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| **Title of Research Presentation** Making a Case for a Universal, Curriculum-Integrated School Food Program for Canada |
| **Background/Objectives**The purpose of this presentation is to highlight aspects of the most promising models from high-income countries worldwide to propose a model for school food for Canada, one of the only OECD countries without a national school food program.**Methods**We will draw on our observational research characterizing children’s lunches at school in urban and rural locations in Saskatchewan, Canada (Everitt et al, In Press) were we characterized lunches using a school food checklist and digital photography in randomly selected schools of three types: urban schools that have a meal program (n=3), urban schools that do not have a meal program (n=3) and rural schools (n=3), with the total sample containing lunches from 773 students. The number of servings of each food group was determined and compared to one-third of recommended intake. Healthy Eating Index (HEI) scores were calculated. We will also draw on our extensive literature review recently published in the Canadian Food Studies Journal (Hernandez et al, 2018) from high-income countries around the world, where we present promising practices that offer a model for a national school food program for Canada. We will draw on both studies to make a case for a universal, curriculum-integrated school food program for Canada.**Results**In our observational study only 55% of all students brought the minimum number of Canada’s Food Guide servings for grain products and meat and alternatives, with an even smaller proportion bringing the minimum for vegetables and fruit (25.6%-34.9%), whole grains (24.1%), and milk and alternatives (14.1%). Meal program participants had more meat and alternatives and whole grains in their lunches compared to children who bring food from home. Students not in meal programs had significantly more calories in their lunches from minimally nutritious foods. Healthy Eating Index scores were significantly different with those students participating in meal programs having the highest scores.In high income countries around the world, school food programs have been shown to benefit health and dietary behaviour and critical food literacy skills (learning, culture, and social norms) that support local agriculture and promote sustainable food systems.**Discussion**The model we propose for a national school food program for Canada is universal, health promoting, respectful of local conditions, connected to local communities, curriculum-integrated and sustainable.**Keywords**School food, children, health promotion, Canada |