

December 15, 2018

Honourable Minister Lisa M Thompson
Mowat Block 22nd Floor, 900 Bay St
Toronto, ON M7A 1L2

Dear Minister Thompson,

With the comprehensive consultation to review the current Ontario education system, the Ontario Dietitians in Public Health (ODPH) is writing to you to recommend the modernization of the curriculum to include **enhanced food literacy education throughout the provincial elementary school curriculum and at least one mandatory food/nutrition course for all students in the secondary school curriculum in order to obtain an Ontario Secondary School Diploma.**

ODPH is the independent and official voice of Registered Dietitians (RDs) working in Ontario's public health system. ODPH members apply evidence-informed nutrition information to enable healthy eating at every stage of life; advocate for and provide support to the creation of food policies and healthier eating environments; and implement and evaluate nutrition education and skill-building programs to improve the health of Ontario residents.

Food literacy is an important life skill encompassing much more than food and cooking skills. It is necessary for a solid foundation of healthy eating behaviours, included in the 2018 Ontario Public Health Standards Chronic Disease Prevention Guideline.¹ Early development of food literacy may lead to lifelong healthy eating behaviours to improve population nutrition and health status.² Food literacy in the Ontario curriculum ensures early on that all children develop vital skills to facilitate informed food choices throughout their lives. Among children and youth aged 4-18 years, food skills programs offer experiential learning that can contribute to significantly increasing vegetable and fruit consumption.³ Self-perceived cooking skills in youth (18-23 years) predict positive nutrition-related outcomes 10 years later (i.e., more frequent preparation of meals including vegetables, and less frequent consumption of fast food).⁴

The benefits of food literacy and cooking programs extend beyond healthy eating behaviour. Preliminary research indicates these programs may also improve psychosocial outcomes such as resilience, socialization, self-esteem, and quality of life,⁵ which aligns seamlessly with the Ministry of Education's Well-Being strategy.⁶

A very strong majority of Ontarians (95%) support making food literacy a component of the Ontario curriculum.⁷ Incorporated as a cross-curricular approach at the elementary level, food literacy will integrate key concepts into a variety of subjects and ensures content is reliably taught and reinforced. A mandatory food literacy course in high school guarantees students are equipped to make consistently healthy choices. We live in the most complex food environment in human history.⁸ Evidence-based food literacy education relevant to today's food environment is necessary to improve the health of current and future generations.⁹ Including food literacy in curricular expectations will simplify the achievement of your Ministry's goal for preparing Ontario students for academic and personal success while training them with life skills and addressing society's burden of chronic disease.

ODPH members with expertise in food literacy and curriculum development would be pleased to meet with your representatives to work on a strategy to include food literacy in the revised Ontario curriculum.

Sincerely,

Carolyn Doris, Ellen Lakusiak
Co-Chairs, ODPH

References

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