

For Information

DATE: February 26, 2010

REPORT TITLE: **ONTARIO SCHOOL FOOD AND BEVERAGE POLICY**FROM: Janette Smith, Commissioner of Health Services
David L. Mowat, MBChB, MPH, FRCPC, Medical Officer of Health**OBJECTIVE**

The objective of this report is to provide an update about the Ontario School Food and Beverage Policy.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- Peel Public Health currently provides health services to local school communities and assists local schools with the implementation of the School Food and Beverage Policy outlined in *Healthy Food for Healthy Schools Act, 2008*, also known as Bill 8.
- Bill 8 amends the *Education Act* to regulate the sale of all food, beverages and ingredients containing trans fat prepared and sold in schools and gives power to the Minister of Education to create policies and guidelines regarding food and beverages provided and sold on school premises.
- Nutrition Standards, an integral part of the School Food and Beverage Policy that was released in January 2010, identifies specific menu items that should not be sold in schools.
- Peel Public Health is eager to work with schools to assist them in meeting the mandatory implementation of the Nutrition Standards, effective September 2011.

DISCUSSION**1. Background**

Peel Public Health is currently mandated by the province to provide health services to local school communities. This includes assisting schools with the implementation of the School Food and Beverage Policy outlined in *Healthy Food for Healthy Schools Act, 2008*, also known as Bill 8. The purpose of this *Act* is to promote healthy food choices in schools and make schools healthier places in which students can learn.

Bill 8 amends the *Education Act* to regulate the sale of all food, beverages and ingredients containing trans fat prepared and sold in schools. It also gives power to the Minister of Education to create policies and guidelines with respect to food and beverages provided and sold on school premises. This legislation provides a great opportunity to find innovative and ongoing solutions to the routine challenges to healthy eating in schools, and allows for the creation of supportive food environments.

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An integral component of the School Food and Beverage Policy are the Nutrition Standards, which were released in January. These standards are intended to ensure that all food and beverages sold in schools are in accordance with Canada's Food Guide and contribute to a student's healthy growth and development. Research shows that children who eat a healthy diet are better prepared to learn and more likely to be successful in school. The implementation of these standards will help create the foundation for teaching children to make healthy choices into their adult years. The legislated Nutrition Standards also provide an exciting opportunity for Peel Public Health to work more closely with school boards and further its mandate of promoting healthy eating among children and youth.

2. Nutrition Standards

The Nutrition Standards were released to all schools across Ontario in January 2010 and will become mandatory effective September 2011. Staff from the Peel District School Board and the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board will be attending training on the Nutrition Standards provided by the Ministry of Education. Peel Public Health is eager and well-positioned to assist school boards with the implementation of these standards, as they align well with several Public Health goals, including a strategic priority to address obesity in the Region of Peel.

The Nutrition Standards are a major breakthrough in school food and beverage policy because they identify specific menu items that should not be sold in schools. The Standards divide all food and beverages sold in schools into three categories:

Not Permitted for Sale: Products from this category generally contain few or no essential nutrients and/or contain high amounts of fat, sugar, and sodium. Food and beverages in this category may not be sold in schools. These items include candy, energy drinks and fried foods.

Healthiest: Products in this category generally have higher levels of essential nutrients and lower amounts of fat, sugar and sodium. They must have at least 80 per cent of all food and beverage choices that are available for sale. These items include extra-lean ground meat and whole grain breads.

Healthy: Products in this category may have slightly higher amounts of fat, sugar and sodium. They must make up no more than 20 per cent of all food and beverage choices for sale. These items include bagels and cheese.

In addition, the Standards require that food made and served by schools should always be prepared in a healthy way using cooking methods that require little or no added fat or sodium, such as baking, barbecuing, broiling or steaming.

The Nutrition Standards do not apply to food and beverages that are:

- Offered in schools to students at no cost;
- Brought from home or purchased off school premises;
- Sold for fundraising activities that occur off school premises;
- Available for purchase during field trips.

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3. Proposed Direction

Peel Public Health nutritionists and school health staff are part of working committees with both Boards of Education to support the implementation of these standards in the schools. Peel Public Health will collaborate with school boards to provide staff training; criteria for choosing food service providers; a comprehensive communication strategy; and pilot testing with key schools. The goal is to develop a Comprehensive Nutrition Policy with school boards that will assist them in creating a healthier environment for students and assist with addressing all food-related issues.

Peel Public Health currently supports schools through several other healthy eating initiatives, such as:

- **School curriculum support, including:**
 - Being Active Eating Well – A resource for ACTION in Peel:
www.schoolhealth101.ca/action
 - Great Lunches for School! School Nutrition Campaign 2008/09
 - Discover Healthy Eating! A Teacher's Resource for Grades 1-8
- **The Eat Smart! School Program:**
 - This program supports students to make healthier food choices and recognizes schools that meet nutrition standards, have excellent food safety practices and comply with the *Smoke-Free Ontario Act*.

The *Healthy Food for Healthy Schools Act* applies only to publicly funded schools, therefore, private schools will not be affected by this Act. In order to adequately support the French-language schools that are included in the Act, Peel Public Health will consult with French-speaking Nutritionists as needed to assist with the implementation of the standards.

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CONCLUSION

Peel Public Health currently collaborates with the Peel District School Board and the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board to create a strong foundation to support healthy behaviours for more than 250,000 school-aged children in the Region of Peel.

The recently released Nutrition Standards of the School Food and Beverage Policy is a major step forward in creating supportive environments for healthy eating in schools. Peel Public Health will support the School Food and Beverage Policy as part of a broader effort to develop healthier learning environments and improve student achievement. Peel Public Health will continue to work with school boards to implement the Nutrition Standards and help eliminate the challenges to healthy eating faced by school-aged children.

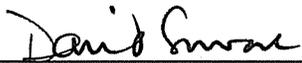


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