

A Snap Shot of the School Food Environment in Alberta. The aim of this study was to capture the current landscape of school food in the province of Alberta during the 2014/2015 academic year.

To achieve this goal, we surveyed school principals in K-12 schools across Alberta to understand their perceptions of the food services, policies, programs, curriculum, and initiatives currently in place at their schools.

It is our hope that findings from this survey contribute to the ongoing conversation around the promotion of healthy school food in Alberta.

WHO WE ARE

Alberta Policy Coalition for Chronic Disease Prevention (APCCP)

WWW.APCCP.CA | INFO@ABPOLICYCOALITIONFORPREVENTION.CA

The APCCP consists of 17 member organizations who have come together to coordinate efforts, generate evidence, and advocate for policy change to reduce chronic disease risk in Alberta.

Growing Food Security in Alberta Network (GFSA) | Alberta Food Matters (AFM)

WWW.FOODSECURITYALBERTA.ORG | INFO@FOODSECURITYALBERTA.ORG

An Alberta non-profit corporation, Alberta Food Matters (AFM) works to foster leadership, relationships and actions that reconnect people, land, and food in Alberta. AFM grows through community development, research and evidence-based approaches, policy development, skill building, educational projects, programs, and workshops.

AFM also operates the vibrant and active Growing Food Security in Alberta (GFSA) network.

Promoting Optimal Weights through Ecological Research (POWER)

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POWER is a research program led by Dr. Kim Raine at the Centre for Health Promotion, located at the University of Alberta School of Public Health.



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Methodology and Glossary of Terms

METHODS

This survey explored principals' perceptions of the school food environment in Alberta. More specifically, we asked principals about a) school food programs and services in place at their school, b) school food policies and administrative procedures, and c) school demographic information.

Fifty-four school boards across Alberta consented to having principals from their district contacted to participate in this study during the 2014/2015 academic year. The survey sample included principals from K-12 public, separate, and Francophone schools in Alberta. The research team reviewed schools on an individual basis and excluded colony schools, charter schools, outreach programs, online/virtual schools, learning stores, alternative schools, and storefront schools. Overall, the survey was sent to 1350 school principals across the province. Principal participation in the survey was entirely voluntary. **The survey response rate was 27% (363 completed surveys).**¹

For each survey question, we calculated the percentage of principals who selected any of the response options. The percentages noted for each question includes responses where principals were able to select all applicable options. Response options also included open dialogue boxes. Qualitative coding was used to group responses by theme. Themes were tabled and presented under the primary list of response options. There is a note for questions where response options were limited. For more information on our study methods, contact info@abpolicycoalitionforprevention.ca.

GLOSSARY

The following terms and definitions were provided to principals before the start of the survey.

Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth (ANGCY): A resource manual published by the Government of Alberta that provides healthy food recommendations for child-care settings, schools, recreation centers, and the community at large. According to the Alberta government, the guidelines aim to help Albertans create an environment that provides healthy food and promotes healthier food choices.²

Healthy Eating: Eating practices that are consistent with improving, maintaining, and/or enhancing health, such as following Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating.³

Unhealthy Food: Food that is of little nutritional value and high in fat, sugar, salt, and calories.

Local Food: In this survey, 'local' means food grown and produced at the school or as close as possible to the school. This includes food acquired from local producers, farmers, and the school community.

Universal School Food Strategy: A comprehensive approach to promoting healthy school food environments in Alberta. It involves making healthy and sustainable food available and affordable to all Alberta students, and providing them with education and skills to grow and prepare food. A universal school food strategy also supports relationships with local producers and the development of local food procurement policies in Alberta schools.

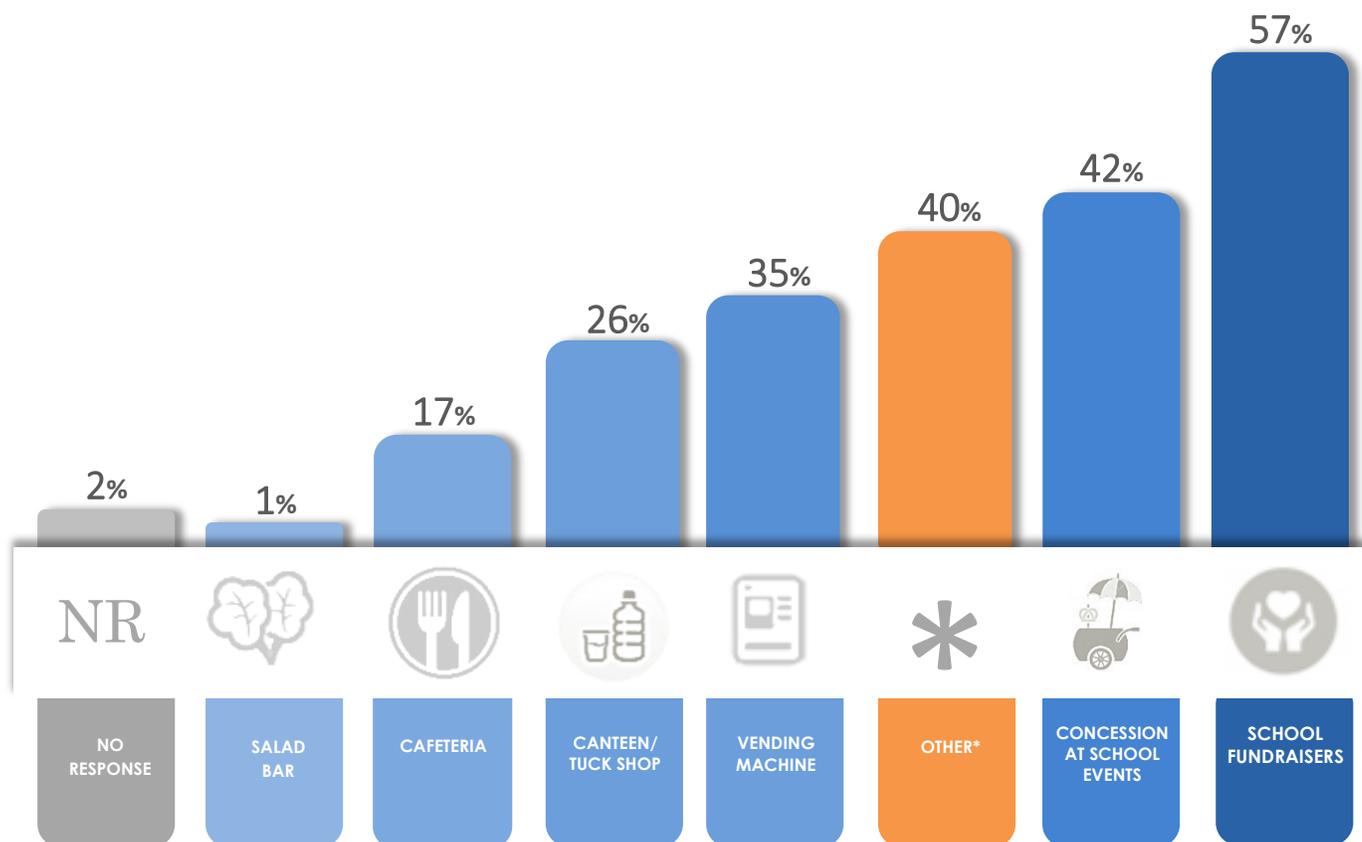
¹ The survey was accessed by 437 individuals. Of this number, 363 completed the survey.

² Alberta Health and Wellness. "The Alberta nutrition guidelines for children and youth." Edmonton (2010).

³ Taylor, Jennifer P., Susan Evers, and Mary McKenna. "Determinants of healthy eating in children and youth." *Canadian Journal of Public Health/Revue Canadienne de Sante'e Publique* (2005): S20-S26.

SECTION A: SCHOOL FOOD PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Question 1: What food services and sales are offered to students at your school?†



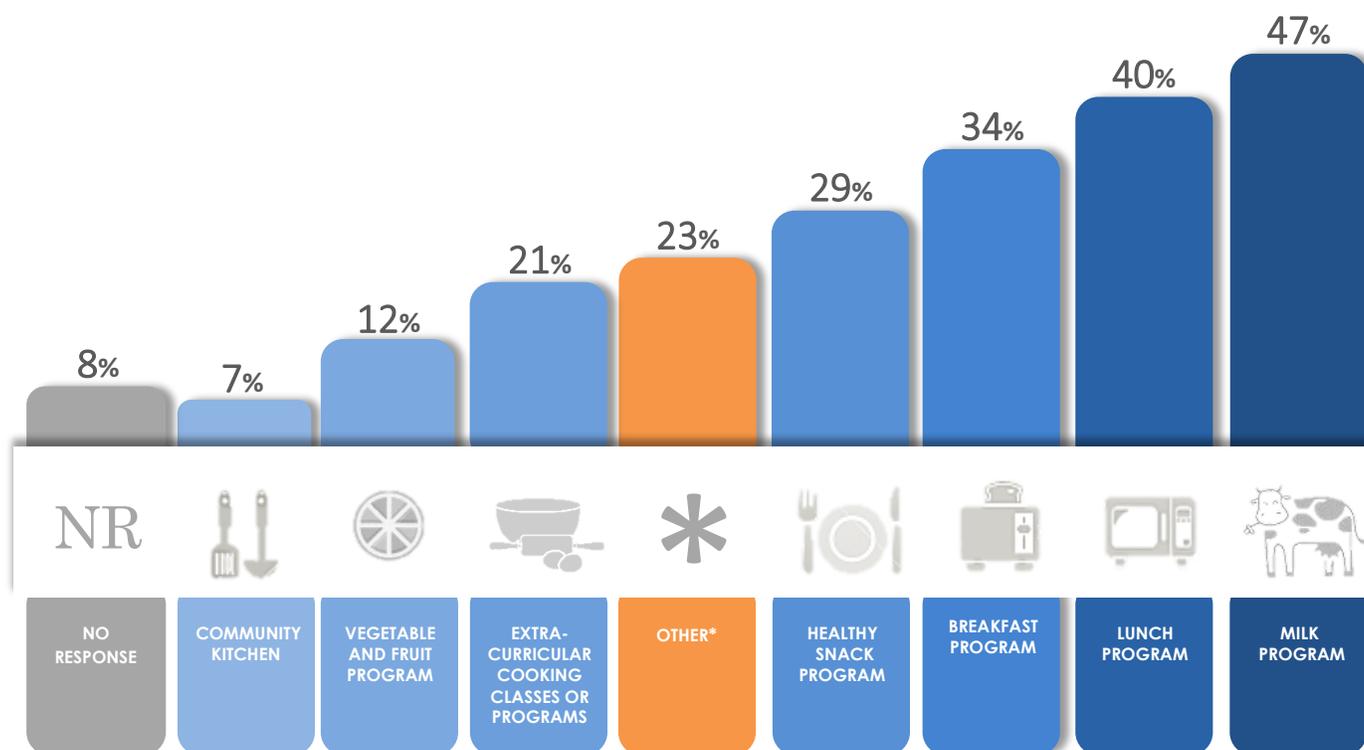
†Note: Participants were able to select all options that applied.

*Participants who selected “other” provided a number of examples, which are summarized below.

FOOD/MEAL PROGRAMS & INITIATIVES	Hot lunch provided once a week or once a month by parents or the school council; breakfast program; lunch program; snack program; milk program; missing meal program; family lunch day; Lunch Lady hot lunch program; APPLE schools ⁴ ; Meals on Wheels; Brown Bagging It; Coco Brooks
OTHER EXAMPLES	Organized special food days; bake sales with home baking; foods classes; free fruit bowls/baskets; parents preparing meals; external vendor (catering company, pizza, subs); none

⁴ APPLE Schools was mentioned frequently by survey respondents. The Alberta Project Promoting Active Living and Healthy Eating (APPLE) Schools is a school-focused health promotion initiative funded by the APPLE Schools Foundation where school action plans are collaboratively developed to meet school-specific needs related to health (www.appleschools.ca).

Question 2: What food programs and/or initiatives are offered to students at your school?†

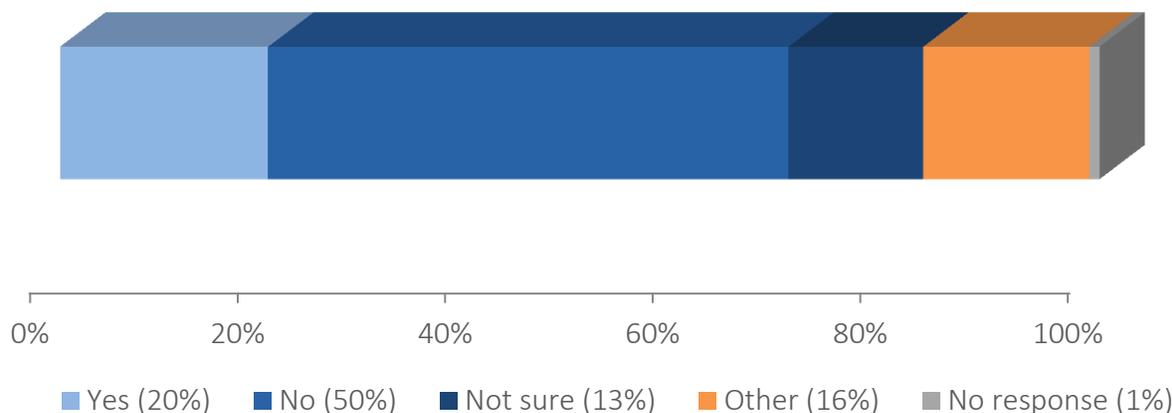


†Note: Participants were able to select all options that applied.

*Participants who selected “other” provided a number of examples, which are summarized below.

FOOD CLASSES	Food studies (Junior/Senior High); kinder cooking; enrichment baking courses
EMERGENCY FOOD PROVISION	Emergency lunch program; replacement meals (breakfast and lunch) provided
FOOD/MEAL PROGRAMS & INITIATIVES	Hot lunch; breakfast cart – healthy items; milk and snacks offered to students; APPLE schools; Food and Nutrition for Schools (FANS); Hope Mission; Food Bank; Loaves and Fishes; community and charitable groups
OTHER EXAMPLES	School vegetable garden; taste testing; district wellness initiative for high school students; school is working on it; none

Question 3: Is long-term, sustainable funding available for food programs and/or initiatives at your school? †

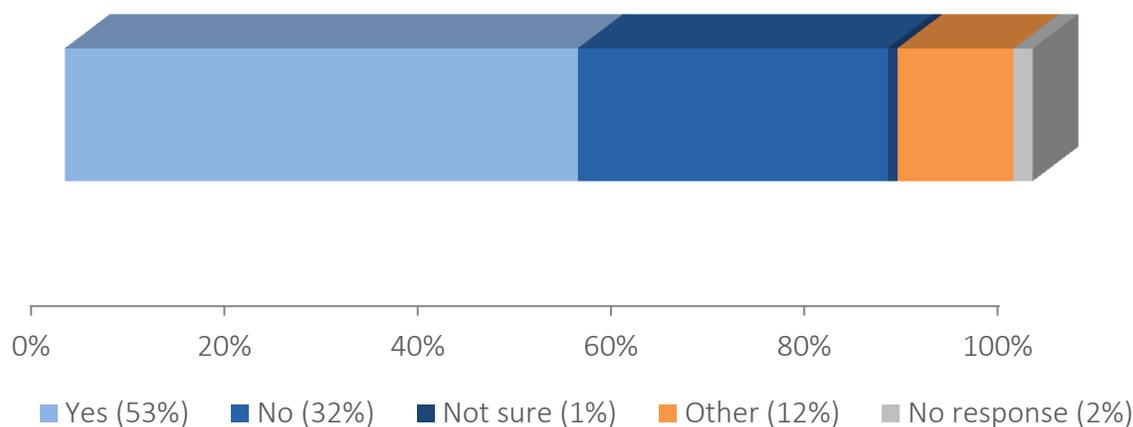


†Note: Percentages of responses were rounded to the nearest whole percentage.

*Participants who selected “other” provided a number of examples, which are summarized below

FUNDING STABILITY	No guarantee of grant/funding renewal; sustainable funding varies from year to year; difficult to determine if partnerships will continue; searching for sponsors to fund a breakfast program; limited donations to fund snack programs
FUNDING AND PROGRAMS	Received grant funding for a breakfast program; applying for breakfast program funding; hot lunch funded by the General Council of Metis Settlements; Breakfast Club of Canada; Boys and Girls Club; Kids Are Worth It; APPLE Schools; rely on E4C donations to help run programs; donations maintain programs; school needs to fundraise
PARENT SUPPORT	Parents pay for services; parents pay for children’s hot lunches and snacks; parents pay for hot dinners.
OTHER EXAMPLES	Pay as you go lunch is volunteer dependent; cost-recovery plan in place; not applicable

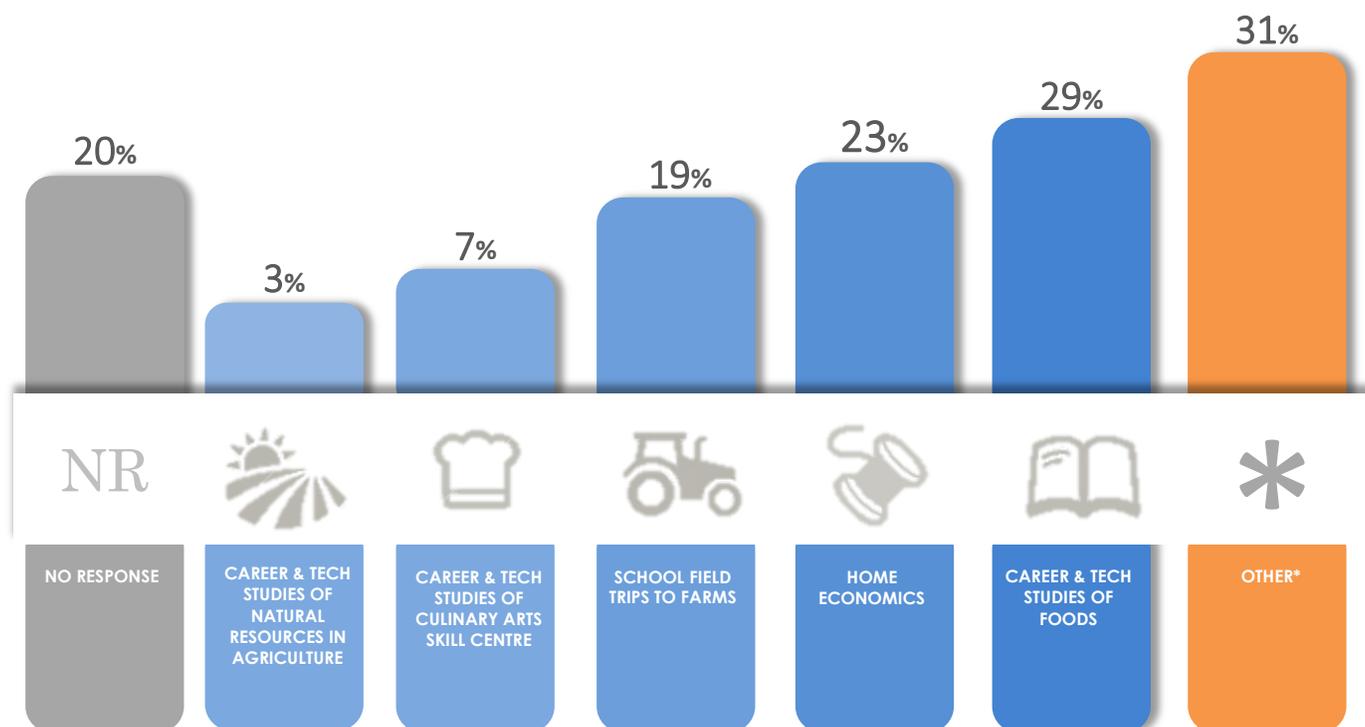
Question 4: Do students have access to food programs and/or initiatives at a free or subsidized rate at your school?



*Participants who selected “other” provided a number of examples, which are summarized below.

FREE FOOD AVAILABLE	Breakfast is free; free snacks are provided for students; fruit is available for free (e.g. apples in the office); APPLE schools offers free apples for students
SUBSIDIES	Food Bank subsidies; Food and Nutrition at Schools (FANS) provides annual subsidy; school subsidizes snacks and some lunches; subsidies can be applied for to reduce cost of hot lunches
EMERGENCY FOOD PROVISION/ FORGOTTEN FOOD	Special cases where school purchases food for students in need; lunch is available for students if they forget their lunch, staff purchase food for students; a forgotten lunch/snack program is funded by the student council
OTHER EXAMPLES	Grant received and school is getting started; food offerings are at cost; some programs are free while others are subsidized; extra food purchased through school budget (e.g. lunch, snacks); not required

Question 5: What food curriculum programs and/or initiatives are offered to students at your school?[†]

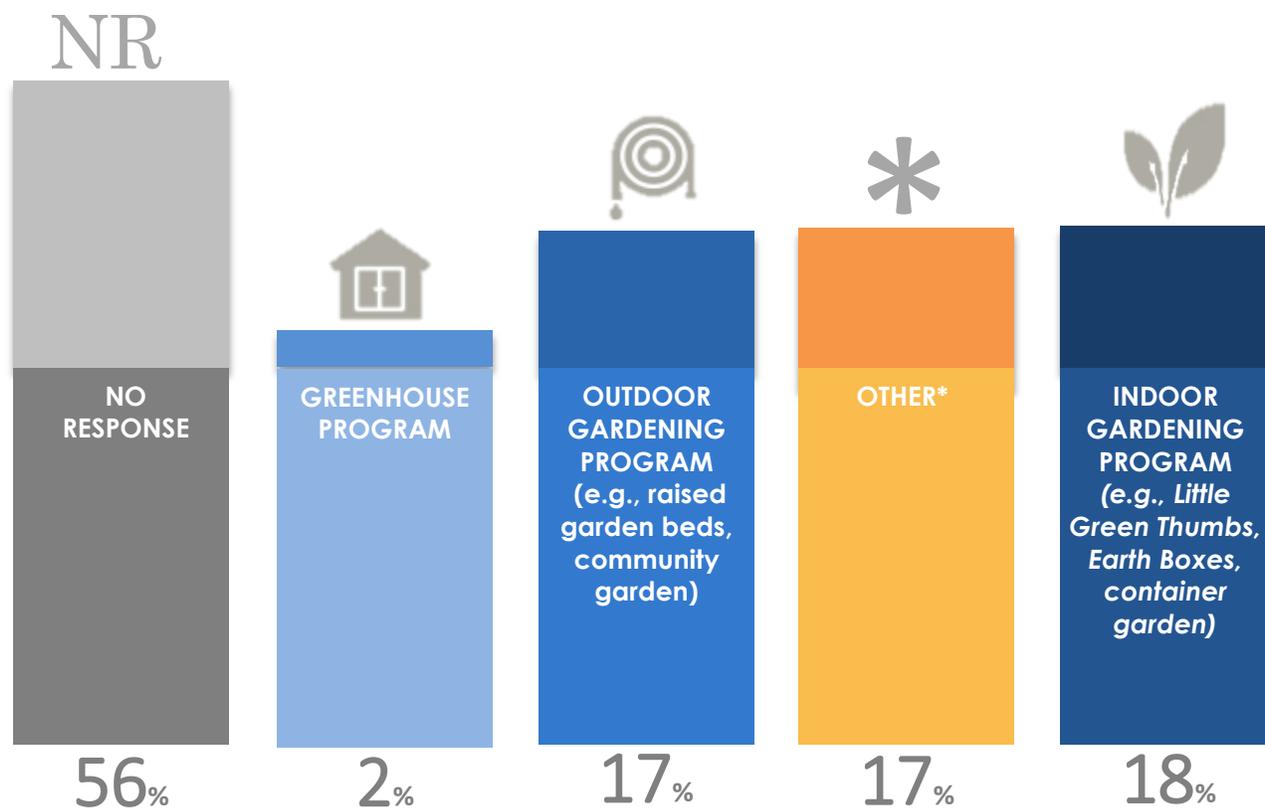


†Note: Participants were able to select all options that applied.

*Participants who selected “other” provided a number of examples, which are summarized below.

HEALTH CURRICULUM/CLASSROOM	General health curriculum; health program of studies; health curriculum plus healthy eating component; health curriculum plus nutrition component; Alberta Health Services online lesson plans
FOOD/COOKING INITIATIVES	Kinder cooking; after school/extracurricular cooking club; Healthy Chefs After School Program; food preparation/cooking courses; Canada/Alberta cooking skills competitions; Field trips to supermarkets; Kinder nutrition trip to Save on Foods
FARMING AND GARDENING	Farm to Table program; rural/farming community – agriculture is understood; community garden available; school garden run by students and staff
COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS	APPLE Schools; Ever Active Schools; Healthy Alberta Schools; N’Step; Souper Stars; Fruit for a Friend; Farm to Table
OTHER EXAMPLES	Not applicable, none at this time

Question 6: What food gardening programs and/or initiatives are offered to students at your school?†

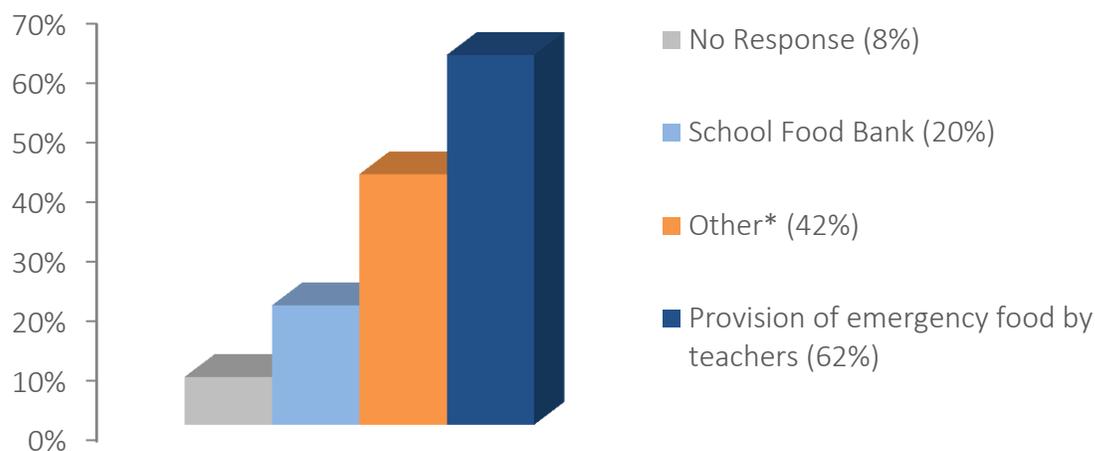


†Note: Participants were able to select all options that applied.

*Participants who selected “other” provided a number of examples, which are summarized below.

SCIENCE CURRICULUM/CLASSROOM	Part of science curriculum; growing beans/plants in class; science class lessons; science class comparison of plant growth
AGRICULTURAL/NATURE INITIATIVES	Spuds in Tubs; traveling greenhouse; naturalization area; small scale vegetable and flower planting
PROGRAMS IN DEVELOPMENT	Greenhouse in development; starting a planting program; funding received for an indoor gardening initiative; indoor gardening program being explored; proposal in place for a community garden with raised beds
OTHER EXAMPLES	Hunting/trapping trips; no agricultural programs offered; none as school has recently opened; not applicable

Question 7: What food programs and/or initiatives related to hunger relief are offered to students at your school?†

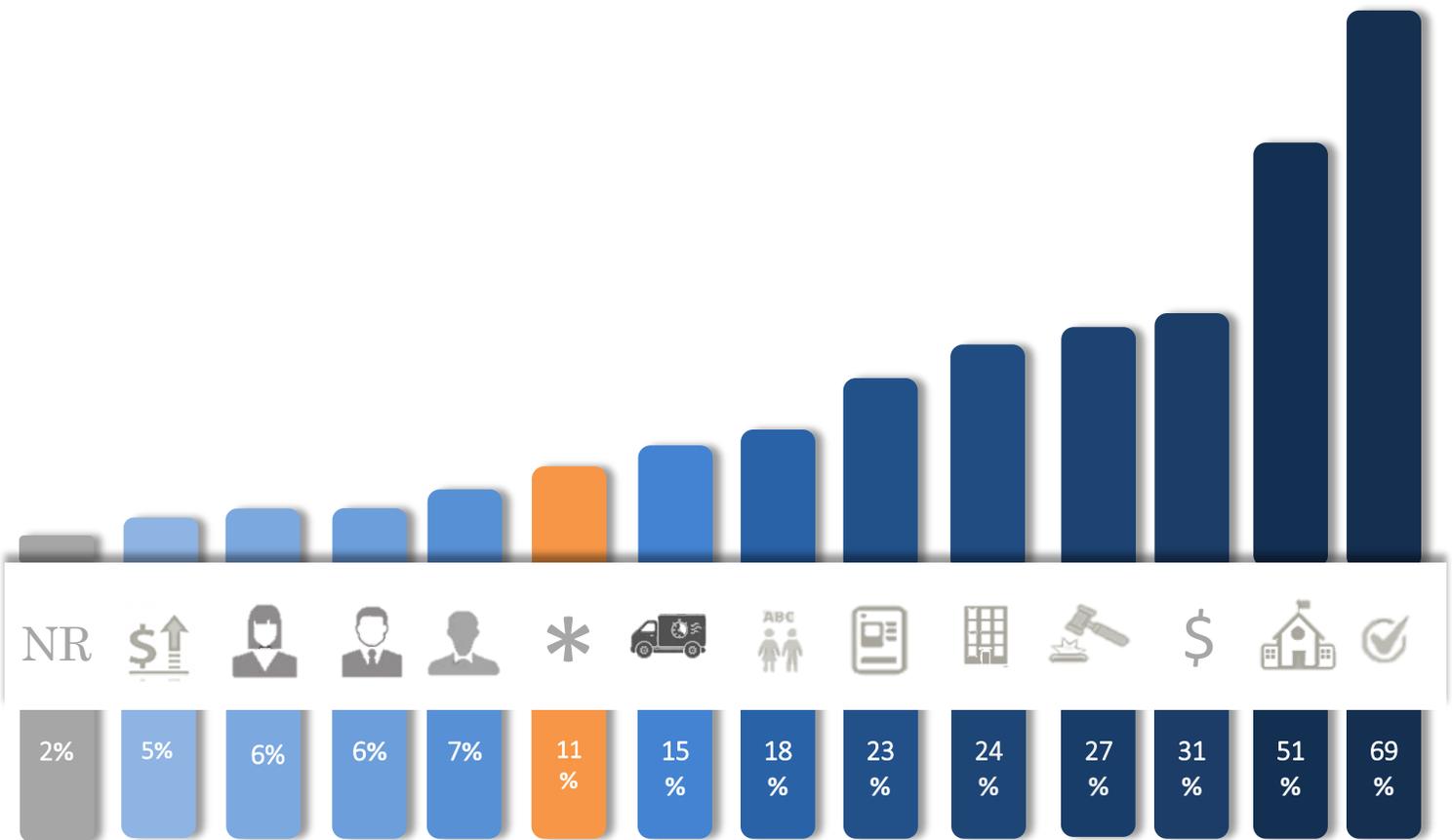


†Note: Participants were able to select all options that applied.

*Participants who selected “other” provided a number of examples, which are summarized below.

COMMUNITY PROGRAMS/PARTNERSHIPS	Community agencies plus local groups support lunches and snacks; Community Friendship Centre lunch program; FANS (Food and Nutrition for Schools) program; Food Bank; Snack Attack Program; Loaves and Fishes; Food for Thought; Hope Mission; Meals on Wheels; Metis Child Services; All in for Youth; Brown Bags for Calgary Kids; company donates fruit for students to eat at recess or when hungry
SCHOOL FOOD/MEAL INITIATIVES	Breakfast program; community lunch boxes; forgotten snack program; grants/district provides snacks; apple cart available
EMERGENCY FOOD PROVISION/SNACKS AVAILABLE	Emergency lunches available; leftover hot lunches/sandwiches kept for students in need; extra family lunch frozen for students in need; provision of emergency food by office/school staff; school purchased meals available for emergencies; teachers provide food for students at a personal cost (e.g. from own lunches, extra granola bars in classroom, food supplies); school council offers emergency food
OTHER EXAMPLES	Families have limited access to hunger relief; school fundraises during Christmas to provide food hampers for needy families; parents assist with providing relief food; donations used to purchase grocery store gift cards; students are involved in humanitarian projects (e.g. feed the hungry in Africa); proposal in place for a community garden with raised beds; none

Question 8: What are the top 3 factors that influence the selection of foods offered at your school?†



†Note: Participants were able to select all options that applied.

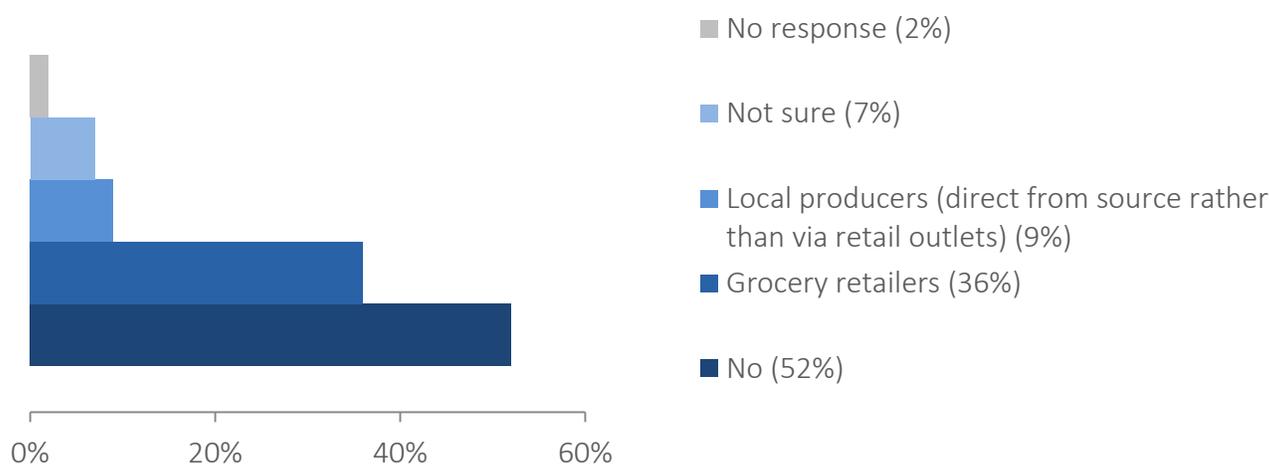
- NR No Response
- Profitability
- Principal preference or opinion
- Teacher preference or opinion
- Lunch supervisor preference or opinion
- * Other*
- Food service contractors
- Student preference or opinion
- Convenience
- Space and facilities
- Parent council preference or opinion
- Price
- School/District policy or procedures
- Nutrition and health guidelines/recommendations

Question 8 continued: What are the top 3 factors that influence the selection of foods offered at your school?[†]

*Participants who selected “other” provided a number of examples, which are summarized below.

GUIDELINES	Guidelines from APPLE schools ⁵ ; Alberta Health Services guidelines ⁶
PARENTAL INFLUENCE	Parental choice on foods to offer; staff and parent commitment to “Best Learning”; parent sponsored events (e.g. movie night, snacks for celebrations); parent/staff created nutrition policy; parents choose whether to join a healthy lunch box code
LOGISTICS & INFRASTRUCTURE	Shelf life; location of the school; availability of food; access; transportation of food; storage; packaging; assistance from volunteers
DIETARY RESTRICTIONS	Kosher foods required; allergies
DISTRICT-LEVEL INFLUENCE	Local school board allows the sale of junk food; school menu is dictated by someone at the district level
OTHER EXAMPLES	Lunch program board; dependence on donations; school has little influence over the contractor providing food to the cafeteria; relevance to program of studies; culinary arts program provides healthy lunch to staff and students; what is available to support local businesses; the only food provided comes from local food bank

Question 9: Does your school have a food supplier or retailer partnership with 1 or more of the following options?[†]



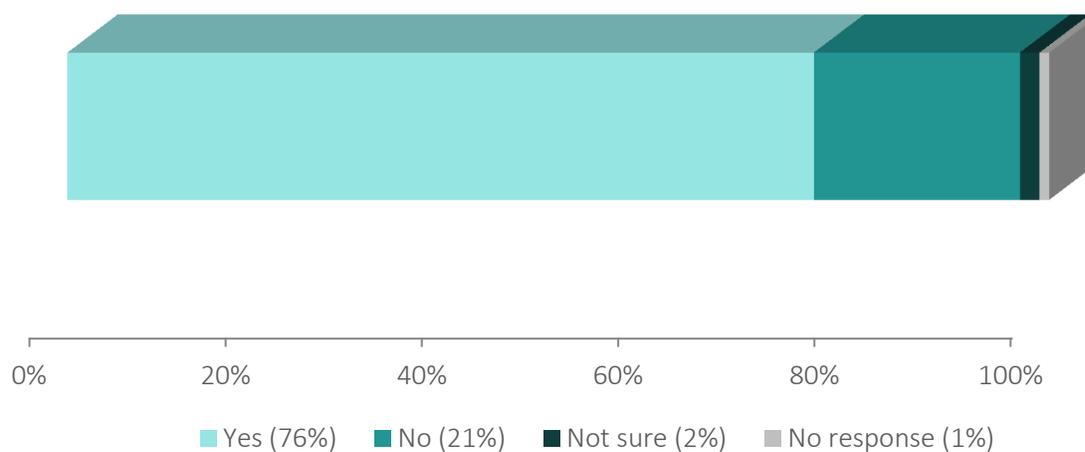
†Note: Participants were able to select all options that applied.

⁵ Note: APPLE Schools does not have guidelines. Each APPLE School works to create school-specific guidelines that align with district policies and the Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth.

⁶ Note: Alberta Health Services does not have guidelines. The Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth are created by Alberta Health.

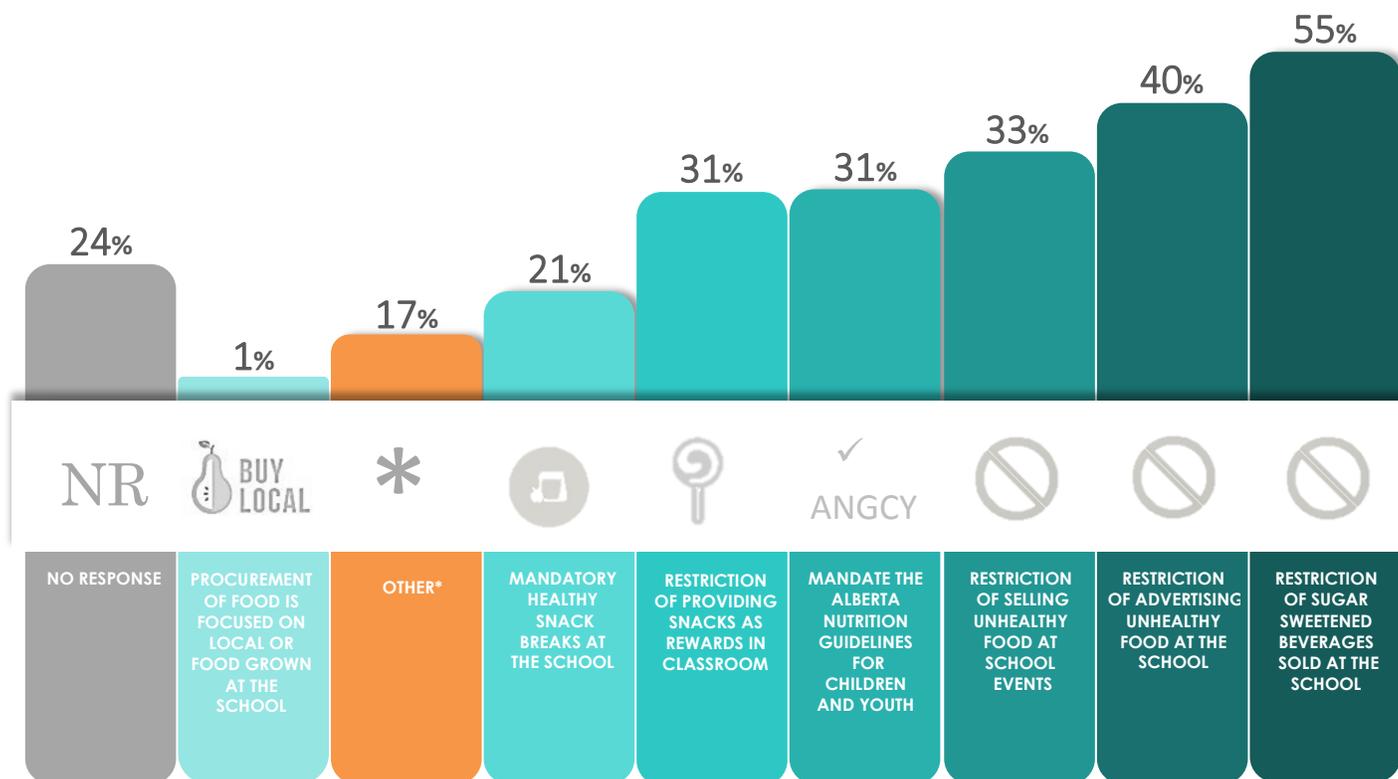
SECTION B: SCHOOL FOOD POLICIES AND ADMINISTRATIVE

Question 10: Does your school have any existing food-related policies in place?[†]



[†]Note: For this question, 18 participants (13 “No”, 5 “Not sure”) had their selection manually changed to “Yes” because in the next question (Question 11) these participants provided examples of food-related policies existing within their school.

Question 11: What food related policies currently exist within your school?†



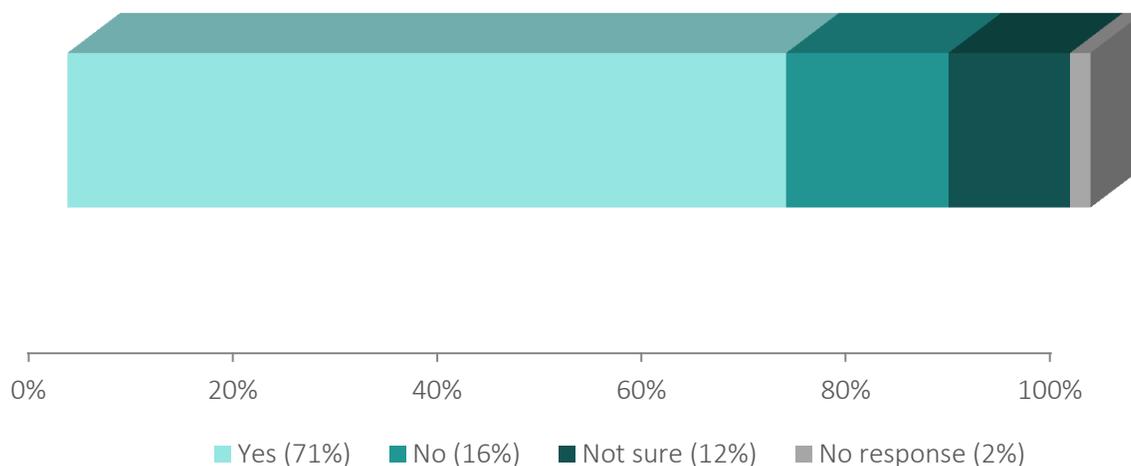
†Note: Participants were able to select all options that applied.

*Participants who selected “other” provided a number of examples, which are summarized below.

DIETARY RESTRICTIONS	No nut policy; policies and warnings on food allergies; Kosher requirements
BANS AND RESTRICTIONS	Energy drinks banned in school; restriction of energy drinks consumed at school; restrictions of having students drink power drinks; restriction of canteen sales based on nutrition guidelines; restriction of unhealthy food sales for fundraising campaigns
GUIDELINES AND POLICIES	District policy; ‘Choose Most Often’ foods; school board policy; the Alberta Nutrition Guidelines; APPLE school guidelines ⁷ ; school developed policy; a school nutrition plan
INFORMAL POLICIES/SCHOOL CULTURE	All hungry students will be fed; encouragement of bringing/eating healthy foods in place of policy; healthy alternatives offered in concessions; snacks/sales reflect the needs of students; students are allowed to eat whole fruit, vegetables, cheese, or yogurt (from snack/lunch kit) any time that they are hungry; staff members are supposed to model healthy eating (e.g. no drinking of pop in front of students); an unwritten policy

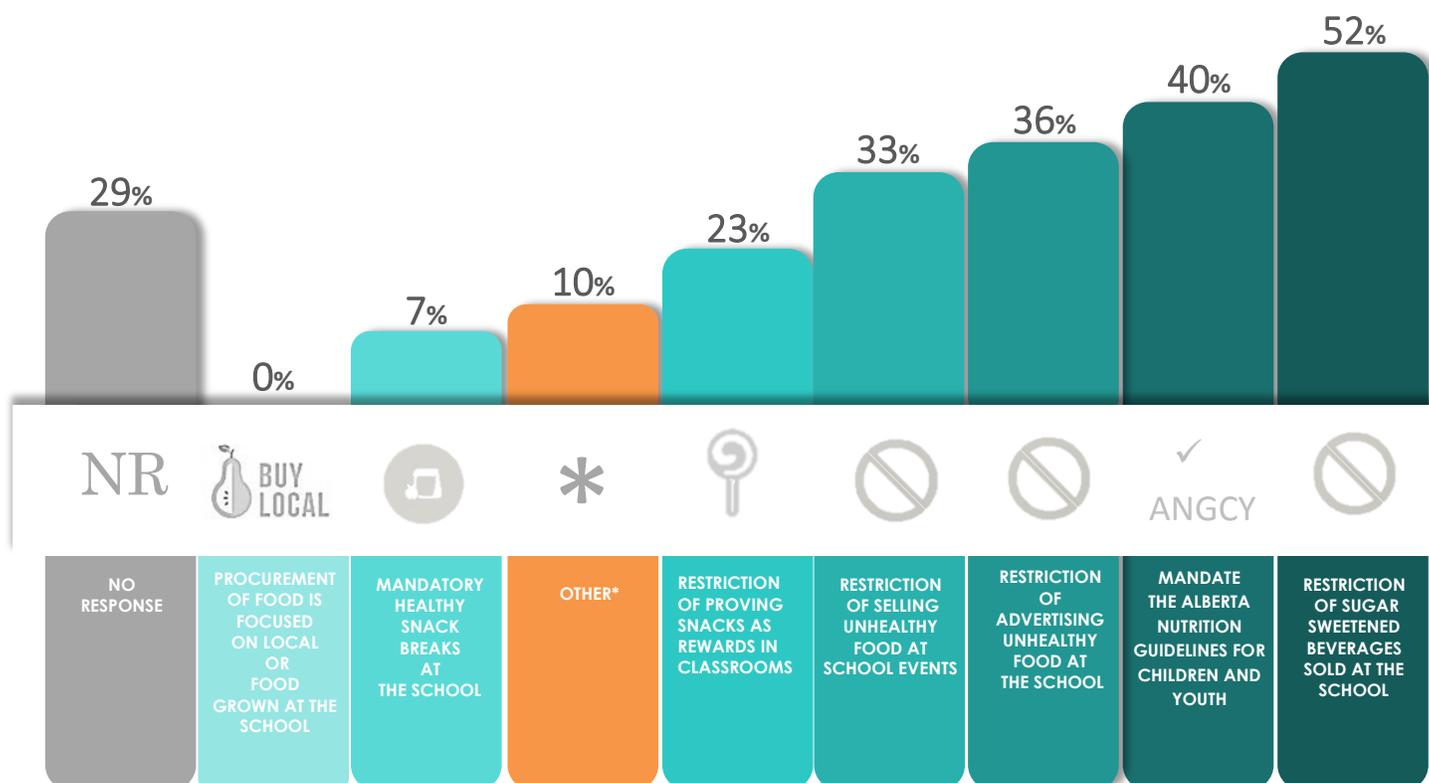
⁷ Note: APPLE Schools does not have guidelines. Each APPLE School works to create school-specific guidelines that align with district policies and the Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth.

Question 12: Does your school district/division have any existing food related policies in place?[†]



†Note: For this question, 9 participants (6 “No”, 3 “Not sure”) had their selection manually changed to “Yes” because in the next question (Question 13) these participants provided examples of food-related policies existing within their school. For this question, percentages of responses were also rounded to the nearest whole percentage.

Question 13: What food related policies currently exist within your district/division?[†]



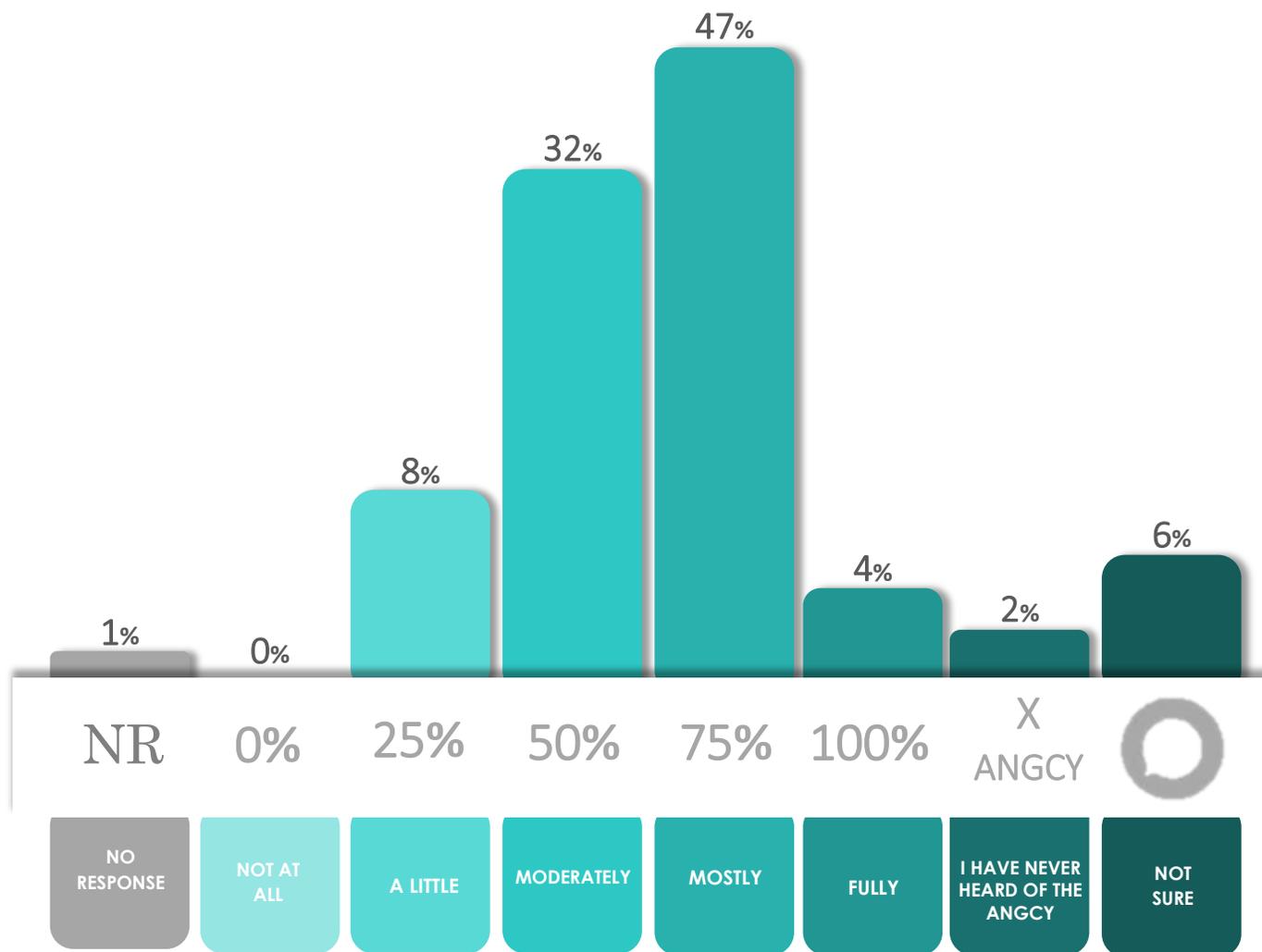
†Note: Participants were able to select all options that applied.

*Participants who selected “other” provided a number of examples, which are summarized below.

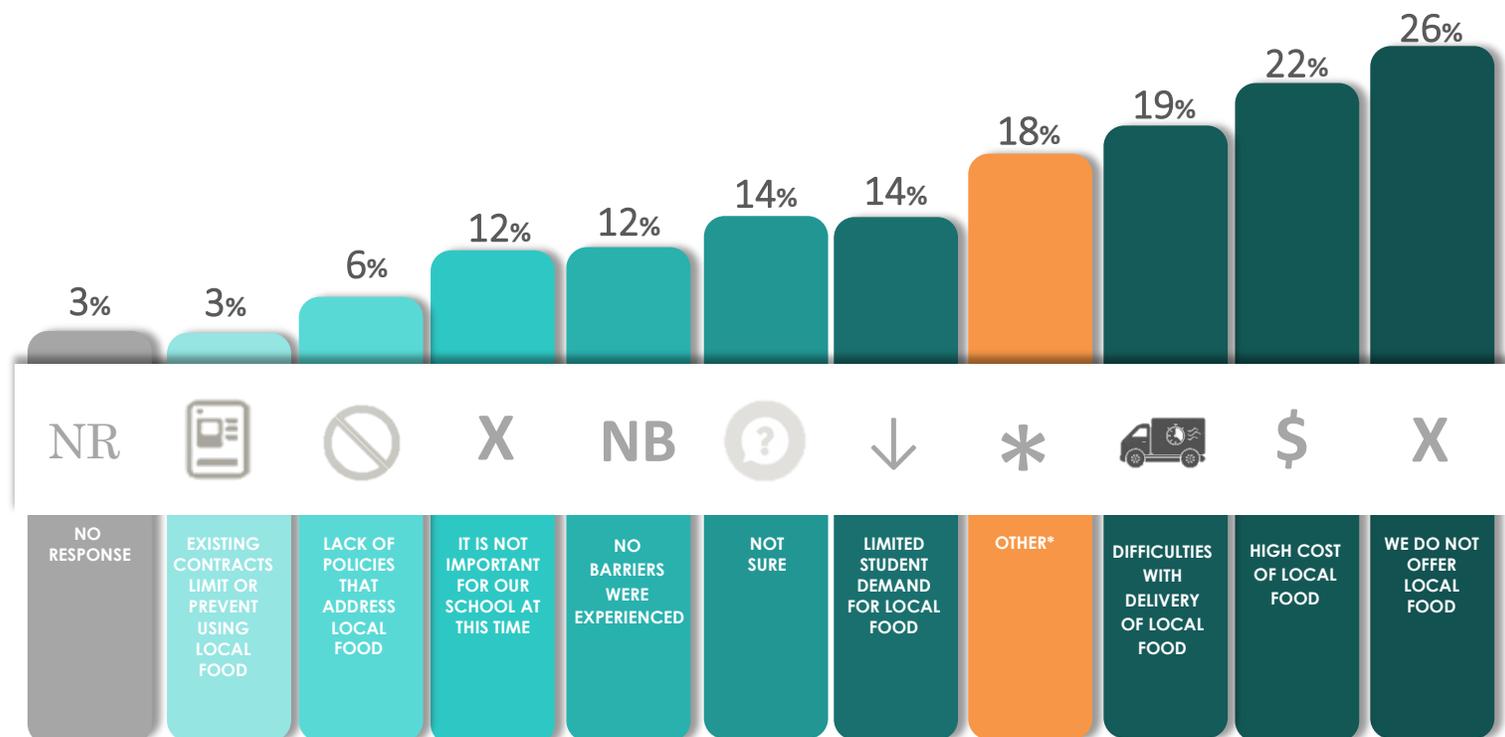
DIETARY RESTRICTIONS	Policies on food allergies, nut awareness
GUIDELINES AND POLICIES	Policy on healthy living at district level; policy focuses on choose most often foods; wellness policy outlining the use of Alberta Nutrition Guidelines and Comprehensive School Health; healthy eating guidelines; administrative guidelines; APPLE schools guidelines ⁸ ; an agreement with vending companies restricting the types of items available in vending machines to meet a district guideline
INFORMAL POLICIES/ SCHOOL CULTURE	Using only healthy choices for fundraising despite limited profit; only selling healthy foods to students; supporting and informing healthy choices; limiting snacks as rewards; only offering healthy snacks; staff members are supposed to model healthy eating (e.g. no drinking of pop in front of students)
OTHER EXAMPLES	Nothing that is mandatory; fundraising; district cafeteria contractor does not meet the guidelines of district policy

⁸ Note: APPLE Schools does not have guidelines. Each APPLE School works to create school-specific guidelines that align with district policies and the Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth.

Question 14: What percent of foods in your school meet the definition of “choose most often” foods based on the *Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth (ANGCY)*?



Question 15: What barrier(s), if any, has your school experienced in aiming to offer local food to students at your school?†

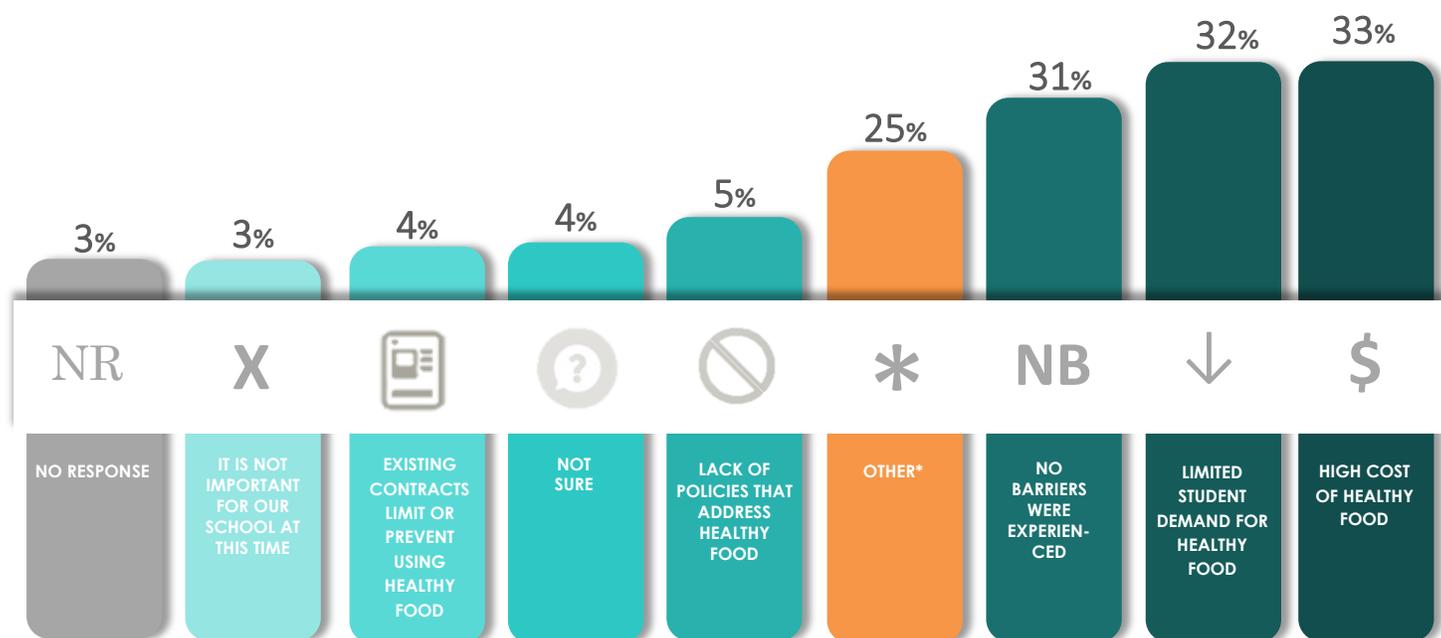


†Note: Participants were able to select all options that applied.

*Participants who selected “other” provided a number of examples, which are summarized below.

NOT AVAILABLE NOR A PRIORITY/FOCUS	Not a major priority but is discussed with students; not available; no local food program; school doesn’t offer food; school purchases very little food
LOGISTICS & INFRASTRUCTURE	Availability of local food; seasonal issues with local food (Alberta/Northern climate); cost of local food; location of school (e.g. area is isolated, urban school); sustainability; time; space; access to local food; food handling (e.g. meat inspection standards); delivery; cooking/serving local food (e.g. volunteers needed for large school); teachers would have to shop for local food; no cafeteria; if price and delivery are favorable then school would offer local food
LACK OF OPTIONS	Limited options available for school community; options are limited and what is available is expensive; only local food available is wild game, which is illegal; school accepts the food that is available from the limited funds donated
DISTRICT & VENDOR INFLUENCE	District controls type of food offered via contracted grocery delivery; local food not offered because school is required to work with district/board approved vendor; unknown vendor pre-prepares lunches
OTHER EXAMPLES	Kosher trumps local food every time; allergies; Alberta Health Services; easier for school to purchase/offer local food directly themselves; high ESL population who are getting used to Canadian food choices

Question 16: What barrier(s), if any, has your school experienced in aiming to offer healthy food to students at your school?†



†Note: Participants were able to select all options that applied.

*Participants who selected “other” provided a number of examples, which are summarized below.

PARENTS	Needing to educate parents (using newsletters to help promote healthy choices); parental resistance (parents resent being told what to supply as snacks); parents providing unhealthy foods (parents providing unhealthy snacks for celebrations); parent convenience; awareness
STUDENT RELUCTANCE	Convincing students to eat healthy food; students often prefer high fat/sugar foods; student resistance to policy; Health Hut opened in school and demand was for unhealthy food (e.g. sugary muffins); cultural barriers as to understanding what healthy food looks like
LOGISTICS & INFRASTRUCTURE	Availability of healthy food; difficulty keeping healthy food fresh (e.g. spoilage); cost of healthy food; school has limited facilities or no kitchen; lack of reliable sources for healthy food; size of the school (e.g. large school makes it difficult to prepare/distribute healthy food, small school doesn't offer food); limited storage space; limited staff/volunteers to deliver such a program; difficult finding reliable convenient stores or providers
UNHEALTHY FOOD AROUND SCHOOLS	Proximity to rec centre offers unhealthy food that students choose; local convenience store offers students unhealthy foods; availability of unhealthy foods in surrounding community (e.g. fast food for lunch)
REVENUE GENERATION	Unhealthy foods (i.e., sugar, fat, junk food) make money during school events (e.g. dances, movie nights); fruit and vegetables do not sell well
OTHER EXAMPLES	Kosher trumps healthy; school is working towards healthier options; potential allergens; low processed ingredients asked for when donations are sought out; limited funding for food purchases; independent cafeteria contractor; district runs the lunch program; hot lunch follows the Canada Food Guide; school only purchases food for students who come to school hungry as there are no vending machines and no cafeteria; not available

Question 17: Please rate your level of support for a Universal School Food Strategy for Alberta funded by the Government of Alberta.[‡]

Universal School Food Strategy: A comprehensive approach to promoting healthy school food environments in Alberta. It involves making healthy and sustainable food available and affordable to all Alberta students and providing them with education and skills to grow and prepare food. A universal school food strategy also supports relationships with local producers and the development of local food procurement policies in Alberta schools.



0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

- Very low support (6%) Low support (7%) Neutral (12%)
- Moderately supportive (27%) Highly supportive (36%) Not sure (12%)
- No response (1%)

‡Note: Percentages of responses were rounded to the nearest whole percentage.

2014/2015 Study Demographics

Demographic Characteristics	TOTAL (n = 363)	
	Number (n)	Percent
Grade Levels Offered		
<i>Participants were able to select all options that applied.</i>		
Early Learning	109	30%
Kindergarten	251	69%
Elementary/Primary	267	74%
Middle/Junior High	165	45%
High School	74	20%
No response	1	0%
Students Enrolled		
Fewer than 100 students	17	5%
100-399 students	212	58%
400-699 students	86	24%
700-999 students	24	7%
1000 or more students	23	6%
No response	1	0%
Economic Background For Majority of Students		
High family income	24	7%
Middle family income	147	40%
Low family income	84	23%
High variability of income backgrounds	106	29%
No response	2	1%
Teachers and Staff Employed		
Fewer than 10	14	4%
10-19	83	23%
20-29	102	28%
30-39	68	19%
40 or more	94	26%
No response	2	1%
Community Types Served by School		
<i>Participants were able to select all options that applied.</i>		
Remote area	13	4%
Rural area	143	39%
Urban area	223	61%
First Nation Reservation	29	8%
Métis Settlement	10	3%
No response	1	0%

Overall Findings	TOTAL (n = 363)	
	Number (n)	Percent
Question 1: What food services and sales are offered to students at your school?		
<i>Participants were able to select all options that applied.</i>		
Cafeteria	61	17%
Canteen/tuck shop	95	26%
Salad bar	5	1%
Vending machine	126	35%
School fundraisers	208	57%
Concession at school events	151	42%
Other	145	40%
No response	8	2%
Question 2: What food programs and/or initiatives are offered to students at your school?		
<i>Participants were able to select all options that applied.</i>		
Milk program	169	47%
Community kitchen	25	7%
Breakfast program	124	34%
Lunch program	147	40%
Healthy snack program	105	29%
Vegetable and fruit program	42	12%
Extracurricular cooking classes or program	75	21%
Other	85	23%
No response	30	8%
Question 3: Is long-term, sustainable funding available for food programs and/or initiatives at your school?		
No	180	50%
Not sure	47	13%
Other	57	16%
Yes	74	20%
No response	5	1%
Question 4: Do students have access to food programs and/or initiatives at a free or subsidized rate your school?		
No	117	32%
Not sure	4	1%
Other	42	12%
Yes	193	53%
No response	7	2%

Question 5: What food curriculum programs and/or initiatives are offered to students at your school? <i>Participants were able to select all options that applied.</i>		
Career and Technology Studies of Natural Resources in Agriculture	10	3%
Career and Technology Studies of Foods	106	29%
Career and Technology Studies of Culinary Arts Skill Centre	25	7%
Home Economics	83	23%
School Field Trips to Farms	68	19%
Other	113	31%
No response	73	20%
Question 6: What food gardening programs and/or initiatives are offered to students at your school? <i>Participants were able to select all options that applied.</i>		
Indoor gardening (e.g. little green thumbs, earth boxes, container gardening)	67	18%
Outdoor gardening (e.g. raised garden beds, community garden)	62	17%
Greenhouse program	9	2%
Other	63	17%
No response	204	56%
Question 7: What food programs and/or initiatives related to hunger relief are offered to students at your school? <i>Participants were able to select all options that applied.</i>		
Provision of emergency food by teachers	226	62%
School food bank	73	20%
Other	153	42%
No response	28	8%
Question 8: What are the top 3 factors that influence the selection of foods offered at your school?		
Convenience	82	23%
Nutrition and health guidelines	252	69%
School/District policy/procedures	185	51%
Food service contractors	53	15%
Principal preference or opinion	20	6%
Parent council preference or opinion	97	27%
Teacher preference or opinion	23	6%
Student preference or opinion	66	18%
Lunch supervisor preference or opinion	24	7%
Price	114	31%
Profitability	19	5%
Space and facilities	87	24%
Other	40	11%

No response	9	2%
Question 9: Does your school have a food supplier or retailer partnership with 1 or more of the following options?		
<i>Participants were able to select all options that applied.</i>		
Grocery retailers	131	36%
Local producers	33	9%
No	189	52%
Not sure	25	7%
No response	9	2%
Question 10: Does your school have any existing food-related policies in place?		
No	75	21%
Not sure	7	2%
Yes	277	76%
No response	4	1%
Question 11: What food-related policies currently exist within your school?		
<i>Participants were able to select all options that applied.</i>		
Restriction of sugar sweetened beverages sold at the school	199	55%
Restriction of advertising unhealthy food at the school	146	40%
Restriction of providing snacks as rewards in classrooms	111	31%
Mandate the <i>Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth</i>	114	31%
Restriction of selling unhealthy food at school events	119	33%
Mandatory healthy snack breaks at the school	76	21%
Procurement of food is focused on local or food grown at the school	5	1%
Other	61	17%
No response	86	24%
Question 12: Does your school district/division have any existing food related policies in place?		
No	57	16%
Not sure	43	12%
Yes	257	71%
No response	6	2%
Question 13: What food-related policies currently exist within your district/division?		
<i>Participants were able to select all options that applied.</i>		
Restriction of sugar sweetened beverages sold at the school	190	52%
Restriction of advertising unhealthy food at the school	131	36%
Restriction of providing snacks as rewards in classrooms	82	23%
Mandate the <i>Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth</i>	144	40%
Restriction of selling unhealthy food at school events	118	33%

Mandatory healthy snack breaks at the school	25	7%
Procurement of food is focused on local or food grown at the school	1	0%
Other	37	10%
No response	106	29%
Question 14: What percent of foods in your school meet the definition of “choose most often” foods based on the <i>Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth</i> (ANGCY)?		
Not at all (0%)	0	0%
A little (25%)	28	8%
Moderately (50%)	117	32%
Mostly (75%)	170	47%
Fully (100%)	14	4%
I have never heard of the <i>Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth</i>	7	2%
Not sure	23	6%
No response	4	1%
Question 15: What barrier(s), if any, has your school experienced in aiming to offer local food to students at your school? <i>Participants were able to select up to 3 options.</i>		
None	45	12%
High cost of local food	81	22%
Difficulties with delivery of local food	69	19%
Existing contracts limit or prevent using local food	12	3%
Lack of policies that address local food	21	6%
Limited student demand for local food	52	14%
It is not important for our school at this time	42	12%
Other	64	18%
Not sure	51	14%
We do not offer local food	93	26%
No response	12	3%
Question 16: What barrier(s), if any, has your school experienced in aiming to offer healthy food to students at your school? <i>Participants were able to select up to 3 options.</i>		
None	112	31%
High cost of healthy food	121	33%
Existing contracts limit or prevent access to healthy food	15	4%
Lack of policies that address healthy food	19	5%
Limited student demand for healthy food	115	32%
It is not important for our school at this time	12	3%

Other	89	25%
Not sure	16	4%
No response	11	3%
Question 17: Please rate your level of support for a Universal School Food Strategy for Alberta funded by the Government of Alberta.		
Very low support	21	6%
Low support	25	7%
Neutral	44	12%
Moderately supportive	97	27%
Highly supportive	130	36%
Not sure	43	12%
No response	3	1%

LIMITATIONS

It is important to note potential limitations to this study. First, the research team manually generated principal contact lists to ease participation requirements of schools and school boards. Manual list generation might overlook any schools that are not listed on district websites. Further, while steps were taken to ensure that schools were accurately selected for inclusion in the survey, there is a possibility that we may have erroneously included/excluded some schools. To ameliorate such limitations, future surveys could seek to work more directly with Alberta schools to determine the survey sample.

Findings from this survey may also be limited by how survey questions were interpreted by survey respondents and by ambiguous qualitative survey responses. For example, school principals may have interpreted the Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth “Choose Most Often” foods in question 14 more broadly than its actual definition considering that the definition of “Choose Most Often” was not provided. It is also important to note that several questions had high no response rates (e.g. 56% for Question 6); ultimately, given the design of the survey, it is difficult to attribute meaning to these statistics. Finally, participation in the survey might be skewed to schools that are already part of health promotion initiatives.

REPORT SUMMARY

Findings from the survey indicate that many schools across Alberta have taken significant steps to creating healthy school food environments. For example, many schools have implemented food programs and initiatives with the potential to promote student wellbeing and a large number of schools and districts have food-related policies in place to support healthy eating. With that said, our survey also found indication that schools require more support and financial stability when it comes to creating healthy food environments.

Several key findings include:

- 53% of survey respondents indicated that students at their school have access to food programs and/or initiatives at a free or subsidized rate.
- 50% of survey respondents indicated that long-term, sustainable funding is not available for food programs and/or initiatives at their school.
- 40% of survey respondents indicated that lunch programs are offered to students at their school.
- 62% of survey respondents indicated that hunger relief in their school is addressed through the provision of emergency food by teachers.
- 33% of survey respondents indicated that the high cost of healthy food is a barrier to offering healthy food to students at their school.
- 63% of survey respondents indicated that they are moderately or highly supportive of a Universal School Food Strategy for Alberta, funded by the government.

In conclusion, this study provides a snap shot of the food programs, policies, and procedures in place in Alberta schools. It is our hope that this report will contribute to the ongoing conversation around the promotion of healthy school food in Alberta.

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Community Advisory Committee

- Bill Gordon, Alberta Coalition for Healthy School Communities
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- Catherine White, School Health Facilitator, Alberta Health Services
- Cheryl Dumont, St. Albert Public School Board
- Erin Wright, APPLE Schools
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