

Winnipeg School Division Universal School Nutrition Program

Brief for Winnipeg School Division Families and Community Members

This document contains essential information on the new funding to support universal access to food in schools. If you have any questions or concerns or would like this information in an alternative format, please contact your school's administration.

Background

In January 2024, The Manitoba Government committed \$30 million toward enhancing school nutrition in 2024-25. Of that, \$15 million was allocated directly to schools to support in-school meal programming (i.e., breakfast, lunch, and snack) over the 2024-25 school year.

For more details, see the full news release [here](#).

What does “Universal” mean?

This means that nutrition programs in schools are available to all students regardless of need at no cost to students or families. Students will not be asked to provide proof of need to access food funded through this program in any WSD schools.

How often (and what) will students be fed at school?

Every school has unique capacities and limitations. Depending on your school's funding for food, staffing, and equipment, programs will offer some combination of breakfast, lunch, and snack. For example, a school may choose to offer universal snacks, but breakfast only 3 days a week. There is no guarantee that your child's school will offer a lunch program in the first year, but this is an offering we are actively working towards over time.

The province's guidelines state that meals must be prepared in alignment with Canada's Food Guide and Manitoba's Healthy Food in Schools in School Guidelines. This will be regulated and enforced at the divisional level for every school. The province has also recommended schools purchase food from local producers when possible, and incorporate more diverse, culturally important ingredients and dishes.

The bottom line is that each school is unique, and while the nutrition program is in its early days, we are working together with each school individually to build their capacity.

Overtime, programs will become more standardized. To learn more about your school's offering, please contact your school's administration team.

WSD's Approach to Universal Nutrition in Schools

As parents, guardians, and families of students, you intimately understand the impact of hunger on children's academic outcomes and well-being. We recognize this impacts families differently, so our no stigma, barrier-free approach aims to ensure over time every child can access food in schools, regardless of need.

While our main priority for the first year is establishing new and expanded meal programming at schools, over time we will focus in on the following priorities for school nutrition:

- Building internal capacity to support universal programming across all schools
- Representing the diversity of families in WSD through nourishing menus
- Incorporating nutrition education opportunities for students and families
- Improving program offerings through student and family engagement
- Reducing single-use plastics while following robust food safety standards
- Developing a longer-term strategic plan for WSD universal nutrition programming

Please note this is a long-term journey and it will take time to ensure every school can provide nutrition programming that fits their goals. Every WSD school has been asked to add or expand on an existing program for the 2024-25 academic school year.

Thank you for your patience and understanding while we build a program that is both meaningful and sustainable for staff, students and families.

Engaging with Students and Families in School Food

We strongly encourage schools to engage with their students and families on school food programming, whether that be through surveys, student projects or other forms of youth engagement, or consulting with parents and caregivers directly. If you have questions, concerns, or considerations for WSD's nutrition program, please contact your school's administration team.

Will this program replace the Parent Advisory Council (PAC) paid lunch monitoring?

No. While schools have been asked to begin transitioning away from PAC-funded paid lunch monitoring programs as of this year, the universal nutrition program is separately managed. For schools offering universal lunch that still have PAC-funded paid lunch monitoring, grab-n-go meal options must be made available for students who do not participate. This is to ensure that all students benefit from this program, including those who do not or cannot stay at school for lunch.

If you have questions or concerns about paid PAC lunch monitoring at your school, please contact your school's administration.

Increasing Capacity for Enhanced Nutrition Programming

To support increasing schools' capacities, a portion of funding was dedicated to staffing and equipment. In addition, staff will be offered professional development training on menu planning, recipes, and food safety. Allergy protocols and special dietary requirements will be carefully followed and access to foods that adhere to faith-based requirements will be made available to schools. Schools also have access to dietitians for nutritional guidance through the continued support of the Child Nutrition Council of Manitoba.

Conclusion

Our vision for this program is ambitious. While we work toward our longer-term goals, this funding will alleviate a significant amount of burden on administrators, teachers, support staff, food coordinators and families to feed their children. As the loved ones of students in WSD, we know that you are concerned about what your children are eating at school, and we take this responsibility to heart. While we wish we could connect with every single one of you, we encourage you to connect via your school's administration.

We appreciate your patience and understanding as we embark on this ambitious journey together. Let us build something we can be proud of. We look forward to a year of deep learning with you.