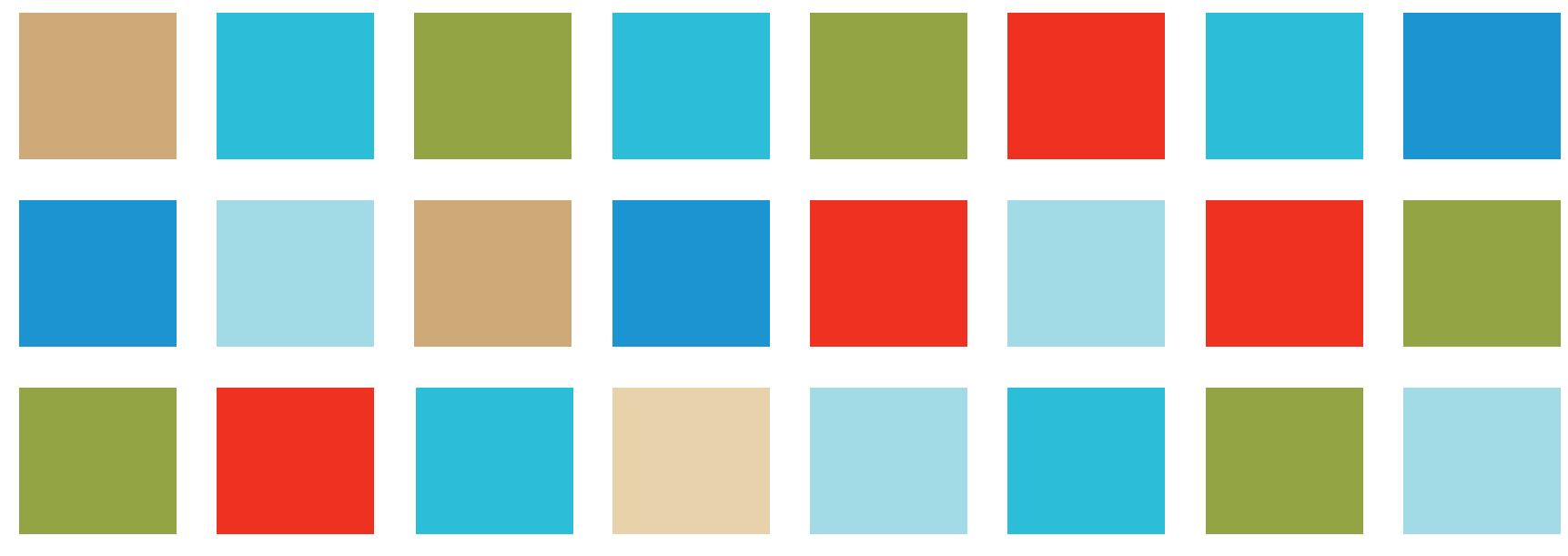


what we know...



STUDENT NUTRITION PROGRAMS: MEETING A NEED FOR HUNGRY CHILDREN

The Research Shop

Introduction and Research Goals

This study evaluated SNPs offered by Food & Friends in Wellington, Dufferin, and Guelph (WDG) to explore the benefits and challenges across the programs. The overall goal of this research was to provide information to Food & Friends to help inform, support, and advocate for the universality of future SNPs in the Upper Grand District School Board. Research questions included:

- What are the perceived impacts of universal SNPs?
- To what extent are program volunteers, coordinators, and school principals committed to SNPs?
- Is there adequate support and effective use of funding for SNPs?

Background

Offered throughout Ontario, SNPs provide healthy food to children and youth in public schools. Within Canada, not all children have access to nutritious food prior to school, leaving children hungry during the day. Morning time constraints, lack of food within the household, and parental work schedules are noted within the literature as contributing factors for why children arrive at school hungry (de Wit, 2012). Previous research suggests SNPs benefit students by improving behaviour, academic performance, and class attendance (Lambton Student Nutrition Advisory Committee, 2012). While SNPs are partially funded in Ontario through the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, there is not a standard student nutrition model within Canada. Therefore this evaluation aimed to look at the universality across the SNPs offered by Food & Friends in Wellington, Dufferin, and Guelph.

Methods

Four schools in Wellington, Dufferin, and Guelph participated in the evaluation, which was conducted by interns from The Research Shop. Online surveys were completed by 258 students in grades 6, 7, and 8 to understand their perspectives on the snack/meal programs offered at their schools. Interviews were conducted with 9 principals and program coordinators to understand their role as well as perceived benefits and challenges of the programs. Ethics approval was received from the University of Guelph's Research Ethics Board and the Upper Grand District School Board.

Limitations

The results presented in this report may not reflect the opinions of all principals, program coordinators and students in Upper Grand District School Board elementary schools, as data was collected from only 4 of 65 schools. The evaluation was not a random sample of participants, and the results cannot necessarily be generalized beyond the study sample.

Student nutrition programs (SNPs) provide nutritious food to students through breakfast, lunch and snack programs. SNPs aim to provide food to students in a supportive and non-judgemental environment by welcoming all students to participate in the program and strive to help students reach their full potential in school.

Research Findings

Key findings from surveys include:

- 65% of students sometimes feel hungry during the day while 31% reported feeling hungry everyday
- 98% of students are aware there is a snack/meal program at their school
- 90% of students either agreed or strongly agreed that the snack/meal program at school is something anyone can use regardless of who they are (Figure 1)
- 66% of students either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that kids who use the snack/meal program at school are sometimes made fun of by other kids (Figure 1)
- In using the program students felt their body was healthier (72%), they reported feeling happier (60%), and felt less stressed about being able to eat when they felt hungry (57%)
- 51% of students reported using the snack/meal program because they like the food while nearly one fifth (19%) cited other reasons, such as when they did not bring/have enough food from home (Figure 2)

Key findings from interviews include:

- Benefits of the program were described by program coordinators and principals as:
 - Meeting a need for hungry students
 - Improving student academics
 - Increasing student socialization
 - Providing leadership roles for students
- Challenges for principals and program coordinators in running the program included:
 - Time restraints
 - Purchasing and delivery of food
 - Limited space and storage for food
 - Limited funding
 - Difficulty recruiting adult/parent volunteers
- Suggestions by principals and program coordinators to improve constraints included:
 - Recruiting more adult/parent volunteers
 - Receiving more funding
 - Having more resources for food storage such as additional freezers

References

de Wit, Y. (2012). Nourishing Young Minds. Toronto: Toronto Public Health.

Lambton Student Nutrition Advisory Committee. (2012). Lambton Student Nutrition Program Evaluation Report. County of Lambton: Lambton Student Nutrition Advisory Committee.

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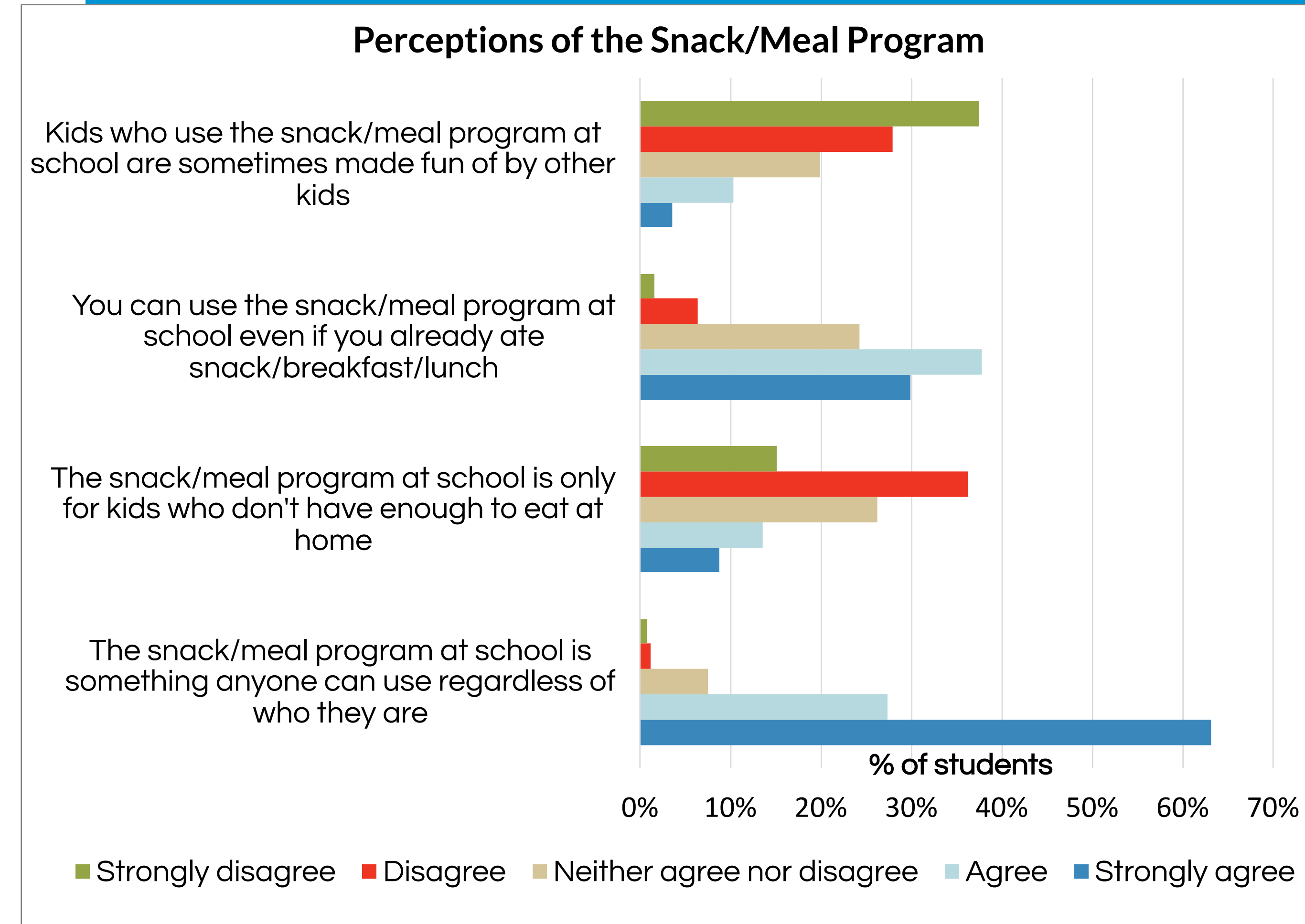


Figure 1. Student perceptions of snack/meal programs offered at their schools

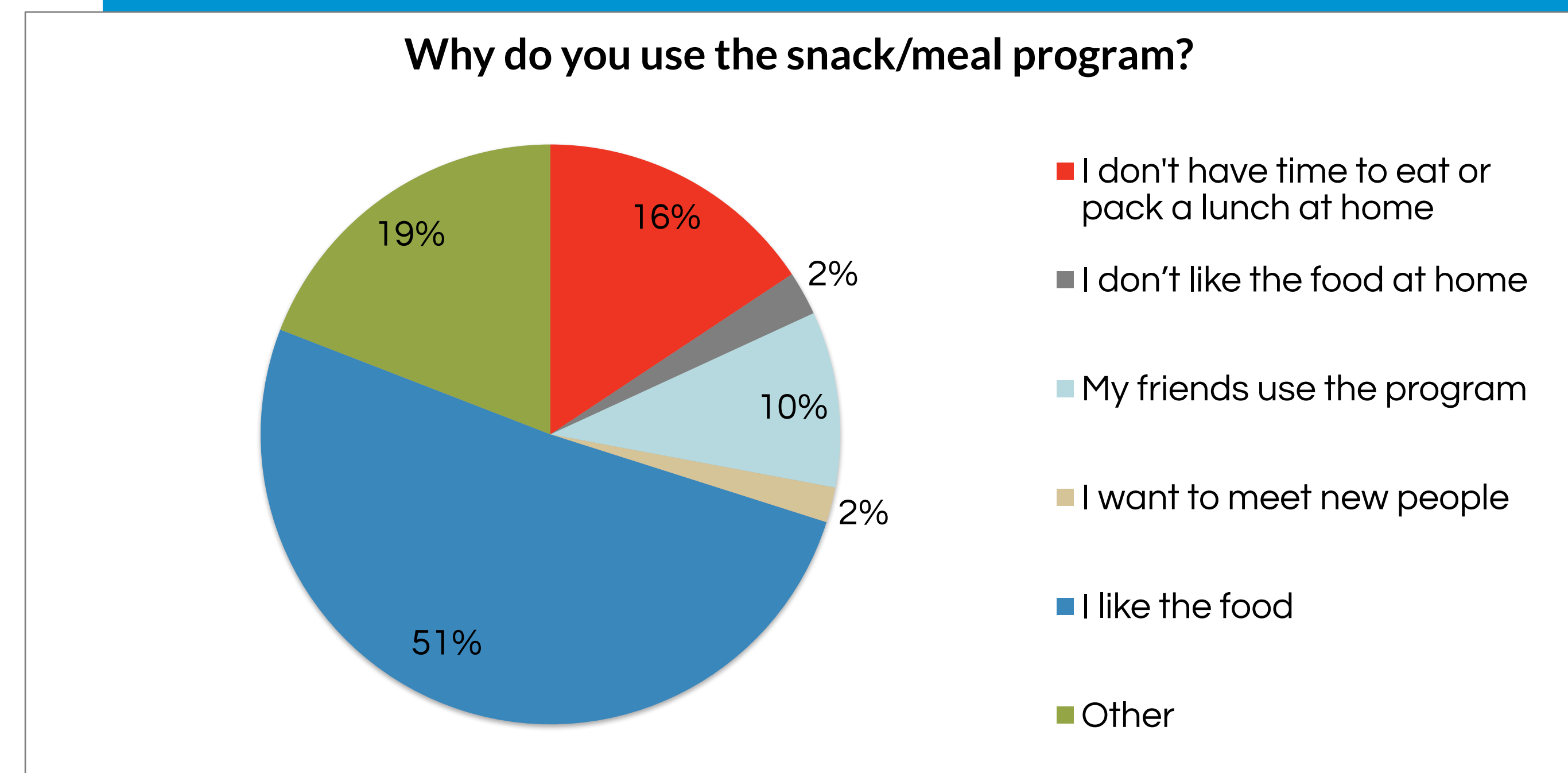


Figure 2. Reasons students reported using the snack/meal programs offered at their schools

Conclusions

- While SNPs differed across the four schools visited, there were commonalities across the schools in the perceived benefits and challenges of the program.
- The results highlight the need, success, and meaningful impact of SNPs upon students in Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph.
- Challenges identified in this report by principals and program coordinators also suggest improvements could be made to the program
- Future evaluations may address additional questions that emerged during this study including why breakfast programs are attended by less students than the other programs.

