Promoting Healthy Eating in a School Setting

Healthy eating enables children to learn well and live well. Schools play a key role in shaping children’s eating attitudes and behaviours. Teachers and other school staff are role models and can have a lasting influence on students. Providing children with positive food experiences promotes physical and mental health through improved:

✓ thinking and learning
✓ attention and focus
✓ body image and self esteem
✓ food choices, including vegetables and fruit
✓ emotional regulation and self-control
✓ problem solving and memory
✓ school connectedness
✓ relationship with food

The new Canada’s food guide is a key nutrition education tool to promote healthy eating. Here are some ways to apply the new online food guide at school:

✓ Eat a variety of foods each day → Provide opportunities for students to eat a variety of vegetables, fruit, whole grains and protein-rich foods.
✓ Mindful eating → Allow adequate time for lunch and snack; connect lunch to curriculum.
✓ Cook more often → Plan opportunities for classroom and after-school food skill development.
✓ Enjoy your food → Respect individual food choices, including culture and tradition.
✓ Eat meals with others → Provide safe and pleasant areas for students to gather with enough time to eat.

On the next page are more examples of ways to support a healthy eating environment, reinforcing key concepts taught through the curriculum, integrated with policies and ideas to extend student learning and engage community partners.
Ideas to **Support Healthy Eating at School** using a **Comprehensive School Health** Approach

**School Policies**
- **Consider:**
  - Guidelines for Food and Beverage Sales in BC Schools
  - Policies and procedures, e.g., “Play First” lunch
  - Adequate time to eat lunch
  - Alternatives to food rewards to encourage positive behavior, e.g., instead of offering candy, offer extra free time
  - Provide healthier options in vending machines
  - Healthy fundraisers

- **Nurture healthy eating at school,** by creating a positive eating environment, recognizing natural hunger/fullness cues, building trust with students & families, and teaching nutrition in a positive way
- **Provide a healthy social environment,** inclusive of diverse body types
- **Offer after-school kid’s cooking programs**
- **Offer free healthy snacks/meals**
- **Promote water drinking with refillable bottles, water fountains**
- **Encourage connectedness and mental wellness through eating together and school gardens**
- **Provide safe and pleasant eating areas**

**Community Partnerships**
- **Build partnerships and engage with:**
  - Food vendors
  - Parent Advisory Councils (PAC)
  - Food committees (students, parents, school staff)
  - Indigenous education team
  - Public health
  - Non-profit societies (e.g., Edible Garden Project, Fresh Roots, PHABC)

- **Focus on health, not weight, and learning that promotes positive body image**
- **Use cross-curricular, hands-on food exploration:**
  - Create an outdoor classroom
  - Explore Farm to School to embed local food systems into the school community
  - Link inquiry to indigenous plants, foods, and knowledge
  - Integrate food into current teaching and lesson plans, e.g. BC School Fruit and Vegetable or + Milk and nutrition education programs
  - Engage youth in reducing food waste and food packaging

**VCH SUPPORT**
- We can provide nutrition consultation and workshops to educators; work with schools to plan food literacy initiatives; provide a review of your new food programs from a food safety lens; and support staff, parents, or youth on healthy eating committees.
- We can facilitate linkages with local community partners.