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Summary Report
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Canada

***Child health practices:
9-12 years in Nova Scotia northern region***

Northern Nova Scotia: Child Health Practices: 9-12 Years

Healthy eating, physical activity and good dental care are basic health practices to ensure good health and prevent illness. Learning to make healthy choices early in life is an important first step. Supportive environments enable children to make choices and build self confidence to make decisions about their own healthy growth and development. This study focused on the policies and systems which exist within the school environment.

Evidence: During March and April 1999, fieldwork teams visited schools in the 20 enumeration areas and facilitated students in grades 4, 5 and 6 through self-administered questionnaires. Students (2439), parents (2154) and home room teachers (103) completed self-administered questionnaires. The principals of 27 schools and more than 20 caterers were interviewed. Preliminary findings were taken back to the community through parent focus groups. Students were able to participate in an interactive website which not only informed them of some preliminary findings, but also gave them the opportunity to supply further feedback.

Some of the key findings include:

14% of children in Northern Nova Scotia do not eat breakfast; this is greater than an earlier study in Ontario which reported 9%. In grade six, this rate increases to 18% **not eating breakfast**.

17% of children said they are “**overweight**” and 17% were told by someone else they are “overweight”. A child who is told by other people that s/he is “overweight” is 77% more likely to be on a diet compared with a child who is told s/he is “just right”.

16% of children in grades 4 to 6 reported to be on a **diet**. For every two boys on a diet there are three girls on a diet. In grade six, 11% of boys and 24% of girls are on a diet.

Although 83% of parents believe that **physical activity** is important, 49% of children said they were not physically active during recess; 33% of children were not active during lunch break.

By grade six, 25% of girls said they **liked themselves** “some” or “none” of the time compared with 18% of boys. Overall, 4% like themselves “none of the time”.

73% of children feel that most **adults at home listen** to their ideas and opinions “most” or “all” of the time and at school this rate is only 47%. At home 6% of children do *not* feel that adults listen to them. This increases to 14% at school.

Planning and action to date: Through discussion at focus groups, parents are in the early stages of mobilising Home and School or Parent Teacher Groups to

act on suggestions brought forward by their own members. Some are becoming more vocal and involved in the food choices in school cafeterias and the availability of physical activities. Two consultation sessions have been held with elementary school principals in Northern Nova Scotia. Less costly alternatives to expensive playground equipment, modifying school menus to provide only nutritious snacks and lunches, and the development of a school board wide food policy are among the several suggested solutions. Participants of the consultations are beginning work on these items.

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