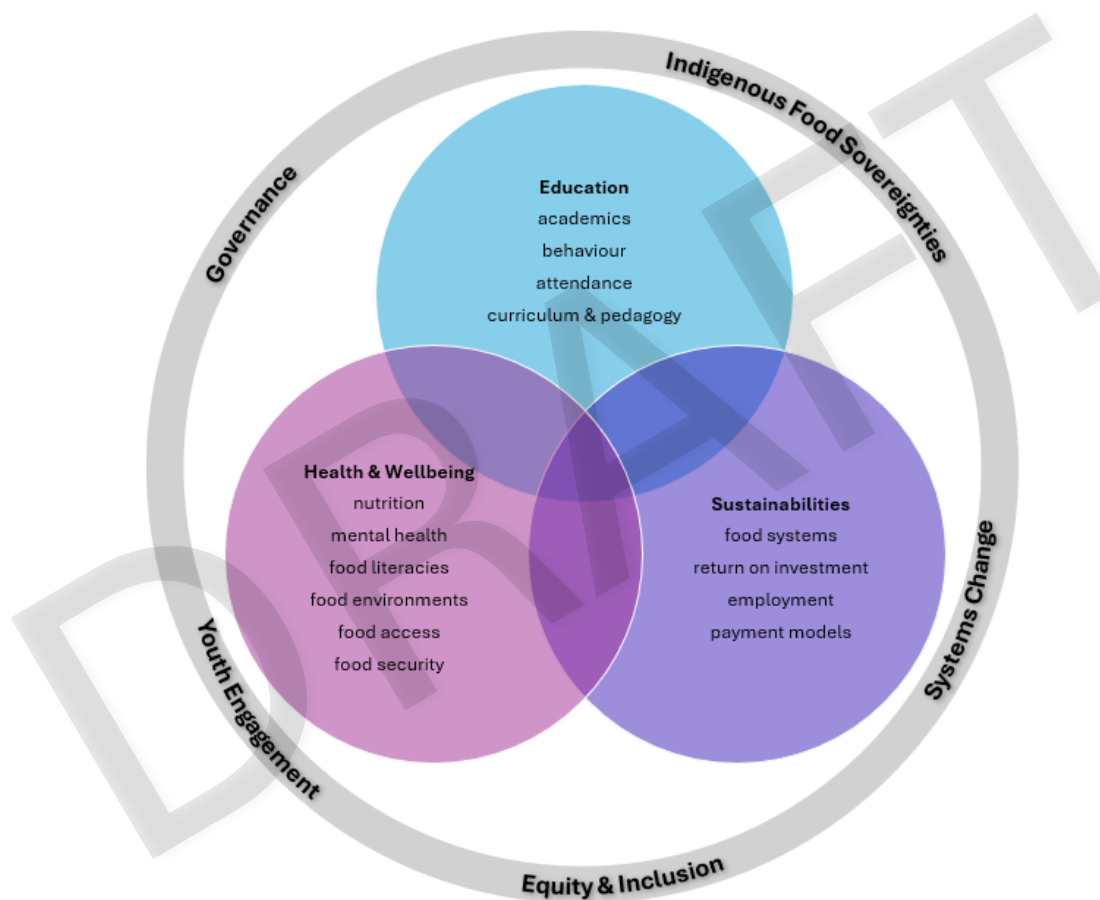


School Food Evaluation Framework

Rachel Engler-Stringer, et al., 2025

There is need for the extensive, objective evaluation of Canada's new National School Food Program (NSFP). In implementing the program, each jurisdiction will be required to make complex decisions that may create inequities in access, quality and efficacy, made even more complicated with rising inflation, and it is not yet well understood what the NSFP means for local governance or marginalized communities. In 2025, Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) consulted school food practitioners, advocates, health staff, researchers, and Indigenous representatives nationwide regarding the key gaps in data and knowledge related to SFPs in Canada. They identified critical data gaps in economic analysis, student mental health and academic outcomes, household food insecurity, economic and food system impacts, and policy implementation. Comprehensive research addressing these priorities is urgently needed to understand program impacts, inform program development and sustainability, and strengthen the evidence base guiding all school food programs.

Based on these factors, a school food evaluation framework was developed, as part of a [SSHRC Partnership Grant](#) proposal, by a national collaborative of school food academics and advocates working to build a transdisciplinary, partnership to advance evidence on the implementation and early impacts of the NSFP, inform its effective delivery, and provide the foundation for long-term comprehensive research rooted in systems thinking.



Health & Wellbeing includes student dietary outcomes, student social and mental health, student food and food systems knowledge and practices, changes to the school food environment, and student access to nutritious food at school.

Education includes student academic outcomes such as literacy and numeracy, changes in attendance and student behaviour and engagement, and how curricula and teaching evolve in response to the changing school food environment.

Sustainabilities includes investment in local and sustainable agricultural systems, job creation, return on investments, and examination of shared payment models for programs. These areas have been studied separately in other contexts, most often internationally, but rarely together and never in the Canadian context¹⁵.

This research draws on five integrated perspectives as it considers *Education*, *Wellbeing* and *Sustainabilities* to allow for cross-cutting analysis: (1) systems change¹⁻⁴; (2) governance⁵⁻⁸; (3) equity and inclusion⁹; (4) Indigenous food sovereignty¹⁰⁻¹²; (5) and youth engagement^{13,14}.

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