



# **Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Framework for Student Nutrition Programs**

*OSNP Southwest*

Student Nutrition Programs provide opportunities to affirm and represent the identities of all students, including those who identify as Indigenous, Black and racialized; those who are experiencing poverty; those who are newcomers to Canada, as well as students with disabilities and special education needs. OSNP's goal is to better understand and support these diverse needs to inform program procedures and practices.

OSNP is fostering creative solutions to ensure equitable access to nourishing and culturally responsive school food. We support safe, inclusive and welcoming student nutrition programs and school food environments that promote student well-being and success.

We work to gain perspectives from diverse communities, students, individuals with lived experience, community partners, cultural experts and knowledge holders to build a collective vision for robust and inclusive school food programs. We continue to facilitate deeper discussions and engagement with our partners and stakeholders to address racial and social inequities in school food programs and meet diverse needs. The process is ever changing and never ending.

## ACTION ITEMS

- Identify and eliminate biases and systemic barriers
- Support school food environments that are safe and welcoming for all
- Ensure inclusive community partnerships and engagement
- Seek out and honour the voices of students and families as active participants in the shaping and design of programs. Increase engagement opportunities, including those that offer opportunities for knowledge sharing and those that include parents that may be disengaged from the education system
- Work with schools to raise awareness and understanding about the impacts of equity and diversity in school food programs and to provide them with the tools and resources they need to support culturally responsive and inclusive practices
- Build the capacity to serve students with disabilities/special education needs and intersecting identities
- Work with school board leads (Indigenous Education; Mental Health; Equity, Diversity and Inclusion etc) to codevelop and integrate actions
- Provide staff with relevant professional development opportunities

# OSNP GOALS AND KEY AREAS OF FOCUS:

## **Practicing cultural humility**

- Listening, not prescribing; understanding people of various backgrounds have different experiences and acknowledging that we are not the experts of all cultures, backgrounds or experiences. Connect with individuals and groups with lived experience and work with community liaisons and cultural and equity teams and experts to guide our work.

## **Gather data to understand true disparities to reach BIPOC and marginalized communities**

- Work with MCCSS data, school boards, public health, community partners and all levels of government to gather data to identify disparities. Facilitate conversations and connections with students, families and communities
- Use data to reach historically under-represented and marginalized communities and to inform the allocation of cash and food donations to identified sites as higher needs
- Provide culturally responsive menu options and resources

## **Reaching rural communities**

- Expanding direct delivery to remote communities, identifying grocery deserts, working with local suppliers and farmers to expand our reach

## **Emphasizing safe and welcoming spaces**

- Providing resources and tools to schools for how to create and maintain safe and welcoming spaces
- Provide students with increased choice and build relationships to support a sense of belonging and connectedness in programs

## **Provide support and reduce barriers for neuro-divergent students**

- Work in partnership with community groups and advocates to provide resources to support students with sensory processing differences and difficulties who may have strong preferences or aversions to certain textures, tastes or smells
- Expose children to new foods in safe ways

## **Use an Equity lens when making program decisions:**

- Ask the following:
  - What else do we need to consider?
  - How else can we build understanding?
  - What are we missing?
  - How does this decision advance equity and support diversity and inclusion?
  - How does this decision remove systemic and structural barriers for traditionally marginalized groups or individuals?

OSNP continues to facilitate deeper discussions and engagement with our partners and stakeholders to address inequities in school food programs and meet diverse needs. Our success in improving equity of outcomes for all students is supported by our work with our community partners. We wish to thank everyone who contributes to this work and provides insight into how equity, diversity and inclusion can be achieved in school food policies and programs.

## OBJECTIVES FROM CANADA'S NATIONAL SCHOOL FOOD POLICY:

**Guided by the Policy's principles, the following objectives help support the long-term vision of every child having access to nutritious food in school. The highlighted portions specifically emphasize the vision for student nutrition programs that are equitable, diverse and inclusive in nature.**

### **Work progressively towards the long-term goal of universal access**

- Building constructively on the work of existing funders and school food programs
- Expanding school food programs to communities that are underserved and/or where programming does not currently exist
- Prioritizing communities and populations that face barriers to accessing nutritious food and which are most affected by food insecurity, including those that are Indigenous, Black, or from other racialized groups; living in rural, remote or isolated areas; and in immigrant, single-parent, or low-income households
- Ensuring that the physical, financial and other barriers to participation are reduced or mitigated, especially for marginalized populations
- Striving to serve meals that are free at the point of participation, such that any contribution on the part of students or families takes place privately and separately from meal or snack service, and ensuring that meals are offered in an environment designed to minimize or eliminate stigma

### **Expand investment in school food so that programs can operate sustainably**

- Enhancing and expanding, and without displacing, existing sources of funding for school food programs with the goal of expanding their reach and capacity
- Exploring how different funding models could be implemented to further expand access to school food programs
- Supporting investments in infrastructure and staffing to procure, grow, deliver, store, prepare, and serve safe and healthy food at schools in a supportive environment
- Taking action to encourage sustainable practices, including efforts to reduce food loss and waste through prevention and diversion strategies and behaviours

**Help children meet their nutritional and health needs, develop healthful food-related behaviours and attitudes, as well as food and nutrition knowledge and skills**

- Fostering a healthy school food environment, aligning meals, snacks, experiences, and education with Canada's Food Guide and provincial or territorial nutrition guidelines
- Valuing the importance of age-appropriate and hands-on learning opportunities related to food, nutrition and/or food systems
- Promoting positive food-related behaviours and attitudes, such as enjoying meals and snacks with others, being open to trying new foods and taking time to eat
- Safeguarding against marketing food and beverage brands and highly processed foods and beverages to children and increasing awareness of the impacts of food marketing on food choice
- Striving to promote food literacy and food skills, including: strengthening knowledge of the connections between food and health, culture, and the environment; healthy eating; and, reducing food waste
- Ensuring food is safe to minimize the risk of pathogens, and that relevant health and safety-focused regulations are followed

**Promote programming that is culturally appropriate, relevant, and inclusive**

- Striving to provide children with opportunities to learn about other cultures
- Ensuring that information on school food programming, including how students and families can participate, is accessible and clear
- Food offerings reflect a mindfulness of dietary needs and allergies and the importance of including foods that reflect students' cultural identifies (for example, country, halal and kosher food)
- Leveraging the experience and expertise of First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners and community leaders, such as Elders, to ensure programs are culturally appropriate
- Involving students in menu planning or food preparation, where possible
- Ensuring opportunities for input and feedback from students, parents and the community

**Create opportunities for local economies and reflect of local and regional circumstances**

- Maximizing opportunities to source food locally and foster connections with local food producers, hunters and harvesters, processors, and suppliers
- Benefiting local economies and job creation
- Ensuring partnerships (for example, with businesses and corporations) are mutually beneficial and support healthy living
- Striving to support the participation of under-represented groups in the Canadian agriculture and food sector