

# NSW Healthy School Canteen Strategy Evaluation Summary Report



## The role of the school canteen

Approximately 2500 schools in NSW provide a canteen service making school canteens one of the major take away food markets in the State.

The school canteen has the potential to impact on food choices made at school, at home and in the broader community.

A healthy canteen sends a strong message about the value and importance of healthy food, supports classroom teaching and educates the school community.

Nourishing food can also help students concentrate more effectively in class.

## Background to the *Fresh Tastes @ School* Strategy

In 2002, the NSW Government convened the NSW Childhood Obesity Summit in response to concerns about increasing levels of overweight and obesity in children and young people. Delegates at the Summit passed two resolutions calling for stronger measures to ensure that food and drinks available in school canteens are healthy. Following the Summit, the NSW Government launched a comprehensive action plan, *Prevention of Obesity in Children and Young People: NSW Government Action Plan 2003-2007*. The NSW Healthy School Canteen Strategy, branded as the *Fresh Tastes @ School* Strategy, is a key initiative within this Plan.

The Strategy heralds a move beyond guidelines to a government-endorsed approach to the types of foods and drinks that can be sold in NSW government school canteens. It clearly defines, through a set of nutrient criteria, foods and drinks that should be sold on no more than two designated occasions per term. These are foods that contain minimal nutritional value and contribute excess levels of saturated fat, kilojoules, added sugar or salt (or a combination of these). The Catholic Education Commission and Association of Independent Schools both endorsed the Strategy to encourage and facilitate implementation in Non-Government schools.

A *Canteen Menu Planner* was developed to assist schools to provide healthy menus. The model features a colourful food spectrum consisting of three broad categories; RED ("occasional", limit sale to no more than twice a term), AMBER (select carefully), and GREEN (fill the menu).



NSW HEALTH



**“NSW is leading the nation with its strong approach to this issue. While most Australian states have continued with guidelines on the types of foods that should be sold in school canteens, NSW is the first to adopt a Government-mandated approach”. Minister for Health, John Hatzistergos**

### Providing support and resources to schools

A key objective of the Strategy was to provide schools with clear and timely information and practical support materials to enable them to implement the requirements of the Strategy.

The *Canteen Menu Planning Guide*, was the first resource package sent to all NSW schools in May 2004. Both the occasional food criteria and the *Canteen Menu Planner* formed the basis of this resource.

A fully scripted PowerPoint presentation was included on a CD-ROM located in the back of the Guide to assist schools to implement the Strategy within their school community.

The second resource, the *Fresh Tastes Tool Kit*, was sent to all schools in October 2004. The *Tool Kit* is a ‘how to’ guide designed to provide schools with user-friendly tools to help them plan, promote, manage, implement and review a *Fresh Tastes* canteen. The accompanying CD-ROM contains a range of templates that can be tailored to meet the needs of individual schools.

#### For copies of the resources visit:

<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/obesity/adult/canteens/resources.html>  
<http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/studentssupport/studentwellbeing/schoolcanteen/index.php>

### Communication strategies

Another key objective was to communicate effectively to all key stakeholders. To this end, four editions of the *Fresh Tastes* newsletter were produced and disseminated to all schools and stakeholder groups clarifying issues related

to the Strategy, informing of new resources and showcasing healthy school canteen case studies.

Other communication strategies have included memos to school Principals, food industry briefings, articles in newsletters of other organisations, presentations at conferences and seminars and posting of all relevant information on Health and Education sector web sites.

### Training

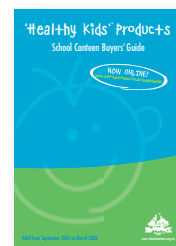
In March 2004, the *Fresh Tastes* project team ran seven train the trainer sessions across NSW for health and education professionals working with schools/school canteens. The two-hour sessions aimed to increase the capacity and confidence of participants to deliver and promote accurate and consistent information about the Strategy.

A six hour *Fresh Tastes* course was also developed for canteen managers and staff and is currently being offered at many TAFE colleges across NSW. The course provides canteen staff with an opportunity to gain the practical ‘hands-on’ skills and knowledge needed to successfully implement a *Fresh Tastes* canteen.

### NSW School Canteen Association (NSWSCA)

The not for profit NSWSCA, is supported by the NSW Health Department and is a key partner in the *Fresh Tastes @ School* Strategy.

The NSWSCA has increased its capacity to support the Strategy through focussing on the following key areas; revising the Association’s nutrient criteria, improving the NSWSCA web site and *School Canteen Buyers’ Guide* and providing a wider range of fact sheets and other support services.





## Evaluation

A comprehensive Evaluation Framework was developed in order to assess the implementation, quality and impact of the many aspects of the Strategy. The information that follows summarises the findings of two components of this evaluation, namely the Quality/Process Survey and the Short-term Impact Survey.

The Quality/Process Survey was designed to review the quality, acceptance and reach of the support materials and communication methods produced for the Strategy while the Short-term Impact Survey was designed to identify current canteen operations and evaluate the short-term impact of the Strategy. These surveys were completed during Terms 1 and 2, 2005.

The surveys utilised a stratified, randomised sampling frame of all NSW schools (Government, Catholic and Independent) with school canteens. Over five hundred (519) Canteen Managers and school Principals completed the Quality/Process Survey and 513 Canteen Managers from the same schools completed the Short-term Impact Survey. This represents a sample of approximately one in five NSW schools with a school canteen. A CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews) script was used to interview Canteen Managers and Principals had the option of completing their survey via telephone or email. A response rate of 60 percent was achieved for the study overall, which is excellent for this type of survey.

## Results and discussion

### Quality/Process Survey

The Quality/Process Survey established that the reach, utilisation, quality, knowledge, confidence and satisfaction with the two main Strategy resources (*Canteen Menu Planning Guide* and *Fresh Tastes Tool Kit*) amongst schools in NSW was very high. The vast majority of Canteen Managers surveyed had received and read some, if not all of the resource material and reported finding it useful and practical. Canteen Managers reported a clear understanding of the Canteen Menu Planning model (RED, AMBER and GREEN) and confidence in applying it to their own menu planning process.

The utilisation of the electronic Strategy resources (CD-ROMs attached to resources and websites) was not as good. This was expected as these were intended to be used as an adjunct to the written resources and represent a relatively new format of resources for schools.

The reach, utilisation and satisfaction with the *Fresh Tastes* newsletters was also high amongst Principals and Canteen Managers with the vast majority of those who received or saw them finding them useful and providing timely and accurate information.

The NSW School Canteen Association's resources and services also received a very positive evaluation by Canteen Managers with the vast majority utilising the resources provided by the Association and recording high levels of satisfaction with them.

### **98 percent of all Canteen Managers surveyed reported making all or some of the changes required**

#### Short-term Impact Survey

The key finding of the Short-term Impact Survey was that nearly all (98%) of the Canteen Managers surveyed reported that they had made all or some of the changes to meet the requirements of the Strategy. Only 2 percent of Canteen Managers reported that they were not implementing the Strategy or were still planning the changes. This result is excellent and clearly shows that NSW schools are embracing the Strategy and working through the change process to ensure that healthier food is sold in NSW school canteens.

A total of 82 percent of the Canteen Managers who had made some or all of the changes had limited the sale of all foods and drinks that fit into the RED segment of the *Canteen Menu Planner*. This is a key requirement of the Strategy. A further 10 percent had limited some of the RED foods and only 8 percent had not limited any at this stage. As far as AMBER foods were concerned, 86 percent of Canteen Managers had made sure that these foods and drinks did not dominate the menu and 87 percent reported that they used smaller serving sizes for AMBER products where possible.

In addition to making menu changes, the Strategy encourages the adoption of a range of practices and processes that will help to build ongoing support for the Strategy within the school community and improve canteen operations. These are summarised in Table 1, over, (for a complete list refer to the Canteen Improvement Checklist included in the *Fresh Tastes Tool Kit*).



The results indicate that the majority of schools are taking these practices on board with:

- about two thirds (64%) of schools surveyed having a canteen committee,
- about two thirds (63%) of the schools surveyed having a canteen policy,
- 80 percent reported communicating information about the Strategy to the school community, and
- more than three quarters (78%) having conducted promotions for healthier products.

It also appears that Canteen Managers have very positive attitudes towards the provision of healthier food choices in school canteens. The results indicate that:

- nearly all (99%) Canteen Managers agree that providing and promoting healthy food is a role of the canteen;
- 92 percent agree that the canteen should model the nutrition messages that students have been learning in the classroom;
- 83 percent agree that supporting classroom nutrition education is a role of the school canteen.

There is also evidence that a substantial amount of progress has been made in NSW school canteens in the last 12 months. When the results of a survey of 74 Canteen Managers (completed as part of the NSW School Students' Physical and Nutrition Survey in Terms 1 and 2 of 2004) are compared with the current study it is noted that:

- In 2004 only 45 percent of Canteen Managers had removed products from sale for health reasons (most of these were RED products) compared to the vast majority that had made this change in 2005.
- Less than half (43%) of the Canteen Managers had conducted healthier product promotions in 2004 compared to 78 percent in 2005.
- Just over half (57%) of the Canteen Managers in 2004 believed that supporting classroom nutrition education was a role of the school canteen compared to 83 percent in 2005.

In terms of barriers to implementing the Strategy, more than half (55%) of those Canteen Managers that reported implementing the Strategy had not encountered any barriers in doing so. A small minority reported the following barriers: lack of demand for healthy foods (10%), difficulty accessing suitable products (9%), lack of support from the school community (7%), and notably only 5 percent reporting an actual decrease in profits.

**Table 1: Key success factors to a healthy canteen**

A broad range of school community stakeholders are involved in an active Canteen Committee
A canteen policy has been developed that meets all the Strategy requirements
The school community is involved in the change process
Healthier food choices are well promoted to customers
There is regular communication about the canteen to the school community
Regular review and evaluation of progress takes place.

### Summary

These results demonstrate that the dissemination and uptake of Strategy resources and support materials has been excellent and has provided schools with the knowledge and motivation to make changes in line with the Strategy requirements. The vast majority of school Canteen Managers understand the RED, AMBER GREEN menu-planning tool and have limited the sale of all RED foods.

There is also a widespread move to adopting a range of practices that support the change process and will sustain it in the long term. This includes the establishment of canteen committees, school canteen policies, involvement of the school community and promotion of healthier products. All of these practices are outlined and encouraged in the *Fresh Tastes Tool Kit* with additional support provided by the NSW School Canteen Association.

Another important finding is the shift in attitude with regard to the role of the canteen. The majority of Canteen Managers surveyed agree that the canteen plays an important role within the school in supporting the curriculum and improving the nutritional health of children and young people. This change in attitude is vital to the long-term success of the Strategy.

Only a small number of schools reported experiencing barriers to implementing the changes, most of which related to the supply and demand for healthier products. Very few reported loss of profit as a barrier to change.

NSW schools are to be congratulated on the progress they have made towards improving the quality of food available from their school canteens. The NSW Healthy School Canteen Strategy will continue to be supported to ensure that these changes are sustained and built upon in the future.

**For a full copy of the report go to:**

<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/obesity/adult/canteens/evaluation.html>

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