

Abstract Title: Applying complex systems to school food environments in Nova Scotia

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Introduction

Supporting implementation of policy strategies that encourage healthier eating is a national priority to address the poor diet quality among children and youth (Blanck & Kim, 2012). School Food and Nutrition Policies (SFNPs) are important in the creation of healthy school food environments as they can improve equitable access, resources, and supports for healthy eating (Fung, McIsaac, Kuhle, Kirk & Veugelers, 2013). However, despite the potential impact of SFNPs, implementation barriers are often reported (McIsaac, Storey, Veugelers & Kirk, 2015).

Objectives

In 2006, Nova Scotia became one of the first provinces in Canada to launch a SFNP (Province of Nova Scotia, 2008). This research used a complex systems lens to describe the interaction between system levels and stakeholder roles within the NS school food environment 10 years following SFNP implementation (Johnston, Matteson & Finegood, 2014).

Methods

Interviews and consultations were conducted with various stakeholders in the school food system to understand roles and experiences with the SFNP and the creation of healthy school food environments.

Results

Consultations (n=13) and interviews (n=34) took place with teachers, parents, cafeteria workers, food providers, public health staff and non-profit organizations from across the province. Preliminary themes influencing implementation of the SFNP and school food environment relate to access, procurement, culture and funding.

Conclusions

SFNP implementation can be challenging and understanding the interactions between system levels and stakeholder roles will help to inform the development of relevant policy strategies that will support healthier school food environments.

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