



Hunger as an Obstacle to learning
A Public Conversation about Nutritional Support in
Dartmouth North Schools

Report of Proceedings

May 12, 2016

Hunger as an Obstacle to Learning – A public conversation about nutritional support in Dartmouth North schools – sponsored by *The Public Good Society of Dartmouth* – May 12, 2016 – Dartmouth North Community Food Centre – 6 Primrose Street

Welcome, Thanks & Introductions: MC Matt Spurway thanked the chef, staff and volunteers of the Dartmouth North Community Food Centre for the outstanding meal and service. He named and acknowledged the children attending reminding us that they represent - the focus of our discussion today. Matt recognized the elected representatives in attendance: Tony Mancini, District 6 Councillor, Marian Mancini, Dartmouth South MLA and Gary Burrill, Provincial NDP Leader. Other elected representatives sent their sincere regrets: Community Services Minister & Dartmouth North MLS Joanne Bernard, Gloria McCluskey, District 5 Councillor, Education Minister Karen Casey, MP Darren Fisher, Jamie Baillie, Provincial Conservative Leader, School Board Representative Gin Yee. Minister Bernard and MP Darren Fisher were thanked for their donations towards the meeting. Matt also introduced Bette Watson-Borg, the *Between the Bridges* project coordinator.

The Public Good Society of Dartmouth video premiere: 10 minute presentation outlining the purpose and programs produced by Nova Scotia Community College student videographer, Morgan Jessome. It will be posted to www.publicgoodsociety.ca

Summary of Dartmouth North teacher/school surveys:

Thank you to the participating schools and staff – Bicentennial Elementary & Junior High, Harbourview Elementary, John MacNeil Elementary, John Martin Junior High and Shannon Park Elementary. A total of 44 teachers representing the five schools responded to the survey. See Appendix A for the detailed results. The following is a summary of the results for each school.

(Caution: Please recognize that all teachers did not participate, that questions may have been interpreted in different ways & results should be viewed as general insights about student hunger from teachers' perspectives.)

Bicentennial School: Grades primary to 9 (310 students)

- Current programs: 3 day-per-week breakfast program, 2 day-per-week “grab’n’go” snacks, free milk (subsidized by Dartmouth Kiwanis), food donations from *Two If By Sea Café*
- 100% of teachers perceived hunger as obstacle to learning in their students.
- Students who would benefit from addition nutritional support on any given day – 38% on average.

Harbour View Elementary – Grades primary to 6 (180 students)

- 5 day-per-week breakfast program (across street at Holy Trinity Church), subsidized milk program (low-cost to families)
- 91% of teachers perceived hunger as obstacle to learning in their students.
- Students who would benefit from addition nutritional support on any given day – 72% on average.

John MacNeil Elementary – Grades primary to 6 (225 students)

- 3 day-per-week breakfast program, low-cost canteen snacks (no-charge on occasion), subsidized milk program (low-cost to families)
- 100% of teachers perceived hunger as obstacle to learning in their students.
- Students who would benefit from addition nutritional support on any given day – 34% on average.

John Martin Junior High – Grades 7 – 9 (160 students)

- 5 day-per-week breakfast program, free milk program, food donations from Sobeys and Tim Horton’s
- 100% of teachers perceived hunger as obstacle to learning in their students.
- Students who would benefit from addition nutritional support on any given day – 84% on average.

Shannon Park Elementary – Grades primary – 6 (115 North Dartmouth students/400 city-wide French Immersion students)

- 5 day-per-week breakfast program (financial donation from McDonald's), free milk if financial need (otherwise low-cost to families), free snacks & lunches on needs-basis
- 75% of teachers perceived hunger as obstacle to learning in their students.
- Students who would benefit from addition nutritional support on any given day – 20% on average.

Guest Speakers:

Jill White – Vice Chair- *Nourish Nova Scotia* & School Nutritionist with the Halifax Regional School Board – *Nourish Nova Scotia* is the largest funder of breakfast programs throughout the province. – “good food equals good thinking in schools”. Some of the challenges include less family time for meal and food preparation, availability and heavy marketing of convenience foods, rising food costs. The Halifax Regional School Board survey students in Grade 4 to 12 annually to better understand the barriers to healthy eating. The Board has 101 breakfast programs delivering 1.4 million breakfasts annually. Programs are free and open. Models vary according to neighbourhood needs but all are focused on social and positive ways to start the school day. [Note – obtain survey results from Jill's notes]

The Board also sources and healthy life skills re production and preparation.

There are also different models of food literacy programs, eg, cooking in the classroom to support math and literacy outcomes and school community meals where students explore affordable, healthy food choices that are tasty and fun. The school garden program, for example, teaches kids where food comes from, how to grow their own food, and gives them the opportunity to experience the feeling of success which comes from growing. The programs offered have been shown to increase the knowledge of the social experience of schools, as well as increase parent participation, which in turn increases community strength.

Still much to be done to foster healthy eating so working together important. The Board puts emphasis on coordination and participation of the various community members, with a focus on increasing accessibility and education.

Roxanne Manning, Executive Director of the *Dartmouth Family Centre* – The Centre has been providing community-based programs for 20 years and understands the impacts of poverty and food insecurity on young children and their families. It took them three years to develop the Dartmouth North Community Food Centre using the family resource models of empowerment and social inclusion. These models emphasize different aspects of the issue of hunger: food security considers how to access quality food, and food skills development allows community members to participate in community gardening and food preparation training from the in-house chef. The models consider whole families/whole communities so that the problem can be addressed holistically. The community action program brings community members together to talk about what aspects of food actually effect them.

The speaker noted two specific priority needs: a) the need for systematic changes in the form of increased wages, for example; and b) the need for education about food quality and supply.

Alana Conrad, Vice Principal – John Martin Junior High – Alana sees the effect of hungry students every school day – unfocused, easily distracted & frustrated, suffering from headaches. She sees a great need for the provision of good, nutritional food. John Martin School offers hot meals each morning, full breakfasts rather than grab-and-go types of foods. She also keeps a supply of juice packs and granola bars in her office to help resolve the situations the students have, and leftovers from breakfast, as well as a variety of snacks are available at lunchtime to anyone who asks the guidance counselor.

The kids at the school participate in the planning, shopping and preparation of the food. This helps to teach the kids how to sustain themselves in the future It's often not how much the students are eating but the nutritional value. In health classes, students are taught how to be food-intelligent; they learn to read food labels, for example. She notes that older students often are expected/want to

feed themselves and make food choices. As such, it is crucial that students learn to sustain themselves nutritionally and be active participants in food programs. Their school further involves students in professional development seminars about breakfast and lunch programs to illustrate student leadership and engagement.

Audience input:

- Children need healthy breakfast and lunch but broader nutritional and emotional support outside of school hours and weekends/vacations (some American inner city schools have open pantry programs re weekend needs).
- If students aren't getting breakfast and lunch at home, why should we assume they are getting supper?
- Can school lunch programs be expanded?
- Questions re nutritional value of items from food banks.
- John Martin students can go to guidance counselor for food throughout the day and even take items home to family; program supported by businesses and community groups.
- Older elementary students sometimes believe it's not cool to eat lunch & some students are not very hungry until after school. Or too tired to eat. Others barriers are embarrassment or being late for breakfast program (why short designated times for breakfast & lunch? Sometimes disrespectful food monitors are challenge).
- Student suggestion that the first period be used for breakfast or food carts (fruit, juice boxes, granola bars) be placed near entrance doors or food cupboard with food to take home to rest of family when needed.
- Healthy eating an emotional issue for those who have food and those who don't.
- Caribbean example - Nutritious boxed lunches prepared by outside organizations & delivered to schools.

- Why differences in availability/cost within Dartmouth North schools, free versus subsidized milk programs, three versus every day breakfast programs?
- How to deal with critical social development needs – compassion, caring, understanding, positive spaces and time
- How can we address the social aspect/positive memories attached to food within food provision programs? It's not just hunger because food and eating has meaningful memories attached to it.
- Poverty as root cause mentioned repeatedly as barrier to healthy eating and affordable housing. Good paying employment critical. Understanding poverty and hunger as something that impacts whole families. Food banks serving people with children, unemployed youth, etc.
- Challenges re breakfast programs outlined – limited funding & volunteers, number of students, etc – one school breakfast program operates on roughly 66 cents per meal per student. Volunteers bring food from home or pay for items to help.
- But all these small efforts by a number of community groups are working for some in the long-term – educator relates personal life experience and how she benefitted with community support: access to education is the key to developing a long-term solution, because education leads to increased wages, and greater opportunities for change. So the small efforts build into a solution long-term
- Wider food issues such as quality – consider pesticides, preservatives.
- Why are we not feeding our brothers and sisters?

A final thank you to Chef Andrew, the Community Food Centre staff and volunteers and all meeting participants.

Appendix A

Hunger as an Obstacle to Learning

Teacher Survey Results

Hunger as an Obstacle to Learning

A public discussion about nutritional support in
Dartmouth North Schools

Dartmouth North Schools (roughly 1400 students)

- John MacNeil Elementary
- Harbour View Elementary
- John Martin Junior High
- Bicentennial School (P-9)
- Shannon Park Elementary

John MacNeil Elementary (225 students)

- 3 day-per-week breakfast program
- Low-cost canteen snacks (no-charge on occasion)
- Subsidized milk program (low-cost)

Harbour View Elementary (180 students)

- 5 day-per-week breakfast program (across the street at Holy Trinity Church)
- Subsidized milk program (low-cost)

John Martin Junior High (160 students)

- 5 day-per-week breakfast program
- Free milk program
- Food donations from Wyse Road Sobeys and Tim Horton's (thank you!)

Bicentennial School (310 students)

- 3 day-per-week breakfast program
- 2 day-per-week grab'n'go snacks
- Free milk program (thank you Dartmouth Kiwanis!)
- Food donations from Two if By Sea Café (thank you!)

Shannon Park Elementary (115 Dartmouth North students, plus 400 city-wide French Immersion students)

- 5 day-per-week breakfast program (supported in-part by donation from McDonald's – thank you!)
- Free milk for students who can't afford it
- Free snacks and lunches provided on a needs-basis

Teacher Survey

- 44 teachers from five schools responded to:
- What grade(s) do you teach?
- How many students in your class?
- Do you think hunger is an obstacle to learning among your students?
- How many of your students on any given day do you think would benefit from additional nutritional support in school?

Survey Limitations

- Not all teachers from all schools completed the survey
- Teachers may interpret questions differently
- Results are not meant to precisely reflect each school's circumstances
- Results are meant to provide some general insights about student hunger from teachers' perspectives

Do you think hunger is an obstacle to learning among your students?

Do you think hunger is an obstacle to learning among your students?

John MacNeil Elementary

| | |
|-----|------|
| YES | 100% |
| NO | 0% |

Do you think hunger is an obstacle to learning among your students?

Harbour View Elementary

| | |
|-----|-----|
| YES | 91% |
| NO | 9% |

Do you think hunger is an obstacle to learning among your students?

John Martin Junior High

| | |
|-----|------|
| YES | 100% |
| NO | 0% |

Do you think hunger is an obstacle to learning among your students?

Bicentennial School

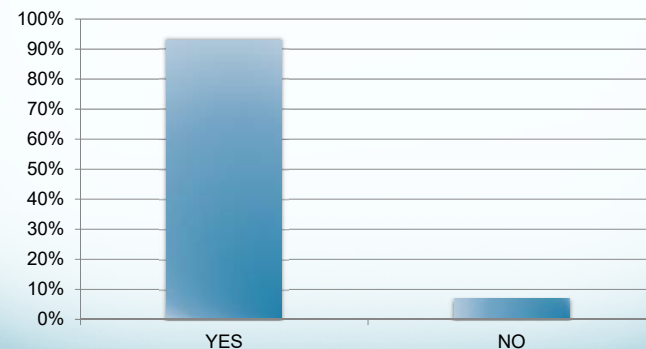
| | |
|-----|------|
| YES | 100% |
| NO | 0% |

Do you think hunger is an obstacle to learning among your students?

Shannon Park Elementary

| | |
|-----|-----|
| YES | 75% |
| NO | 25% |

Summary of all 44 teachers surveyed



How many of your students on any given day do you think would benefit from additional nutritional support?

How many of your students on any given day do you think would benefit from additional nutritional support?

John MacNeil Elementary

Number of responses: 4
Lowest: 19% of students
Highest: 50% of students
Average: 34% of students

How many of your students on any given day do you think would benefit from additional nutritional support?

Harbour View Elementary

Number of responses: 11
Lowest: 11% of students
Highest: 100% of students
Average: 72% of students

How many of your students on any given day do you think would benefit from additional nutritional support?

John Martin Junior High

Number of responses: 7
Lowest: 28% of students
Highest: 100% of students
Average: 84% of students

How many of your students on any given day do you think would benefit from additional nutritional support?

Bicentennial School

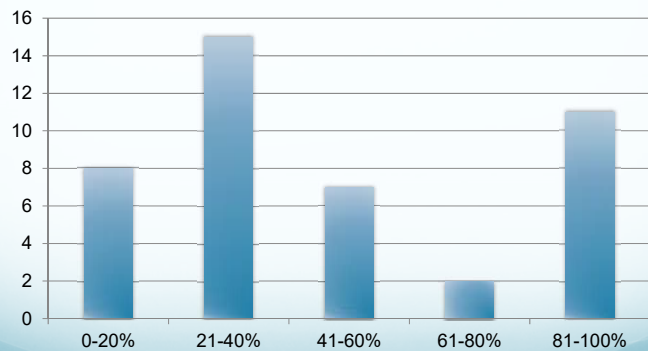
Number of responses: 14
 Lowest: 20% of students
 Highest: 71% of students
 Average: 38% of students

How many of your students on any given day do you think would benefit from additional nutritional support?

Shannon Park Elementary

Number of responses: 8
 Lowest: 5% of students
 Highest: 45% of students
 Average: 20% of students

Summary of all 44 teachers surveyed
 (# of teachers whose answer fell into each quintile)



How many of your students on any given day do you think would benefit from additional nutritional support?

OBSERVATIONS

- Lowest response: 5% of students
- Highest response: 100% of students
- Average response: 50.3% of students
- 4 out of 10 of teachers responded that *at least half of their students would benefit from additional nutritional support*
- 2 out of 10 teachers responded that *all of their students would benefit from additional nutritional support*

Appendix B

Hunger as an Obstacle to Learning

Participant Feedback Results

Hunger as an Obstacle to Learning - A public conversation about nutritional support in Dartmouth North schools – May 12, 2016

Thank you to the many participants who provided feedback on the public meeting. Their comments are grouped under the questions asked:

How did you hear about tonight's meeting?

Ad in Family Matters

From paper that was sent from kids school

Grandchildren's school – notice in backpack

Vel Oakes Peer Advocate DNCFC

Through Facebook/poster

Facebook

DNA email

Email resources, radio

On-line

Facebook, community member, volunteer

I heard about this through the CFC facebook page

Through Dartmouth CFC

Through my office

Matthew Spurway

Dart. North Food centre invitation

Talking with Tim Risessco at Kiwanis Club meeting

From one of the regulars at the center

Web page & food center calendar

Food Centre calendar

Dartmouth North Food Centre

On the wall at the food centre

Facebook & Farrell Hall (Linda)

Farrell Hall through Linda Rowe

Through a friend at the centre (kitchen)

What did you like about the meeting?

Different perspectives of guest speakers; opportunity for community to speak – not rushed.

The community meal was very delicious, all the staff/volunteers were friendly. The speakers talked very loud and clear about the topics tonight.

I mostly liked getting together and meeting new people. Grandkids met new friends.

The informal sharing and the positive environment to have input from our community.

The variety of speakers.

Attendee's stories & perspectives.

Mix of people, food & talk.

The open mic so community members could share their perspectives.

The dynamic comments. The passions in the people to create a change in the community.

There were great speakers. It was eye opening about my Community.

Well I would have to first say the food was amazing! But I thought the format was really good – well organized. I thought that Matt Spurway did a fantastic job as M.C.

Very important discussion with a variety of perspectives. Well organized & structured. The Food was excellent.

Hearing from the youth.

Excellent meal, great turnout of people, Matt presented good information, speakers all good and excellent resource people.

Very informative to learn about food & Housing.

Food, volunteers, relative (relevant?) topic. Talk about quality vs quantity and the family unit.

Everything, it makes me aware of how much these programs are needed.

It was fabulous.

It was an interesting & much needed topic to have been discussed in our community. A good group turned out & a great meal.

What could be done better?

Served meal earlier before presentations – hard to hear especially at beginning.

Nothing it was great, the service was great, I liked the fact two volunteers came out to offer to watch all the kids in the room for a play group.

Nothing, I think everything was great – food was amazing and speakers were good and clear.

I don't see anything, perhaps we could have a conversation on housing!!

A better viewing system, audio checks.

Sound system could be clearer.

No PowerPoint – Higher level overview of stats.

PPT – sorry Matt

Understanding with/about intersectionality (?) in issues and contexts (Poverty is the root issue, exploitation of the poor by big business is the cause of poverty).

Screen for the video.

A larger question time.

Open mics are important but unpredictable.

Small group brainstorming with a community leader at each table.

Screen was not readily visible by all.

It was great. Could not have been better.

Could not hear at the back when Matt was talking – sound was distorted.

Nothing – I think it was well presented.

Wasn't easy to hear the short film.

The audio could have been a bit better.

Do you have any comments or input about the topic you would like us to include on our final report?

I believe we need more awareness of breakfast programs & importance/needs so community (HRM) can respond with funding & volunteering. I am sure there are people who would love to volunteer with/or help fund breakfast to enhance learning – adopt a kid”.

Schools need to offer more options to kids that may not get to eat breakfast or lunch due to any reason whether it be personal to just forgot it, and it needs to be a variety of healthier foods. Will John MacNeil ever get a free milk program like other elementaries in area?

Not so much about any topics, just that all the staff and everyone serving were very polite and friendly. Also it was very nice that some volunteers came and offered to take the grandkids to the play room and watch them also.

I was glad to hear some positive comments esp from the VP of John Martin Jr High on how services in place resulted in helping the family so that she was able to get the education and succeed in life like she has. People ARE making a difference!! A positive difference! People care!! And it is making a difference.

More of these sessions – housing, bus transportation since we have limited bus passes.

Is there a model for healthy eating at the Breakfast Programs?

Education is almost impossible for those affected by poverty, so poverty must be the focus as the problem is getting worse, not better.

Ideas: 1-Teach the community to grow food. How to grow it in pots, etc. 2- Food box lunches. Perhaps an organization or association that prepares healthy meals and deliver box lunches to schools for

students in need. 3-Food workshops at schools. Teach the kids to make a few simple, healthy, filling (or fueling?) meals.

These breakfast & lunch programs should be public funded (not managed through association). Classes about cooking & healthy habits could be held. But overall, there should be real emphasis on fighting poverty, unemployment, controlling food prices (a list of products with fixed prices) & bringing prosperity to the greater number with redistribution taxes.

I found there was a great range of discussion. I think the points from all the speakers gave plenty of "food" for thought. I found it to be a very motivating experience. I would love someday to be part of this Board. Congratulations on your fantastic work.

An action plan with next steps.

Please include the statistics that Matt presented and widely distribute the report. Please send copy to Kiwanis Club of Dartmouth.

Matt did a great Job and sin to know that so many children in our schools are hungry when there are so many resources to use in our community.

Surveys were all for elementary schools, what about high school? All schools in the neighbourhood should have been included. What about lunch programs? Shannon's suggestions and talk was great. Nice to hear from our students.

Allow kids to finish their breakfast, not rushing them. I think I said enough on the mic.

No.