and education to ensure that schools practices do not undermine the very curriculum expectations designed to educate children and youth about the importance of healthy eating.

In the four year period since the release of the *Call to Action*, the majority of Ontario's 36 public health units have officially endorsed the *Call to Action* and use it locally as a framework to guide their mandate² to promote and support nutrition education and healthy eating environments within schools as well as the development of school nutrition policies. A number of school boards, including Limestone DSB³ and Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic DSB⁴, have enacted board-wide nutrition policies that reflect all of the essential elements included in the *Call to Action*.

Further, a collaboration of registered dietitians from seven public health units have developed, pilot-tested, and recently launched an innovative toolkit, *Nutrition Tools for Schools*. The toolkit facilitates elementary school communities in collaboration with public health to create healthier nutrition environments, according to all of the essential elements included in the *Call to Action*. Among its many components, *Nutrition Tools for Schools* provides a comprehensive set of "food standards" that define healthier foods and beverages which build on existing provincial policies for vending machines and student nutrition programs. To date, 27 of Ontario's 36 public health units have procured *Nutrition Tools for Schools* to guide effective work with school communities to create healthier nutrition environments.

Recommendations:

OSNPPH commends the Ministry of Education for the introduction of Bill 8. We are optimistic that the *Healthy Food for Healthy School Act* will benefit the nutritional and overall health of Ontario's children and youth; however we make the following recommendations to strengthen the overall impact of the legislation.

In response to Bill 8, OSNPPH recommends that:

- 1. the *Healthy Food for Healthy School Act* be inclusive of all instances where foods and beverages are offered or sold in both elementary and secondary schools.**
 - Nutrition environments differ greatly between elementary and secondary schools. For example, in contrast to secondary schools, most elementary schools do not have cafeterias and many do have snack vending machines making aspects of the proposed legislation non-applicable to the elementary setting.
 - In elementary schools, "special event days" including "special food" days (eg, pizza or hot dog lunches) and classroom celebrations are common and may occur on a frequent basis. Making these exempt from the legislation will present a serious loophole that will allow for regular availability of unhealthy choices to children in the elementary schools.
- 2. the *Healthy Food for Healthy School Act* include evidence-based, comprehensive provincial nutrition standards applicable to all foods and beverages available in Ontario schools.**

We urge that the following be considered:

 - Due to the differences in the nutrition environments between elementary and secondary schools, we recommend the development of a set of standards for elementary schools and another set of standards applicable to secondary schools. The food standards included in *Nutrition Tools for Schools* should be considered in development of standards for elementary schools as they are

already being implemented widely across the province. The nutrition standards included in the *Eat Smart! School Program*⁵ should be considered in the development of standards for secondary schools. The *Eat Smart!* nutrition standard for cafeteria is currently under revision to reflect the new *Canada's Food Guide*⁶ and the program will also be expanded to include a nutrition standard for vending machines and tuck shops in January 2009. Currently the *Eat Smart! School Cafeteria* program is being implemented in 235 secondary schools across the province.

- The standards must be comprehensive and reflect general nutrition recommendations beyond trans fat.
- A consultative process should be employed whereby all stakeholders, including OSNNPH may have input into the nutrition standards.

3. **the Ministry of Education recognize the pivotal role that public health will play in successful provincial and local implementation of the legislation.** OSNPPH members can provide nutrition expertise needed to support school board implementation of the Act. It would be advantageous for the Ministry of Education to consult with the Ministries of Health Promotion and Health and Long-term Care to delineate the role of public health units, in particular the role of Registered Dietitians, to support school boards in successful implementation, monitoring, surveillance and compliance with the legislation.

¹ Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health School Nutrition Workgroup. 2004. *Call to Action: Creating a Healthy School Nutrition Environment*. Available at: www.osnpph.on.ca/position.html

² Ontario Ministry of Health, Public Health Branch. 1997. *Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines*. Available at: <http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/providers/pub/pubhealth/manprog/manprog.html>

³ Limstone District School Board. 2007. *Creating a Healthy School Nutrition Environment*. Available at: <http://www.limestone.on.ca/board/Documents/procedures/AP-210.pdf>

⁴ Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board. 2006. *Board Policies S.M.06 – Nutrition*. Available at: http://www.hwcdsb.edu.on.ca/board_policies/fs_bp9.html

⁵ The Eat Smart! School Program is coordinated provincially by the Nutrition Resource Centre at the Ontario Public Health Association and is implemented locally by public health units. See www.EatSmartOntario.ca for more information.

⁶ Health Canada, 2007. *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide*. Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, represented by the Minister of Health Canada. Accessible at: www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide