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NUTRITION TOOLS FOR SCHOOLS©

The Health and Emergency Medical Services Committee recommends to Regional Council acting as the Board of Health, the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report dated March 27, 2009, from the Commissioner of Community and Health Services.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. The Regional Chair write to the Minister of Health Promotion and Minister of Education requesting that both Ministries:
 - Collaborate to adopt *Nutrition Tools for Schools*© as a province-wide resource to support the creation of healthy nutrition environments within schools.
 - Consider the food standards included in the *Nutrition Tools for Schools*© toolkit as the basis for the development of comprehensive nutrition related regulations as part of provincial legislation.
2. The Regional Clerk circulate this report for information to York Region District School Board, the York Catholic District School Board and the Canadian Association of School Health.

2. PURPOSE

This report is prepared for Regional Council in order for it to carry out its legislative duties and responsibilities as the Board of Health under the *Health Protection and Promotion Act*. It outlines the development of *Nutrition Tools for Schools*©, an innovative comprehensive toolkit that reflects best practices, local evaluation research and supports health unit staff to meet the requirements in the *Ontario Public Health Standards* (2008). This report is timely as the Ministry of Education is expected to announce enhancements for Bill 8 – *Healthy Foods for Healthy Schools Act*. The *Nutrition Tools for Schools*© food standards should be considered as the basis for development of comprehensive nutrition regulations as part of this provincial legislation.

3. BACKGROUND

Most Ontario Health Units including York Region have adopted the *Call to Action: Creating a Healthy School Nutrition Environment*

In June 2004, Regional Council endorsed the Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health's document entitled *Call to Action: Creating a Healthy School Nutrition Environment* (2004) through the adoption of Clause No. 5 of Report No. 5 of the Health and Emergency Medical Services Committee. This document provides a comprehensive framework and recommendations based on nine essential elements to support a healthy school nutrition environment.

York Region Community and Health Services staff led the development of the *Nutrition Tools for Schools*© toolkit, a comprehensive resource for public health staff

Led by York Region Community and Health Services staff, Public Health dietitians from seven health units (Algoma Public Health, City of Hamilton Public Health Services, North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit, Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit, Sudbury & District Health Unit, Timiskaming Health Unit) collaborated to produce the *Nutrition Tools for Schools*© toolkit to support schools with implementing the recommendations made in the *Call to Action*.

Nutrition Tools for Schools© outlines a step-by-step community development process to guide schools and provide practical tools to help make healthy eating environments a reality. This toolkit is based on the 'whole school' or comprehensive health approach that engages the entire school community in promoting consistent messages about healthy eating throughout the school day. The toolkit consists of five main components including a leader's handbook, seventeen action guides and a food standards reference guide.

The action guides facilitate local school nutrition initiatives. For example, the Student Nutrition Program Action Guide aligns with the work of Food for Learning which is a York Region community partnership that supports student nourishment programs (e.g., breakfast and snack programs). This partnership has received Community Development and Investment Funding (CDIF) since 2004. In December 2008, Regional Council approved CDIF funding for Food for Learning in an amount of \$120,371 per year, for the next three years.

Food standards are the essential foundation by which schools improve their nutrition environment

Nutrition Tools for Schools© includes school food standards which align with:

- The Ontario Ministry of Education's Policy/Program Memorandum No. 135 *Healthy Foods and Beverages in Elementary School Vending Machine Guidelines*.

- The Ministry of Children and Youth Services' *Student Nutrition Program Nutrition Guidelines*.
- *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide*.

The food standards provide clear direction for administration, staff, school councils and lunch providers when making decisions concerning the types of foods and beverages to offer or sell or to use for fundraising.

A Nutrition Standards for Schools Committee was convened by the Ontario Ministry of Education in early 2008 to provide expert advice on regulatory considerations for provincial school food standards. Subsequently, Bill 8—*Healthy Foods for Healthy Schools Act* received Royal Assent in April 2008. The Act provides power to the Minister of Education to create policies, guidelines and regulations governing nutritional standards for all food and beverages provided on school premises or in connection with a school-related activity. The first phase of this Act—*Trans Fat Standards Regulation* became effective in September 2008.

Pilot-evaluation of *Nutrition Tools for Schools*© identifies public health support as the number one enabling factor for implementation

Nutrition Tools for Schools© has been piloted in 18 schools in the Province, including three schools in York Region. Health unit support was identified as the number one enabler to implementation and as a result, a *train the trainer* package was developed for all health units. The majority of public health units use *Nutrition Tools for Schools*© in some capacity in their work with schools.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

***Nutrition Tools for Schools*© has increased York Region's capacity to meet the Ontario Public Health Standards related to promoting healthy schools**

Participation in the Healthy Schools program requires schools to form a committee representing parents, teachers and students and to choose a health topic based on the school population needs. Nutrition is one of the most popular topics chosen. Currently there are 76 schools participating in the Healthy Schools program of which 41 are working on creating a healthy nutrition environment.

The development process undertaken to create *Nutrition Tools for Schools*© exemplifies a positive collaboration between health units. This approach has reduced duplication of work by health units, leveraged financial resources, and resulted in a high quality, evidence-based resource. The Public Health Branch also hosted a three hour training event with 70 participants via teleconference to orient and coach health unit participants on the *Nutrition Tools for Schools*© approach.

In addition, *Nutrition Tools for Schools*© has been promoted by the Canadian Association of School Health (CASH) via list serves, webinars and communities of practice. CASH is a national association composed of provincial/territorial coalitions whose members promote the health of young people through comprehensive school health. Participation in CASH led activities is open to all schools.

Provincial regulations on school food standards can define acceptable foods and beverages that can be served and/or sold in school

Bill 8—*Healthy Foods for Healthy Schools Act* needs to be expanded beyond the *Trans Fat Standards Regulation* to include comprehensive mandatory food standards. Without mandatory food standards, schools will continue to struggle to define acceptable foods and beverages that can be served and/or sold in schools. Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and British Columbia have released provincial comprehensive school food standards.

***Nutrition Tools for Schools*© food standards should be considered as the basis for development of comprehensive nutrition regulations as part of provincial legislation**

The *Nutrition Tools for Schools*© food standards are being used by health units, the food industry and to shape school board nutrition policies and catering contracts. With this high level of uptake the *Nutrition Tools for Schools*© food standards should be considered as the basis for comprehensive nutrition regulations as part of provincial legislation.

The timing is right for the Province to adopt *Nutrition Tools for Schools*© and its food standards

Given the widespread uptake by public health units, *Nutrition Tools for Schools*© has created a state of readiness/receptivity for Ontario schools. The time is ripe for the Ministry of Health Promotion and Ministry of Education to collaborate and adopt *Nutrition Tools for Schools*© as a province-wide resource. In addition, Bill 8 provides an opportunity to include more comprehensive nutrition regulations. The *Nutrition Tools for Schools*© food standards should be used for the basis of this development. By adopting this resource and food standards, the Ministries would clearly demonstrate their commitment to acknowledging partnerships, reducing costly duplication and sustaining local successes that support healthy school nutrition environments.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The approved 2009 Operating Budget for the Public Health Branch includes expenditures related to delivering health promotion and education initiatives which are 75% funded by the Province.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The York Region District School Board has recently approved a Healthy Schools Policy for all elementary and secondary schools. The York Catholic District School Board is currently working on a Healthy Schools Policy. The *Nutrition Tools for Schools*© and its food standards can support the development and implementation of the Healthy Schools Policy for both school boards and create healthy school nutrition environments throughout York Region.

7. CONCLUSION

The *Nutrition Tools for Schools*© is a comprehensive toolkit that was developed with leadership from York Region Community and Health Services. This resource is widely used by the public health community in Ontario. By adopting this resource, the Ministry of Health Promotion and Ministry of Education can potentially reduce costly duplication, enhance consistency in nutrition policies and help sustain those schools in their effort to create a healthy nutrition environment.

For more information on this report, please contact Dr. Karim Kurji, Medical Office of Health at Ext. 4012.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.