



School meals to improve the nutrition and health status as well as knowledge and skills related to food
School meal as a social innovation in Finland:
investment in effective learning

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School meal as a social innovation in Finland: investment in effective learning

With a history of over 70 years the world's longest-running free-of-charge school food system.

Each school day, all pupils and students attending pre-primary, basic and upper secondary education are entitled to a complete and nutritionally balanced meal.

In the country of 5.5 million inhabitants, approximately 830,000 school meals are served daily, most of them in basic education schools.

Legal base



- The law on compulsory education came into effect in 1921
- The law on providing free-of-charge school meals for all pupils in 1943, with 5-year transition period
- 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

Nutritionally balanced meals

- 1954 The National Nutrition Council is founded to monitor and develop public health.
- 1960s meals at school become more varied with more vegetables and are planned to cover approximately one third of the energy requirements of a pupil.
- 2004 School meal becomes a part of the national core curriculum and a part of pupil's welfare services.
- 2010 Nutritional criteria for procurement services are issued by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.
- 2014 school meal system is described in detail in the new national core curriculum; health-related, educational, social and cultural significance.

Why to provide free-of-charge school meals?



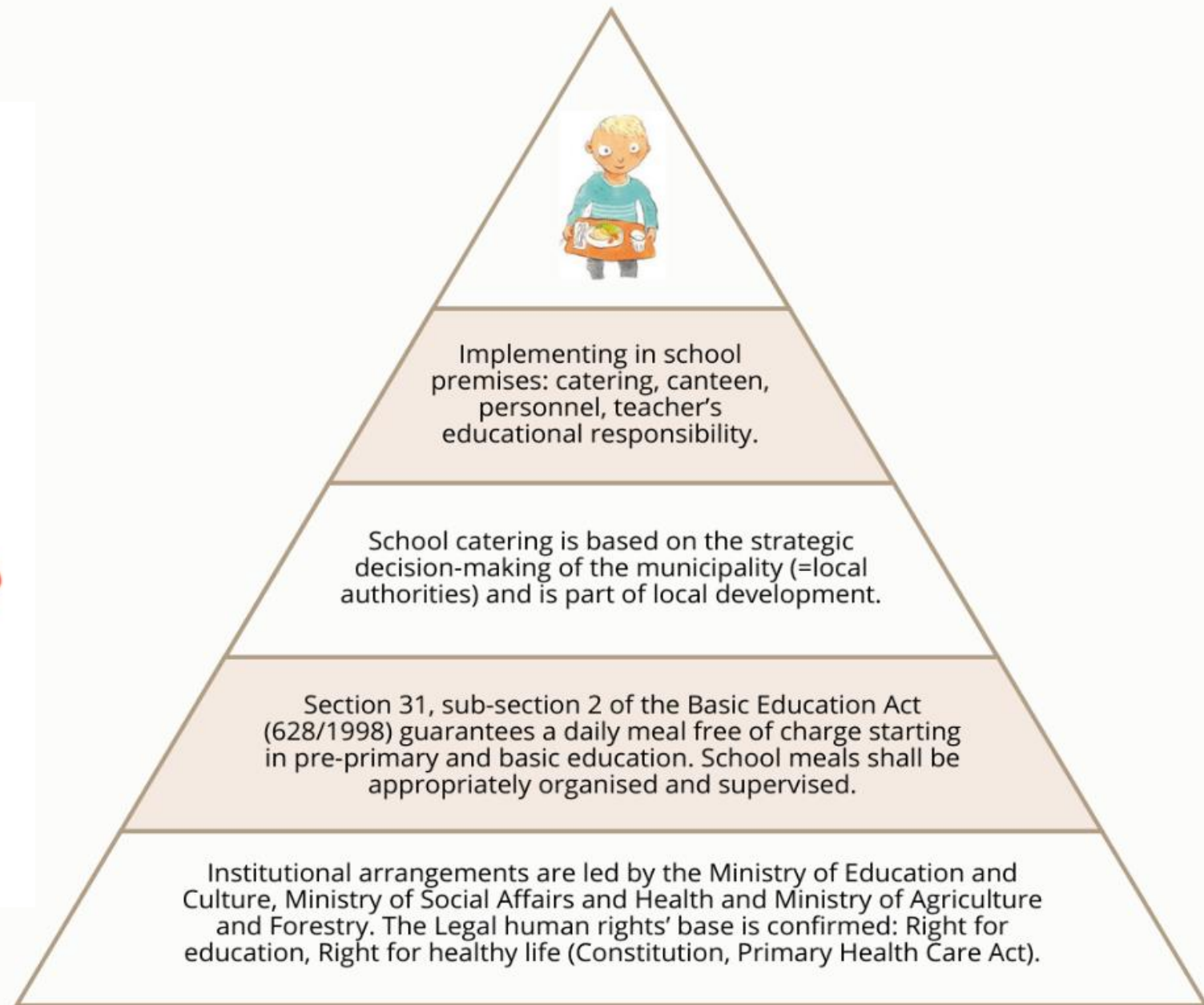
- The aim is to promote pupil's well-being, growth and development
- Good lunch helps to concentrate during the school day
- School meals are important for education: part of the National Curriculum
- Not only food, also a social event
- Meals served at schools are model for nutritionally balanced diet which helps to develop healthy eating habits for all life-time

Collaboration!



1. Well-organised school catering.

- <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-302-844-9>



Administrative responsibilities

Ministry of Education and Culture

- Finnish National Agency for Education

Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry

- Finnish Food Authority National Nutrition Council

Ministry of Social Affairs and Health

- Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare

Ministry of Finance

>Sustainable food system: Ministry of Environment

- Finnish Environment Institute

Why to provide free school meals?

- Food preferences develop early in the childhood and eating habits in childhood persist into adulthood
- Eating habits during childhood have lifelong effects on health
- Thus adopting healthy food habits in the childhood prevents health problems in the adulthood and decreases health expenditures in the future



Implementing school meal system

- Providing free-of-charge meals is a responsibility of municipalities and schools
- Expenses covered by taxation
- The financial and practical resources differ between municipalities
 - Food stuff on average 1 € (3.5 LVL) / child / day
 - Whole meal including work 2 € (6.9 LVL) / child / day
- In addition most schools sell healthy snacks during the afternoon (fee about 1.5 € (5.2 LVL), for example different breads, fruits and drink)

Guidelines for school meals

- Lunch time at 11-13
- Enough time to eat, at least 30 min, in addition 10-15 min time for outdoor activities
- School restaurants should be attractive, comfortable and peaceful
- Teachers attend the dining hall with the pupils and show example



Nutritional criteria for meals

- School meal should provide one third of daily nutritional energy requirements (depending on age 550-860 kcal)
- Recommended proportions of energy nutrients:
 - Fat 30%, saturated fat max 10%
 - Protein 15%
 - Carbohydrates 55%



- Quality of fat, quantity of salt
- The menu changes in six weeks intervals
- Fish in main course at least once a week

School meals today



The meal includes:

Main course and

1. High fiber bread, for example rye crispbread
2. Soft margarine as bread spread
3. Fat-free milk or sour milk to drink, plant-based drink as option
4. Fresh vegetables, salad, berries or fruits
5. Vegetable oil based salad dressing

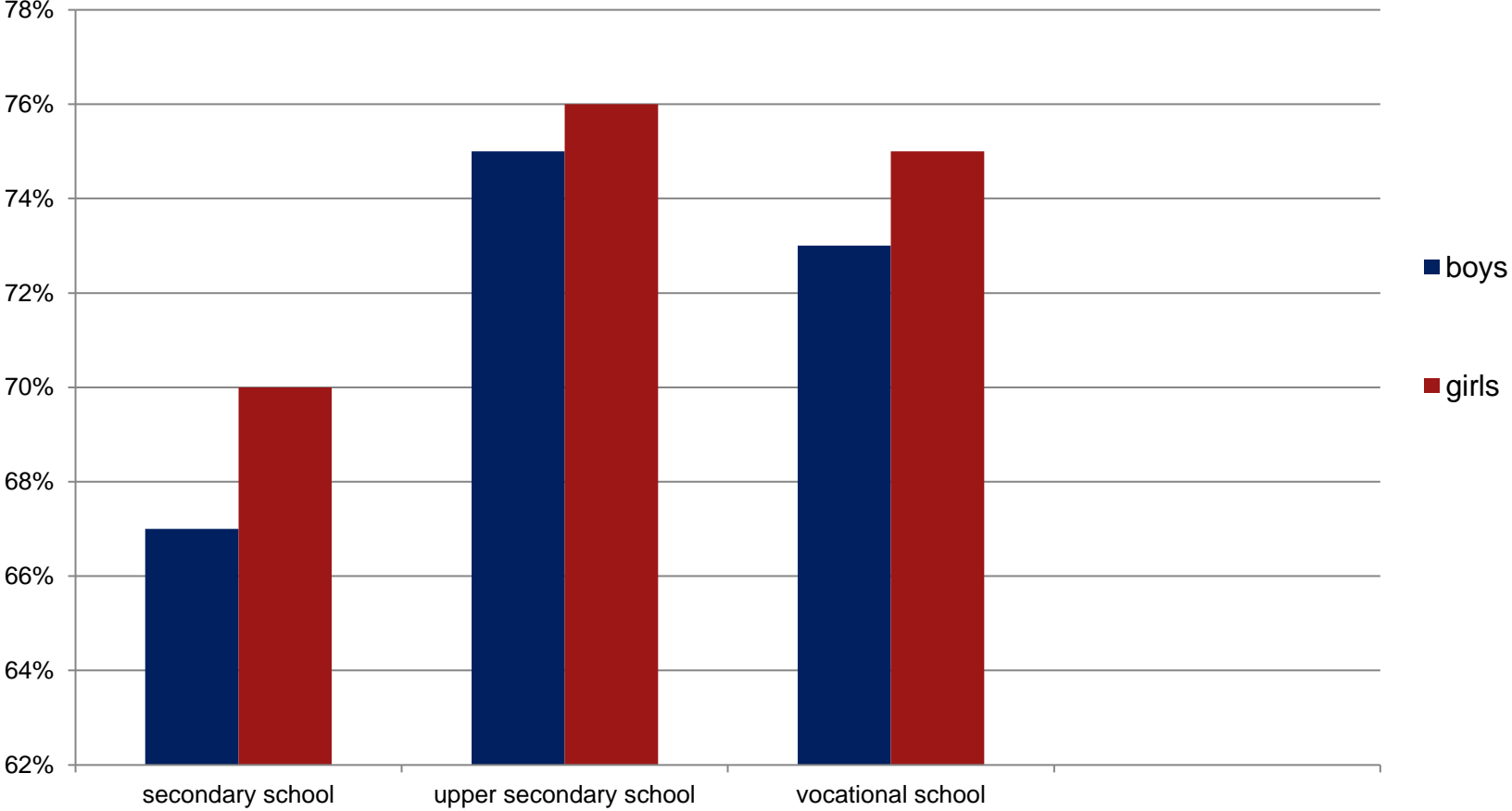
Eating habits of Finnish school children during school day

The School Health Survey 2011 by THL
(15-18 years children)

-On average 80 000 respondents yearly since 1995

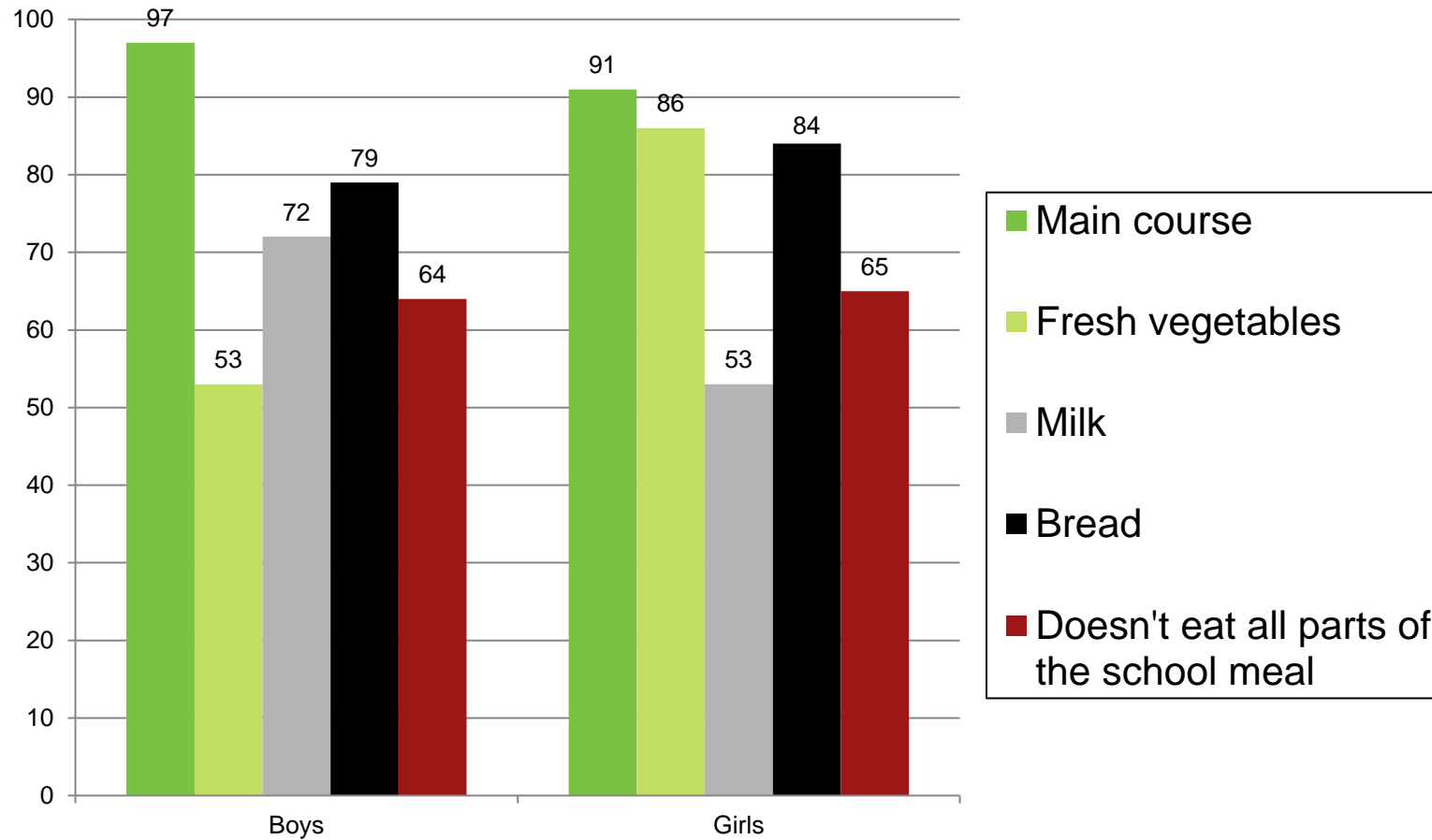
- Sociodemographic factors, school as a working environment, health-related behavior
- Method: Anonymous classroom questionnaire

Eats school meal every day, %



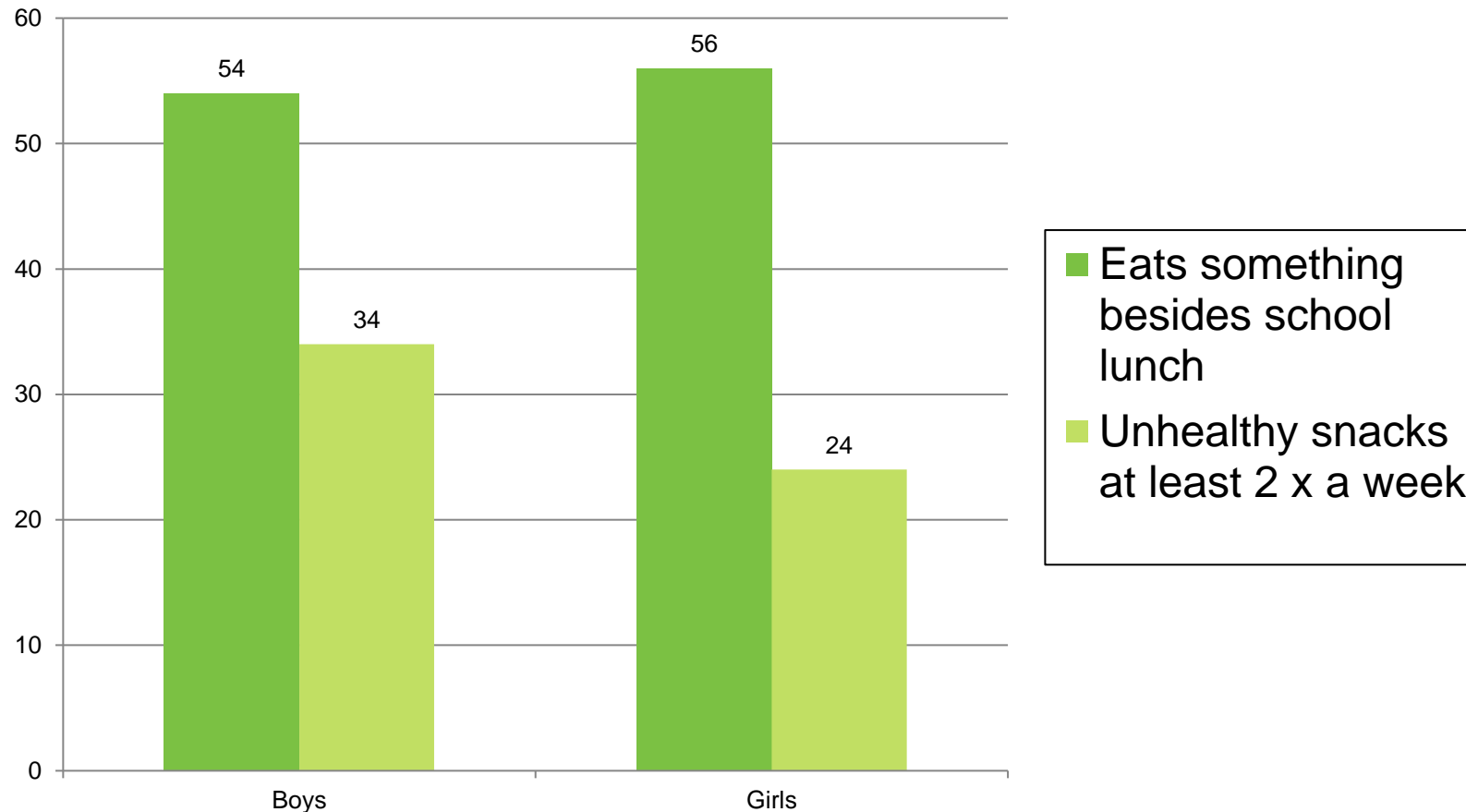
School Health Survey 2011

Parts of the meal:



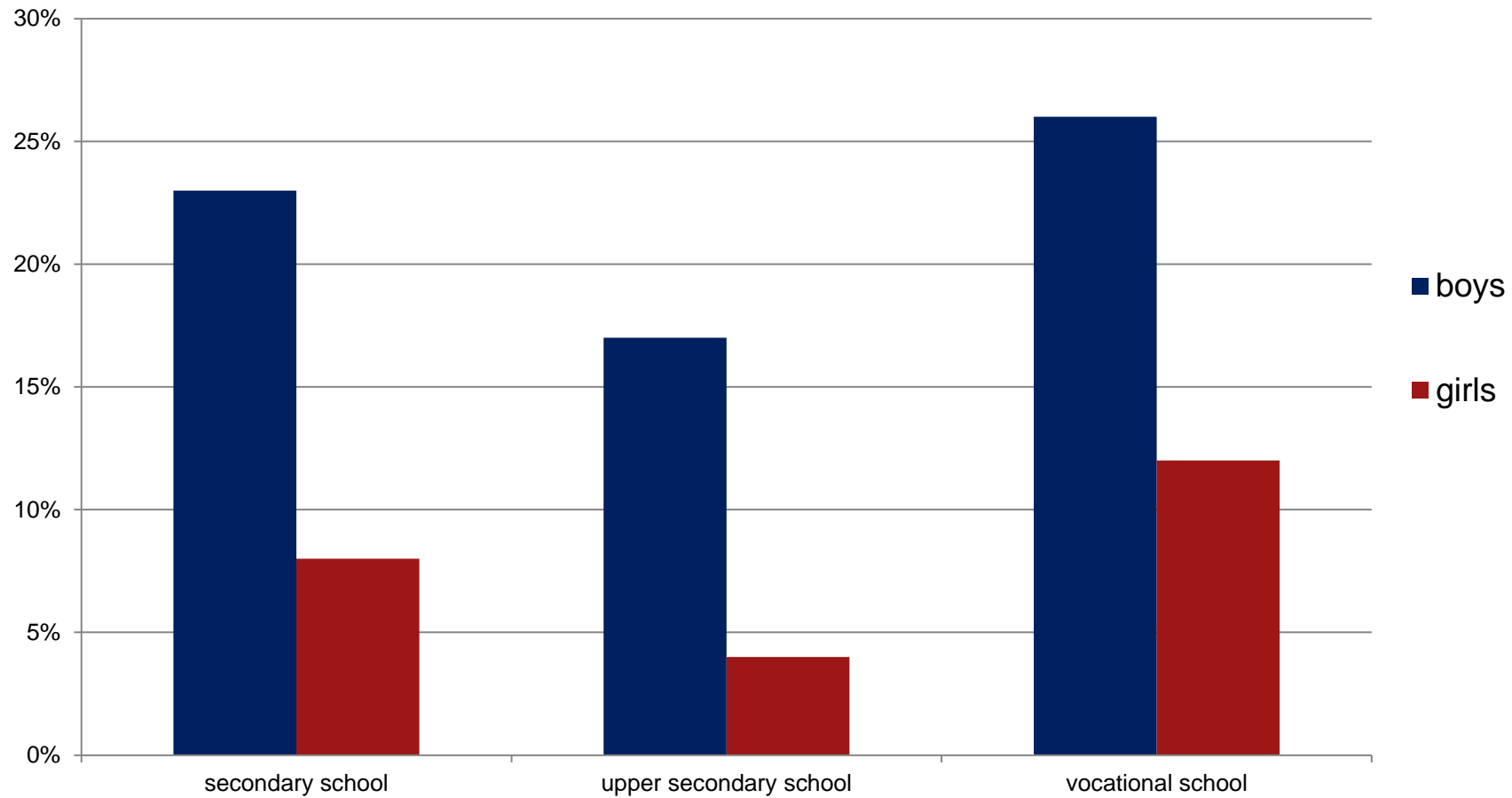
The School Health Survey 2011

Eating in addition to school lunch:



The School Health Survey 2011

Drink energy drinks at least once a week, %



School Health Survey 2011

Lifestyle factors and conditions in schools and eating the school meals:

Skipping school meal or parts of it was associated with:

- unhealthy lifestyle: smoking, alcohol use, eating unhealthy snacks during school hours and not eating regular family meals
- being overweight
- not liking school or being bullied

School without candy project



- National institute for health and welfare cooperates with dentists in Helsinki metropolitan area with School without candy campaign by challenging schools
 - Not to sell any candy or soft drinks in school
 - To recommend that children would not bring any candy or soft drinks to school
- Three schools will receive one-month dose of xylitol tablets as a prize

Recommendation concerning vending machines

In 2007 the National Board of Education and THL recommended that

- Selling of sweets, soft drinks and sugary juices should not be allowed in schools
- Only healthy products should be provided for snacks



Future challenges concerning school lunches

- All Finnish children are offered a free lunch at school but those who need it the most, eat it least often
 - To encourage those pupils who have unhealthy habits to participate in lunch
- Encourage children to eat all parts of the meal
- The pressure to save money in municipalities has led to transition from small school kitchens to larger units: more ready-made foods, effect on food taste, school atmosphere
- Providing healthy snacks in every schools

Challenges concerning nutrition of Finnish children



- To collect data and follow-up the nutrition of Finnish children and adolescents
- To increase consumption of fresh vegetables, fruits, fish and soft fat
- To decrease the consumption of sugar-containing beverages, chocolate and sweets

Conclusions

- Free school meals and well-organised school catering systems offer unique potential for improve the dietary habits of children
- Free school meals form the good basis for the diet of children (the best meal of the day)
- Free school lunches promote social equality
- Schools can promote healthy eating habits by making healthy choices easy during the school day
- School food system and sustainable policies have a strong impact on future of pupils
- Adequate financial resources for school meals is a good investment for public health

More challenges in providing meals

- No more than one in ten pupils eat a balanced school lunch and one in four municipalities provide a free-of-charge snack on long school days
- Guidelines and tools are available for creating a healthy food environment, but their implementation is a challenge.
- Stronger policies are required for example to steer prices, marketing, and procurement.

Development programme for school meals; School meal 2.0

The aim of the programme is to increase appreciation for school food, improve pupils' participation in school meals and develop the practices related to school meals. The programme is looking for solutions to include healthy snacks in free school meals. The programme also aims to increase the proportion of Finnish ingredients used in school meals, improve the healthiness and ecological quality of ingredients, and develop equitable and community-based provision of school meals.

In addition to preparing the development programme, the working group will ensure that the programme's proposals are put into practice in the municipalities and that cooperation on school meals is improved between the stakeholders, including students, teaching staff, parents and carers, catering providers, the food industry and decision-makers.

The working group will prepare the programme with the broad involvement of the relevant stakeholders and active consultation with children and young people.

Municipalities can provide nutrition commitments to improve school meal system



Nutrition Commitment
is a part of the Society's Commitment
to Sustainable Development in Finland

The Society's commitment – the Finnish social innovation to promote sustainable development. It is one of Finland's ways to implement Agenda 2030

<https://commitment2050.fi/> <http://kestavakehitys.fi/en/frontpage>

UN Agenda2030: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/>





Know what you are
trying to achieve
and improve
Cultural
understanding
Clear and
understandable
messages



”Understand what you see and listen to what you hear.”

UN Declaration of Human Rights

https://www.un.org/en/udhrbook/pdf/udhr_booklet_en_web.pdf