

Smart CHOICES

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EVALUATION SUMMARY

Healthy Food and Drink Supply Strategy for Queensland Schools

Toward ²
Tomorrow's Queensland

Overview

In June 2005, the Queensland Government announced the implementation of the *Smart Choices – Healthy Food and Drink Supply Strategy for Queensland Schools*. *Smart Choices* is one initiative in a broad Queensland Government program to promote healthy weight and improve children and young people's health through better nutrition.

The aim of *Smart Choices* is to ensure that all food and drink supplied in state schools reflects the *Australian Guide to Healthy Eating* and the *Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents in Australia*. *Smart Choices* applies to all situations where food and drink is supplied in the school environment including tuckshops, vending machines, school excursions, school camps, fundraising, classroom rewards, sports days, breakfast programs, school events, class parties, sponsorship and advertising, and food used in curriculum activities.

The strategy includes a Food and Drink Selector to assist schools to provide healthy food and drinks. The selector categorises foods and drinks into three broad categories:

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| GREEN 'have plenty' | Encourage and promote these foods and drinks eg. bread, cereals, fruit, vegetables, low fat milk. |
| AMBER 'select carefully' | Do not let these foods and drinks dominate the choices eg. processed meats, muffins, savoury breads. |
| RED 'occasionally' | These food and drinks are to be supplied on no more than two occasions per term eg. soft drinks, confectionary, deep fried foods. |

Following the introduction of *Smart Choices*, state schools had an 18 month lead in time to implement changes to current school practice before the strategy became mandatory in all Queensland state schools in January 2007.

The Queensland Council of Parents and Citizens' Associations (QCPCA), Queensland Association of School Tuckshops (QAST) and Nutrition Australia were funded to support the implementation of *Smart Choices* in schools.

Two resource packages were developed and distributed to all schools in Queensland to assist implementation of the strategy:

- *Smart Choices Healthy Food and Drink Supply Strategy for Queensland Schools* (distributed Term 3, 2005)
- *Smart Choices Tool Kit* (distributed Term 1, 2006).



To increase understanding of *Smart Choices* and its implementation in schools, a number of information and training seminars were conducted throughout the state. A dedicated *Smart Choices* website was developed to disseminate information about the strategy and is accessible at www.education.qld.gov.au/schools/healthy/food-drink-strategy.html

Evaluation

The implementation of *Smart Choices* was evaluated in Term 2, 2007 by surveying principals, Parents and Citizens' Associations (P&Cs), and tuckshop convenors. The evaluation examined the level of understanding, engagement and implementation of *Smart Choices* within school communities.

As part of the evaluation all principals and P&Cs in Queensland were invited to participate and a random sample of 523 tuckshop convenors from across Queensland was selected to be interviewed. Results are reported from the responses received from:

- 973 principals who completed an online survey (response rate 78%)
- 598 P&Cs who completed a self administered postal survey (response rate 48%)
- 513 tuckshop convenors who were interviewed via phone (response rate 98%).

The major limitation of this evaluation is that the responses are self reported. However, there is a high level of consistency between the three groups of respondents within the school community which supports the findings of the evaluation.

Key findings

The findings from this evaluation indicate that Queensland state schools:

- supported the rationale for introducing *Smart Choices*
- made significant efforts in a short period of time to implement *Smart Choices* across all areas of food and drink supply
- took steps to engage the wider school community in implementation of *Smart Choices*
- accessed resources and attended training sessions to gain further understanding of *Smart Choices*.

The evaluation found that the overall implementation of *Smart Choices* was high with:

- nearly all schools reporting implementation of *Smart Choices* in tuckshops, vending machines, breakfast programs and in curriculum activities
- the majority of schools reporting implementation of *Smart Choices* in sporting events and sports clubs, fundraising events, classroom rewards and class parties.



Results and discussion

Smart Choices in the tuckshop

Nearly all Principals (97%), P&Cs (99%) and tuckshop convenors (97%) reported that the school tuckshop had implemented *Smart Choices*.

Nearly all (97%) tuckshop convenors reported that RED foods had been removed from the tuckshop. One fifth (21%) experienced some difficulties removing RED foods and drinks including concern over loss of profits and lack of demand for healthy food and drink by students.

Most tuckshop convenors (91%) reported that the availability of GREEN foods and drinks such as reduced fat dairy products, plain water, fruit, vegetables and wholegrain foods increased on the tuckshop menu.

The majority of tuckshop convenors (84%) indicated they used two or more strategies to ensure AMBER foods and drinks do not dominate the tuckshop menu choices.

Over half P&Cs reported an increase or no change in tuckshop profits since implementing *Smart Choices* (15% reported an increase and 41% reported no change). 32% reported a decrease in profits.

Smart Choices in the broader school environment

Smart Choices is the first healthy food and drink strategy for schools in Australia to go beyond tuckshops and apply across the broader school environment. Principals and P&Cs who participated in the evaluation reported that *Smart Choices* had been implemented well across the whole school environment (see table).

Proportion of Principals and P&Cs reporting implementation of *Smart Choices* in the broader school environment

| | Principal (%) | P&C (%) |
|-----------------------------|---------------|---------|
| Breakfast programs | 98 | 92 |
| Vending machine stock | 94 | 83 |
| Sponsorship and advertising | 93 | 84 |
| School events | 87 | 88 |
| Vending machine advertising | 85 | 84 |
| School sporting events | 81 | 80 |
| Fundraising events | 80 | 84 |
| School/P&C sporting clubs | 73 | 75 |

Only some schools have breakfast programs or vending machines. In the schools that provide these services, principals and P&Cs reported the food and drinks supplied are consistent with *Smart Choices*.

In 2005 the DET sponsorship and advertising policy was revised to ensure consistency with *Smart Choices*. The majority of principals and P&Cs reported sponsorship and advertising within their school was consistent with *Smart Choices*.

Principals and P&Cs reported that *Smart Choices* has been implemented in the majority of school and P&C sporting events and clubs. Promoting and modelling healthy eating and being physically active is important and more work is needed to improve the availability of healthy food at sporting events and clubs.

Many principals and P&Cs reported they had changed from using RED foods as the basis of their fundraising activities. However, with around one in five P&Cs and principals reporting that they are not implementing *Smart Choices* in fundraising, more work is needed to improve the confidence and ability of schools to successfully fundraise without relying on RED food and drinks.

Smart Choices in the classroom

Almost all principals (97%) reported implementation of *Smart Choices* in curriculum activities. Curriculum activities that involved RED foods fit the context of *Smart Choices* as occasional foods.

Implementation of *Smart Choices* was reported by a majority of school principals as part of classroom rewards (86%) and class parties (75%). It is encouraging to see the changes being made in classrooms, however, further work is required to support and direct teachers to suitable alternatives.

Recommendations for the future

Queensland state schools are to be congratulated on the progress they have made toward improving the nutritional quality of the food and drink available to students.

The following recommendations have been made to ensure that the strategy continues to be an effective initiative to improve food and drink supply in schools:

- Provide ongoing support to maintain the implementation of *Smart Choices* in the tuckshop and vending machines and strengthen implementation of *Smart Choices* in school sporting events and clubs, fundraising events, classroom rewards and class parties (DET and Queensland Health).
- Implement a process to ensure the *Smart Choices* strategy keeps pace with changes in food supply and the food industry (Queensland Health).
- Maximise the benefits of existing funding grant and award programs by promoting the programs to schools and disseminating the experience and knowledge of schools that participate (DET and Queensland Health).
- Develop an implementation plan to action the recommendations of this report (DET and Queensland Health).