

## **Blog Summary of Webinar: England's School Food Program- Conceptualization, Underlying Policies, and Implementation**

### **Description**

The England School Food Webinar took place on Wednesday September 28, 2022, and is a part of the *School Food Programs Around The World: Lessons for Canada* webinar series, hosted by Food Secure Canada's Coalition for Healthy School Food, George Brown College, and Toronto Metropolitan University's Centre for Studies in Food Security. The webinar focused on England's School Food Program, including, conceptualization, underlying policies, and implementation. The webinar provided the opportunity to learn from experts and leaders in England's school food programs and hear about innovative best practices to inform the creation of a world-class School Food Program in Canada.

### **Hosts:**

Gary Hoyer, Professor and Researcher, George Brown College, Toronto.

Juliette Clochard, Communications Assistant, Food Secure Canada & Coalition for Healthy School Food.

### **Panelists:**

- **Stephanie Slater**, Founder and Chief Executive Officer at School Food Matters and Vice-Chair of Sustain: The Alliance for Better Food and Farming.
- **Myles Bremner**, Chief Executive Officer Bremner Consulting.
- **Naomi Duncan**, Chief Executive, Chefs in Schools.

### **Summary of presentations**

#### **Panelist: Stephanie Slater, School Food Matters (4:25)**

School food policy in England (each nation in the UK has its own school food policy).

#### **School Food Matters - UK charity**

- Founded by Stephanie 15 years ago due to the appalling food she saw at her children's school.
- They exist to teach children about food and improve access to healthy, sustainable food at school.
- They provide fully funded food education programs to schools (i.e., Farm to Fork) and campaign for school food policy.
- Programs provided include cooking classes, food growing courses, pollinator education, food enterprise programs, and funds for edible or sensory gardens.
- During COVID they temporarily shifted to 'Food Aid' in the form of healthy breakfasts to go.

- Food prices came down as more children wanted the school lunches.

### **School Food Policy in England - The School Food Plan (2013)**

- In 2012 a year-long process took place to review school food in England. Sixty schools were visited, and meals were evaluated.
- The process found that good school food includes:
  - A head teacher that leads the program.
  - A *whole school approach* to food at school.
  - Seeing food through the eyes of children.
- A School Food Plan was then published in 2013 that included the following:
  - Universal infant (ages 4-7) free school meals program.
  - Mandatory School Food Standards (since Jan 2015) that apply across the entire school day - Update is now due.
  - Cooking in school curriculum.

### **Policy Documents:**

#### **Levelling Up (February 2022) - White Paper for the UK included the following items relevant to school food:**

- Schools would be required to publish statements on ‘whole school approach’ to school food.
- Training and support worth £200,000 (approximately \$335,000 CAD) provided to school governors who have the role of leading how a ‘whole school approach’ is taken.
- Funding of £5 million (approximately \$8,240,000 CAD) was provided to support food teachers, ensuring students learn six recipes during their time at school.

\*Missing from the Levelling Up paper was reference to nutrition standards, which should be under the mandate of the school inspection body.

#### **Government (National) Food Strategy (June 2022) - Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs:**

The strategy named very bold and exciting recommendations for food in schools. The implementation of the report has been disappointing so far.

**Free School Meals** - In addition to the Universal Infant free school meals program, a second Benefits Related ‘free school meals’ program, based on eligibility, is available throughout a students’ education.

- Families may be eligible for ‘free school meals’ throughout their time in school but the eligibility threshold of £7,400 (approximately \$12,200 CAD) has not changed and advocates feel this needs to be adjusted.
- Child Poverty Action Groups estimates that one-third of the children living in poverty (~800,000 children) are not entitled to free school meals under current eligibility criteria.

- England is falling behind other UK nations' school food programs in terms of eligibility
- School Food Matters is currently campaigning for all children living in poverty to be eligible for 'free school meals'.

**Panelist: Myles Bremner, Bremner Consulting (18:42)**

A timeline of England's School Food history was provided.

**School Food Reform** - Through 2021 a range of groups and organizations came together under the umbrella '*School Food Review Working Group*' and have made a list of recommendations to the government calling for reform under the 5 Pillars of the school food system noted below:

- Entitlement of school meals (call for change to eligibility criteria).
- Procurement and Operations (focus on nutritious and sustainable food).
- Accountability Mechanisms (ensure and monitor nutritious food availability at school).
- Uptake (improve school meals uptake).
- Convolved Funding System (make accessing available funds easier).

**Statistics on England's schools**

- There are 10.3 million students in English schools (18% of population).
- There are 24,360 schools in England including 389 nurseries, 16,784 primary schools, 3,456 secondary schools, 2,332 independent schools, 1,342 special schools, 58 non-maintained special schools, 349 pupil referral units.
- Formal education includes 15 years of school.
- Schools differ by size, location, and hence school meal type.

**What is meant by School Food?**

School food centers the child and may include all or some of the following food related meals, snacks, and programs:

- Breakfast.
- Universal Infant Free School Meals.
- Benefits Related to Free School Meals.
- Paid for meals.
- School Fruit & Vegetable Schemes.
- After school food.
- Holiday food provisions.
- Food education ingredients.
- Packed lunches.

A school catering system map was completed by Impact on Urban Health (2021) and illustrates the enormous complexity of school catering in England (see [Serving Up Children's Health report here](#)).

## **School Food Governance**

- The Department for Education has overall responsibility for school food and collaborates with other Departments, such as the Department for Food and Agriculture and the Department for Health.
- School governing bodies decide what form school food lunches will take at the school level.
- English Local Authorities (LA's) have a statutory obligation to children's safeguarding and wellbeing. There are 152 LAs in England who may work with schools on resources and food education.

## **Current Free School Meals programs**

- Benefits Related Free school meals - families who receive certain government benefits and have a household income of less than £7,400 (approximately \$12,200 CAD) can apply.
- Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM) - available to all students for the first three years of school, typically ages 4-7. Funding is based on census data.

## **School Food System Funding**

Over £4 billion is invested in school food in England annually. Of this:

- £1.4 billion is invested by the central government in school food.
- £2.3 billion is from income through paid school schools.
- The additional value contributed by LAs, community groups, non-profits organizations, and businesses is unknown.

There is a complicated and complex funding system that includes many stakeholders throughout the food systems including the Government Funding Stream, Local Authorities, the School, Catering Team, the Child/ young person.

## **\*\*Recommendation for Canada**

While considering school food administration and governance, at each stage of the funding process, think about monitoring and accountability mechanisms. Referred to as a 'leaky bucket' at times in England.

## **The Economics of School Food**

- Funding and costing of school food explained in detail.
- Costs of school meals paid by students vary between £1.60-£3.00 in primary schools and £1.80-£3.05 in secondary schools.
- Uptake of school meals outlined.

## **Panelist: Naomi Duncan, Chefs in Schools (35:44)**

### **About Chefs in Schools**

Chefs in Schools is a registered charity founded roughly four years ago by Henry Dimbleby, author of the School Food Plan. They began by encouraging professional chefs to go into schools and prepare good quality food and saw that when children eat delicious food, they become excited about school meals. They train chefs and do education around food quality.

### **How do school meals work in schools?**

There is no one size fits all but generally speaking:

- *Most* primary schools offer a choice of hot meal or snack meal and a dessert for a fixed price.
- *Most* secondary schools have a cafeteria with several hot and cold choices and students can choose what they want.
- *Most* schools have dining halls.
- *Some* schools have ‘family dining’ shared meals
- *Rarely* do schools have children eating in classrooms

### **The recipe for success:**

“Fresh food, made with love, from raw ingredients”

- Set expectations for fresh food from day one.
- Get procurement right:
  - Legislation.
  - Quality over cost.
  - Culture of monitoring in contracts.
- Accountability for quality school food must be designed in system.
- Train, invest in, and develop school kitchen workforce.

### **A Whole School Approach to Food includes:**

- School leaders who believe good food helps kids learn.
- Written vision at individual schools created by leadership.
- Sufficient time for lunch.
- Teachers who eat with kids.
- Links between curriculum and kitchen.

## **Q&A Session - Key Takeaways**

- School Food funding is not sufficient - In England the allowance for school meals has not increased relative to inflation. Caterers are raising their voices about the need for investment.
- One of the best ways to make quality meals more affordable and get more funds in the school food system is to get more students eating school meals (economies of scale).
- Extending free school meal eligibility will improve parents ability to deal with the rise in food prices more generally.
- Separate capital funds for school kitchens and dining room infrastructure is essential to ensure universal school meals work well.
- A culture of training school food chefs is important from the inception of school food programs if possible. Currently developing a National qualification for school food chefs in England.
- Most people who work in school kitchens like cooking food and like children, so raising the standard of school food and training school cooks is generally received well by cooks themselves.
- Cultural diversity in school food seems to work best when the local community is diverse, and parents are involved in the school.
- As there is a legal obligation to send children to school, there should be a legal obligation on schools to feed them well while they are there.
- Investing in ‘learning’ should also mean investing in the ‘learner.’
- Current consultation on procurement and the focus is on local food and environmentally friendly food. Looking at creative ways to connect suppliers directly with schools. Suggest procurement rules that support local procurement.
- Ensuring transparency is embedded in procurement contracts is necessary. Local schools can do this themselves (ask for what they want) before policy is in place.

**For more resources and information on the webinar please follow the links below.**

[England’s School Food Program Webinar](#)-Including England’s School Food Program webinar slides

[School Food Matters](#) - UK Charity

[School Food Standards \(2015\)](#)

[Sustain Alliance for Better Food and Farming](#) - UK Charity

[Bremner Consulting](#)

[The School Food Plan 2013](#) - UK Department of Education

[Serving Up Children’s Health](#) - report by Impact on Urban Health (2021)

[Chefs in Schools](#) - UK Charity