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Alberta School Nutrition Programs Study



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Alberta School Nutrition Programs Study

This study is based on several activities carried out with the support of the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS). Representatives from Alberta Education assisted in developing an invitational survey that was shared with Alberta school authorities. Following the survey, respondents were invited to participate in a focus group or individual interviews to explore more deeply what school authorities do in managing school nutrition programs. A scan of relevant literature is also provided. The findings are provided along with discussion of implications for system education leaders.

Methodology

The study comprised a brief literature scan of Canadian jurisdictions and a survey of Alberta school authority leaders responsible for the oversight of school-based nutrition programs. The study provides a basis for the development of a CASS Learning Lab, which is designed to facilitate active learning, collaboration, and practical application of knowledge based upon recent research and school authority practices. Learning Labs integrate case studies and reflective tools to support leadership development in this area.

It was determined that a survey approach would be timely so that system education leaders would have current information available as they examine their school nutrition programs. Federal government funding for school nutrition programs was announced in 2024 and was in addition to provincial funding to support such programs. School authority leaders are looking for relevant information and practices as they engaged in decisions about school nutrition programs.

For the literature scan, the following criteria were used to identify relevant articles:

- peer-reviewed research specifically on school nutrition programs
- primarily Canadian-based literature
- findings on student outcomes (nutrition, health, and/or achievement)
- addressing Indigenous nutrition programming needs
- identification of successes and barriers to nutrition programming

An invitation to participate in an online survey was extended to all members of CASS through the weekly *CASS Connects* e-newsletter. A focus group and related interviews (for participants who were not able to attend the focus group) were conducted. The focus group and interview questions were identical and semi-structured, allowing for participants to go into greater detail in some areas. This format also allowed for clarifying questions to be asked of the participants. Here, the interview and focus group results are combined and all referred to as “the focus group.”

The literature scan is presented first, and the survey provided a combination of descriptive statistics and qualitative responses to open-ended questions (see Appendix A). The focus group data were qualitative and analyzed and coded for emerging themes (see Appendix B).

Literature Scan

Overview

The topic of school nutrition programs is expansive, including opinion and research. This study focused on research-based analysis of nutrition quality, comprehensive school implementation, and impact on student health and learning. The primary purpose of Canadian school nutrition programs is to improve student health outcomes (Badyal & Moffat, 2025; Carducci et al., 2025; Everitt et al., 2022; Florence et al., 2008; Godin et al., 2017; Russell et al., 2007). Effective school nutrition programs can also positively impact student learning (Florence et al., 2008; Jollimore & Fisher, 2016; Murray et al., 2007). Canadian school nutrition programs have at their core the desire to improve student health and learning outcomes. However, as there is no single national program with federal oversight, approaches to school nutrition programs are variable (Carducci et al., 2025), depending on provincial standards and guidelines (Carducci et al., 2025; Everitt et al., 2022; Government of Alberta, 2012, 2025; Mullally et al., 2010).

For nutrition choices, the Canadian food guide is commonly used in schools (Badyal & Moffat, 2025; Carducci et al., 2025; Gates et al., 2013; Gillies, Alexander Research Committee, et al., 2020; Henry et al., 2003). Provincial and regional nutrition guidelines build upon or refer to the national guidelines, as well (Carducci et al., 2025; Gillies, Blanchet, et al., 2020; Government of Alberta, 2012; Mullally et al., 2010). Overall, nutrition programs focus on providing high-nutrient food choices to students (Carducci et al., 2025; Florence et al., 2008; Mullally et al., 2010; Vine et al., 2020) and reducing or eliminating low-nutrient food choices.

In most school nutrition programs, access is universal; that is, all students can get nutritious snacks or meals (Badyal & Moffat, 2025; Everitt et al., 2022; Godin et al., 2017; Mullally et al., 2010). School authorities attempting to provide nutrition only to those who need it most can be met with resistance, from parents, students themselves, or policy misinterpretation by those overseeing the programs (Carducci et al., 2025; Gillies, Alexander Research Committee, et al., 2020; Russell et al., 2007; Vine et al., 2020, 2021). School authorities not only examine their own nutrition programs, but also need to address vending machines, which are most often found in secondary schools. Addressing nutritional guideline compliance in vending machines is

challenging (Carducci et al., 2025) and requires regulation with accountability measures in place.

The literature points to successful school nutrition programs that encompass a comprehensive set of practices in schools. Comprehensive practices include not only nutritious food options, but also accompanying health education and physical activity (Carducci et al., 2025; Everitt et al., 2022; Gates et al., 2013; Gillies, Alexander Research Committee, et al., 2020; Russell et al., 2007). School authorities that intentionally included nutritional information in health classes and regular physical activity were more likely to achieve positive outcomes such as reduced low-nutrient density food intake, increased intake of high-nutrient foods, and, in some cases, reduced weight or waist circumference (Carducci et al., 2025; Everitt et al., 2022; Gates et al., 2013; Mullally et al., 2010). Florence et al. (2008) indicated that a decreased diet quality negatively impacted student academic performance. In summary, school nutrition programs have generally been found to have a positive impact for students in terms of better food choices, overall health, and, in some cases, improved academic performance.

Funding for school nutrition programs varies across Canada (Carducci et al., 2025; Gillies, Blanchet, et al., 2020). Each province and territory is responsible for the provision of education in their respective jurisdictions, so funding for school nutrition programs may come from a provincial ministry of education. Other funding sources include national nutrition programs (e.g., Breakfast Club of Canada); local food banks, grocery stores, or restaurants; and individual and corporate donations (Carducci et al., 2025; Gates et al., 2013; Gillies, Blanchet, et al., 2020; Murray et al., 2007). In 2024, the federal government provided additional funding to ministries of education across Canada to support school nutrition programs through the National School Food Program (Government of Canada, 2024). As a result, there is considerable variation among school nutrition programs across Canada.

Another significant aspect of school nutrition programs is that of appropriate and safe handling of food. Food handling oversight is carried out by provincial and territorial governments, and the safe handling of food in school-based programs is often prescribed by provincial ministries of education, which are informed by provincial health and safety regulations (Godin et al., 2017; Government of Alberta, 2012; Russell et al., 2007). The provision of appropriate food safety and handling training for staff responsible for school nutrition programs is an essential component of such programs.

School nutrition program policies and regulations from provincial, municipal, and local school authorities are essential for consistent program delivery. The Canadian government, in its National School Food Policy (Government of Canada, 2024), outlined guiding principles for school nutrition programs. This framework states the vision “that all children and youth in Canada have access to nutritious food at school, in an inclusive, non-stigmatizing environment that fosters healthy practices, while strengthening connections with local food systems, the environment and culture” (Government of Canada, 2024, Vision section).

Although policy and regulation are necessary to guide actions at the school level, adherence to such policies can be variable (Carducci et al., 2025), which may not be negative but rather adaptive to unique local needs (e.g., using wild meat rather than domesticated meat to match local diets).

Challenges Implementing and Operating School Nutrition Programs

The literature identified many significant challenges implementing and operating school nutrition programs, ranging from resource limitations to social and cultural barriers. The most prominent challenges identified in the sources are listed in Table 1.

Table 1
Challenges in School Nutrition Programs

Challenges	Sources
Resource and financial constraints <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • funding instability • staff and volunteer capacity • time barriers (e.g., short lunch periods, lack of time for food preparation) 	Badyal & Moffat, 2025 Carducci et al., 2025 Godin et al., 2017 Henry et al., 2003 Jollimore & Fisher, 2016 Laitsch, 2009 Russell et al., 2007
Social and cultural barriers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stigma and social exclusion • cultural misalignment (e.g., traditional, Indigenous foods, halal foods) • student choices and preferences (e.g., easy access to “junk food,” unfamiliarity with foods provided) 	Gillies, Alexander Research Committee, et al., 2020 Jollimore & Fisher, 2016 Mullally et al., 2010 Vine et al., 2020
Communication gaps <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • communication of purpose to parents • communication issues within school community 	Gillies, Alexander Research Committee, et al., 2020 Gillies, Blanchet, et al., 2020
Infrastructure and environmental hurdles <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • food preparation and storage equipment • proximity to competitive foods • quality food availability at reasonable cost 	Badyal & Moffat, 2025 Carducci et al., 2025 Everitt et al., 2022 Gillies, Alexander Research Committee, et al., 2020 Godin et al., 2017 Government of Alberta, 2012 Henry et al., 2003 Russell et al., 2007
Policy and administrative issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • local administrative support 	Gillies, Blanchet, et al., 2020 Godin et al., 2017

- understanding and consistent implementation of policies and procedures
 - lack of federal or provincial leadership
-

Vine et al., 2021

Findings From Survey and Focus Group

The survey invitation asked that one survey per school authority be submitted, and 16 school authorities responded. Because CASS membership includes system education leaders with central office responsibilities, a limitation of this survey was that it did not include school-based leaders or staff.

Of the 16 survey respondents, eight school authorities indicated their interest in participating in a focus group to give more detail and depth to the survey responses. Seven individuals participated in the focus group, and two individuals participated in interviews, as their schedules prevented them from attending the focus group. These focus group and interview participants represented eight school authorities.

Survey and Focus Group: Descriptive Information

The invitational survey was presented in the weekly *CASS Connects* email to all CASS members. A total of 16 survey responses representing 16 school authorities were received and analyzed. Survey participants came from all CASS zones. This representation was important so that views from school authorities across Alberta are presented.

Respondents were also invited to participate in a follow-up focus group to share more detailed information about how they manage their nutrition programs. The focus group meeting was transcribed, and content was analyzed to establish emerging themes and categories (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, Curtain, 2026).

Policies and Procedures

Survey respondents were asked to identify whether they had policies or procedures for school nutrition programs in place. Most (69%) respondents had relevant policies or procedures. Almost one third of the respondents indicated that they had no relevant policies or procedures (Figure 1). Five of the survey respondents provided links to their nutrition procedures or regulations. Of the policies and procedures that were shared, the stated purposes focused on fostering student health, enhancing learning potential,

and establishing lifelong healthy habits.

The focus group participants demonstrated that they had variable practices regarding written policies, regulations, or procedures about nutrition programs. For several participants, minimum standards for food safety and preparation were codified. Such standards allowed the greatest flexibility to local school leaders to provide food to students, with the focus being on guidelines for healthy choices rather than highly prescriptive procedures. On the other hand, one of the participants indicated that comprehensive procedures provided school leaders with clear direction and defined parameters for providing food to students. Whether school authorities had general or highly detailed administrative procedures, all required that the food be prepared and handled safely, and that the food choices be nutritious, following federally and provincially established school nutrition guidelines.

Figure 1

School Nutrition Policies and Procedures in Place (N = 16)

7. Does your school authority have student nutrition policies and/or procedures in place?



School Nutrition Program Providers

Survey respondents were asked to identify nutrition providers and supporters from a list of possible food suppliers or funders. Figure 2 shows that local corporate donations were the most common support of nutrition programs. This support was followed closely by local grocery stores as a common source of food. Individual funders and local food banks were the next commonly listed supporters of school nutrition programs. For 6 of the 16 respondents (37.5%), local restaurants provided food for the nutrition program. For the “Other” category, survey respondents indicated supportive organizations such as Breakfast Clubs of Canada, President’s Choice Children’s

Charity, Powerful Kids, Mustard Seed, Salvation Army, Hope Mission, and local not-for-profit organizations. Survey respondents adopted national, provincial, and local food providers and supporters.

Further, when asked about formal contracts they had with school food providers or supporters, survey respondents identified the following organizations: Breakfast Clubs of Canada, local Lions Clubs, and local Meals on Wheels. Other organizations were identified, specific to local towns and cities. Of interest, survey respondents indicated several organizations with which they had informal arrangements supporting school nutrition programs: local parent fundraising societies, COBS Bread, local grocery stores and restaurants, local food banks, and not-for-profit charitable organizations. Individual and corporate donations were also mentioned in relation to informal agreements with school authorities. System education leaders worked with various organizations in formal and informal ways.

Figure 2

Identified Local Food Providers and Supporters (N = 16)

11. Identify the food providers and nutrition program supporters for the school authority nutrition programs. Check all that apply.



System education leaders participating in the focus group described varied approaches to securing and maintaining food providers and supporters. Most school authorities had central office contacts for grocery stores, restaurants, or funders to speak to about providing support. The focus group participants provided centralized service to schools in brokering relationships that provided suitable food to schools. However, several of the school divisions allowed for individual school leadership to work with nutrition supporters in their neighbourhoods or communities, as long as food safety requirements were met. One participant summed up the nature of

relationships between central office, schools and nutrition providers in this way:

There would be a combination of central and office and school for that. Sometimes it's some of our schools, ... when they're building relationships with their parents, they find out that parent owns a company and wants to donate something to the school. ... Sometimes ... we will have restaurants reach out to central office, and they know that ... we're looking for, ... schools that have hot lunch programs, [which] run through their parent councils. So I think it's really a combination of ... both central and school. ... And I guess it is just about relationships and maintaining those relationships that we have with our food vendors, and that, I would say, is more at the school level. (Focus group participant)

Given that some school authorities have schools in rural towns and communities, the challenge of providing centralized support becomes difficult. Central office officials communicate the regulatory requirements for food preparation and delivery, and school personnel oversee the safe distribution of food.

Formal and Informal School Nutrition Program Agreements

Survey respondents were asked to identify the providers with whom they had formal and informal agreements. Almost half of the respondents indicated that they had no formal contracts or agreements with food providers. Five of 13 respondents indicated that they had formal contracts with Breakfast Club of Canada. Three of the respondents indicated that they had formal agreements with local food providing organizations.

School authorities had informal agreements with nutrition providers and local food banks, along with business and corporate donations most commonly supported school nutrition programs. This support was followed closely by that from local grocery stores. Individual funders also provided some support, but to a lesser degree. Overall, informal school nutrition agreements were common in school authorities and were most often tied to the local context of the local community. For example, a small-town business donation may support a single school in that community.

Focus group participants reiterated that aside from general regulatory and financial oversight, school leadership was responsible for the safe

handling and distribution of food. In addition, any relationships with local or neighbourhood food vendors could be explored and developed. Local school nutrition support was contextual and, in some cases, not permanent, depending upon the relationships between nutrition providers and school leadership.

Primary Oversight and Day-to-Day Operations of School Nutrition Programs

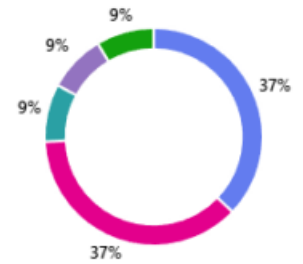
Survey respondents were asked to identify how primary oversight of the school nutrition programs was managed. Figure 3 shows that 13/16 respondents (37%) indicated that primary oversight was managed centrally and that another 37% of respondents indicated that primary oversight was managed by school-based administrators. In some instances, oversight was managed by teachers given this responsibility, or by educational assistants (both at 9%). The results show that 100% of respondents were assigned to oversight of nutrition programs. Focus group participants clarified by indicating that oversight of nutrition programs was managed through specific division of labour. Central office administrators managed oversight of school authority funding and provincial ministry reporting. They also managed the purchase of some food and equipment such as refrigerators and freezers because centralized purchasing power was greater than that of schools alone. School-based administrators were responsible for managing school nutrition program assigned funds and for ensuring that appropriate staffing was in place to ensure the day-to-day operations of the program. School-based administrators ensured that food safety practices were in place and that the staff members responsible for the day-to-day operations were provided the necessary information or professional development to carry out their responsibilities.

Figure 3

Primary Oversight of School Nutrition Programs (N = 16)

16. Who has primary responsibility for the **oversight** of nutrition programs in your school authority? Identify all that apply.

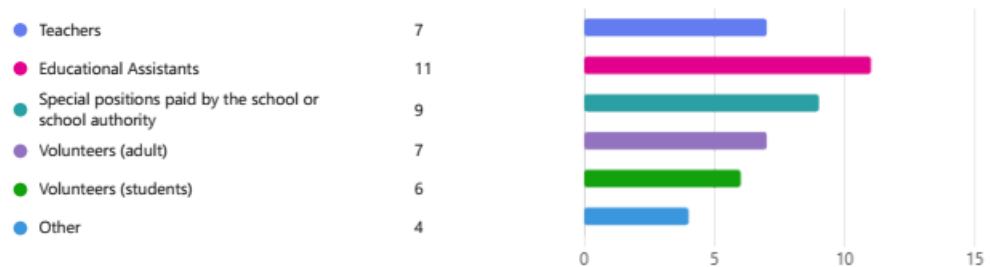
● Central office based administrator/coordinator	13
● School-based administrator - principal/ assistant or vice principal/ coordinator	13
● School-based teacher leader	3
● School-based volunteer	3
● Other	3



Survey respondents indicated that the day-to-day operations of school nutrition programs were typically assigned to educational assistants (Figure 4). Respondents also indicated that in some instances, people were paid for their work in relation to the daily operations of the nutrition program. Some respondents relied on teachers to take on the role of daily operations, and in some instances, volunteers took on that role. It was not clear whether volunteers were from the school staff or external to the school.

Figure 4
Day-to-Day Operations of School Nutrition Programs (N = 16)

18. Who carries out the day to day operations of providing snacks and/or meals to students? Check all that apply.



Focus group participants clarified that the day-to-day operational decisions were made by school leaders, which included the assignment of school staff or volunteers to take part in the nutrition program. Participants felt that school leaders were in the best position to make decisions at the local level.

Beneficiaries of School Nutrition Programs

Survey participants were asked to clarify to whom the nutrition programs were provided. The findings showed that 75% of respondents provided nutrition to all students. This left 25% of the respondents indicating that they provided nutrition to selected students. Of note, the number of responses were 20 in this question, indicating that 4 school authorities have both universal availability of food for all students in a classroom or school and a more targeted, selected program for others.

To address the issue of stigma or social exclusion of students and families identified as requiring food, respondents were asked directly how this was approached in their school authorities. The following tactics were used to reduce stigma:

- “grab and go” lunches and snacks at multiple locations in the school, which were available to anyone
- food as snacks or lunches provided universally in schools, with minimal monitoring by staff

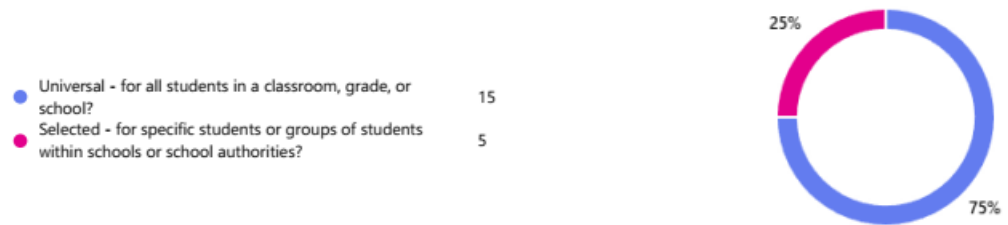
- staff were trained in such a way as to observe and offer food to avoid stigma [no specific identification of the training was provided]
- communication to school community, including parents outlining the purpose of the program as support to all students

In some instances, food was provided directly and discreetly to students in their backpacks or in lunch bags.

Figure 5

To Whom Are School Nutrition Programs Provided? (N = 16)

24. For whom are school nutrition programs provided?



Focus group participants provided an explanation for the “universal versus selected” nutrition programming. All focus group participants indicated that their nutrition programs were available to all, and therefore universal to a school or classroom. No participants indicated that they provided nutrition programming for their entire school authority population. A small number of participants indicated that they provided food hampers or grocery store certificates to families identified as requiring extra assistance. This was done privately to avoid stigmatizing families who presented with nutrition needs. School populations were often identified for nutrition programs if they met criteria showing that the general population of the neighbourhood was in need. This identification was achieved through an “equity index” or information related to family income in a specific postal code or section of a city, town, or school authority. Each school authority had its own way of identifying whether schools received support (funding, equipment) for nutrition programs.

Challenges and Opportunities

Survey respondents and focus participants indicated strong agreement about what challenges they faced in providing school nutrition programs. Generally, the greatest challenge was that of funding such programs. The need to address perceived issues of food insecurity and more universal availability of quality food options through increased funding were consistently raised. Increases in funding were also required to address increasing costs of food,

equipment, and staff to manage nutrition programming.

Another consistent challenge was that of adequately staffing nutrition programs. School leaders were challenged to address educational needs and issues while at the same time ensuring that nutrition programs were operating appropriately. Staff and volunteer turnover for day-to-day operations was identified as a challenge. This resulted in increased food handling training costs, not to mention the disruption to daily operations of such programs.

The nature of partnerships with local food providers, whether restaurants, grocery stores, or food banks, provided challenges. Although schools rely on such partnerships, food providers are also managing their own stresses and demands resulting in changes to formal and informal partnership arrangements. In one case, a food bank had provided frozen lunches for students, and due to changes in demand, the food bank was only able to provide snacks such as granola bars. These challenges were often outside of the control of the schools and school authorities.

In addition to challenges, survey respondents and focus group participants provided opportunities and unique actions taken by school authorities to provide nutrition programs. According to participants, preparing food in-house rather than relying on outside vendors was identified positively because it allowed more students to be served at a lower cost, making the program more accessible and sustainable within existing budgets. Some respondents indicated that the use of school-based gardens provided both educational and nutritional opportunities for students. Another successful action cited was incorporating students themselves in food preparation through curricular programs, such as home economics or food preparation programs, which both reduced costs and provided students with valuable experience. Flexibility and local decision-making were consistently described as important, with central offices disseminating funds and providing basic guidance but letting schools determine how to use resources, depending on what best fit students' needs.

Finally, both survey respondents and focus group participants indicated that developing and maintaining partnerships was important to nutrition program success. Each group indicated the challenges with maintaining and enhancing partnerships, as it was time intensive. However, each group indicated that this was an important way to address ongoing challenges with providing a quality nutrition program. Some of the responses clearly stated that the school authority required a nutrition team or a school-

based nutrition coordinator who had some responsibility for maintaining or enhancing partnerships.

Implications for System Education Leaders

This study provided important considerations for school authority leaders as they examine ways of supporting school nutrition programs. Table 2 summarizes these considerations.

Table 2
School Nutrition Program Considerations for School Authority Leaders

Issue	Consideration	Implication for leaders
Funding	Explore additional funding sources	Dedicate a team or staff member to developing additional funding sources or partnerships
	Access to limited funding sources	Narrow the focus of where funds are applied
Staffing	Dedicate paid staff for school-based nutrition programs	Apply more funding to staff
	Establish a school authority nutrition team/coordinator	Use school authority monitoring, support, and accountability to guide nutrition program decisions
Cost	Reduce equipment costs	Purchase equipment in bulk with other school authorities
	Reduce food costs	Establish or invest in food preparations programs at secondary schools to provide nutritious snacks or lunches to students in other schools
Policy/ procedures	Establish or update policies or procedures regarding nutrition programs	Access locally grown food Ensure consistent implementation of school nutrition polices and

regulations for the benefit of students who need such programs

Each consideration and implication for system education leader has embedded within it a trade-off to current nutrition programs operating in school authorities. Leaders must make difficult decisions regarding how resources (human, financial) are applied to achieve the goal of providing school nutrition programs. Although federal school food program funding has been announced and shared with school authorities in the 2025 school year, focus group participants indicated that nutrition programs require even more support. All funding is welcomed, but school nutrition program needs are greater than what is available.

Conclusion

This study provides current information regarding school nutrition programs in Alberta. The purpose of school nutrition programs appears to have shifted from concern over childhood obesity and low-nutrient food choices to greater concern for food security and high-nutrient food choices available in schools. The pressure on system education and school-based leaders to leverage nutrition funding for the greatest number of students is considerable. Student nutrition has become an educational issue, and educators work hard at partnering with local grocery stores, restaurants, food banks, and other providers and supporters. They reach out to government ministries to access nutrition expertise and possible funding. Essentially, their goal is to utilize all available resources and knowledge to assist students in need of nutritional support.

The unique features of school authorities impact the planning and ultimate decisions that are made in relation to nutrition programs. Local autonomy and decision making was reflected in the survey and focus group findings. Local autonomy regarding nutrition programs results in unique solutions suited to the neighbourhood, community, and culture. The corresponding challenge is that school authorities are left to their own to devise nutrition programs. The fundamental requirements for food preparation and handling are embedded in policy or administrative regulations to ensure student safety. School authorities decide upon how food is distributed and to whom. School authorities are willing to share their practices, and local school authority autonomy is prioritized over a more centralized (provincial) approach to nutrition programs.

Providing students with nutritional food options is a reality in many schools and across Alberta in school authorities. The priorities, established by the immediate need of hungry students and the funding and accountability provided by Alberta Education, are being addressed in all school authorities. How school nutrition program priorities are addressed is different between and among school authorities, as local decision making is paramount. As shown in this study, the commitment to providing quality nutrition programs in schools is very high. The cost of trade-offs to make such programs work is also high, requiring tough decision making and strong leadership.

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Appendix A: Survey Questions

College of Alberta School Superintendents - Nutrition Program Survey 2025

* Required

Purpose

This survey is commissioned by the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS). It is intended to complement data collected by Alberta Education related to current student nutrition programs in Alberta schools. This survey is part of a larger project intended to collect and share information regarding promising practices related to school nutrition programming. The completion of this survey will be of great assistance in compiling and sharing this important information.

1. Please indicate whether your school authority has a student nutrition program. *

Yes

No

Introduction

School nutrition programs are an important way in which school authorities provide for optimum learning for all students. This survey has been sent to all publicly funded school authorities in Alberta. The data will be compiled and common themes and promising practices will be shared through a report posted on the CASS website in early 2026. The completed report will lead to a series of webinars highlighting CASS school authority promising practices and will be presented during the Spring of 2026. School authorities will not be identified in the report, and any identifiable features will be anonymized.

It is requested that only **ONE** survey be completed for each school authority. The survey deadline is Sept. 24, 2025

It will be necessary to collate data related to the school authority's total student population and the number of students who participate in school nutrition programs. Links to relevant policies are requested, as are reflections on strengths and challenges facing school nutrition programs in the school authority. It is also requested that current partnerships with food or funding providers be identified. Once relevant information is collected, the survey should take between 20 and 40 minutes to complete. Depending on the complexity of the school authority's nutrition program, the collection of relevant, aggregated data may take longer to collect.

Please contact Dr. Edgar Schmidt (edgar.schmidt@cass.ab.ca) if you have any questions or concerns about this survey.

Questions

Please complete the following questions.

2. What is the name of your school authority?

3. What is the most recent total number of students in your school authority? *

4. Approximately, how many students participate in school nutrition programs in your school authority? *

5. In which CASS Zone is your school authority located? *

- 1
- 2&3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- Other

6. If "Other" has been selected, please identify where your school authority is located.

Definitions

For this survey, a school nutrition program is a free or highly subsidized breakfast, lunch, or snack program provided for students during the school day. This survey does NOT include snacks or meals associated with special events or fund raising purposes.

7. Does your school authority have student nutrition policies and/or procedures in place? *

Yes

No

8. If "Yes", please include links to and/or titles of relevant policies and procedures.

9. How were these policies or procedures developed? Briefly describe the process and how the policies and procedures were informed (i.e. input from students, parents, and/or staff..).

10. How often are nutrition policies or procedures reviewed or revised?

11. Identify the food providers and nutrition program supporters for the school authority nutrition programs. Check all that apply.

Local food Bank

Local grocery stores

Local restaurants

Individual funders that support nutrition programs

Local corporate donations in support of nutrition programs

Others (partners or providers that have not been identified)

12. If "Other" was chosen in Question (Q) 10, please list the partners or providers.

13. From Q.11, for which of the nutrition program providers or partners does the school authority have a **formal contract**?

14. From Q.11, for which of the nutrition program providers or partners does the school authority have an **informal arrangement**?

15. What challenges does your school authority face in sustaining nutrition program partnerships?

16. Who has primary responsibility for the **oversight** of nutrition programs in your school authority? Identify all that apply.

- Central office based administrator/coordinator
- School-based administrator - principal/ assistant or vice principal/ coordinator
- School-based teacher leader
- School-based volunteer
- Other

17. If "Other" was indicated in Q. 16, please indicate who is given oversight or responsibility.

18. Who carries out the day to day operations of providing snacks and/or meals to students? Check all that apply.

- Teachers
- Educational Assistants
- Special positions paid by the school or school authority
- Volunteers (adult)
- Volunteers (students)
- Other

19. If "Other" was chosen in Q.18, please indicate who carries out the day to day operations of providing snacks and/or meals to students?

20. What specific training is provided to the identified people who carry out the day to day operations?

21. How does your school authority maintain the partnerships with nutrition program food providers as identified in Question 11?

22. How does your school authority develop new partnerships with nutrition program food providers?

23. What unique or innovative features of your school authority's nutrition program should be highlighted? What was the impetus for the innovation?

24. For whom are school nutrition programs provided?

- Universal - for all students in a classroom, grade, or school?
- Selected - for specific students or groups of students within schools or school authorities?

25. If the nutrition program is for **selected** students, what criteria are used to identify the students?

26. How is student participation managed to avoid stigma?

27. How is the nutrition program communicated to the families and the school community and what is shared with them? Please provide a sample message, if possible (from a letter, newsletter or website).

28. I would be willing to participate in a 60 minute focus group (September or October) on this topic to provide further information and context.

- Yes
- No

29. I would be willing to participate in a 60 minute focus group (September or October) on this topic to provide further information and context.

- Yes
- No

30. If "Yes" to Q. 27, please provide your full name and email for follow up.

Thank you for completing this survey!

Thank you for your participation in this survey. The data will be compiled and a report will be shared through the CASS website in early 2026. Following the completed report, a series of webinars will be held identifying promising practices related to nutrition programs in school authorities in the Spring of 2026. Please contact Dr. Edgar Schmidt (edgar.schmidt@cass.ab.ca) if you have any questions about this survey.

This content is neither created nor endorsed by Microsoft. The data you submit will be sent to the form owner.



Appendix B: Focus Group Questions

School Nutrition Program Focus Group Questions – January 6, 2025

Introductions

1. Tell us your name, your current school authority, and the role you play in the authority. AND, what are your responsibilities in relation to school food programs in you authority?

Questions

2. Given that in the School Nutrition Program survey that 69% of respondents said they had policies and procedures in place regarding school nutrition programs, what role do policies and procedures play in the success of school nutrition programs in your school authorities?
3. What responsibilities do school leaders (principals or assistant principals) have for establishing or supporting a school lunch program in the school?
 - a. How do you support the people with day-to-day operational responsibilities for school nutrition programs?
4. How important is it for Central Office leaders to be responsible for school nutrition programs?
5. If nutrition programs are targeted to specific children or families, how is food support provided without attaching stigma to the individuals or the families?
6. How do you track school nutrition programs in you school authority? (Output? Input? By student numbers? OR...)
 - a. What evidence do you use to maintain or expand your school nutrition program?
7. How do you establish, maintain or expand the number of food providers in your school authority?
8. What innovations or actions do you see as critical to your success in providing school nutrition programs in your school authority?
9. What else would you like to say about school nutrition programs that has not been mentioned?

