

Building Healthy School Environments Through Farm to School:

How local food for students supports comprehensive school health

What is Farm to School?

[Farm to School](#) is broadly defined as a school-based initiative that connects schools (K-12) and local farms. One of the primary goals of this initiative is to ensure that children have access to fresh, local, nutritious, safe and culturally appropriate foods while at school. Farm to School programs aim to improve student nutrition, and provide students with opportunities to learn about foods and the local food system, while supporting local farmers and the local food economy.

How does Farm to School fit within the Comprehensive School Health Framework?

[Comprehensive school health](#) is a movement that is gaining momentum in Canada as educators, health professionals and governments recognize that a healthy school environment not only leads to healthier children, but also better learners.

The [Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health](#) defines comprehensive school health (CSH) as “....an internationally recognized framework for supporting improvements in students’ educational outcomes while addressing school health in a planned, integrated and holistic way.”ⁱ Farm to School can be an effective tool to create healthy school environments by nourishing students and supporting local food systems.

The [Comprehensive School Health Framework](#) identifies four pillars that provide a strong foundation for students to improve health, increase healthy behaviours, and enhance educational outcomes. A well-designed Farm to School program can support each of these pillars.

- 1. Social and Physical Environment** – Farm to School provides opportunities for students to develop social connections in the larger community through relationships with farmers, health professionals, chefs, and other like-minded organizations and individuals. As a result, there can be a growing sense of connection to the larger community. Student leaders often embrace volunteer roles in delivering the program, enhancing their social capital within the school setting.
- 2. Teaching and Learning** – Through Farm to School, students learn about local food systems, growing, harvesting, cooking, storing and serving food as well as disposing of food waste. Students gain valuable hands-on experience through all aspects of this program, from grow to throw.
- 3. Healthy School Policy** – The Farm to School network advocates for policies that improve local food sustainability and consumption of healthy, sustainable foods in schools. These policy positions include (but are not limited to): establishing local food procurement policies; embedding food skills training in schools; ensuring appropriate equipment is available in schools to serve healthy, local food; and allotting adequate time for students to eat.
- 4. Partnerships and Services** – At its core, Farm to School is about creating partnerships within the school and with local agencies and individuals. The community network that enables a successful Farm to School

program is broad and comprehensive including teachers, parents, students, school administrators, farmers, community nutritionists, environmental health officers, sustainability consultants, local governments, and many others. From a provincial perspective, Farm to School represents a unique partnership between agriculture, health and education to improve the health of children and youth by increasing access to locally grown, nutritious, safe and culturally appropriate foods in schools.

Farm to School is a dynamic way to bring the Comprehensive School Health Framework to life in schools. This is a program that nourishes the bodies and minds of children, while contributing to the health of farms, communities, the environment, and schools. Farm to School is managed by the [Public Health Association of BC](#) with funding from a variety of sources including the BC Ministry of Health.

Join the conversation on our [Farm to School Canada](#) Facebook group, and follow us on Twitter [@farm2cafeteria](#). For information about how to get Farm to School in your school, please contact us!

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ⁱ Source: <http://www.jcsh-cces.ca/index.php/school-health>