



Knowledge hub - Collection of best practices

Summary of the best practice

1. Title of the best practice (e.g. name of policy, programme, project, etc.) *

School Meals for All - investment in effective learning and well-being

2. Country or countries where the practice is implemented *

Finland

3. Please select the **most relevant** Action Track(s) the best practice applies to *

- Action Track 1. Inclusive, equitable, safe, and healthy schools
- Action Track 2. Learning and skills for life, work, and sustainable development
- Action Track 3. Teachers, teaching and the teaching profession
- Action Track 4. Digital learning and transformation
- Action Track 5. Financing of education

4. Implementation lead/partner organization(s) *

Day care, Schools, vocational institutes, second upper schools, (universities) municipalities

5. Key words (5-15 words): Please add key descriptive words around aims, modalities, target groups etc. *

free-of-charge school,
educational system
the Finnish national core curriculum
food-related education
joint responsibility
shared investment in the future

6. What makes it a best practice? *

School meals free of charge for all are the most widely provided form of social protection for well being as well as by eating together assure learning. Schools provide a unique opportunity to coherently address the different causes and consequences of malnutrition, while at the same time facilitating children's access to school, increasing enrolment and attendance rates globally, and improving their cognitive development.

Description of the best practice

7. Introduction (350-400 words)

This section should ideally provide the context of, and justification for, the practice and address the following issues:

- i) Which population was affected?
- ii) What was the problem that needed to be addressed?
- iii) Which approach was taken and what objectives were achieved? *

In Finland, free-of-charge school meals have been provided since the 1940s, with the aim of supporting the educational system. Today, each school day, all pupils and students attending pre-primary, basic and upper secondary education are entitled to a free-of-charge, full meal. According to the Finnish national core curriculum, in addition to providing nutrition, the mealtime also contributes towards education by raising awareness of the importance of healthy diets and nutrition as well as sustainable life style in food-related education. The Finnish school meal system is a joint responsibility, steered nationally while implemented locally by municipal education authorities. It is a shared investment in the future of the individual pupil and in the future of the society.

8. Implementation (350-450 words)

Please describe the implementation modalities or processes, where possible in relation to:

- i) What are the main activities carried out?
- ii) When and where the activities were carried out (including the start date and whether it is ongoing)?
- iii) Who were the key implementation actors and collaborators? (civil society organizations, private sector, foundations, coalitions, networks etc.)?
- iv) What were the resources needed (budget and sources) for the implementation?

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Each school day, all pupils and students attending pre-primary, basic and upper secondary education are entitled to a full, balanced meal which is part of education. In the country of 5.5 million inhabitants, approximately 830,000 school meals are served daily, most of them in basic education schools. School meal system is seen as an essential part of a child's well-being and growth, and a part of learning. School meal is more than just nutrition: it sustains the ability to study, it gives pleasure and renewed energy, and increases the students' awareness and knowledge of food and nutrition. As a joint responsibility of the national institutions and local education providers, school meal is a shared investment in both learning and the future of the country.

A law on providing free-of-charge school meals for all pupils in a municipality came into force in 1943. At that time Finland was still at war, which resulted in a large number of internally displaced people with reduced access to proper food and nutrition. After a 5-year transition period, the school feeding system had reached a nationwide scale.

School meal system is directed by national legislation, instructions and recommendations. Since 2004, school meals have been part of the national school core curriculum giving the system an educational status. The core curriculum also includes sustaining the wellbeing of the pupils including basic education, before-school and after-school activities, as well as pupil welfare services.

The school feeding system in Finland is decentralised, meaning that the responsibility for planning and organising statutory education, including school meals, rests with municipalities and other providers of education. As budgets for education are determined locally, financial allocation to school feeding is also subject to local political decision-making by municipal councils. In 2020, the national average cost of a single school meal in basic education was EUR 2.61 (this was lower than before because of covid 19 - it used to be about 2,80 per day per pupil at basic education schools). This cost includes food personnel costs, equipment and transport.

Tough economic times are also reflected in school meals. As the number of schools in each municipality varies from a single school to over a hundred, the practicalities of procurement and organising the feeding vary substantially. Local curricula and annual school plans define the principles of arranging mealtimes and objectives for school meals and food-related education, concerning health, nutrition and table manners.

9. Results – outputs and outcomes (250-350 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the questions below:

- i) How was the practice identified as transformative? (e.g., impact on policies, impact on management processes, impact on delivery arrangements or education monitoring, impact on teachers, learners and beneficiary communities etc.);
- ii) What were the concrete results achieved with regard to outputs and outcomes?
- iii) Has an assessment of the practice been carried out? If yes, what were the results? *

School meals are monitored both on a local and national level. Local data is usually gathered on food waste and pupils' participation in school meals. Other collected data varies. The nutritional quality is monitored by the catering service during the menu planning and implementation, with the help of dietary intake nutrient analysis software; standard recipes provided by material suppliers; or the nutrient content calculations in the National Food Composition Database, Fineli. Local data on costs is gathered to monitor the realisation of the budget and for planning future budgets.

Feedback from pupils can be gathered regularly with simple electronic or paper feedback forms, for example, using a scale of smiley faces expressing different levels of satisfaction. The Finnish educational system has strong faith in the capability of a child, who has the potential, ability and right to take part in the decision-making that concerns his or her life. One of the responsibilities of basic education is promoting democratic values, active citizenship and participation in the community. This requires an operational culture of openness, where pupils can practice using democratic methods in everyday life and find opportunities to influence nearby communities. Pupils must have the opportunity to actively participate in the implementation and evaluation of school meals, and attention must be paid to their feedback and suggestions.

Database <https://teaviisari.fi/teaviisari/en/kartta?view=PkOPPYdiB&category=SAIRAAHOITOPIIIRI&y=2019>

10. Lessons learnt (300 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the following questions:

- i) What were the key triggers for transformation?
- ii) What worked really well – what facilitated this?
- iii) What did not work – why did it not work? *

Since 2006, a national evaluation targeted at basic education and upper secondary schools is made biannually using the Benchmarking of the Local Health Promotion Capacity (TEA) survey.

In 2016–2017, the survey

covered approximately 90% of comprehensive and upper secondary schools.

The data is gathered by the National Institute for Health and Welfare, in cooperation with EDUFI, in a national comparison database, TEAviisari.

<https://teaviisari.fi/teaviisari/en/karttaview=PkOPPYdiB&category=SAIRAANHOITOPiIRI&y=2019>

This survey includes questions on

- pupil participation in mealtimes
- the timing of school meals (the time of the first mealtime shift and the duration of the break)
- the position of school feeding in the local curriculum
- local monitoring and evaluation
- cooperation between operators
- the involvement of pupils and their parents in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the practice.

The School Health Promotion study has been conducted biannually (since 1996), with the latest data gathered in 2018. The survey covers such health and welfare related issues as smoking, use of alcohol, and exercise, social well-being in schools, and some questions related to school feeding:

- How often pupils eat all the components of the school meal
- Which components they eat and how often
- How often they eat fruit and vegetables, sweets or sugary beverages.

The data collected is used as the basis for the evaluation and development of the practice and its guiding.⁴³

11. Conclusions (250 words)

Please describe why may this intervention be considered a “best practice”. What recommendations can be made for those intending to adopt the documented “best practice” or how can it help people working on the same issue(s)? *

During the over 70 years of implementation of school meals, Finland has developed from a poor rural country to a modern welfare state. Finnish people possess a high-level of education and a positive attitude towards education. The benefits of school feeding are widely acknowledged, and mass meals following the same basic pattern are also common at universities and in workplaces.

Serving a full, balanced meal at school gives parents the relief of knowing, that their children are well-nourished during the day. School attendance is very high, and school feeding reaches virtually all 7–15-year-olds and a large proportion of young people studying in upper secondary education.

School meals are a part of the Finnish basic education system, that has provided excellent results: Since the year 2000, every year 90–95 % of pupils completing basic education moved straight onto upper secondary education. Finland has also achieved high scores in PISA reviews.

12. Further reading

Please provide a list and URLs of key reference documents for additional information on the “best practice” for those who may be interested in knowing how the results benefited the beneficiary group/s. *

The Finnish School meal system:

School meals for all. School feeding: investment in effective learning – Case Finland

https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/um_casestudyfinland_schoolfeeding_june2019_netti.pdf

Recommendations for primary school meals

<https://www.julkari.fi/handle/10024/134867>

Food recommendations for vocational institutions and general upper secondary schools, 2019

<https://www.julkari.fi/handle/10024/139596>

Some of the most important school meal and food education projects:

Tasty School – Food Education for Primary Schools (in Finnish: Maistuva koulu)

<https://maistuvakoulu.fi/info/english/>

Balanced school lunch and smart snacks School dining today and tomorrow (In Finnish: Kattava koululounas ja välkyt välipalat)

<https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/163084>

The Policy Brief: The school meals of the future. Stronger cooperation and equal access to snacks.