



A Scan of School Nutrition Programs in Canadian Provinces and Territories – COVID-19 Response

ABSTRACT

A summary of the school nutrition plans used in Canadian Provinces and Territories during COVID-19 pandemic

Joint Consortium for School Health

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Summary

School Nutrition Programs/Home Nutrition Programs Interjurisdictional scan - methods and considerations

In September 2021, Manitoba EDU submitted a questionnaire to the Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health, asking about how SNPs (School Nutrition Programs) from across Canada responded to school closures resulting from the pandemic. The questionnaire focused on three main themes: Innovative adaptations of SNPs during school closures, alternative food service models, and SNP delivery during typical school closures. The responses received through the questionnaire have been supplemented with information from online government resources such as websites and reports.

Due to the variability in SNP models, the data does not provide a full representation of SNPs in Canada. However, responses highlight common themes that were reflected in the literature, and provide a snapshot of how SNPs in different jurisdictions responded to school closures.

Findings

The following is a summary of responses received from eight provinces and territories. They are referred to numerically: Prince Edward Island (1), Newfoundland and Labrador (2), New Brunswick (3), Ontario (4), Alberta (5), British Columbia (6), Northwest Territories (7), and Yukon (8). Quebec is not a member of the Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health and is therefore not included in the interjurisdictional scan.

During school closures, three main innovative approaches were used by provincial / territorial governments and SNP facilitators to ensure students received food during school closures:

- Partnering with third parties such as food banks in order to increase capacity of food programs to reach students outside of school (1, 2, 4, 6)
- Redirecting funding and other resources to community centres and non-profit organizations who have capacity to reach students outside of the school (2, 5)
- Providing support through non-SNP related government programs (1, 3, 7)

The approach of partnering with third parties to increase capacity is a strategy that was prominent in the literature. [21] [1] [19] [13] [9] In Manitoba, partnerships with foodbanks helped SNPs overcome the challenges of high food costs and increased student numbers. [5] [6] Another innovative approach was to partner with local farmers who provided surplus food that was distributed to students and their families. (2) [9]

The approaches of closing SNPs and providing support through other government programs, or redirecting funding to third parties, were also common (1, 2, 3, 5, 7). However, the majority of provincial back to school plans for 2021/22 recommend that SNPs resume normal operation when schools are open, which suggests that these measures are temporary responses to the inability of some SNPs to adapt to school closures. [8] [3] [25] [11] [20] [16] [18] [22]

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The second major theme highlighted in the questionnaire was the alternative food service models utilized by SNPs to provide food to students during school closures. These included:

- financial support such as an electronic benefit, gift cards and grocery vouchers (3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8)
- weekly/monthly food hampers (2, 4, 5, 7, 8)
- emergency food hubs at schools where students and caregivers could pick up food (2, 4, 6)
- meals delivered to the home (1, 6)

A majority of respondents reported that SNPs in their province used a combination of multiple food service methods. (4, 5, 6, 7, 8) The literature review also demonstrated the efficacy of using a hybrid approach to ensure students both in and out of school received food. [19] [17] [13] In both Manitoba and Ontario, food programs were adapted to include a combination of in-school meals, food-boxes, and increased partnerships with food banks. [5] [6] [21]

Finally, SNPs in 4 out of the 8 provinces / territories were extended to operate during summer vacation due to an increased need for support resulting from the pandemic (2, 4, 6, 8).¹ The data provided through the questionnaire is not sufficient to provide an accurate understanding of how and to what extent SNPs were offered in the summer and during other typical school closures at each stage of the pandemic.

Province	SNP responses to school closures	SNP delivery during summer break
1. PEI	<p>-If schools close due to COVID, families are asked to register for help through the PEI Food Security Program offered through the Department of Social Development and Housing</p> <p>-Through the PEI Food Security Program, prepared meals are delivered cold to houses 2-3 times per week, in the quantity of one meal per child per day</p> <p>-School bus drivers make deliveries, as they are not providing their regular services during school closures</p>	<p>-The PEI Food Security Program was offered over the 2021/22 Summer Break, but is not offered for other non-COVID related closures</p>

¹ Note that responses addressed different school years. To better understand how SNPs are offered in the summer, further research would be required to analyze program administration in 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22, due to the evolving conditions brought by each stage of the pandemic.

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	-In 2021, the PEI School Food Program will transition to the PEI School Food Program Inc., a new non-profit organization that will continue to use a pay-what you can model, and partner with local food vendors to provide healthy lunch options ²	
2.Newfoundland and Labrador	<p>During school closures, government-supported school food programs transitioned to supporting community centres who supplied food to students and families who would usually rely on SNPs. Components of this approach included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnerships between schools and food banks to distribute food supplies to families in the community • Monthly grocery hampers provided to families • Partnerships with third parties (St. John’s Farmers Market, Food First NL and Choices for Youth) to distribute surplus food supplies in schools to community meal programs 	<p>-To help support increased need for food during the pandemic, school food programs expanded their mandate to provide food outside of the school year</p> <p>-School food programs provided funding to community centres to prepare grocery hampers for families, which could either be picked up or delivered to the home, during the summer</p>
3.New Brunswick	-The Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer is available for families with school aged children who were eligible for free or reduced priced school meals prior to school closures ³	n/a
4.Ontario	- During pandemic-related school closures in the 2019-20 school year, all agencies that deliver SNPs continued to support the delivery of nutritious food to children and youth	<p>-Although SNPs are not typically provided during typical school closures, there were limited summer offerings in 2019/20</p> <p>-During the 2020-21 school year, SNPs received funding through the Federal Safe</p>

² Government of Prince Edward Island, 2021, “PEI Healthy School Food Program moves to new non-profit organization,” accessed September 2021 at: <https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/news/pei-healthy-school-food-program-moves-to-new-non-profit-organization>.

³ New Brunswick Public Schools, 2021, “P-EBT Information-June 2021,” accessed September 2021 at: <https://www.nbpschools.net/foodserves>.

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	<p>-A variety of models were implemented by lead agencies working with community partners, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • grocery gift cards • farm vouchers • food boxes or meal kits • food hubs or distribution sites where families could drop-by to access food, meals and or gift cards <p>-The majority of Lead Agencies implemented a combination of models in their areas (or across their funded community partners) based on the availability of volunteers, local community needs and existing partnerships that were in place</p>	<p>Return to Class Fund that also supports extension of services to summer. In both cases the method of delivery remained similar to the approaches used during the school period</p>
<p>5.Alberta</p>	<p>-Some schools are providing grocery store cards for students as volunteers in schools are not allowed to build food hampers due to COVID-19 restrictions</p> <p>-Caregivers can apply to receive emergency food hampers through different emergency food organizations</p> <p>-In 2019/20, the Alberta Government provided \$3M to 9 non-profits who provide food to communities. This was in addition to the \$15.5M provided to SNPs⁴</p> <p>-For both 2020/21 and 2021/22, the Alberta Government provided \$16M to SNPs⁵</p> <p>- If SNPs are unable to continue during school closures, they have been asked to direct remaining government funds to non-profit organizations⁶</p>	<p>n/a</p>

⁴ Alberta Government, 2020, “Nutrition Program support continues for students”, accessed September 2021 at: <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=69985583EED83-0C75-4535-C73FD796C40C1802>.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

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<p>6. British Columbia</p>	<p>-SNPs in BC are designed and coordinated by individual school districts and local school communities, and programs vary greatly. The responses to the pandemic from 29 SNPs surveyed by the BC Coalition for Healthy School Food were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 31% of respondent SNPs reorganized their mode of operation, such as through offering delivery or pick-up options, or weekly grocery hampers • 26% of respondent SNPs were canceled due to school closures⁷ <p>- Some of the methods SNPs used to provide food to children during closures include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food delivery to students • Emergency food hubs at schools where students and caregivers could pick up meals • Grocery money⁸ <p>-12% of respondent SNPs reported partnering with foodbanks in order to provide food to students outside of the school⁹</p>	<p>-Between March-June 2020, 18% of B.C. schools reported that were planning to continue food programs over the summer months</p> <p>-The Ministry of Education is currently conducting an environmental scan to confirm the scope and delivery of current expanded school food programs to include weekends and other typical school closures</p>
<p>7. Northwest Territories</p>	<p>-When schools are closed, school food program funding is used to provide food packages directly to families</p> <p>-Families are also supported through non-SNP food programs such as Nutrition</p>	<p>n/a</p>

⁷ Samantha Gambling, 2020, "Feeding Students During COVID-19: A Report on the Impacts of BC's School Food Programs," *The Coalition for Healthy School Food BC*, accessed October 2021 at: https://2edb03c8-6d8c-411f-88a8-2708d30ad344.filesusr.com/ugd/e7a651_49d07c290b924a69a3c92f9de4e5c5be.pdf

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

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	North and the Healthy Family Program, which provides food boxes and gift cards to families	
8. Yukon	-When schools were closed, families were provided with food delivered to the home, hampers, food vouchers and gift cards	- In 2020 it was common for SNPs to be offered during the summer

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