

## Topic Area: School Nutrition

### Abstract Title

Nourishing Young Minds: An Evaluation of the Nutritional Quality of the Elementary School Nourishment Program at New Westminster Schools.

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** Children who suffer from hunger are more likely to have poor academic performance and cognitive development. New Westminster Schools (NWS) has been offering a subsidized lunch program, the School Nourishment Program (SNP). This program was redesigned in January 2019. The nutritional quality of the menus previous to 2019 has not been evaluated.

**Objectives:** To evaluate the nutritional quality of the SNP lunch menus in NWS prior to the program redesign and to determine if the menus meet the recommendations from the BC School Meal and School Nutrition Program Handbook (SMSNPH).

**Methods:** Three SNP schools were approached to provide menus and recipes for a retrospective menu review. Each menu day was analyzed for the number of food groups served, whether there was a vegetarian option, and the frequency with which fish, juice, processed meats, and other foods were offered. Menus were assessed based on the SMSNPH.

**Results:** Of the participating schools, one was able to provide a 37-day menu for analysis. Thirty menu days (81.1%) provided all four food groups. While a vegetarian option was available every day, fish was only offered once (2.7%). Other foods and processed meats were served on 9 (24.3%) and 11 (29.7%) menu days, respectively. Juice was the only source of fruit and vegetables on 9 (24.3%) menu days. Standardized recipes were not available for in-depth nutritional analysis.

**Conclusion:** The majority of the days, the SNP met the SMSNPH recommendations for food groups and vegetarian options. However, processed foods should be reduced, and whole fruit, vegetables, and high-quality proteins could be provided more often to optimize the nutritional quality of meals.

**Significance to the Field of Dietetics:** Our research supports the redesign and future evaluation of the SNP with the goal of optimizing nutrition and promoting the health of future generations.