



Healthy Eating Policy – Lanesboro Community College

Introduction

Food and drink are an essential part of our daily lives. They play a fundamental role in the development of the human being. Making the right choices to support our nutrition requirements satisfies our physiological needs, and also contributes to our mental and emotional development. What we eat and drink is directly related to our state of health.

Adolescence is a time for developing the skills to make informed choices and decisions throughout life. Young people need to be aware of the importance of good nutrition for health in order to optimise their growth, health and developmental potential through their teenage years and beyond. By developing a Healthy Eating Policy that reflects and represents the whole-school community, Lanesboro Community College hopes to contribute to this.

Whilst healthy eating has always been strongly encouraged in Lanesboro Community College, it is now an appropriate time to develop a Healthy Eating Policy for the student population. This policy was formulated by the Healthy Eating Policy Committee in consultation with management, teaching staff, parents and pupils. The policy is applicable to all pupils when on the school grounds.

Rationale: Why is it necessary to devise a policy?

For young people to achieve their full potential, it is essential that they eat healthily as this is a time they develop the building blocks for lifelong health and well-being. Adolescence is a time of physical growth and development – the most rapid since infancy. It requires adequate intake of energy and nutrients. Eating a nourishing breakfast and a healthy school lunch allows children to take full advantage of the education provided for them.

The Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC, 2006) report has shown that many adolescents have poor eating habits. Skipping breakfast and/or lunch is a habit reported by up to 17% of students, while many do not eat good food or drink enough fluid. All this can lessen their concentration levels and make learning more difficult. Research has also shown that the foods eaten at lunchtime can affect behaviour in the classroom during the afternoon: consuming food and consuming food and drink that are high in fats and sugars, especially fizzy drinks, may cause over-activity, resulting in difficult classroom management and poor concentration among students.

Obesity – The Policy Challenges: The Report of the National Task Force on Obesity (2005) highlighted the worrying increase in childhood obesity across Europe. Figures suggest that the number of overweight children in Ireland has trebled over the past decade and may be rising at a rate of 10,000 per year. A further study “Growing up in Ireland” showed that almost 20% of nine year-olds were overweight in 2011 and a further 7% obese. Foods associated with this increase in obesity include energy-dense, micronutrient-poor foods such as packaged sweet and savoury snacks and sugar-sweetened soft drinks.

The NTFO report makes recommendations for the education sector. Two key recommendations provide a strong basis for action by schools:

- Nutrition and physical activity levels of school children should be seen as part of the duty of care of each school, for example in relation to catering for school meals, policy on vending machines, and provision of fresh drinking water.

- All post-primary schools should be encouraged to engage with their student councils and parents' associations in promoting the concept of 'healthy eating and active living'. Young people spend a large part of the day in school where they eat at least one of their main meals.

The home plays the major role in determining healthy eating habits. However, the school, in partnership with parents, can make an important contribution. It is recommended that a whole school approach be taken in developing a Healthy Eating Policy. This creates a strong sense of ownership among students, staff and parents and a commitment to sustain the improvements.

In developing this Healthy Eating Policy, the school will address two key action areas: a) the whole-school context and (b) teaching and learning. This ensures that an action plan to develop a supportive whole-school environment is created and that consistent messages are provided through the curriculum.

Aims of Policy

- To encourage the nutritional and overall well-being of all pupils in the school
- To heighten an awareness of the importance of a balanced diet
- To encourage pupils to make informed and responsible choices around food and nutrition
- To recognise the dietary needs of all pupils and aim to ensure that all pupils' individual and cultural needs are met
 - To support pupils to develop life-long healthy eating practises and a positive attitude towards the topic.
 - To raise and maintain levels of concentration and focus within class due to consumption of healthy food.
 - To monitor and review the schools practise and policy and, if necessary, make amendments to the policy

Action Plan

a) Whole-school context

Lanesboro Community College provides a physical and social environment that encourages healthy eating. It ensures that lessons learned in the classroom are transferred into school life and that healthy-eating messages are consistent throughout the school.

In order to implement a Healthy Eating Policy, consideration must be given to the following:

- Promotion and encouragement of healthy eating by the school community.
- Provision of easily accessible water bottle filling stations on the school premises.
- Removal of opportunities for unhealthy eating choices within the school environment.
- Ensuring fast food, sweets and fizzy drinks are not available to consume on the school premises.
- Provision of healthy food and drink options on school premises e.g. water, fruit, cereal bars.
- An outright ban placed on fizzy drinks, high-caffeine and high sugar drinks within the school grounds.
- An outright ban placed on chewing gum on school grounds.
- Provision made for healthy lunch options served to students.
- Survey of the student's population to ascertain their preferences regarding food choices.
- Consultation with parents through the parents' association.

Healthy Eating Events:

Hosting a Healthy Eating Day/Week offers an ideal opportunity to focus on the importance of healthy eating and nutrition. It should provide a variety of healthy eating activities for students, staff and parents. Healthy Eating Week activities may include:

- Inviting guest speakers into the classroom
- Offering healthy options in the canteen at reduced prices
- Hosting a healthy-eating cookery demonstrations/competition
- Holding art/slogan competitions
- Awards and rewards incorporated into Sports day or wellbeing week.

The activities deemed to be the most beneficial may be repeated at appropriate times throughout the school year and integrated into school life. Involving students and offering them specific roles and responsibilities in promoting and marketing healthy eating may help to influence the wider student body.

Parental/ Guardian involvement:

The school should encourage parents and guardians to be actively involved in and foster healthy eating habits in their children. Parents/guardians must be offered guidance and support in this area also. This may take many forms (e.g. being kept informed via newsletter/flyer, communications sent home on healthy eating and the nutrition needs of a young person or school event centred around the topic).

Involvement of the wider community.

This helps to provide support and expertise to the school and may help to generate heightened interest in healthy eating in the community. Buy in from the local community gives students enhanced focus and they can see better the importance of the topic.

Possible ways of involving the wider community include:

- Developing initiatives in partnership with local food businesses –e.g. sports shops, supermarkets, gyms, sports clubs, fitness centres and food suppliers
- Participating in national youth projects – for example, Young Social Innovators or school business projects.
- Local media can also play a part by highlighting the school's good work

b. Teaching and learning

The classroom should be used to inform the whole-school practice and help instigate change. Health education is not only about delivering information but also about developing the skills and confidence required to make healthy choices.

Subject areas

The subject of healthy eating is addressed to varying degrees in many subject areas that offer a unique opportunity for teachers to influence young people in this regard.

Home Economics, Social, Personal & Health Education (SPHE), Science, and Physical Education (PE) are subjects on the curriculum that address aspects of diet, nutrition, physical activity and health.

Cross-curricular projects

These provide valuable learning opportunities. Examples of cross-curricular links include: English (Media Studies) and Art. Pastoral-care and form-tutor time may also offer teaching and learning opportunities.

Success Criteria

The success of this initiative will be measured in a number of ways including:

- How pupils participate in and display enthusiasm, knowledge and understanding about the project.
- Students' parents/guardian awareness of food choices and importance of these to them and their children both now and into their future.
- Teachers observations regarding the benefits and knock-on effects in terms of learning, improved behaviour and focus in the classroom and outside.
- How educated and influenced student behaviour is from participating in this initiative,

Roles and Responsibility

There are a number of roles and responsibilities required for the successful implementation of the initiative.

- The policy is promoted by the teaching staff in the school in their classroom work.
- Specific guidelines are presented to pupils at general assemblies and to parents at the beginning of the school year to encourage a healthy lunch-box/healthy eating. Feedback will be presented to the principal at staff meetings and at parent association meetings in terms of the implementation and success.
- All special dietary requirements will be respected inclusive of dietary needs and cultural dietary habits. These requirements must be communicated to the Principal/Deputy Principal as soon as possible.
- Catering personnel will ensure that healthy options are available to students each lunchtime and are consumed in the assembly area.
- Catering personnel will ensure that healthy snacks are available to students each break time and lunchtime.
- Hot drinks and bottles of water may be provided on school premises by both catering company and school authorities.
- Staff have the right to confiscate fizzy drinks, high-caffeine and high sugar content drinks or any foods deemed inappropriate, from students on school grounds.
- The Principal will regularly inform pupils in school assemblies of the importance of healthy eating and healthy lunches.
- The initiative will be monitored by the Principal having considered feedback from staff and parents on its continuation and on how the initiative can be further enhanced and improved.

Timeframe for Implementation

The policy will be fully implemented following discussion with The Parents' Association and the Board of Management.

Timeframe for Review

The policy will be reviewed on an annual basis in consultation with the whole school community. The review will consider any legislative changes, new policy and strategy documents, changes in school facilities and feedback from parents, students and staff.

Responsibility for Review

Responsibility for review of the initiative will be shared by the school community.

- Staff feedback on the success of the initiative or otherwise. This will be discussed at a staff meeting.
- Pupils will be asked to contribute to the review by offering suggestions on other healthy snacks/meals that could be included in the school menu.

- Parents; The Parent Association will be asked to comment on the policy and its implementation.
- The review will be co-ordinated by the Healthy Eating Policy Committee. The Board of Management will discuss the policy and any recommendations will be included in the review. Ratification of the policy will take place.

Signed:

Willie Doniger
Chairperson

Date 6/3/24.

Aazel Mannon
Secretary

Date 6/3/24.