



## **Promoting Healthy Food and Nutrition for all Students**

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**Sabbatical Leave Term 3 2008**

### **PURPOSE:**

The purpose of my proposed sabbatical leave was to provide me with the opportunity to investigate the impact of new strategies/initiatives selected schools have implemented or are implementing to meet the requirement of the NAG 5 change that took effect from 1 June 2008, when schools are required to: *“Promote healthy food and nutrition for all students”*.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

My thanks to the Ministry of Education Sabbatical Leave Scheme and the St Joseph's School (Temuka) Board of Trustees for making this time available to me.

My thanks also to those Principals and teachers who took the time to respond to my survey and answer my questions.

### **BACKGROUND**

The following points influenced my choice of this research topic:

- Our school is one of six schools in South Canterbury in the Fruit in Schools programme. I am our school's FIS coordinator and part of our FIS agreement relates specifically to Food and Nutrition.
- The introduction of the NAG 5 addition.
- The link to our Strategic Plan: “That children develop an awareness, knowledge and understanding of, and skills for, healthy living, physical, emotional and spiritual health.”

I used the opportunity of a term's sabbatical leave to investigate schools in my own area to gain first hand knowledge of current best practice and its impact on teaching and learning in the food and nutrition area. The time was also used to refresh and recharge myself for continuing principalship, and provide me with the opportunity to develop my own research skills.

My board of trustees was very keen for me to seek information that will provide a sound basis for reflection and our decision making with regards to the NAG 5 changes and what we have done and will do in our school community.

Key questions I addressed were:

- What can schools do, and what are schools doing, that will have a greater impact on Food and Nutrition related learning than what has been achieved in the past?
- What has been the impact of Fruit in Schools, and/or Food and Nutrition programmes, towards enabling children to make healthy food choices in the school context and in contexts other than school?
- What are children's attitudes to, and thoughts about, healthy living and food and nutrition?
- How are other schools using the Fruit in Schools programme to meet the new NAG 5 requirements?

## **ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN**

I sent a covering letter and a questionnaire/survey to South Canterbury primary schools that asking the following and followed up with phone calls as necessary:

1. Briefly describe Food and Nutrition related initiatives your school has implemented or is implementing.
2. List the factors that you believe have made or are making the initiatives successful.
3. List what impact the initiatives have had or are having on food choices children are making
  - i. in the school context
  - ii. in contexts other than school.
4. What evidence is there to support the above?

I received 20 replies from a range of schools (decile, urban, rural, small, large, full primary, contributing). A summary of the responses to the questions follows. The number in brackets at the end of each response indicates the number of schools that gave the same or similar responses (July 2008).

### **Initiatives Implemented:**

- Healthy food choices promoted in newsletters. (3)
- Pie warmer available only on Fridays. (2)
- Off-site takeaway choices improved or limited. (16)
- Pupils take lunch leftovers home to help parents make informed choices about what their children are eating. (2)

- Increased class discussion reflecting media focus on healthy food, obesity, fitness. (2)
- BOT decision not to have a chocolate selling fundraiser (to avoid sending a mixed message).
- Reorganised class timetables to allow “brain” breaks e.g. three 1 hour blocks in the morning separated by eating/exercising/drinking. (3)
- Water is the only drink permitted at school. (3)
- Fruit in Schools involvement (not available to all school). (2)
- Healthy eating units. (3)
- Supervised eating of lunches (“Healthy food first, other – last”. One school carries out the supervised eating in classrooms). (3)
- Food is not used as a reward. (2)
- Water is readily available (including in the classroom). (2)
- Consultation with the school community (and sometimes wider e.g. local takeaway outlets, dairies) re changing current practices. (2)
- A rice meal is available once a week.
- Regular consultation re content of the school’s Health curriculum. (2)
- Promoting the NAG change in the newsletter.
- Introduced “School Fruit Scheme” with WAVE support.
- Using HEHA funding to release a teacher to investigate good Food and Nutrition programmes.
- Students attend WAVE workshops and return with ideas to implement via school council/Healthy Living committee etc. (2)
- KidsCan Trust utilized to provide healthy food for children in need.
- Breakfast Club started using WAVE funding.
- Reviewed/put in place relevant policies/procedures. (5)
- Involve pupils in decision making process, making suggestions, encouraging others e.g. Children’s Healthy Action Team, Healthy Living Team. (4)
- Lead teacher appointed in Food and Nutrition area. (4)
- Applied for and received funding for Food and Nutrition projects via WAVE. (2)
- “No Wrap” encouraged as a school.
- Parent/staff meetings. (2)
- Using Health advisor (UC Education Plus)
- Providing samples of healthy food for children to try.
- Growing fruit/vegetables in school garden and/or glasshouse. (2)
- Planting fruit trees at school.
- Ongoing focus on Healthy Eating in health programmes.
- Having a Food and Nutrition focus for a curriculum target.
- Soft drink rewards/prizes replaced by flavoured milk.
- Breakfast barbecue activity.
- Parent education via newsletters, PTA meetings, surveys.
- Working on creating a community of “enviro conservationists and health dictators” – and waiting for parents to rebel!
- No “food” fundraising activities. (2)
- Having a “launch day” for initiatives.
- Compiling a Healthy Lunches/Snack Food recipe/ideas folder (pupil/family involvement in trialing recipes/ideas and compiling the folder). One per family, added to over time. Using WAVE funding.

- Statistics unit in conjunction with New World using nutrition information to find out about foods, then students planned and prepared a healthy lunch.
- Bought lunches menu identifies everyday, sometimes and treat foods.
- Healthy choices posters displayed around school.
- Use Life Education programmes.
- Students from Yrs 6-8 plan for and prepare school lunches each Friday.
- We work with international chefs investigating nutrition, cooking, health and safety, business practices (Aoraki Mt Cook).

This list reflects what schools recorded on their survey sheet. I'm sure the numbers above are not a true reflection of all the initiatives schools are implementing – just the ones that came to mind at the time!

### **Factors that impact on the success of initiatives**

- Government NAG change - has given authority/direction to change.
- Media push. Greater parent/BOT/staff/student awareness. (7)
- Level of support from staff/BOT/parent community and the wider community. (8)
- Introduction of Physical Activity Leaders at lunchtime and making Food and Nutrition/Physical Activity links with students. (2)
- Creating an environment where there are consistent expectations, and being able to support this with research findings.
- Positive role modeling by staff, pupil leaders and parents. (3)
- South Canterbury District Health Board HEHA/WAVE/Fruit in Schools support, promotion, resourcing, funding (initially confusing, but becoming clearer). (8)
- Student led initiatives.
- Appointing a motivated lead teacher in this area. (5)
- Including parent representatives on committees/action teams. (2)
- Positive reinforcement of messages we are promoting.
- Methods chosen to implement change e.g. non-threatening, consultative etc.
- Pupil pride in outcomes of initiatives e.g. eating own garden produce.
- Children all required to taste new food.
- Involving all parties in the process. (3)
- An awareness and acceptance that there is a need to make changes.
- Food and Nutrition related term topics/themes.
- Practical student involvement in real contexts.
- Taking a common sense approach. (3)
- Having key people attend HEHA food and nutrition workshops. (2)
- Keeping all involved informed.

### **Impact on the food choices children are making**

In the school context:

- Children seem to have a positive attitude towards healthy eating. (3)
- Children ask questions about the nutritional value of foods.
- Children have a better understanding of what is “good” food and what is not. (4)
- The content of children’s lunch boxes has improved. (2)
- Children’s knowledge is not necessarily reflected in the content of their lunch boxes.
- Children have difficulty choosing healthy options when food is mixed e.g. pizzas.

- Early days yet. (6)
- It's hard to tell when the school is making many of the choices for pupils e.g. what takeaway food is available etc. (3)
- Have seen a huge shift in the content of lunch boxes.
- Children are reading ingredient labels and can make more informed choices.
- Children's pride in showing healthy food (in recyclable wrappers!) at food breaks.
- Better choice of food being requested for hot lunches.
- Children love the new food options – no complaints.
- More fruit seen at school. (2)
- WAVE student days have made a positive impact.
- Children making excellent choices at school.
- Children speak the language of “healthy choices”.
- Discussion at lunchtime often revolves around what's in each others lunch boxes.

In contexts other than school:

- No response/not sure. (15)
- Children informing parents about healthy options.
- Parents talk about the impact of school initiatives at home.
- Some children choosing Subway over other fast foods outside school.
- Parents and wider community are keen to order our healthy lunches too!

### **Evidence**

- None (6)
- Informal observations. (9)
- Survey data.
- Anecdotal comments from children. (2)
- Evaluations completed by pupils following health units.
- Parent/student/staff/wider community feedback. (2)
- Huge shift in school tone and eating practices – especially at the Yr 7/8 level.
- We inspect lunch boxes and talk about choices each day. Praise is given for having healthy food.
- Some children bringing fruit platters for class treats instead of chips etc.

### **Other comments**

- I don't see there being any significant new programmes or initiatives, rather change has been coming for some time – evolving with time/media awareness etc.
- Life Education Trust is also a helpful promoter of making good choices. We also ensure that our Health programme is current and reflects the new NAG. Our BOT believes in everything in moderation.
- Not yet gathered data (surveys etc.).
- We are slowly working towards improving the choices available. Parent education is the key.
- Very much early days and tentative first steps. We're taking a common sense approach.
- I believe in moderation. We are not going to be food police, but we are willing to do our bit.
- The school impact/influence is limited by parent/pupil decision. No school can make students choose.

## **Extract from June 2008 ERO report on “Schools’ Progress Towards Meeting National Administration Guideline (NAG) 5 on Food and Nutrition”.**

The review officer comments on the response sheets identified common themes in terms of specific actions that schools had taken or were planning to take. These included:

- improving the school lunch menu, removing unhealthy food items and/or replacing these with healthier options;
- identifying the health status of foods through “heart ticks” or a similar marking system;
- engaging students in practical activities related to healthy eating (such as growing fruit and vegetables, or forming a student committee to implement healthy eating in school);
- consulting or surveying parents, or providing them with guidelines, about healthy eating;
- working with parents, the community and/or external agencies, such as Public Health promoters, to develop a healthy eating policy; and
- taking part in national initiatives such as Fruit in Schools or Enviro Schools.

### **Children’s attitudes to, and thoughts about, Healthy Living and Food and Nutrition**

This one ended up being put in the “Too Hard” basket.

### **How are other schools using the Fruit in Schools programme to meet the new NAG 5 requirements?**

- Increased PD in the food and nutrition area.
- Accessing expertise through the FIS programme.
- Accessing funding for school initiatives in the food and nutrition area.
- Accessing resources in the food and nutrition area.

These schools were included in the survey.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR SCHOOL**

- Continue with current initiatives.
- With the support of our school community, implement selected initiatives used by other schools.
- Build on the anticipated success of our current initiatives.
- Take advantage of opportunities to inform/educate parents.
- Use the BES Cycle of Inquiry model to help ensure effective and relevant learning when implementing initiatives.
- The whole school community needs to be involved on an ongoing basis if change is to be sustained.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

- Almost all schools have taken some form of action to meet the new NAG requirements.
- The common themes match the ERO findings as above.
- We are fortunate in South Canterbury in having a pro-active District Health Board that through HEHA, WAVE and Fruit in Schools has made a positive impact in the Food and Nutrition area (and other areas).
- In consultation (in most cases) with their school community, schools have made or are making changes that make healthy choices easier for pupils to make within the school environment.
- Most are building on already good practices.
- Using a wide range of resources and strategies, schools are endeavouring to educate parents as well as pupils.

- What schools are doing is made easier/more effective by media focus in this area and by various forms of government support.
- The effectiveness of what we are achieving in this area is difficult to establish because of the often limited real choice that pupils have i.e. choices often made by the school (as a result of consultation) or by parents. A wide range of other factors also impact on their decision making e.g. advertising, home finances, peer pressure.
- Our role is to establish an environment that encourages and supports healthy choices and develop teaching and learning programmes that provide our pupils with the knowledge and skills which they can use to help them in their decision making and consequent actions.
- “Fruit in Schools” schools have had a distinct advantage in their efforts to bring about change.