



NUTRITION
by Jennifer Bowden

Practise what you teach

Schools could be doing better at getting across healthy food messages.

Schools have a long way to go to put what they're teaching children about health and physical education into action, according to the Ministry of Education's first chief education health and nutrition adviser, Grant Schofield.

"It's hard to imagine other parts of the curriculum where there would be that much hypocrisy," says Schofield, who laments that schools, of all elements of society, set a bad example of healthy eating. "It's an emperor's-got-no-clothes situation, because it's not close to being okay."

Ubiquitous food-based school fundraisers exemplify the unhealthy message. According to a School Food Environment Review and Support Tool (School-ferst) national study last year, 82% of primary schools used sales of food and drinks for fundraising activities, and of those schools, 90% reported using "occasional" or unhealthy items.

Selling chocolate bars is popular but frowned on by Schofield. Although he acknowledges removing confectionery from school fundraisers won't at a stroke solve children's weight and dental problems, it's a start. "We've really got to begin making progress here, because despite a lot of talk about this over the past couple of decades, the problem has got worse."

If he imagined Minister of Health Jonathan Coleman would get behind such a ban, he'd be wrong. When Schofield mooted the idea in April, Coleman tweeted,

Grant Schofield: chocolate fundraisers need to stop.



"I'm happy for schools to continue doing chocolate box fundraisers – I've sold plenty of them myself to help my kids' school."

According to Boyd Swinburn, professor of population nutrition and global health at the University of Auckland, the minister's reaction is exactly what healthy-eating educators are up against. "This is a prime example of undermining the teaching and the curriculum – not only that schools have unhealthy fundraisers but also that the Minister of Health is undermining the curriculum."

Schools are a lighthouse for their community, says Swinburn. "But what light are they shining? Is it a light that's saying it's okay for kids to eat junk food or one showing alternatives? People – parents and kids – take notice of what schools do. The food available at fundraisers, at sports days and in the canteen speaks more loudly than the healthy-food curriculum."

For that reason, St Peter's Catholic

School in Cambridge gave itself a dietary makeover. It used to do chocolate fundraisers and sausage sizzles, says office manager Donna Warwick, until it joined Project Energize, a joint AUT and Sport Waikato programme. "When the project started, we wanted to promote healthy eating and keeping active, so we weren't comfortable selling chocolate."

The Waikato District Health Board-funded effort involving 240 schools aims to improve children's nutrition, physical activity levels and ultimately their health. "Selling chocolates increases the intake of high-sugar, low-nutrient food in the school community," says Sport Waikato's Richard Battersby, the project team leader for Hamilton and North Waikato. "Our goal is to support schools to do the opposite – for example, increase vegetable and fruit consumption."

Warwick says St Peter's saw that selling chocolate would defeat the purpose of what the school was





trying to achieve. "We had to find a better way of fundraising that would embrace our healthy mind, healthy body philosophy, and from that came the idea of the Waipa fun run."

Six years after its inception, the run is now an annual event on Cambridge's social calendar. In March, more than 650 people, including 300 children, ran or walked courses of 2km, 5km or 10km. For a school with a roll of 170, says Warwick, the number of participants and the \$17,500 raised were impressive and proof that there are healthy alternatives to the standard chocolate fundraisers.

St Peter's hasn't stopped there. The Parent Teachers Association has children's birthday cakes in its sights. "When it was someone's birthday, parents were bringing in a cake or cupcakes or whatever for the whole class," says Warwick. "If you have, say, an average of 26 kids in a class, over the school year, in most weeks

there's a birthday with cakes or lollies and lollipops."

Instead of lavishing sugary stuff on their child's classmates, families are being encouraged to mark birthdays by donating a book to the school library. "A little insert says 'this book was presented on the birthday of' whoever. It's a good way for the library to stock up and better for students who aren't being filled up with all those treats," says Warwick.

There are many ways for schools to raise funds that don't harm health, says Battersby. Some have chosen the EcoStore Good Soap for a Good Cause fundraiser. Others are staging discos, concerts, readathons and mufti days; selling the Entertainment Book, plant seedlings, student artworks and calendars, donated fruit and vegetables

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and clothes pegs; or raffling travel vouchers.

"Fundraising can be an opportunity to involve children in thinking creatively and learning marketing skills," says Battersby. Project Energize worked with one school that ran a car wash one day a week at lunchtime, for example. "The thing the principal didn't anticipate was the benefits to students from the teamwork, organisation and planning involved, which added value to school life." Much more so than any box of chocolate bars. ■

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iEat

Oriini Kaipara

The *Native Affairs* presenter has vivid memories of childhood meals, including collecting pipi and cockles in Tutukaka as a six-year-old with her grandparents and enjoying family meals of boil-up pork bones in West Auckland.

Do the Maori Television team share meals? Ae. Kai is an important part of Maori culture and it's that way with us at Maori TV. We love our kai, but given the nature of our mahi/work, we don't always get time to sit down together and share a meal. We eat on the fly. But on special broadcasts, we're treated to catering. The Hangi Shop is a regular - its steamed pudding is superb.

When you're filming, do you eat certain meals or at particular times? I try not to eat big meals an hour before we film *Native Affairs* because I get fatigued. One time last year, I ate four large pieces of pizza right before the show. I hadn't eaten all day. The pizza was okay, but I felt really gross and struggled through my read. I learnt my lesson and haven't done that again. But a must either before or after the show is chocolate.

How would you describe your diet and lifestyle? Terrible. On a good day I'll eat lunch and dinner.

I have a late breakfast because my appetite doesn't wake up until mid-morning. I start the day with coffee.

Most days I eat when I'm hungry and whatever is in sight. Most days I'll grab sushi or sandwiches from across the road. On days when I'm snowed under, I forget to eat. I'll realise at the end of the day when I'm tired and feel like crap that I haven't eaten.

What's your favourite evening meal? Boil-up - pork bones with watercress and kumara.

Do you snack, and if so, what on? Not often enough. I'll have a couple of pieces of fruit, a couple of muesli bars, chicken potato chips and, of course, a chocolate bar throughout the day.

What topics do you want to see on New Zealand's political agenda? Suicide is our nation's biggest shame. The statistics are alarming, disturbing and appalling - just like our mental health system, which needs serious work. Whanau are in desperate need of help and support yet our political priorities are out of touch with reality.

Election Aotearoa, *Maori Television*, Tuesdays, 8.00pm.

