

700 Lawrence Ave. W., Suite 310
Toronto, Ontario M6A 3B4

Tel: (416) 367-3313
1-800-267-6817 (Ont)
Fax: (416) 367-2844
E-mail: info@opha.on.ca
www.opha.on.ca

Honorary Patron

The Hon. David C. Onley
Lieutenant Governor of Ontario

President

Carol Timmings
E-mail: ctimmings@opha.on.ca

Executive Director

Connie Uetrecht
E-mail: cuetrecht@opha.on.ca

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Charitable Registration
Number 11924 8771 RR0001

November 26th, 2003

**To: The Honourable Gerard Kennedy
Minister of Education**

Dear Minister Kennedy:

I am writing to you on behalf of the Ontario Public Health Association with respect to your recent announcement (Nov 25, 2003) of plans to "get rid of junk food and sugary drinks in elementary schools."

OPHA would like to acknowledge the Ontario Liberal Government's commitment to encouraging healthier food choices within school environments by banning the sale of unhealthy foods and beverages in elementary schools. Given the rapid rise in rates of childhood overweight and obesity, it is important that real measures are taken to ensure that Ontario elementary schools provide environments that are supportive of healthier food choices.

OPHA would also like to draw your attention to a sampling of other types of initiatives that could be further supportive of the Liberal Government and Ministry of Education commitment to these issues:

1. Local public health units across the province are addressing school nutrition issues in a variety of ways:
 1. many are developing handbooks and guides for schools and school boards to promote the development of policies and guidelines related to food and nutrition
 2. others are working on specific issues such as vending machines; in Ottawa, the local public health unit is conducting a pilot of "Fuel to Excel" vending machines with an assortment of nutritious snacks, including milk, yoghurt and cheese. This initiative is still in early stages, but may prove to be a viable alternative to traditional vending machine choices of pop and chips.
2. The Eat Smart School Cafeteria Award Program - primarily applicable to secondary schools with food service facilities. School cafeterias can receive an Award of Excellence, if they meet standards related to nutrition/healthy food choices as well as food safety . This program is administered locally by public health units and supported provincially through the Nutrition Resource Centre at the Ontario Public Health

Association.

- The Food Share Salad Bar Program (Toronto) offers schools a child-sized salad bar stocked with fruits, vegetables, grain products and a daily source of protein so kids can create a healthy lunch. So far, this project has been successful and will hopefully be offered to more schools in the next year.

The Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) was founded in 1949 and is a voluntary, charitable, non-profit association. OPHA is an organization of individuals and Constituent Associations from various sectors and disciplines that have an interest in improving the health of the people of Ontario. The mission of the Ontario Public Health Association is to provide leadership on issues affecting the public's health and to strengthen the impact of people who are active in public and community health throughout Ontario.

One of OPHA's long-term projects is the Nutrition Resource Centre (NRC) - funded by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, Public Health Branch (Health Promotion and Wellness). The NRC has a mandate to increase the level of coordinated provincial support of nutrition promotion programming, resource development and dissemination and support services for nutrition practitioners in Ontario. The NRC works closely with nutrition practitioners in public health units and community health centres across the province on many different issues including school nutrition.

In closing, let me reiterate our support for this important first step in addressing issues related to school nutrition. We encourage you to continue looking for other supportive programming options for supporting healthier food choices in Ontario schools. OPHA would be happy to work with the Ministry of Education in achieving this laudable goal.

Sincerely,

Jack Lee
Executive Director
Ontario Public Health Association