

# Re-Freshing the School Menu

*Bringing fresh, local foods to the district's food services program.*

By Aubrey Kirkpatrick



In 2005, the Canadian province of New Brunswick passed the stringent Healthier Foods and Nutrition in Public Schools Policy 711 aimed at getting students to eat better and to stay healthy.

With that same goal in mind, the Anglophone East School District, which serves 15,476 students in 37 schools, is “re-freshing” the menu by serving more local, fresh, healthy, whole-grain, unprocessed, organic, and sustainable food to students in our school cafeterias.

Educating young people about eating healthy begins at home, but it is important for schools to reinforce that message during the school day by providing fresh food in school cafeterias. That approach can encourage students to make healthy eating choices before, during,

and after school and can affect student performance positively.

In addition, by purchasing local food products as much as possible, the district is supporting the local farm economy through increased production, which will create jobs and ensure the sustainability of our local farms. The school district sees that outcome as being positive for everyone.

## **Finding the Right Partner**

Our contracted food services provider was following the healthier foods policy by means of a standard cafeteria approach—using large corporate suppliers of frozen and processed foods. However, our school community was

telling us that it wanted a new approach to food services. So as the contract was nearing expiration, we set out to develop a request for proposals (RFP) that would help us take food services to the next level—with emphasis on using fresh, nonprocessed food and encouraging integration of food education as part of the cafeteria operations.

Cafeteria operations in Anglophone East must be self-sustaining, as no operational dollars are allotted for this service. In preparing for the RFP, we reached out to ASBO International colleagues through ASBO's Global School Business Network and received quite a bit of information about cafeteria operations across North America. Even though food services differ from state to province and from district to district, we were able to use much of what we learned in crafting our RFP.

## By purchasing local food products as much as possible, the district is supporting the local farm economy through increased production, which will create jobs and ensure the sustainability of our local farms.

The RFP process closed in June 2015, and the submissions were reviewed and scored by a committee that included a dietician, school principal, district education council member, and two school district employees. With Anglophone East's new food services provider, the 25 district schools that have cafeterias will experience a new, fresh program over the next three years:

- **A food services focus:** The food services provider will focus on fresh, healthy, local, whole-grain, unprocessed, colorful, varied, and sometimes organic and grab-and-go offerings.
- **Local purchasing:** The food services provider will purchase New Brunswick products first, then Maritimes-sourced products before buying outside of the Maritimes.
- **Food service committee:** Each school will have a food services committee that meets four times a year.
- **Culinary tech programs:** The food services provider will work with the high school culinary tech programs.
- **Farm to school:** The food services provider will support the farm-to-school grants and programs that the district encourages.
- **Chefs 2 Schools:** The food services provider's chefs will interact with students, teach them about cooking, and introduce new flavors.
- **Parent-teacher night:** The food services provider will participate in one parent night at each school, promoting and offering sample foods.

- **Online payment system:** The food services provider will provide parents with easy access to ordering and paying for food purchases online.
- **School gardens:** The food services provider will develop policies and practices regarding school-grown foods that will be used in cafeteria operations.
- **Entrepreneurship:** The food services provider will work with schools to develop entrepreneurial projects for students that highlight healthy foods.

So students, school staff, and parents know where the fresh food comes from, the food services provider clearly displays the origin of the local produce in the school cafeterias.

## Growing Support

Feedback has been positive thus far. Even though the approach is in its beginning stages, people have noticed a significant improvement in the offerings in the school cafeterias. "I am glad to see this improvement in the offering of fresh local food within school cafeterias," Danielle Robichaud, public health dietician supporting the school district, said. A principal of one of the large high schools recently shared, "The cafeteria food is freshly prepared, mostly local, looks and tastes great! The staff is starting to come back to eating in the cafeteria again."

The ultimate success of this "re-freshing" menu approach will be determined by the students and staff—whether they buy into the new offerings they requested. To date, food sales have not been where they were last year, due in large part to the restrictive nature of the healthier food policy, which limits the number of days certain food items can be sold. (For example, pre-sweetened cereal and low-fat breads can be sold only twice a week.) We believe that with our new food services approach of fresh and local preparation, overall sales will increase with good promotion and satisfied customers.

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Although the overall success of the program has yet to be determined, we do see positive signs at places like Salisbury Elementary School, which has been promoting the salad bar option as part of its farm-to-school project. In a school of 340 elementary students, 120 students preordered the salad bar recently. Partnering with the elementary school is neighboring James M. Armstrong High School, whose culinary tech students contributed homemade croutons, baked pumpkin seeds, and lots of





cut veggies and fruits to the salad bar, which also had homemade dressing made with local maple syrup.

Schools are planning to work with their cafeterias to increase the educational opportunities for students as well. For example, students in the culinary tech courses will now be able to supplement their classroom experience with hands-on, real-life planning, preparation, and promotion of food offerings in a large food services setting, in addition to their classroom experience.

Healthy food services definitely require a partnership—with cafeterias being asked to place healthy

“grab-and-go” options (such as healthy subs, wraps, and salads) up front and schools being asked to ensure that all food used for fund raising, class rewards, or catering meet Policy 711—as a means of modeling good food choices at all times. And parents are encouraged to promote healthy lunch choices at the cafeteria or to pack healthy and nutritious lunches for their students’ well-being.

Superintendent Gregg Ingersoll is pleased with the direction the school district is taking. And Joanna Bays, who is at the helm of Farm to Cafeteria Canada, a national network supporting farm-to-cafeteria policy and programs from coast to coast, says, “The Anglophone East School District has just set a new gold standard for the procurement of local food in schools.”

To see the various school menus go to our district website (<http://web1.nbed.nb.ca/sites/ASD-E/Pages/default.aspx>), choose a school, click on the school website, and click “Cafeteria Menu” to see the new food offerings available. Anglophone East School District is proud to promote this win-win approach to food services with student health and achievement at the center of it all.

**Aubrey Kirkpatrick** is director of finance and administration for Anglophone East School District, New Brunswick, Canada. Email: [Aubrey.Kirkpatrick@gnb.ca](mailto:Aubrey.Kirkpatrick@gnb.ca)

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