

Feeding our Children: Communities that Care

A report on school food programs in the Trillium Lakelands District School Board
written for the Tri-County School Nourishment Committee

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	4
Introduction	10
This report: the data sources	10
Background: Tri county committee beginnings.....	12
Haliburton and CKL	12
Muskoka	13
How the board became involved.....	16
Significance of the TLDSB nutrition policy	16
What the literature says.....	18
Health and nutrition concerns	18
School food programs	19
Schools as sites of nourishment programs	20
Implementation challenges	21
Policy design and implementation.....	21
The complicated financing of school food programs	23
How schools get funds from Ministry of Children & Youth Services	23
How schools apply.....	24
How schools get funds from TLDSB.....	26
How schools get funds from Breakfast for Learning.....	27
Schools obtain funds through fundraising	29
Funding for coordinators.....	30
Re-structuring and compensation changes.....	30
Funding for Muskoka program manager	32
Funding for CKL coordinator	33
Funding for Haliburton coordinator.....	34
Importance of stabilizing this position.....	35
Honoraria for school/site coordinators.....	36
Examining the quantitative data.....	37
Patterns of growth in school nutrition programs.....	37
2002-2005 in Muskoka	37
2002-2005 in CKL	39
2002-2005 in Haliburton.....	40
Examining the qualitative data.....	43
The school interviews	43
Program descriptions	43

Reasons to offer food programs	44
Program challenges	44
Necessary and valued volunteers	45
Managing the resistance.....	45
Program strengths	46
Staff response	47
Tracking progress.....	48
Final observations	49
Parental and site coordinator interviews	50
Parent profile	50
Reasons to offer food programs	50
Program challenges	51
Program strengths	51
The heroes	52
Profile of volunteers.....	52
Tracking progress.....	53
Final observations	53
Suggestions for improvement	53
Lack of parent response	54
Summary of interview information.....	55
Common reasons for offering programs	55
Role of volunteers	56
Negative perceptions and resistance to change.....	56
Resistance to making changes	57
Conclusions	58
Recommendations	59
Appendix A: Methodology	64
Appendix B: Interview template.....	66
References	67

Executive Summary

This is a qualitative report describing the implementation and growth of the student nutrition program in the Trillium Lakelands District School Board through the work of the Tri-County School Nourishment Committee from 1999 until the present.

The board's school nutrition programs have grown as a result of productive partnerships within this committee. This community-based partnership includes school board and community representation from all three larger geographic catchments of the Trillium Lakelands District School board [Muskoka, Haliburton and the City of Kawartha Lakes]. Its primary goal since its inception has been to bring together school and community resources "to optimize the nutrition of our children" (draft Nov 24, 1999). To accomplish this, committee members share information about the three area programs and critical ministry initiatives, develop protocols and procedures, and advise on the disbursement of TLDSB funds for school nutrition programs.

The process that incorporated nutrition programs and practices into Trillium Lakelands schools built on solid community collaboration, was championed by trustees, committed community members and board professionals and is characterized by the best practices identified in the research literature on the implementation of change. School nutrition programs in this board are noteworthy for consistent, rapid, relatively inexpensive implementation and local support.

The financing of school food programs is complex. The process in each of the three counties is different and has changed over time. Money flows from and through various ministries to institutions, individuals and schools. Each area functions within a different and sometimes complicated fiscal hierarchy characterized by detailed bookkeeping and regular information gathering.

TLDSB schools get funds from four sources.

- The Ministry of Children and Youth Services that supports the schools' purchase of food and funds the manager and two area coordinators,
- The Trillium Lakelands District School Board that budgets to assist their programs,

- Breakfast for Learning that continues to offer funds although to a lesser extent.
- Community financial support solicited through cash and in kind donations

When MCYS took over responsibility for school nutrition programs the funding model, and supervisory positions for the catchment areas changed. In Muskoka the coordinator position disappeared when the funding shifted from BFL and when the health units were reorganized. In comparison, the coordinator positions in both Haliburton and Kawartha Lakes remained as a result of community lobbying efforts. Two very different supervisory models now exist within the Tri-County committee:

- A manager, based in North Bay now supervises the Muskoka area food programs of TLDSB schools in addition to the North Bay and Parry Sound area school food programs
- In Haliburton and Kawartha Lakes a local coordinator in each of these area networks, supports and supervises school programs.

The supervision in the Muskoka area concerns the Tri-County committee.

While Ministry funds provide stipends directly for the area program coordinators, there are no funds set aside for on site (school) coordinators. In the three areas comprising the Tri-County committee, Haliburton alone supplies an honorarium for all its site coordinators using community funds. In the City of Kawartha Lakes one school currently provides its coordinator with a stipend and another plans to do so this fall. No Muskoka site coordinators receive compensation.

100% of the TLDSB schools currently offer food programs. By way of comparison, a 2002 status report indicates that 50% of Muskoka schools, 24% of Victoria/City of Kawartha Lakes schools and 100% of Haliburton schools offered food programs. Success has led to expansion quite rapidly and relatively inexpensively.

The food offerings differ in each area. In Muskoka approximately 81% of TLDSB schools report breakfast programs and 18% report snacks. In the city of Kawartha Lakes, 56% of schools report breakfast programs while 72% offer snacks. In Haliburton 100% of schools offer universal snacks, 42% offer breakfast. Future growth will mean involving a substantially larger percentage of students. Since breakfasts are

open to students who drop in they provide food to a smaller percentage of students than universal snack programs that feed an entire student population.

Ten school administrators and twelve parents/ site coordinators are among the thirty-five interviews that produced the information for this report. Their views confirm strong support for these food programs and the board's policy. Conversations about the kind of food offered either as rewards in classrooms or refreshment at staff meetings are now occurring where they wouldn't have happened several years ago.

These particular interviews reflected a number of common themes:

- Alleviating hunger and improving the nutritional profile of students were the major reasons given for providing school nourishment programs
- Volunteers manage and deliver the programs; training and soliciting volunteers was the most frequently mentioned challenge
- Resistance to food programs generally took two forms: negative, informal responses from community or staff, and student, parent and even some volunteer resistance to making the changes to more nutritious food offerings.

Educators most often cited poverty, hungry children and the research linking nutritious eating with academics as reasons to offer school nutrition programs; the parents were slightly more interested in developing/modelling healthy eating habits and improving children's nutritional profile. Site coordinators were concerned about stigmatization (usually with respect to breakfast programs) and the time required for the program. While evaluating the success of the school programs was acknowledged as a difficult/complex task, several volunteers were strongly interested in identifying the impact of their labours.

This school board needs to be commended for its leadership in designing a nutrition policy and procedure for its schools and providing classic pressure and practical support to its schools throughout the implementation process. The Tri-County committee, which includes representatives of local health units, the school board and social agencies, provides a local model of successful inter-ministry collaboration that deserves replication at the provincial level.

Recommendations are provided for future discussion and consideration. They include suggestions regarding program infrastructure, communications/information

sharing, administrative and board support and funding. A preamble to each recommendation is included in the conclusion of the full report on page 59.

Recommendation #1: Support school-coordinators

Each school nutrition program should provide its site coordinator with a stipend. This cannot possibly be an hourly wage, but it will reimburse some of the expenses that individual incurs off site, such as mileage and time spent shopping, collating food receipts and writing thank you notes. It could expand the available resources by encouraging individuals other than retirees to assume these responsibilities.

Recommendation #2: Engage students where possible

Wherever possible principals should be encouraged to implement their own Student-to-Student programs that include cross age groups of students working together. Older students can model appropriate social behaviour and assist younger students during the food programs. They can also assist volunteers with clean up, thus reducing the amount of time needed for this part of the program.

Recommendation #3: Stabilize area coordinator funding and reinstate local Muskoka coordinator

Continue to lobby MCYS and other Ministries for commitments to sustainable funding to support the two positions in the southern catchments and to restore the parallel position in the northern area that has been lost. A local coordinator situated in Muskoka is both practical and desirable.

Recommendation #4: Establish a board database

The board should collect and eventually track the progress of the individual school programs. There is some soft data (anecdotal) available, and there is the data that schools are already submitting in terms of menu content, descriptions and frequency of their specific programs, as well as student numbers that would provide information for this first stage in the development of a long-term database. Coordinators and the manager already submit detailed data to MCYS that could be incorporated here.

Recommendation #5: Share the success

Share information about the successful implementation process and the value of this program with pertinent provincial Ministries notably the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health.

Recommendation #6: Continue and expand training programs

The Tri-County Committee should support the continued sharing and dissemination of information about these nutrition programs to raise public awareness, garner support and share good practices. The regular local training sessions that educate volunteers about safe food handling and nutritious menu planning are a valuable resource that should be continued and expanded if at all possible.

Recommendation #7: Continue local publicity

Continue to increase public awareness and understanding through various radio and print media to encourage and sustain the pool of available volunteers. Invite community members into the schools during food programs. Principals should continue to use the school newsletter, as many already do, to promote their local programs and nutrition awareness.

Recommendation # 8: Establish annual conference

The board and the Tri-County committee may want to host an annual conference open to parents, stakeholders, community representatives, school students and staff, to contribute to public awareness, evaluate progress and celebrate successes as well as raise the profile of the nutrition programs.

These programs are tremendously successful due largely to sustained political and professional commitment, along with public support. They depend on champions who articulate and share a powerful belief in their value. Now the most important tasks are to sustain that belief system and extend it, particularly among those who might be tapped as volunteers.

Introduction

The school nutrition programs operating in the Trillium Lakelands District School Board have grown as a result of productive partnerships on the Tri-County Nourishment Committee composed of dietitians from the local health units, school board trustees, field workers in the community partnership programs and the director of Family Services in Haliburton County. On February 13, 2006 Bob Orr, Valerie Smith and Fay Martin of the Tri County School Nourishment committee met with Dr. Stella Voisin a community researcher and retired secondary school principal. They wanted a description and review of the Trillium Lakelands District School Board's school based nutrition program developed and implemented through the resources of the Tri-County committee.

This report

This report combines qualitative and quantitative sources of data to provide in-depth information about the evolution of this program as well as a method to identify and understand:

- its history and the conditions that encouraged its implementation and growth
- its perceived value
- its challenges
- its perceived strengths and weaknesses

The data sources

The print and interview data for this report was collected between February 15th and May 9th, 2006. A first draft was presented for feedback to the Tri-county committee on May 15th with ongoing input from various committee members until June 28th. The final edited copy was submitted in mid-August. Data sources included the following

- Written communications, e-mails and committee minutes as well as reports from the files of various members of the tri-county committee including dietitians from the three Health Units, the area program coordinators, the Muskoka program manager, the school board trustee who chairs the committee and the executive director of Family Services in Haliburton County.

- Thirty-five personal and telephone interviews with members of the Tri-County Nutrition committee, school administrators, parents and members of the board conducted between March 7 and May 9th 2006
- Quantitative data from a survey created, distributed and collated by the Tri-County committee in 2000 and shared with me by Valerie Smith (trustee), and Fay Martin (executive director of Family Services of Haliburton County).
- Reports of school programs written by various area coordinators between 2002 and the past school year.

Background: Tri-County Committee beginnings

The Tri-County Committee is a community-based group which originated in Haliburton and Victoria County in the fall of 1999 with a committee called Train the Brain: Include the Food. At the same time Muskoka had a committee called Food for Learning. These two groups joined forces in 2002 to help schools with a task they had previously undertaken on their own. Tri County committee came about with the encouragement of the two Community Partners Program coordinators who joined forces with their Muskoka CPP counterpart.

This community-based partnership gradually evolved to include school board and community representation from all three geographic catchments of the Trillium Lakelands District School board. Currently the Tri-County committee serves as an umbrella group whose members share information about the programs in their area and critical ministry initiatives, develop protocols and procedures, and advise on the disbursement of TLDSB funds for student nourishment programs to schools. Each area has a slightly different history with Haliburton and the City of Kawartha Lakes sharing a collaborative past.

Haliburton and City of Kawartha Lakes

The dietitian at the Haliburton Health Unit received the original invitation from Breakfast for Learning inviting a community group to apply for a school nourishment program grant from them. She approached the executive director of Family Services in Haliburton County who became her strongest ally and then, *“there was no turning back. I couldn't have done it without her”*.

The funding opportunity driving this initiative required a school connection as part of the community based network and so the committee initially added:

- A program consultant from TLDSB
- The vice-chair of Haliburton Rotary
- A representative from the YWCA
- Two representatives from an early childhood education/support group
- An elementary school principal in Haliburton

The city of Kawartha Lakes (Victoria County) was originally a partner in this initiative (the criteria for receiving Breakfast for Learning funds), so the initial group quickly expanded to include

- A representative from the Lindsay Boys and Girls Club
- A representative from Chimo Youth and Family Services in Lindsay
- A representative from the Catholic school board in Lindsay
- A vice-principal from an elementary school in the Kawartha Lakes area

After this committee had applied for and received their funding, it hired two Community Partnership Program field workers to stimulate and coordinate school nutrition programs: one for Haliburton and one for the city of Kawartha Lakes.

The initial purpose of this committee was ‘to create a structure that supports community-based initiatives that improve our relationship with food’ (draft Nov. 24, 1999). Its primary goal was to bring together school and community resources ‘to optimize the nutrition of our children’.

These committed individuals, aware of the pitfalls and, mindful that “the consequences of even the best planned, best supported, and most promising policy initiatives depend finally on what happens as individuals throughout the policy system interpret and act on them” (McLaughlin, 1987, p. 172), began its work.

The original structure struggled with several organizational challenges. Funding was tight as the two communities competed for funds. Developing the partnerships was difficult in the beginning and bringing two communities together a challenge although it appeared to work well for a while. In 2003, Breakfast for Learning permitted their separation into two different steering committees with the one in Haliburton adopting the name Food 4 Kids and Kawartha Lakes continuing with Train the Brain: Include the Food.

Muskoka

School nourishment programs in the Muskoka area originated with the Muskoka Parry Sound District Health Unit approximately ten years ago when Breakfast for Learning encouraged community-based groups to initiate nourishment programs in schools. The Muskoka Parry Sound Health unit was the original flow through unit for the

Community Partners Program that hired an area coordinator to stimulate the growth of school programs. That unit was split in two in 2004 and the Muskoka area is now part of the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit.

When BFL sponsored the Community Partners program there were funds to pay for a coordinator. She had functioned as her colleagues in Haliburton and Kawartha Lakes did, supporting the program by helping schools apply for funding, encouraging them to start up food programs, seeking local support, identifying school needs and beginning to advocate with the Trillium Lakelands School Board. In 1999, Food for Learning was already promoting breakfast clubs and educating parents about nutritious snacks and lunches. The Huntsville area trustee joined that committee and while she recalls breakfast programs in operation at some schools, she describes them as sometimes “hit and miss”. A number of critical events occurred between 2002 and 2004:

- the funds from BFL began to dry up as more and more schools applied for support
- the major funding source switched from BFL to MCYS with funding for area coordinator positions originally left in question
- the Health units were re-organized in 2004 and the position for the Muskoka coordinator was lost
- the lead and transfer agency for Muskoka decided not to fund three separate area coordinators for Muskoka, Parry Sound and North Bay but consolidated these positions into one
- health inspectors in Muskoka began to inspect school facilities and identify them as food service facilities requiring upgrades
- trustees in TLDSB suggested that the board allocate money for a nutrition project

As well, trustees, representatives from flow through agencies, dietitians from the health units and the coordinators agreed that a cooperative approach would benefit everyone. Their collaborative approach continues successfully today and provides a local inter ministerial model that could well be emulated at the provincial level.

The present Tri-County committee has been meeting since the fall of 2002 and now includes:

- a school trustee from each county, one of whom chairs the committee
- two field workers from CPP (Community Partnership Program) ,
- a representative from the North Bay and District Association for community Living, the lead and flow through agency for Muskoka
- three health unit dietitians
- and the executive director of Family Services of Haliburton County (the original flow through agency for the Breakfast for Learning funds)

This committee benefited from the leadership of the original area coordinators in Haliburton and Kawartha Lakes who were familiar with the Muskoka coordinator through Breakfast for Learning meetings they all attended. They brought the three counties together to articulate a goal of providing a universally available, nutritionally excellent nutrition program in every school in its catchments. Today the Tri-County committee oversees local work; strengthens and supports other community-based steering committees composed of school representatives, parents, and influential community people who can initiate fundraising. It is the venue for the various partners to share information, develop protocols and institute common procedures. Its members are in close communication between meetings.

They have influenced a number of significant changes with positive effects on the school nutrition environment. The Tri-County Committee advocated for the allocation of board maintenance funds to upgrade school kitchens to health inspection standards. They lobbied for certain amendments when the Aramark contract came up for renewal with TLDSB in June 2005. First, they requested and received an exception to the Aramark's cafeteria and hot food contract so that other food could be allowed/served in the school. Its members also urged the company to increase nutritious products sold in their cafeterias and vending machines, and provide a larger number of well-priced healthier choices. Their work has been effective. Both secondary schools interviewed for this report spoke highly of their relationship with Aramark. One also highlighted the company's contribution to the implementation and tracking of the school's nutrition initiative.

How the board became involved

Because trustees were actively involved in their communities' school nutrition programs, they began to share regular monthly progress reports about the Tri-County Committee initiatives at the board table. One of the committed trustees was chair of the board at the time and the former director of education supported the introduction of these discussions. As well, dietitians approached the program superintendent with their concerns about the discrepancy between the 'official' message of the importance of healthy snacks, the mixed messages of hot dog and pizza days, and the content of school vending machines. He too became a supporter and gathered a committee to examine nutrition and fitness issues in the schools. He credits the efforts of the dietitians for this initiative. He included a trustee, the three dietitians from the Tri-county committee, and school and board representatives on this second committee that eventually wrote the board's nutrition policy and assumed responsibility for its implementation.

Significance of the TLDSB nutrition policy

The TLDSB nutrition policy and procedures passed in August 2004, not only pre-dates the Ministry Program Memorandum but also requires a broader range of compliance. In September 2005 it required compliance from all its schools. In contrast the two other boards that were contacted as part of this report do not yet have policies although one is in the planning stages for this fall.

This document represents the efforts of a number of committed people in the schools and in its communities who had advocated for and championed the values it articulates. Board Policy and Procedure (ES-5050 and ES-5051-AP) states that well nourished students are better able to perform academically and socially and notes that a significant number of board students do not consistently receive adequate nutrition to support their learning and developmental needs. Prior to the publication of the Ministry of Education's PPM 135 (Healthy Foods and Beverages in Elementary School Vending Machines) the board undertook an integrated initiative

- to support the development of school nourishment programs in all its schools;
- to promote nutrition awareness within its various communities;

- to implement this goal in consultation with local public health dietitians;
- and engage a supportive network of community partners and sponsors.

The Ministry memorandum (PPM 135) directs boards regarding the sale of food and beverages in school vending machines and encourages Ontario children to select nutritious foods and establish lifelong healthy eating habits. The TLDSB policy goes beyond it by articulating “the direct relationship between healthy nutrition, the fitness level of students and their academic achievement.” It conveys the belief supported by research that “well nourished students are able to concentrate better, retain and apply information more effectively, and are more likely to demonstrate positive behaviours and relationships with peers” (policy preamble). With this policy the Trillium Lakelands District School Board committed itself to the implementation of school-based nourishment programs developed in productive collaboration among its schools, their communities and local public health units.

What the literature says

Health and nutrition concerns

Health concerns created by increasing rates of obesity, chronic illnesses like diabetes and the increasing push to establish healthy eating habits are fuelling policies and resources to reverse the poor eating patterns that are frequently the cause of these concerns. As well, children receive benefits from access to nutritious food during the school day (Hyndman, 2000). School nutrition programs can greatly increase the quality and quantity of children's total required intake when they provide nutritious food through healthy breakfasts, snacks or lunches. While conclusive results have yet to be reached, there is research that supports the productive link between good nutrition and school performance. Healthy breakfasts in particular improve children's cognitive functioning, particularly in the speed and accuracy of information retrieval in the working memory. A major literature review of the effects of breakfast on scholastic performance (Papamandjaris 2000) revealed that breakfast provides performance benefits for both well-nourished and malnourished children. As well, children participating in breakfast programs demonstrated improvements within the classroom environment that produced increased attendance, fewer classroom disruptions and improved classroom behaviour (Hyndman, 2000). While the link between eating breakfast and improvement in the classroom environment has yet to be definitively established, it appears that school breakfast programs provide children with benefits well beyond improved cognitive ability.

“By fostering a school environment that is more conducive to learning, breakfast programs benefit the entire student body, not just malnourished, disadvantaged participants” (Hyndman, 2000, p.9).

The federal government originally promoted school nutrition policies as an appropriate avenue to improve students' health, nutritional status and academic achievement' (McKenna 2003). Policy reports indicated that parents, children, communities and government departments generally identified the school environment as having significant influence on children's food choices (Murton, 2004). The Ontario ministry of education's 2004 Policy/Program memorandum directed school boards to ensure that food and beverages sold in elementary vending machines were healthy and

nutritious. It provided recommended standards for the selection of these products and indicated that this was an important first step in promoting a healthy school community.

School food programs

Long before formal policies were instituted defining the parameters of school nutrition programs, sensitive teachers had always been aware of the hungry students in their classrooms and provided food for them when necessary. However some individuals have challenged the premise that schools should be shouldering current responsibilities for ensuring adequate student nutrition.

David Hay vice-president of the Canadian Council on Social Development queried whether the need for school food programs had been adequately determined noting that they had usually been implemented in response to informal assessments of a school or community's social and economic situation. He argued that cuts to social programs led communities across Canada to examine school food programs as a viable solution to issues of hunger and inadequate nutrition. Social equity issues led him to support schools as the location of choice to deliver food programs 'because many of the social conditions that children face elsewhere are minimized or equalized in schools' (Hay, 2003).

Breakfast for Learning, which initially funded school nutrition programs insisted on partnerships with local schools as well as the inclusion of community based structure to establish and sustain nutrition programs before providing funding.

Call to Action (2004) prepared by the Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health (OSNPPH) advocated for healthier school nutrition environments and called for collaboration among provincial ministries, local school boards and local boards of health to ensure consistency between the messages about healthy eating taught in the provincial curriculum and the food practices observed in schools.

Because the school environment can profoundly influence students' attitudes, preferences and behaviours (Policy/Program Memorandum 135) and because students spend so many hours in school during their formative years, it seems logical to support their learning about proper nutrition and promote their development of good eating habits.

Schools as the sites of nourishment programs

School nourishment programs in Canada developed in response to concerns about hunger and inadequate nutrition among Canadian children (Hyndman, 2000). Although child poverty is a key indicator of nutritional need, Canadian children from all income brackets experience the consequences of inadequate nutrition. Reasons for these circumstances are varied (Basrur, 1998 cited in Hyndman, 2003)):

- Parent work schedules make breakfast difficult
- Children skip meals to maintain a socially acceptable body image
- Children miss breakfast due to early morning curricular activities
- Familial norms do not include the consumption of breakfast

Nationwide, Breakfast for Learning provided the stimulus to initiate and maintain student nourishment programs. It financed appropriate research and through that developed best practices for quality programs. In 2004, 2,272 programs across the country received funding from BFL (Evaluation of Child Nutrition Programs, 2004). It insisted on the establishment of collaborative community partnerships before providing funding to develop, support and sustain school food programs. When the Ontario Ministry for Children and Youth Services took over funding responsibilities for school nutrition programs recently, it requested that OPHA (Ontario Public Health Association) review Ontario's student nourishment program prior to restructuring. That report produced a model for system delivery and funding. It based its recommendations on a literature search and the analysis of data collected through surveys and focus groups with 140 key informants across four regions in Ontario. It supported:

- the universality of student nourishment programs to improve student nutrition and health while increasing student readiness to learn; and
- recommended that programs model appropriate social and nutritional behaviours such as attention to food safety and allergies, the serving of nutritious food and opportunities for social interaction.

The report also suggested that:

An inter-ministerial steering committee define policies and standards and supervise fund distribution

36 Community Partners Programs based on the geographic boundaries of the 36 local health units.

In Ontario the local health units have been instrumental in the development of community partnerships supporting school nutrition programs. Networks developed to assist schools with

- Accessing funds
- Sharing information among schools regarding successful nutrition programs
- Acquiring necessary equipment
- Developing nutrition programs
- Providing access to a registered dietician and other professionals

Implementation challenges

Designing, implementing and delivering new policies is complex (Fullan, 1993); the process unpredictable and never easy. A change in a policy or practice usually involves several stages. The first step involves learning about the changes that are required and ensuring compliance. Change processes must be accompanied by the strategic application of pressure and support (Evans, 1996). The second stage acknowledges that a change can embrace more than just a single model (McLaughlin, 1987). Committed action is also necessary (McLaughlin, 1990) because ultimately what matters most is “local motivation, skill, know-how and commitment” (Fullan, 1994) so any change of practice involves champions. The establishment of school food programs is no exception since “most institutions and individuals are allergic to change” (McLaughlin, 1987) and since well vested, commercial interests and local community and school cultures frequently played a part, the challenges have been well documented and numerous.

Policy design and implementation

McKenna (2003), in documenting the implementation of a provincial school nutrition policy in New Brunswick, concluded that that policy proved to be so controversial implementation was inconsistent with little impact on school foods. In the US, various states have attempted to limit junk food in schools and last year 40 states

introduced 200 bills to try to improve the nutrition in American schools (Lawmakers, 2006). Only recently has there been an agreement between the executives of the American beverage industry and the American Heart Association to remove sugary soft drinks from public and private schools, however full implementation is not expected until the 2009-2010 and critics say it's too little, too late. (USA Today, May 4, 2006). In contrast an article in the Edmonton Journal reprinted in the National Post January, 2004 reported that Coke and Pepsi were planning to remove pop from Canada's schools in response to concerns about childhood obesity. The implementation date for that process was to be September 2004.

A 2003-2004 environmental scan of food programs in Nova Scotia schools noted that some school boards and communities were concerned about sustaining the positive changes in student nutrition that had already been established in some locations. Identified difficulties for improvements to providing healthy food and beverages in schools were:

- competing school priorities
- financial challenges
- inadequate information and resources for school food
- limitations of school food service facilities

A study on the implementation of a provincial school nutrition policy in New Brunswick (McKenna, 2003) identified these challenges to its implementation:

- the sale of food for profit
- student choice regarding the range of foods available
- policy interpretation
- the implementation approach

Here in Ontario, the process that incorporated nutrition programs and practices into Trillium Lakelands schools built on solid community collaboration, was championed by trustees, committed community members and board professionals and is characterized by the best practices identified in the research literature on the implementation of change. School nutrition programs in this board are noteworthy for consistent, rapid, relatively inexpensive implementation and local support.

The complicated financing of school food programs

The financing of school food programs is complex. The process in each of the three counties is different and has changed over time. Money flows from and through various ministries to institutions, individuals and schools. Each area functions within a different and sometimes complicated fiscal hierarchy characterized by detailed bookkeeping and regular information gathering. Ministry funds address the expenses of individual school programs and provide stipends for specific individuals who sustain school programs by liaising with a variety of community partners.

TLDSB schools get funds from four sources.

- The Ministry of Children and Youth Services supports the schools' purchase of food and funds the manager and two area coordinators,
- The Trillium Lakelands District School Board budgets to assist their programs,
- Breakfast for Learning continues to offer funds although to a lesser extent.
- Community financial support solicited through cash and in kind donations

Information in the following section is based on pertinent files as well as interviews with two area coordinators, the program manager and dietitians.

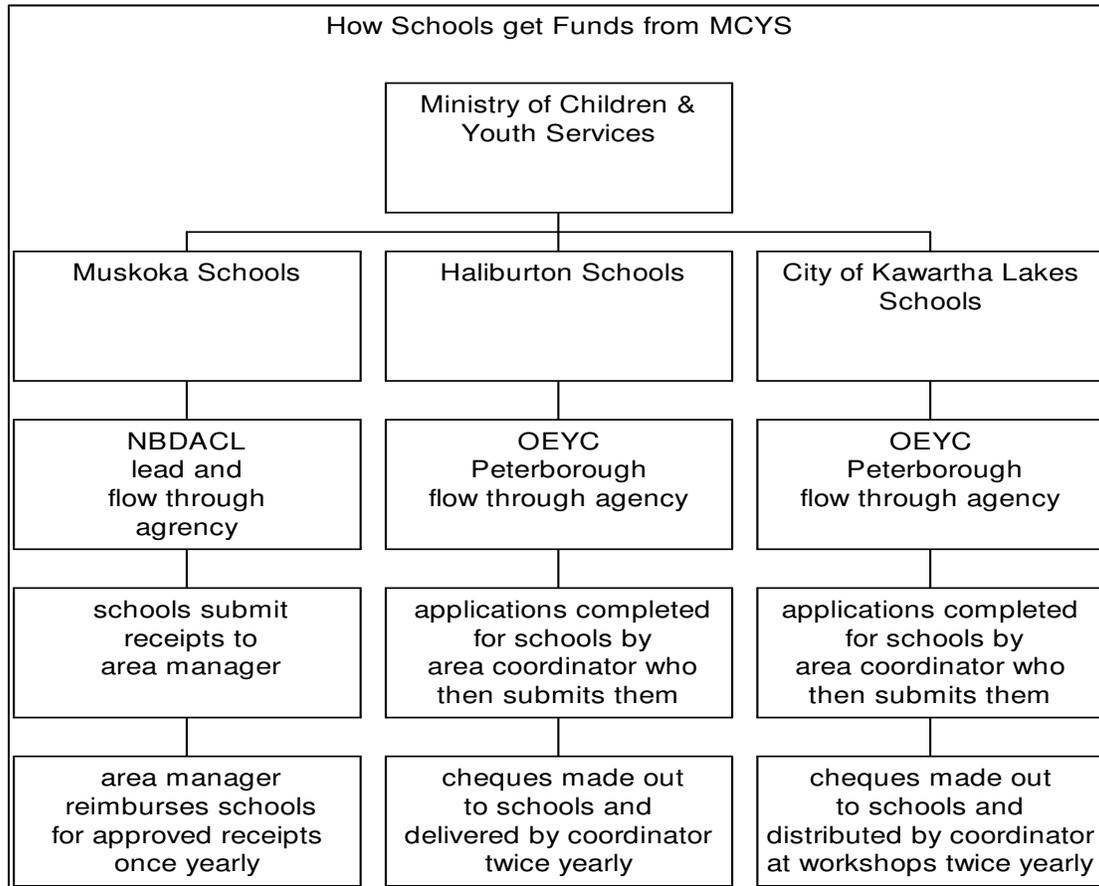
How schools get funds from Ministry of Children and Youth Services

MCYS (the Ministry of Children and Youth Services) is the major fund provider disbursing funds through various lead and flow through agencies. For Muskoka, the North Bay and District Association for Community Living is both a lead and flow through agency. Haliburton and the City of Kawartha Lakes share the Ontario Early Years Centre in Peterborough as lead agency. Haliburton then has the HKPR Health Unit as a flow and Kawartha Lakes has TLDSB.

Schools in the Muskoka area apply for Ministry funds that are distributed yearly through the North Bay and District Association for Community Living. The manager reimburses approved expenses when schools submit their receipts.

Schools in Haliburton and the City of Kawartha Lakes apply with the assistance of the coordinators every year for funds distributed through their lead agency, OEYC

(Peterborough). Cheques are sent twice a year to the area coordinators who then distribute them to their schools. (see below)



How schools apply

The area coordinators in Haliburton and the City of Kawartha Lakes complete the MCYS applications for their schools. These requires specific site data about the programs including average numbers of children served per day, the number of serving days per year and the average number of volunteer hours/days (excluding the hours worked by the site coordinator) to produce the identified programs. It also requests that other sources of funding be identified including cash amounts and in-kind donations. Recently the Peterborough OEYC which funds Haliburton and CKL schools determined

it would supply 11% of estimated costs for running the food programs according to a complicated formula that will consider:

- Value of the co-ordinator [# wkly hours for 10 months]
- Value of off site volunteer [hrs of off-site food prep for 38 wks]
- Value of disposable supplies [flat rate of 5%]
- Meal costs (breakfast 0.85; snack 0.55; and lunch \$2.00)
- Value of in program volunteers [number of volunteers, specified hours for breakfast, lunch and snack and serving days]

NBDACL on the other hand supplies Muskoka schools with up to 15% of their estimated costs. Recently (in 2005-6) schools in the Muskoka area received between \$3200 and \$960.00 from the MCYS. The manager noted, “*MCYS forwards different amounts of funding for each area. I’m not sure what formula the Ministry used but it is different everywhere*”. She determined school allocations by adjusting figures provided by another Health Unit and includes:

Breakfast:	\$32/year/child
Lunch:	\$40/year/child
Snack:	\$13.00/year/child

She observed however that her schools “*are leaving big bucks on the table*” and she is not quite sure why. She encourages schools to stockpile products that will not go bad in order to spend allocated funds before the expenditure deadlines.

Before the formula produced by OEYC (Peterborough), schools in Haliburton received between \$2524.00 and \$375.00. The City of Kawartha Lakes schools received between \$6000.00 and \$2200.00 in two separate instalments, one in December 2005 and the other in January 2006 year. The coordinators assist schools with the completion of their application forms and then submit them to MCYS. The Haliburton coordinator delivers the cheques to her schools; the Kawartha Lakes coordinator distributes the school cheques at a twice-yearly training workshop. The Ministry also provided assistance with the purchase of microwaves, refrigerators and freezer and thus far has funded for the area coordinators and manager.

How schools get funds from TLDSB

TLDSB currently sustains its school nourishment programs through a budget given to the Tri County Committee. This board has pioneered several initiatives to support the school nutrition programs that meet their criteria. These include:

- Funds to upgrade food facilities in schools
- Establishing a school nutrition policy and procedure
- Funding for school programs through the Tri-County Committee

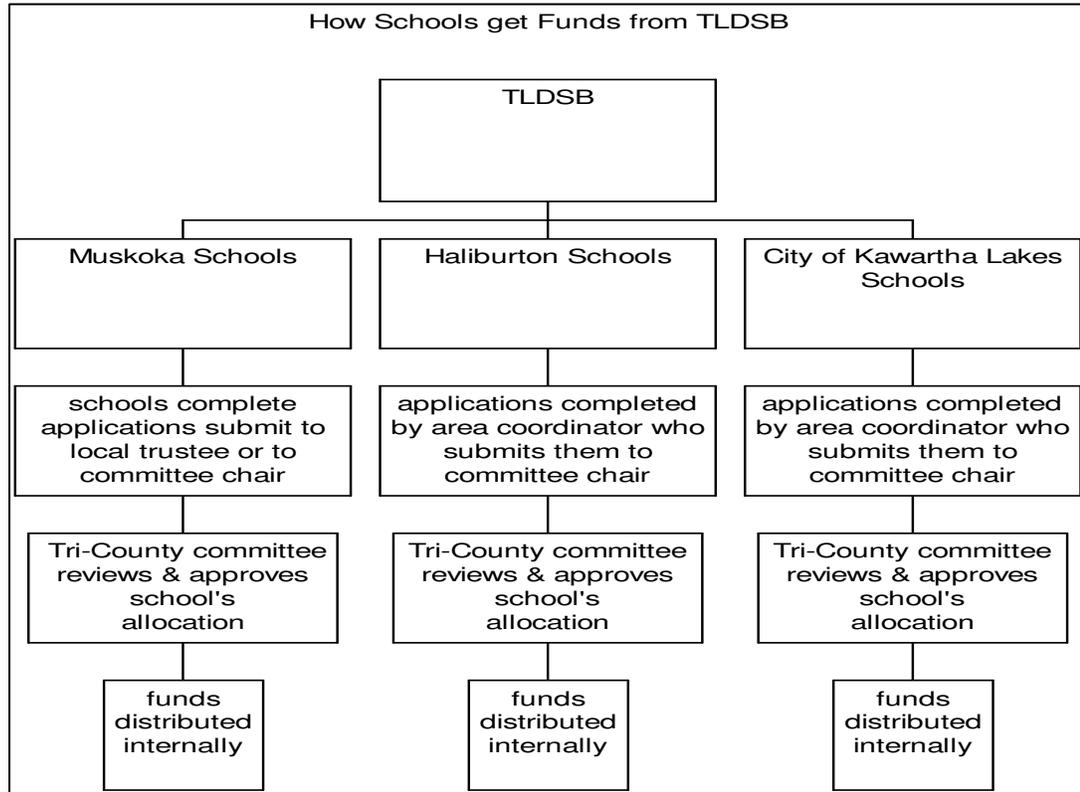
Initially the board allocated maintenance funds to bring school kitchens up to standard so they could provide a greater variety of food. Although this was an issue initially identified by the Muskoka health inspectors, their counterparts in other areas continue to encourage schools to bring their kitchens up to standards. A January 2006 letter addressed to a Haliburton area elementary school principal articulates the concern, *“It would appear that serving foods to children in the schools is becoming a permanent fixture. It is recommended that the premises be brought up to the standards described. ... This will permit a variety of foods without restrictions”*.

A January 2003 press release announced the TLDSB’s decision to support school nutrition programs and community partnerships. *“Educating a child and helping him or her grow is about more than providing new books and comfortable buildings. It’s about giving our schools the facilities to make breakfasts or snacks so that our kids eat well and concentrate on their work.”* The upgrading of school facilities that the board began several years ago continues.

Now the board allocates funds to directly support the food programs in its schools, the only school board in the province to do so. This funding specifies the purchase of *“fresh vegetables, fruit and milk products according to Canada’s Food Guide to Healthy Eating.”* Their application package includes nutrition guidelines for specific food choices and a form requesting information about the type of program, other funding sources, the numbers of students to be served and a sample menu. Schools complete this application and submit progress reports. The two coordinators assist their schools by completing these reports to ensure accuracy.

Completed applications are given to the chair trustee of the Tri-County committee by the Muskoka trustee and the Haliburton and Kawartha Lakes coordinators. After the

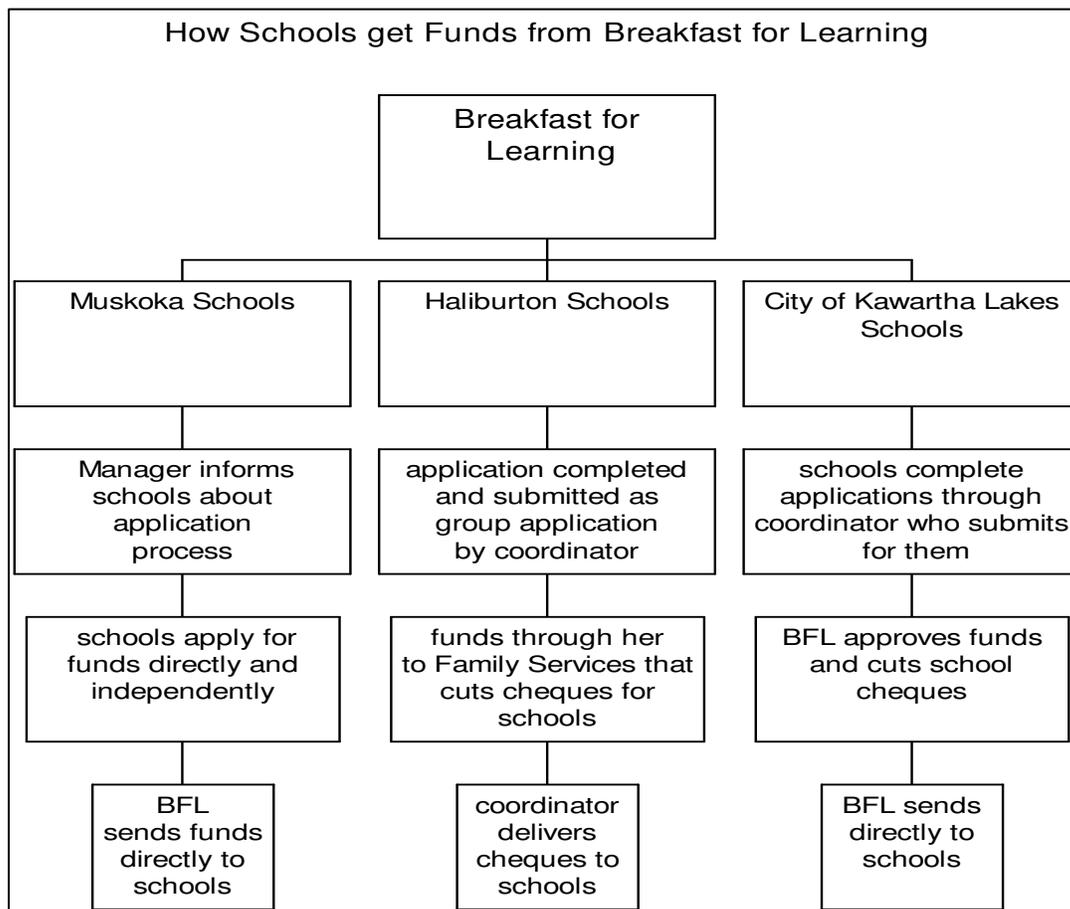
committee reviews and approves the applications, funds are distributed to schools internally through the board (see below)



The Tri-County committee originally allocated \$1200.00 to each school that applied and submitted receipts for appropriate expenditures keeping a reserve to assist schools on a case-by-case basis. This current year schools were given \$1000.00 since the numbers of participating schools have increased. Last year's budget was \$60,000 and this could increase to \$75,000 for the 2006-7 school year.

How schools get funds from Breakfast for Learning

While Breakfast for Learning is still involved in school nutrition programs it is now a minor partner. In 2004 for example, one school reported that its funding dropped from \$2300 to \$800 in the space of one year. The flow of money from this source differs in the three areas (see below)



Schools can apply by directly accessing the BFL applications on the web as some schools in Muskoka do. The Muskoka manager alerts her schools to the pertinent information but does not play an intermediary role. Her advisory committees indicated they did not want to submit a group application (the lack of a coordinator makes such collaboration difficult) but encouraged schools to apply independently as needed. Last year seven of potentially twenty-two Muskoka schools applied for funds from Breakfast for Learning.

In Haliburton the grant applications for Breakfast for Learning are completed and submitted as a group application for all eight by the area coordinator; the money comes back to her and goes through Family Services which then processes the individual school cheques she delivers.

In the City of Kawartha Lakes, seven of twenty-five schools completed applications through the area coordinator who forwarded them on their behalf to BFL. When the funds are approved, BFL sends cheques directly to the schools. Next year the coordinator hopes that they too can apply to BFL using the group-funding model currently used in Haliburton. They have been previously discouraged from doing so.

Schools obtain funds through fundraising

It costs money to feed students. As stated previously, the two lead agencies that deliver MCYS funds produce 11% and 15% of estimated costs. Steel (2006) cites a report from the Toronto medical officer of health that identified approximate program costs for elementary students to be:

\$1.20 for breakfast

\$1.09 for snack and

\$1.83 for lunch

These costs increase at the secondary level with breakfast requiring \$1.81, \$1.49 for snack and \$2.95 for lunch. Compare this with Peterborough's OEYC's funding formula that includes 0.85 for breakfast, 0.55 for snack and \$2.00 for lunch. Clearly, despite provincial and board support, most of the TLDSB communities usually need to raise the additional funds to support their school nutrition programs. Sometimes schools raise funds on their own, in other areas there are large fundraising projects supported through the work of the area coordinators.

Last year, the Haliburton community raised \$30,000 in additional funds to allay various school food program costs. Community sources include the local grocery stores, an area drugstore, parents, service clubs, corporate donations and individuals from the community at large. The coordinator assists with county wide fundraising efforts by sending out letters and making contacts with businesses, service groups and other individuals to request funding. Fundraising is easier now than it was a few years ago. *"Now that Food for Kids is more widely recognized in the county, I spend less time soliciting and have been more successful getting funds."* These funds are deposited with Family Services who produce tax receipts, keep the books and cut cheques for the individual schools.

In the City of Kawartha Lakes, “*a ton of fundraising goes on in the area*”. The coordinator notes that school-based funding is the most effective model because schools are so widespread. She solicits funds from various donors and then directs their donations to the school or schools in their area. Once this connection is established, she introduces school and donor adding that the relationship is usually maintained during the following years. Money raised through these fundraising efforts is deposited into the Community Donations Account (G/L Account) managed by the Trillium Lakelands School Board.

In Muskoka there is no central group that fundraises for school nourishment programs although the program manager pursues proposals for extra funds on their behalf. Schools either fundraise themselves through parental contributions, school events or local service clubs and churches. None of the schools interviewed from this area reported that they had engaged in fundraising efforts for their food programs.

Funding for coordinators

MCYS compensates the work of the coordinators in Haliburton and Kawartha Lakes and the Muskoka program manager. The importance of the coordinator role to the school food programs cannot be over stated. The local positions are central to the success of the Haliburton and Kawartha Lakes programs and their funding should be stable and equitable. The sources, distribution and compensation amounts for coordinators have changed over time and some of these changes have affected the supervision of and networking among the school food programs. The current supervisory structure in Muskoka concerns the members of the Tri-County committee.

Re-structuring and compensation changes

When MCYS took over responsibility for school nutrition programs both the funding model and the catchment areas were changed. In Muskoka the coordinator position disappeared while the coordinator positions in both Haliburton and Kawartha Lakes remained. Two very different supervisory models now exist within the Tri-County committee.

When Breakfast for Learning originally provided compensation for coordinators, there were three in the TLDSB catchment: one in Muskoka, one in Haliburton and one in Kawartha Lakes. They were all part of the CPP program and as such were supported by BFL. In Muskoka, the money for the coordinator flowed through the existing Health Unit.

On March 31, 2004, the Muskoka Parry Sound Health Unit was dissolved and Muskoka became part of the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit. As well the BFL funds, which had supported the Muskoka coordinator's position, disappeared with the switch in funding to MCYS. The Simcoe Muskoka Health Unit decided it would not be a flow through for the Muskoka coordinator's funds and a new flow through agency for the three districts in the region (to encompass Muskoka, Parry Sound and North Bay) was also required.

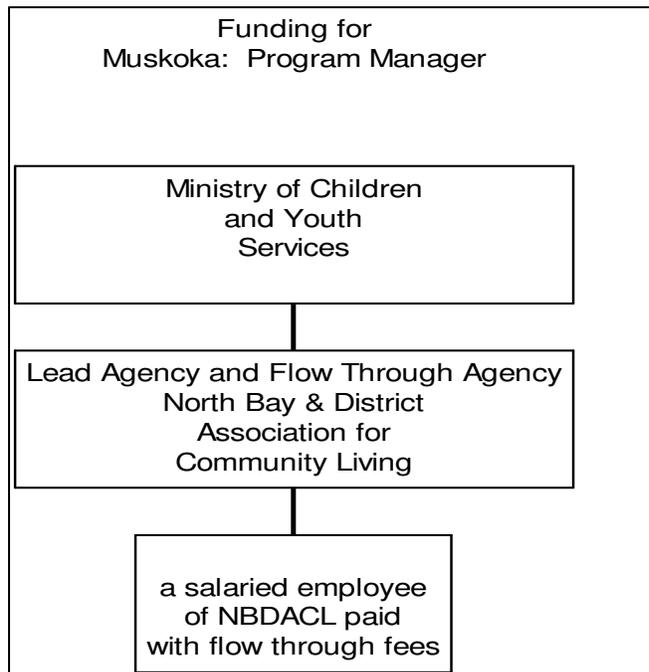
When MCYS took over funding from BFL they had asked for input from the chairs of the individual Community Partnership programs regarding the coordinator role. The Health Unit in Muskoka was overlooked in the first round of consultations with no voice in the discussion regarding the future of the coordinator position.

As well, the Algonquin Child and Family that had originally indicated interest in being a flow through agency and taking responsibility for the three coordinators in the three districts withdrew. The North Bay & District Association for Community Living became the lead and the flow through agency. They chose to administer the program through one manager rather than three area coordinators.

In Haliburton and the City of Kawartha Lakes community representatives lobbied hard for the Community Partnership Program and the continuation of the coordinator positions.

Funding for the Muskoka program manager

Muskoka no longer has a local area coordinator. This position disappeared with



the re-organization of the health units in that area and the re-designation of a flow through agency. Now a manager in North Bay oversees the programs in three areas (Muskoka, Parry Sound and North Bay).

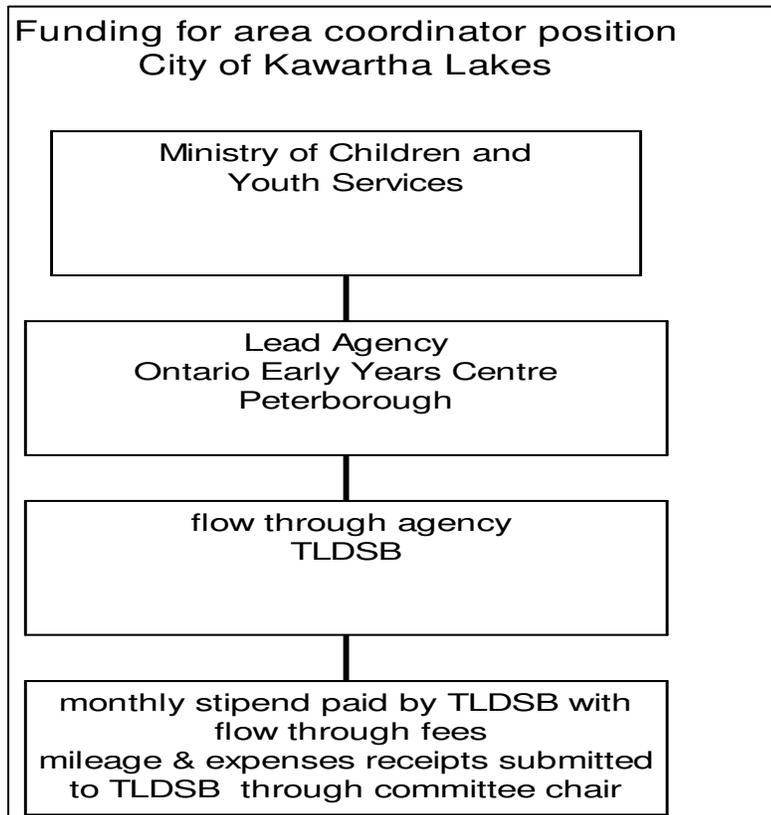
She is a nineteen year salaried employee of North Bay and District Association for Community Living, now both a lead and a transfer payment agency for MCYS. The manager is compensated for her work with the food programs with flow through funds from MCYS.

The manager assumed the portfolio for the area's school nourishment programs approximately a year ago. Her responsibilities include schools within a large geographic area that includes three districts only one of which, Muskoka, is within the boundaries of TLDSB. The manager has just recently come to the Tri-County committee table after being invited to join last fall. Despite her laudable efforts that include extensive travel to schools in three districts and personal liaison with three separate community partners committees, the absence of a local program coordinator creates a void. In order to complete site visits to all schools in the districts for example, she received permission to hire a part-time assistant in February to help her with this task.

Funding for City of Kawartha Lakes coordinator

Haliburton and Kawartha Lakes have area coordinators who each receive compensation through two different flow through agencies. In the city of Kawartha Lakes, the funds for the coordinator come from the Ministry; it then filters through the Ontario Early Years Centre in Peterborough that transfers that money to TLDSB. The coordinator assumed this position a year ago.

TLDSB forwards her stipend on a regular monthly date and compensates mileage and expenses. She submits receipts for these to the local steering committee chair who approves them and forwards them to TLDSB. TLDSB also provides her with an

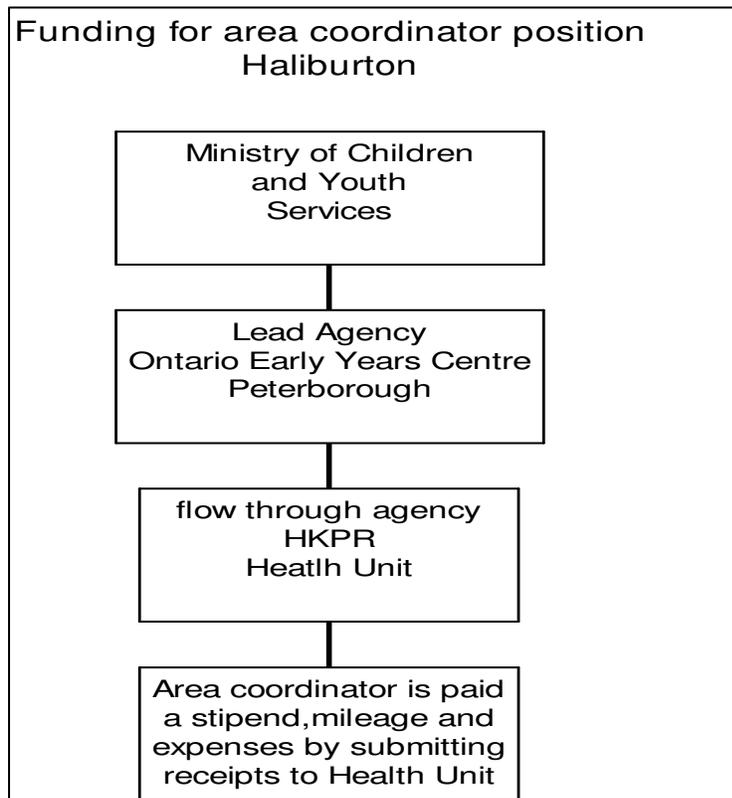


office and a telephone.

When BFL originally funded this position there were 13 to 16 schools participating in the program and the coordinator was paid for a 20-hour week. Now there are 24 schools [a total of 32 when separate schools are included], and her contract doesn't mention hourly wages

Funding for Haliburton coordinator

The Haliburton coordinator's funding also comes from the MCYS. That money is transferred (or flows) to the Haliburton Kawartha Pine Ridge Health Unit that also provides her with an office and a telephone. The coordinator invoices the Health Unit for mileage as well as additional expenses.



Because this coordinator has worked in her current position since the inception of food programs in Haliburton schools, she has experienced the fluctuations in fiscal compensation related to changes in amounts and sources. BFL had assumed that the need for a coordinator would disappear or at least be reduced as food programs became firmly established in schools. Originally BFL compensation was set at fifteen hours work per week. When BFL cut its funding, compensation dropped to ten hours. The original assumption that the coordinator's work would be reduced has not held up, in fact the opposite appears to be true. As schools and their communities experienced the benefits of these nutrition programs, the numbers and variety of programs become embedded within schools and continue to increase in number. Over time in Haliburton, the local

steering committee has secured more sustainable funds for this position. A recent contract update ensures that she will currently invoice HKPR for 15 hours of weekly work 11 months of the year.

Importance of stabilizing this position

The area program coordinators embody the school nutrition programs in their communities. They are familiar faces in their schools; recognized in their communities. Their personal approach is not only appreciated it is crucial to sustained growth. That is why in addition to the challenges that distance provides for the Muskoka manager, the absence of a local coordinator position has been so keenly felt. She is not able to easily visit Muskoka schools and program leaders when their nutrition programs are delivered. Her connections to school principals need to be calculated and definitely pre-planned. . Although various committees have tried to negotiate with the ministry to get extra money for salaries of area program coordinators in Muskoka, the Ministry thus far has refused.

The Tri-county committee itself communicated with the Ministry of Children and Youth Services regarding the importance of the area coordinator positions. In January 2006, each steering committee represented in the Tri-County committee sent an advocacy letter to the Minister of Children and Youth Services requesting she assure continued support for the community partners' program by restoring lost positions and committing to sustainable funding. Their letter describes the coordinators' key roles in maintaining a provincial network that sustains all school food programs. It asked the Minister to *“recognize the value of community partnerships by allocating a portion of funds each year for community partners program coordinators.”*

Her response, *“ Our new decentralized service delivery model is intended to empower local program providers by giving them the flexibility . . . to respond to the needs and priorities of local communities”* means the maintenance of these valuable positions continues to be an unowned responsibility usually requiring decision making and fundraising within each community. Under these conditions, funding for the infrastructure, the area coordinators and key volunteers, continues to lack sustainability.

Honoraria for school/site coordinators

While Ministry funds provide stipends directly for the area program coordinators, there are no funds set aside for on site (school) coordinators. In the three areas comprising the Tri-County committee, Haliburton alone supplies an honorarium for all its site coordinators. Last year this community raised \$11,000 to support the coordinators. These funds provide a monthly stipend of between \$10 and \$12 dollars hourly for totals that range from \$100.00 to \$240.00 per month depending on the work required at a site. The stipend reimburses mileage expenses, organizing volunteers, banking, photocopying and forwarding receipts to the coordinator for forwarding to the proper agency, liaison with parent council and the school principal. It is a list of responsibilities that doesn't cover the amount of time they are on site. Each coordinator receives ten cheques a year for a standard amount mid-month. Their cheques are processed through Family Services of Haliburton County. The minimal turnover among site coordinators in Haliburton contributes to the quality and consistency of the program. The area coordinator observed that the stipend imparts additional value to the position, and the individuals in place take their responsibilities quite seriously; they are still without a site coordinator at the high school however, a position she continues to fill.

In the City of Kawartha Lakes, two schools fiscally support this position. One currently provides monthly honoraria for its site coordinator and has done so since the introduction of their program; another will introduce a yearly stipend next September the result of the efforts of its school advisory committee. The program coordinator has developed a formula for a possible fee that could range from \$950 to \$1000 yearly based on the type of food program, the number of children served and the numbers of days per week the program is offered.

In Muskoka, school coordinators are currently not reimbursed. In November 2004 the previous coordinator reported the loss of five school coordinators, *“Few parents and community members have the time, energy and resources to devote to running nourishment programs. It is our hope that with the help of additional financial support we will be able to offer honorariums to each leader sometime in the future. That would help to maintain the consistency and quality of the programs.”*

Examining the quantitative data

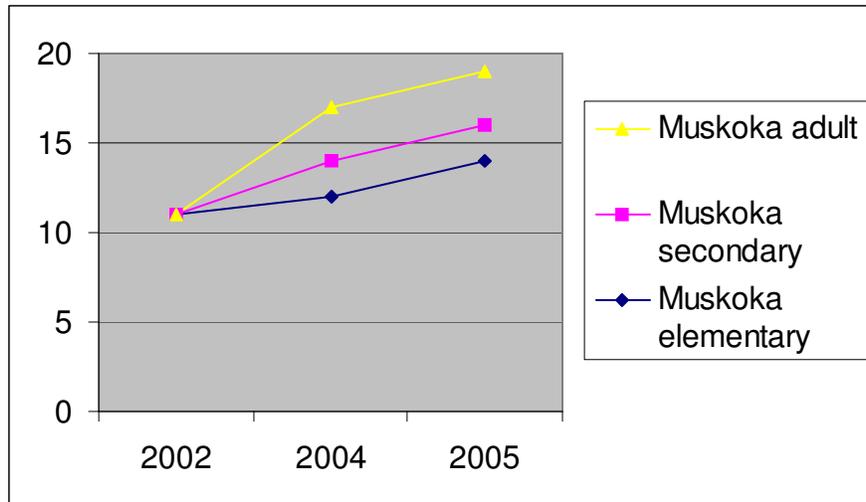
Patterns of growth in the school nutrition programs

Information for this section was collated from pertinent files and an initial status report on food programs and community centres in Haliburton and Victoria County, as well as Muskoka. Fay Martin, executive director of Family Services in Haliburton, completed the design, analysis and final report prepared “*at the request of interested TLDSB trustees with the additional cooperation of the Muskoka project*” in May 2003. It includes figures from 2002, 2004 and 2005, tracks growth in the numbers of schools, the numbers and kinds of meals and, when possible, the numbers of students served. Coordinators and the manager have only begun compiling quarterly reports for MCYS this year.

2002-2005 in Muskoka

In 2002 in Muskoka, eleven of sixteen elementary schools were offering both a breakfast or a snack program, two reported a lack of interest in offering any food program, and one was working toward establishing a program. None of the secondary schools had a food program; none of the adult education centres either. Just 50% of its total schools reported offering a food program.

By 2004, twelve elementary schools reported offering a program “a small one” at one of them. Two secondary schools were offering food programs and all three adult centres had programs. Now 77% of its schools offered programs.



The latest reports for the 2005-2006 school year record that all elementary schools had food programs as well as the three secondary schools and the three adult centres.

Currently, breakfast is the most frequently reported meal with approximately 81% of the total number of schools reporting this. Fourteen of sixteen elementary schools and two of three secondary schools report serving breakfasts; one secondary school reported serving a snack. Three learning centres report offering breakfast and one also offered a snack. In contrast, the 2002 status report described eleven of sixteen elementary schools (68%) offering breakfast five days a week.

Currently fourteen elementary schools report serving food five days per week and one reported serving food on three days weekly. All three secondary schools and the three learning centres reported serving food 5 days weekly.

Certainly these schools are continuing a practice of serving food to students that began even before Breakfast for Learning's 1999 initiatives. At first glance it appears there is very little room for growth in the program here. However, breakfast tends to be 'open' that is, a meal that is offered to anyone and everyone who drops in. Total numbers of participants are sometimes difficult to accurately gauge. A snack, on the other hand tends to be 'universal', that is, it is prepared for every single student in the building. The Tri-county committee has defined and applies these terms as follows:

- 'universal' means enough food is prepared and served to everyone;

- ‘open’ means it is offered to everyone, anyone can attend but there is only enough food prepared for those who do.

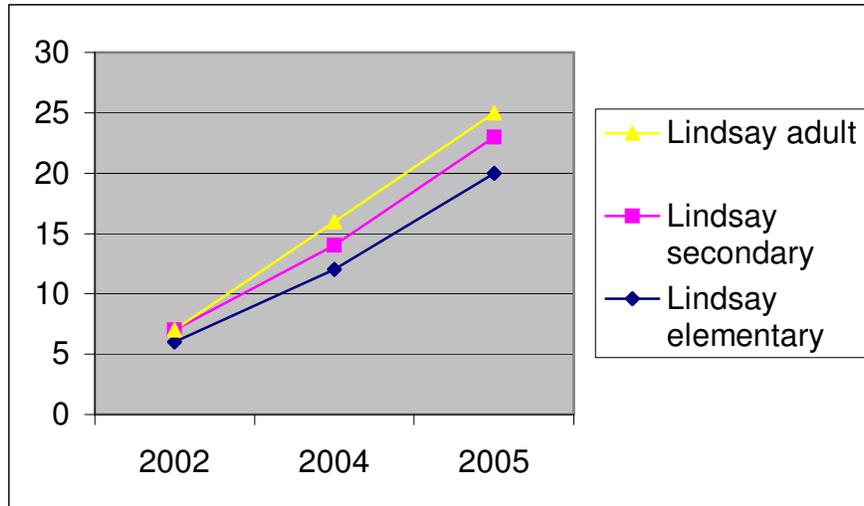
To illustrate: a school with an enrolment of 350 reports feeding breakfast to between 50 and 75 students or approximately 21% of its population. A school with an enrolment of 290 feeds a universal snack to all 290 of its student population or 100%. In the Muskoka area, it appears that only four of its schools report offering snacks (18%); the nutritional growth of students and the growth of the food programs here will occur when more schools offer a universal snack program.

2002-2005 in the City of Kawartha Lakes

In 2002 five of twenty elementary schools offered breakfast or snack programs. Four other schools reported they were actively considering food programs, one of these was a school considering the addition of a snack to its already established breakfast program; five stated they were considering the idea and three elementary schools indicated they had no interest in offering a food program

Two secondary schools indicated they were not interested in food programs and one was already working towards establishing one. None of the community centres offered programs. At this time approximately 24% of the TLDSB schools here offered food programs.

By 2004, thirteen elementary schools offered some form of school nutrition programs in snacks (6) or breakfast programs, as well as two secondary schools and two adult education centres. 68% of TLDSB schools offered food programs during this year.



In the current school year (2005-2006), all twenty elementary schools offered programs ranging from the most recent offering of a one-day a week snack program to breakfasts offered every day of the week at ten schools.

In January 2006, eleven of twenty elementary schools reported offering breakfasts; thirteen reported offering snacks, with five of these offering both. All three secondary schools offer breakfasts and the two adult centres offer both snacks and lunch.

Twelve of the elementary schools, and the three secondary schools [60% of its schools] offer food five days a week. The two adult centres and three elementary schools offer food three days weekly and five elementary schools offer food fewer than three days a week.

However, the kinds of meals reported are slightly different in this area. Fourteen of twenty-five schools or 56% report offering breakfast, while eighteen of twenty-five or 72% offer snacks. As well, the coordinator notes *“In CKL, a school committed to serving snack is in fact serving snack to the entire school population. The snack program here is definitely a ‘universal’ food program.*

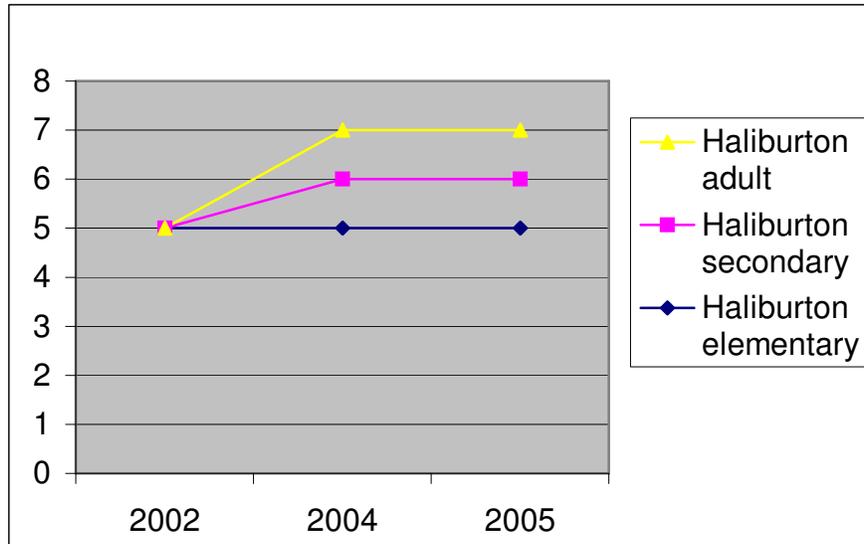
2002-2005 in Haliburton

The introduction, establishment and growth of the food programs in Haliburton has benefited from the constant presence of the coordinator who has encouraged and supported that development since the beginning.

By 2002 there were eleven nourishment programs in operation in Haliburton. All five of the elementary schools were offering breakfast, lunch or snack programs (one of them offered two programs), other programs were taking place in the community in the early childhood education centres, a youth supper club and a snack offered at the homework club in a senior elementary school. The high school was on record as 'considering the idea'.

In 2004 records show that all five of its elementary schools continued to offer universal snack programs on two days weekly and one school offered an additional breakfast program. The secondary school had established a breakfast program three days per week and the adult learning centre had established a twice a week snack and once a week lunch program.

In 2005 we note that all school programs have been consistently sustained in this area; none has lapsed since their inception and several have expanded. One school has consistently offered 660 snacks weekly (give or take a few) for the past 6 years. Two elementary schools now offer breakfast programs on three days a week; one of these began in 2000 and the most recent began just this spring. In one school the breakfast program that attracted an average of 130 students three days a week in 2004 and has now grown to approximately 150 students. The snack programs in the five elementary schools are all universal snack programs that operate twice weekly. One elementary school that began by offering universal snack to its three senior grades, expanded by offering the universal snack to all its students.



Currently (2005-2006 school year) all 7 TLDSB schools in Haliburton, 25 schools in the City of Kawartha Lakes (twenty elementary, three secondary and two adult education centres) and 21 schools in Muskoka report food programs. Muskoka offers the largest percentage of breakfast programs; one elementary school reports a universal snack program and one secondary school provides a snack five days weekly. The City of Kawartha Lakes schools offer both breakfast and snack programs with a comparatively larger number of schools offering universal snack programs. All seven of Haliburton’s schools offer universal snack programs.

This is the 100% participation rate that fulfills the original Tri-County committee’s long-term goal for the “establishment of an appropriate [nutrition] project in every school in their jurisdiction”. Success has led to expansion, quite rapidly. If the initial goal was to establish programs in 100% of the schools, what will a future goal be? The participation of a substantially larger percentage of students in those schools is the most reasonable target.

Examining the qualitative data

The school interviews

In addition to reviewing the history of this project and the available quantitative data, I also sought qualitative data from individuals in the schools since “each person’s history. . .is unlike anyone else’s” (Eisner, 1998, p. 34). The following information comes from interviews with eight elementary school administrators and one future administrator in schools ranging in size from between 280 and 740 students as well as one supervisor for a 3-school pilot involving a combination of student nutrition and personal support. Three secondary school administrators were also interviewed; two from community secondary schools and one from an adult education centre. This section reveals their views about their programs giving voice to their observations and experiences, beliefs and suggestions.

Program descriptions

This is a snapshot of the healthy food programs described by eight elementary and three secondary school sites. There is additional reference to a pilot program combining nutrition opportunities and social support for selected students.

The breakfast program is the most frequently reported nutrition program. It is a longstanding tradition in some schools. Five of the eight elementary schools reported offering ‘open’ breakfasts an average of three to five days weekly. One of the schools noted that this twelve-year tradition had originally been instituted by volunteers in the various area churches and continues to this day; another school’s program was in its inaugural year.

Four of the nine schools offer snack programs between two and five days per week and included a program that had been in existence for three years or more. One of these schools offers breakfast and snacks, providing students with healthy food options every day of the week.

One school reported that their current program of healthy lunches replaced the former hotdog and pizzas day fundraisers and credited the board’s nutrition policy for their implementation of the new format.

One special program currently being piloted in three other elementary schools provides nutritional offerings at every break during the school day to a small mixed-aged group. The program also offers adult support for those students who require either additional structure or coaching with social skills during those unstructured periods to help them cope.

All three secondary schools reported offering food programs during the previous three years; two provide daily healthy breakfasts and the other daily healthy snacks, milk once a week as well as healthy lunches twice weekly when the food preparation programs are in session. One of the schools had also initiated an Eat Smart program encouraging students to select a pattern of healthier lunch choices in the cafeteria.

Reasons to offer food programs

Elementary and secondary administrators gave similar reasons for their support of site nutrition programs. Of the twelve, five reflected the needs of their low socio-economic communities. *“I just thought there were kids in need of it”*. They knew that some students were regularly hungry, requiring assistance through food vouchers *“we end up giving out quite a few”* or the advocacy of watchful teachers. Others reported that nutrition was provided after or because of long bus rides because, *“they arrive at school hungry”*. Seven referred to research linking nutrition and good academics. *“The most important thing is {that it} provides a nutritious snack for the children so they can learn better”*.

“Kids need a healthy nutritious snack or breakfast in order to learn and I’m sure our school is like those across the province with parents rushed for time in the morning; sometimes it’s cheaper to buy candy for snack as opposed to buying fresh vegetables. [We need] to meet the needs of kids and improve learning.”

“The board policy is a recognition of healthy body, healthy mind and it was the right thing to do”.

Program challenges

School administrators and personnel identified the following challenges to the implementation of their programs. Finding volunteers to run and supervise the

programs was mentioned most often; managing student and parental resistance to required changes was mentioned next. Additional individual comments included

- concerns about the time required to run the program;
- the maintenance of hygiene standards
- occasional anxiety regarding food allergies
- occasional additional storage needs for the dry goods or juice boxes that were purchased early to meet funding deadlines.

One administrator mentioned lingering negative perceptions from some stakeholders.

Necessary and valued volunteers

Six administrators stated finding and keeping volunteers in sufficient numbers to sustain their programs to be the primary challenge. One observed, *“Our community is kind of changing. Despite the fact that it’s a rural community our parents are going out to work now. Parents are [in] two income families and lots of families can’t volunteer anymore”*.

Obtaining or the need to be continually looking for volunteers was frequently mentioned. One administrator reported, *“[last year when] we didn’t have volunteers running it, it was difficult for teachers”*. One administrator added, *“I find that when manpower isn’t an issue there’s no complaints but when I’m looking for volunteers there are lots of questions. Resistance from some is less and less as breakfast clubs become more a part of school life. It’s an easier sell now than three years ago.”*

One comment summarized it all, *“Thank heavens for volunteers”*

Managing the resistance

Three elementary administrators described managing student, parent and, sometimes, volunteer resistance to the implementation of the changes required by the board policy and funding requirements. Sometimes breakfast menus needed adjusting to comply with the nutrition guidelines and satisfy the criteria for grant allocation. But, as one administrator noted *“the community was quite happy with the way the school was functioning and we needed to take the bull by the horns”*. Sometimes attempts to offer

alternative products for sale failed. *“We piloted trying to sell yoghurt, fruit, granola bars and that type of thing. We let it go.”* When offering certain foods for healthy snacks, *“Sometimes things would go over and sometimes not”*. One school reported resistance from students and parents to changes in the hot lunches usually sold for fundraising. Terminating long-standing and familiar practices of selling hot dogs and pizza produced some conflicts. *“It was quite controversial,”* noted one. Another added, *“Our biggest challenge was convincing the parents that there are certain foods that cannot be sent [to school] not only for anaphylactic purposes but also to avoid unhealthy snacks such as chocolate bars and chips”*

One school creatively ended student resistance to proposed changes in pizza selections by having some of their senior students, teachers and parents taste test various alternatives. *“We held to our limits and it worked out well. Now our pizza sales are right back up to where they were, but [the crust] is more whole wheat than not.”* Another principal reported *‘some grumbling from the kids’* when the school did away with cup cakes and abandoned other sugary alternatives.

Some individuals voiced concerns that running their program was time consuming for the coordinators, and that storage could sometimes be a problem.

One administrator had this to say about setting up the morning snack program, *“It’s easy to set up road blocks. We could have found all the reasons why we couldn’t do it, but we looked for reasons why we needed to do it. We started small and made modifications. Unless we don’t have enough volunteers or the funding dries up, I don’t see any reason why we can’t keep it up.”*

Finally one administrator observed, *“There is still with some in the school community, the mindset that feeding the kid’s breakfast is a parent’s responsibility and so why are we doing it.”*

Program strengths

While administrators identified several program strengths, staff responses were viewed as both strengths and challenges. In addition, six respondents believed that the positive aspect of additional nutrition for children and adolescents was a program’s greatest strength. *“It creates an awareness of healthy choices”*; *“it increases the quality*

of their food intake for that day". A few noted various other benefits that included the socialization involved when students ate together under the watchful eyes of volunteers and staff supervisors, *"we've worked on a culture of respect"*. Another noted, *"I have seen the program as hugely beneficial for those who need it as much from a nutritious point of view as a routine that grounds them in a school that is a safe and caring place. It provides some of the kids a sense of relief and security when they know they belong to the club and will be looked after."* One added, *"I think the kids are thankful, there are some kids who come everyday to say good morning to us, [it is] some place they can go and see consistently; they might not even be getting something"*.

One individual identified as positive the increased community knowledge of the school through the program's volunteers *"it gets volunteers into the school that might not be here. It's wonderful for them to see what's happening in the school"*; two applauded the universality of the program and another the opportunity for older students to assume responsibility by assisting with some aspects of the program.

Staff response

Administrators identified staff response to the requirements of the board's policy and the institution of nutrition programs as both challenges and strengths. While administrators tended to describe staff negativity as minimal, the fact that administrators raised the topic spontaneously is significant.

Some principals experienced positive responses. One noted that staff was *"very, very supportive; they are quite aware of the need in this community"*. Another observed, *"There are those that think we are an educational facility, not a social agency, but that's a small minority. Most see the benefits to kids and to their programs"*.

Other administrators described less supportive staff members. *"Some staff are frustrated because it's one more thing they have to put into the day, another interruption"* [when snacks are delivered]. One lamented, *"There isn't a teacher who would take it on and that's a problem"*. With reference to their changed lunch programs another reflected, *"We didn't want to add to the teacher's load; it runs fairly smoothly and is not a burden to any teaching staff"*.

Various respondents reflected the importance of avoiding disruptions to the school day as well as additions to teacher workload. *“It’s a minimal disruption to the school,”* reported one. *“It can run fairly efficiently without a whole lot of work; teachers are playing a role and responsibility is shared. They [can] see the difference in the students in the classroom”*, added another. One administrator concluded, *“It’s a team effort and everyone works together,”* describing how one staff member wrote thank you notes to donors while another assisted with record keeping.

Tracking progress

Evaluating the success of school nutrition programs is difficult. The variables that impact on its success are diverse and it is hard to isolate a single influence. The goals of these programs are also varied. They included providing food security to individuals who are hungry, increasing the nutritional intake of children and adolescents, providing instruction about and models for healthy eating, the development of healthy eating habits and creating a more productive learning environment by reducing distracting behaviours.

Educators referred to all of these variables when they responded to the question about tracking progress. As one principal observed, *“We could track behavioural referrals on healthy snack days, but then there are so many other factors it’s hard to say that the healthy snack program was the determining factor. My feeling is that the days we had the snack program we don’t see the same number of behavioural referrals.”* Another described his ‘pretty soft data’ *“I talk to the kids and they are quite happy to have it. Parents are quite happy too. Certain students have indicated they want to try foods they have at the snack program.”* Another concurred, *“The kids are a lot happier [but] I haven’t really talked to the teachers about attentional concerns. {I have} no quantitative measurement.”* Others suggested their benchmarks might be if all the food were consumed on a particular day, or if the quantity of needed food had increased over time. Another administrator stated, *“the benefits are impossible to measure, but I know it’s there in terms of self-respect.”*

One administrator reported, *“Teachers find if kids aren’t consuming only carbs and caffeine, they tend to be calmer.”* While adding that these results were not

quantifiable, he reflected, *“The tone of the school is better this year. It creates a nice atmosphere.”* Another reflected, *“If I do have a student who is struggling, I will ask if they are eating a healthy breakfast. If they are not, I will encourage them to join our breakfast club. I have soft data, none that makes those connections.”*

Final observations

In their final observations, seven administrators reiterated their beliefs about the benefits of their programs, regardless of whether they were snacks, breakfasts or healthy lunches. This is a sample:

At one point I thought I'd taken on too much, but it's a really good thing for the kids and the school and that's what I'm all about”

A very successful thing to me; [it is] as important as texts and other resources. some people will criticize the board for pending public money on food but I think you have to do it”

If you provide kids with nutrition other problems go away. I'm pretty cranky when I'm hungry”

Five reflected they would like to expand their programs, some to offer afternoon snacks, others to offer daily ones but all were cautious about over extending their fiscal or human resources. Two underlined their concerns about financial sustainability. *“If I had to do fundraising the program wouldn't be in effect. The funding is important and sustains the program. If the funding dries up my program will too”*

Parental and site coordinator interviews

Parent profile

This section includes information provided by twelve individuals directly involved in some way with the various school food programs described earlier. Seven of the twelve are parents of children who attend the school. The interview group includes:

- seven elementary parents who were site coordinators interviewed by telephone between March 28th and May 9th
- one secondary school parent who was also interviewed by telephone
- two other site coordinators interviewed by phone, and
- an EA and a teacher interviewed jointly in person with the principal

Reasons to offer food programs

While the educators involved in the study tended to cite poverty, hungry children and the research linking nutritious eating with academics as reasons to offer school nutrition programs, the parental responses varied slightly. Six reported that developing nutritious eating habits in children and adolescents while increasing their nutrition profile was the motivation *“kids need to eat right”*; *“the vast majority of children don’t meet their daily requirements for fruits and dairy.”* Four respondents indicated that the reason for offering school nutrition programs at their schools were alleviating hunger *“[we have] a big empathy for kids with no food in their stomachs no matter what’s in the frig at home”*. and reflections on the lengthy bus rides produced, *“There seemed to be a need to feed kids in the morning.”* Three respondents specified that community service in the local school and an interest in working with children were personal reasons for involvement. One observed, *“I realized we had to have a reason to get up in the morning and dealing with young people keeps us young too. It gives me a purpose for community work”*. Another respondent said, *“It was a great way to get involved in the school at some level, help my kids out and educate myself in this area.”* And a final respondent indicated that the board nutrition policy directed the change in their lunch program; *“we needed to move away from hot dog days”*.

Program challenges

Site coordinators shared two of the administrators' opinions of program challenges. The common concerns were difficulties in obtaining volunteers to run the local programs (six parents mentioned this), *"the greatest challenge is selecting good volunteers that are trustworthy and will come out and mix with the children and feel at home which is not the easiest thing"* and overcoming student, and parental resistance to new, food alternatives (three parents mentioned this). *"You go to a volleyball tournament and an open house and they expect hot dogs and they can't figure out why you can't do that."*

The remaining challenges differed from the administrators' observations. Four reported the negative perceptions they had heard about school nutrition programs, *"only poor kids go there"* and *"some teachers feel that it's a parent's responsibility"*. Four mentioned the work itself; time spent shopping or stocking supplies. *"It has consumed my life a lot. At night I was cutting meat, cheese, celery and making dips. I was thinking of quitting and my daughter was so disappointed because she loved to come in to help"; "there's a lot of work involved; purchasing is a big part of the whole thing"* as well as the challenge of keeping the offerings interesting, different and varied. One voiced concerns about sustainable funding *"we are always on the lookout for money for this"*. Another respondent noted that identifying what needed changing and deciding what/how to do it was a challenge for her and her committee. Another observed that tracking receipts and managing the paperwork was sometimes difficult.

Program strengths

Five parents and site coordinators shared the view articulated by six administrators that improving nutritional offerings for children and adolescents was a program strength. *"We talked about having a culture of nutrition in the school so we are not just feeding the children but teaching them about nutrition in a very practical way"* observed one. Another added, *"The introduction to fruits, vegetables and yogurts is very helpful. Some kids have never tried an avocado or a melon before."*

While administrators had commented on staff response as strength, five of these respondents concurred that community and school staff support was a strength. *"The*

whole community is behind it, the administrative staff as well as teachers,” noted one parent. *“The community is amazing in the number of donations they do provide,”* reported another. *“We get total support from the school staff”*, another observed. The high quality and dedication of their volunteers was noted by two, and three others commented on the positive socialization that occurred among students as well as between students and volunteers during the breakfast club: *“During the breakfast club, students help clean up and help the JK or SK kids put syrup on pancakes. It’s a really nice image of what it should be like.”*

The heroes

Several respondents in this group articulated appreciation for the work of individuals with whom they were familiar not only on the committee but also within their own local school communities. The list was long. It included individual principals with whom they had a collegial relationship and a shared commitment to the work, members of the Tri-county committee, including the school trustees, were mentioned by name, the coordinators who had helped them set up the programs, obtained resources, assisted with supplies and completion of application forms were both familiar and appreciated; dietitians who had helped with menus and additional good ideas for menus. The trustees were also noted for committing the board to the process of feeding healthy food to children.

Profile of volunteers

Two elementary schools reported that their current food programs were completely staffed by parent volunteers, five other school coordinators reported a mix of individuals on their teams that included

- parents with children in the school
- a small group of 43, 45 and two 60 year olds
- a 77 year old site coordinator
- “mainly senior citizens who have time in the morning and a few younger people”

Tracking progress

The eight responses from this group about tracking provided an interesting reflection on the administrator comments. Three indicated that they evaluated their success by *“what actually comes back.”* If students emptied the bins or trays, that was progress enough and the snack experience considered to have been successful. Another reflected, *“You wonder if its having a direct effect on academics but there’s so much involved there that nutrition is just one of them. It seems to be a very difficult thing to track.”* Another added, *“I’m not in the classroom; it’s not been tracked but I just figure it’s gotta help. It’s a given”*.

There were four individuals who indicated a strong interest in more ‘measured outcomes’ as one of them phrased it. One parent observed, *“I would really like to get data and numbers. There’s never been something out to parents, do you think it’s a good program and do you want it to continue?”* Another added, *“I would like some feedback from teachers . . . to see if the children are showing a difference. [It would be] positive feedback for the program. That would be a recognition that we want to hear.”* The secondary parent involved in the Eat Smart initiative noted that they track progress through cafeteria sales. She reported that after the milk month campaign sponsored by her committee *“milk sales are up about 50%. Sales of French fries have gone down by about 39%.”* She also added that when their committee promoted the Treat Yourself Right meal campaign in the cafeteria, the sales “took off”. She also observed that more and different students were in the cafeteria and attributed it to *“You can get vegetarian, you can get what you want and don’t have to get downtown.”*

Final observations

Suggestions for improvement

There were three suggestions for improvements offered by this group and most of them were of a very practical nature. One parent mentioned how much she appreciated the sharing of information from others schools about the program. She had gone to one meeting and gathered information about practices to initiate at her site and others to avoid. She wanted more information about setting up accounts at grocery stores.

Another observed that being allowed greater freedom with food selection would be helpful, for example sometimes some cheeses on sale weren't covered by the grants.

Another mentioned that although expanding the program would be good, she had reservations, *"I see a lot of hungry kids; they are not eating well, they haven't packed a lunch. Maybe they haven't had breakfast and they're on that bus pretty early. The need is there, probably every day, but I don't think that would be realistic. I think the kids would just love it every day and would use it every day."*

One parent hoped for more volunteers while another praised the program for increasing parent volunteerism in their school, *"It's a good thing and our school benefits from it; our students and our community benefit from it. We are very please to be able to do it and we would like the funding to keep on coming. I've had teachers come and say that parents are in first to feed kids and then they stay and read to them"*.

One parent was pleased that other schools had inquired about their particular project. Her committee was organizing a toolkit for distribution so that other schools could easily replicate their Eat Smart program. Others noted their students had participated in the nutrition forum and enjoyed it.

Lack of parent response

Four respondents expressed concerns about the commitment of parents in their school communities. Some noted that parents didn't seem to know about the program and were not really playing a part. One observed that if parents were more aware they might get more volunteers. In three of these four cases, there had been no fundraising by parents either because there was no perceived need or because the principal believed that the school was already involved in a sufficient number of fund raising efforts.

Summary of interview information

Administrators, parents and site coordinators were willing and pleased to speak with me about their student nutrition programs. All these individuals were strongly committed to their work and convinced of its value to the children or adolescents in their schools. Several of the administrators made sincere efforts to fit personal or telephone interviews with me into their busy days. On more than one occasion a principal was simultaneously dealing with a troubled youngster who needed calming or support and providing me with thoughtful responses during our conversation. One parent coached her youngster through a math workbook as we talked. Administrator, parent and site coordinator interviews reflected a number of common themes that included:

- Alleviating hunger and improving the nutritional profile of students were the major reasons given for providing school nourishment programs
- Volunteers manage and deliver the programs; training and soliciting volunteers was the most frequently mentioned challenge
- Resistance to food programs generally took two forms: negative, informal responses from community or staff, and student, parent and even some volunteer resistance to making the changes to more nutritious food offerings.

Common reasons for offering programs

Educators and parents were closely attuned to the needs for offering the various food programs in their schools. There were two major reasons offered by both groups of these respondents. One was the alleviation of student hunger necessitated either by the socio-economic profiles of particular school communities or the urgency of early morning starts and lengthy bus rides; a second was providing raising the nutritional intake and awareness of healthy eating habits of the students in their care. Educators were more likely to mention the link between nutrition and academic productivity. Several indicated soft data about positive effects on school atmosphere. Parents were most likely to mention student enthusiasm about the food. One reported hearing from another parent “*My kids refuse to eat breakfast at home now; it’s so good at school*”. These two themes were common to both elementary and secondary educators and the parents.

Role of volunteers

With the exception of the programs at the adult education centre where nutritious food delivery programs were a joint activity shared by the administrator, teachers and students, all the school food programs referred to in this report depend heavily on volunteers for their management and delivery. Finding, retaining and training school volunteers were most frequently described by both groups as their major challenge to the food programs. One administrator equated funding and volunteers as the two mainstays indicating that a loss of one or the other would result in shutting that food program down. The quality of the individual volunteers, the growth of volunteerism in some schools and positive additional school exposure to the community were all seen as additional benefits.

Only two elementary schools reported strong parent participation in their program delivery; one school reported that parents totally delivered its program, another's parents were assisted by an EA. All other programs depended on a variety of community volunteers that could include a parent or two but usually involved church goers, retirees or members of service clubs, groups generically characterized by one coordinator as having "free time in the morning". Several schools mentioned strong parental links to their school councils either through a parental liaison or committees. Three others indicated that some of their nutrition programs had developed through a council sub-committee composed of parents, staff and students.

Negative perceptions and resistance to change

Both administrators and parents mentioned that they had dealt with or were aware of negative social perceptions about their food programs although no one reported having to defend them. Parents were more likely to mention negativity or opposition coming from the community and occasionally teachers, educators were more likely to have experienced it from members of their staff. Some individuals reported a complete absence of negativity reporting instead the wholehearted support of staff, and praised community associations for generous full-hearted support through financial donations or donations in kind. Generally speaking, the longer a program had been in place, the less likely it was to attract negative comments.

Resistance to making changes

Some schools reported student, parent and sometimes volunteer resistance to the changes in food offerings at their schools. The changes in the contents for sale in vending machines did not seem to be an issue at all; in fact some schools had completely removed them. Others had restocked them in compliance with both the board and ministry policy as well as in response to requests from the community who used them after hours. One school mentioned a contract still in effect and mused about potential income loss and alternatives when that contract would mature several years down the road. Generally schools reported that resistance arose from changes to a traditional breakfast menu that had long been offered at that site, for example, the exclusion of sugary cereals and such products as “cheez whiz” and their replacement with non sugar products and hard cheese. As well, certain administrators reported critical responses to the changes in various foods offered for prizes or as products for fundraising; the removal of cupcakes from school bake sales or classroom parties, avoiding the purchase of sports drinks and chips for school teams and the reaction to changes in the various hot lunch items sold for profit all sparked responses and even, as one administrator noted ‘controversy’. A heightened awareness of healthy food choices also led to critical responses when pop was provided as refreshment at a recent board-wide event for elementary schools. *“It never even occurred to them”*.

Social pressures, as well as policy initiatives and the domino effect have created a fertile ground for these changes, but they also require determination on the part of individuals in schools be they administrators, parents or site coordinators. One parent observed, *“the success of the breakfast club menu has allowed other activities to make decisions along the healthy route.”*

Conversations about the content of food offered as rewards in classrooms and staff meetings are now occurring where they wouldn’t have happened several years ago. Students and a staff member organized a nutrition awareness program at a secondary school recently. One of the schools interviewed had had representatives attend and they provided positive feedback on the event.

All these processes and activities simply reflect the fact supported by research that “Organizations don’t innovate or implement change; individuals do.” (McLaughlin 1987, p.174)

Conclusions

The implementation of school nutrition programs in the schools of the Trillium Lakelands School board is a great success because of a strong community-based school linked partnership built on common beliefs and values. Its strength is in its diversity. It would not survive without volunteer support at a high level. The process that began with committed community members and board officials seven years ago is an example of productive good practices. It deserves more support and imitation.

The development, implementation and evolution of these nutrition programs demonstrate the best practices identified in the literature on policy implementation and educational change. While educational changes are frequently mandated, political pressure usually fails to make a difference (Fullan, 1997); top down processes usually don’t work (Fullan & Miles, 1992). What does work is the ‘bottom up’ process of mutual adaptation that we have described at work here.

Successful change requires conceptual simplicity, clearly articulated goals, and an implementation system (Drucker, 1992) with reasonable timelines, an explanation of anticipated benefits and descriptions of the required adaptations (Huberman & Miles, 1984). It also requires champions to prepare its acceptance with assurances of support, training, additional resources and a commitment to informative communications (Huberman & Miles, 1984; Fullan, 1991). All these processes were followed strategically, practically and intuitively; its champions and heroes are both numerous and articulate. They have made important contributions within their local communities, at the board level and in its schools.

This school board needs to be commended for its leadership in designing a nutrition policy and procedure for its schools and providing classic pressure and practical support to them throughout the implementation process. There are a few recommendations offered below for future consideration; they include suggestions

regarding communications/information sharing, administrative and board support and funding.

Recommendations

Volunteers are the backbone of school nutrition programs at all the school sites. All the school programs are run by a core group of committed individuals. Acquiring a competent and reliable team and training them is both the greatest challenge and, eventually, one of the greatest strengths of this program. School administrators, site coordinators and area program coordinators all agree on that. The volunteers who manage the site programs contribute many hours of unpaid labour to ensure their success. Their responsibilities include creating menus, shopping for the groceries and trying to find nutritious food on sale, preparing the food, presenting it attractively for students and cleaning up afterwards. Site coordinators do more work than the rest of the team of volunteers. They train them, keep accounts, and do the shopping, frequently attempting to get grocery ‘specials’ and keep principals in the loop. Breakfast for Learning recommended in its best practices program standards that resources should be in place “to attract, train and support staff and volunteers”. A solid volunteer infrastructure needs to be in place in order to support this program.

Within the Tri-county committee’s catchments, only Haliburton raises money to reimburse its site coordinators. More needs to be done to attract and support the volunteers without whom these programs would cease to exist.

Recommendation #1: Support school coordinators

Each school nutrition program should provide its site coordinator with a stipend. This cannot possibly be an hourly wage, but it will reimburse some of the expenses that individual incurs off site, such as mileage and time spent shopping, collating food receipts and writing thank you notes. It could expand the available resources by encouraging individuals other than retirees to assume these responsibilities

This program provides many additional social benefits to schools and their students. More than one individual commented on the benefits of the social interaction between volunteers and students; others noted that the interaction between older and younger students was beneficial for both; another noted that the level of volunteerism in one particular school had increased; and an administrator was pleased that additional members of the community were able, through this program to experience her students and better understand the work of her school. Some school have arrangements with neighbouring secondary schools that provide students who assist with this program by providing or serving food or by assisting with clean up tasks. These programs are usually called Student to Student and provide valuable informal learning opportunities.

Recommendation #2: Engage students where possible

Wherever possible principals should be encouraged to implement their own Student-to-Student programs that include cross age groups of students working together. Older students can model appropriate social behaviour and assist younger students during the food programs. They can help volunteers with clean up, thus reducing the amount of time they need to commit to this is part of the program.

The efficient, practical and respectful support provided to the schools by area coordinators has been instrumental in the development of local school nutrition programs. These positions and the individuals who staff them are the heart and soul of these programs. They are ‘the face’ of these program; without their extensive commitment, hard work and hands on approach many of these programs would not be so securely imbedded in school practice. The responsibility for funding these positions needs to be consistent and stable with a provider common to all of them. The current situation is not only unnecessarily complex but can easily lead to inequities.

Recommendation #3: Stabilize area coordinator funding and reinstate local Muskoka coordinator

Continue to lobby MCYS and other Ministries for commitments to sustainable funding to support the two positions in the southern catchments and to restore the parallel position in the northern areas that has been lost. A local coordinator situated in Muskoka is both practical and desirable.

It would be useful to have a system to assist schools with the evaluation and impact of their individual food programs. The board's own policy calls for "a mechanism to coordinate, review and evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of nourishment programs in the system and to make changes where necessary" (ES-5050 8.0). Some parents working on different school programs thought that sharing information about the effects of their work might encourage additional fiscal and human support; others were curious but acknowledged the complexity of the process. As well, principals mentioned 'soft' or 'anecdotal data' to which they referred and reflected on during our conversations

Recommendation #4: Establish a board database

The board should collect and eventually track the progress of the individual school programs. There is some soft data (anecdotal) available, and there is the data that schools are already submitting in terms of menu content, descriptions and frequency of their specific programs, as well as student numbers that would provide information for this first stage of the development of a long-term data base. Coordinators and the manager already submit detailed data to MCYS that could be incorporated here.

It is vital to continue to publicize the good news about this program within various contexts both provincial and local. Pertinent Ministries with responsibilities for the development and financial support of this initiative should be kept informed of its value and needs. Parents, volunteers and other stakeholders need to regularly read, see and hear information about specific programs in local schools. As well the newly formed Local Health Information Networks should receive current and up-to-date information to help them understand the value of these programs.

Recommendation #5: Share the success

Share information about the successful implementation process and value of this program with pertinent provincial Ministries notably the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health.

Information about the nutrition guidelines and their practical implementation provided by dietitians, training regarding safe food handling as well as regular inservice for area volunteers should be continued and expanded. Not all school volunteers have experienced this training. Not only do scheduled workshops expand a skilled pool of volunteers, they also share good practice and publicize the local food initiatives.

Recommendation #6: Continue and expand training programs

The Tri-County Committee should support the continued sharing and dissemination of information about these nutrition programs to raise public awareness, garner support and share good practices. The regular local training sessions that educate volunteers about safe food handling and nutritious menu planning are a valuable resource that should be continued and expanded if at all possible.

Recommendation #7: Continue local publicity

Continued and increased use of local media opportunities will sustain and could increase local support.

Increase public awareness and understanding through various radio and print media to encourage and increase the pool of available volunteers. Invite community members into the schools during food programs. Principals should continue to use the school newsletter, as many already do, to promote their local programs and nutrition awareness.

The student nutrition forum held at a local secondary this past year was a successful initiative that could be expanded into in a larger format.

Recommendation #8: Establish annual conference

The board and the Tri-County committee may want to host an annual conference open to parents, stakeholders, community representatives, school students and staff, to contribute to public awareness, evaluate progress and celebrate successes as well as raise the profile of the nutrition programs.

These programs are tremendously successful due largely to sustained political and professional commitment, along with public support. They depend on champions who articulate and share a powerful belief in their value. Now the most important tasks are to sustain that belief system and extend it, particularly among those who might be tapped as volunteers.

Appendix A

Methodology

This is a qualitative report describing the implementation of the school student nutrition program through the work of the Tri-County Committee in its partnership with the Trillium Lakelands School Board. It includes data from files as well as reflective data. Comparisons could not be made because local structures and the intensity of the programs vary in each community.

Because qualitative research is inherently multi-method in focus and requires multiple methods to secure an in-depth understanding of the question (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), data was obtained through various sources:

I began with a brief review of the literature on school nourishment programs in Canada and Ontario. I then interviewed the three area program coordinators, the three dietitians and one of the three trustees who sit on the Tri-County Committee in person. As well as agreeing to be interviewed, the director of the TLDSB provided me with a letter of introduction to her school staff that encouraged them to cooperate with me when I contacted them.

I contacted secondary and elementary administrators in each of the board's three geographical areas [two in Haliburton, four in the city of Kawartha Lakes, five in Muskoka-Huntsville] and asked each administrator to suggest a parent or staff person involved with their program whom I could also interview. I had previously met five of the eleven school administrators through other professional, school or community related projects. I had no previous relationship with any of the school parents.

A TLDSB school superintendent and a principal with responsibility for an elementary student nourishment pilot program were also interviewed. I also interviewed a superintendent engaged in a parallel program in a neighbouring board and their two program coordinators to provide me with contextual information.

The interviews consisted of a series of open ended questions [see appendix B] and ranged from thirty minutes to one and a half hours. I conducted a total of thirty-five interviews; some in person and others by phone and took notes on a laptop computer

during each interview. I read and re-read these notes until patterns and common themes emerged.

I presented a first draft to the Tri-county committee at their May 15th meeting. The members present provided feedback and suggestions. There were also ongoing e-mail conversations as absent (and former) members read the first draft, feedback from three members at a brief meeting on June 12th and a lengthy telephone conversation with another on June 19th.

This report is a description of the student food project at this point in time that the various individuals who have been involved in its design and delivery have communicated to me and agree upon.

Appendix B

Interview template

For school administrators, tri-county committee members

For school council, site coordinators

Introduction:

My name is Stella Voisin and I have been contracted by the Tri-County committee of TLDSB to prepare a written review of their board-wide school nutrition program. I am reviewing written documentation and speaking with various individuals involved with the programs. I appreciate your time and assistance with this report. I will be taking notes on my computer as we talk.

Describe your program

What is your role

when/how did it begin

why did you choose to implement

What challenges does it offer?

fiscal resources?

food prep services?

volunteers?

other?

Tell me how your program is managed/supported

What have you observed about this program? Benefits? Consequences?

How would you defend this program? (have you had to?)

Would you expand this program? How?

How would you improve this program? Good advice?

Do you have any other comments/observations?

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