

Introducing Melanie Kurrein, Ministry of Health

Supporting schools through a passion for health promotion

Each month, DASH features a member of the healthy schools community who is making a difference in BC schools. This month, DASH is pleased to introduce our readers to Melanie Kurrein. Melanie promotes healthy schools as the Public Health Nutrition Project Manager at the Ministry of Health. Her portfolio of work includes overseeing the School Fruit and Vegetable Nutrition Program (SFVNP), Farm to School, and revisions to the Guidelines for Food and Beverage Sales in BC. We had the opportunity to speak with Melanie this month and ask her a few questions. Here's what she had to say.

1. Your previous role was with the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority as a community nutritionist. What brought you to your current position at the Ministry?

As a community nutritionist, I worked closely with the Vancouver School Board to develop and implement healthy eating programs and policies. I left this position to pursue my Master's and then came to the Ministry of Health. After working with schools and the school board, I had seen the difference that healthy eating programs and policies could make and I wanted to continue this work, but also wanted the opportunity to expand my reach and apply what I had learned to the entire province.

2. Can you tell our readers about the work happening in healthy eating in the province?

There is a lot of exciting work happening in the province right now. There is a focus on comprehensive school health (CSH), so the work we do fits into the four pillars to create a "whole school" approach to healthy eating.

- The [SFVNP](#) continues to expand to more public and First Nation schools, bringing fresh, local fruit and vegetables to schools
- [Action Schools! BC](#) is always developing and updating resources to bring new and exciting resources to classrooms
- [Farm to School](#) is spreading across the province, helping students and teachers connect to where food is grown and to enjoy local, BC food
- As part of Farm to School and the SFVNP, 28 salad bar grants were awarded in January to help schools provide local, BC food.
- The [Guidelines for Food and Beverage Sales in BC Schools](#) are being revised. The Ministry of Health has consulted with the public health and education sectors to get feedback. The revised Guidelines will have a new look and new resources to help make implementation easier. Stay tuned to hear more about this piece of work!

3. What healthy schools accomplishment are you most proud of?

My work with the schools and school district in Vancouver was invaluable. I got to see firsthand the wonderful work being done and the commitment to supporting health in all aspects of school life. I also

learned about some of the challenges that schools face when trying to adopt and implement healthy eating initiatives.

I'm really proud of the work done by [Windermere Community School](#) as they embraced and implemented a CSH approach to healthy eating. The teachers, students and administration worked together to build a garden and greenhouse that was used in the culinary arts program and for teaching purposes. They brought in a salad bar that featured the food from the garden when in season and the school worked hard to make sure the food sold aligned with the Guidelines.

What impressed me most at Windermere was the students' dedication to making the projects succeed. They were key in developing the vision and plan for the garden, and also took the initiative to write some grant applications. It was very inspiring! I now apply all this knowledge and experience to the work I do at the Ministry of Health.

4. What advice could you give to teachers wanting to get involved with healthy school initiatives?

You can start small by looking at your own classroom (do you teach healthy eating, avoid using food as rewards, model healthy eating?) or you can get staff, students and parents together to look at what you can do at the school level by implementing the Guidelines, increasing access to fruit and vegetables through SFVNP or Farm to School, and creating nice environments to eat.