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2006 BUDGET BRIEFING NOTE

Community Partnership & Investment Program – Funding for Student Nutrition Programs (Elementary & Youth)

Issue/Background:

The increase in food costs and the growth of student nutrition programs each year since 1998 has resulted in a continual decline of the proportion of costs subsidized by the City. The estimated annual total cost to operate the 375 programs currently serving children and youth is \$15.8 million dollars. Although the needs of these community-based programs are overwhelming, the City's contributions are significant to ensure sustainability. The City's current investment of \$2,399,340 for both children and youth programs has provided subsidies to 302 programs serving children and 73 programs serving youth, but has left 46 programs serving youth unfunded.

Increasing rates of obesity in Toronto's children are occurring at the same time that many children and adolescents experience food insecurity and hunger. Thirty-eight per cent of the population relying on emergency food relief programs in Toronto in 2005 are children. Rates of overweight and obese adolescents have doubled and tripled over the last two decades, and weight gain in adolescence tends to persist into adulthood. Literature shows that participants in student nutrition programs have lower rates of overweight and obesity, higher consumption of vegetables and fruit, less calorie intake from fat, and higher dietary quality index scores. Student nutrition programs provide needed nutrients to food insecure children, while modeling healthier food choices to help reduce the future risk of chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis and some types of cancer.

Based on approved allocations for 2005 funding by the City of Toronto, student nutrition programs are projected to serve 74,450 meals and snacks to children and youth in 375 programs during the 2005/06 school year, which is an 11% increase over the 67,000 students served in 279 programs in the past two years. The dramatic increase in programs is primarily due to the new municipal funding of \$200,000 available to programs serving youth. As a result of this Council policy change in 2005, whereby municipal funding would be invested in youth programs, 119 programs serving over 6,000 youth applied for a municipal subsidy. The funding was adequate to fund only 73 of these 119 eligible programs. Forty-six programs that would have been eligible for funding received no municipal subsidy. Therefore, while 421 programs serving children and youth are operating across Toronto, only 375 receive municipal funding.

KEY POINTS:Nutrition Quality & Food Costs

Toronto food costs have increased by 3% over the last year according to “The Cost of the Nutritious Food Basket in Toronto, 2005” Report. Since 1999, the cumulative increase in food costs has been 16.7%.

Current Food Costs of Toronto Student Nutrition Programs for Children & Youth

	Breakfast		Lunch		Snack	
	Children	Youth	Children	Youth	Children	Youth
2005 Food Costs per child/day (including 30% for program supplies & on-site resources)	\$ 1.21	\$1.81	\$1.83	\$2.95	\$1.09**	\$1.49

Breakfast: minimum of 3 food groups served in all calculations; nutritionally superior has 4 food groups.

Lunch: minimum of 3 food groups served in all calculations; nutritionally superior has 4 food groups.

Snack: **based upon 3 food groups served; nutrient analysis conducted in 2003 of foods served indicated that a nutritionally superior snack is recommended, and is achieved by adding one food group.

Funding Programs for Youth at the Expense of Programs for Children

A limited number of student nutrition programs serving youth had been operating without any municipal subsidy until 2005. Higher nutrient and energy needs by youth, less parental support or involvement and targeting to at-risk youth, have meant these programs have been under tremendous financial strain. The \$200,000 allocated to youth programs in 2005, was reallocated from elementary programs. Therefore, the benefit to youth was at the expense of programs serving children. The impact of the reduction in funding to elementary programs was offset by one-time provincial funding for equipment and infrastructure in 2005. This \$200,000 needs to be restored to elementary programs, while additional funding is required to meet the needs of programs serving at-risk youth.

Incorporating current food costs and restoring the \$200,000 to elementary aged programs will cost a net increase of \$374,980.

Programs Serving Youth

Unlike the student nutrition programs for children, which are often universal programs serving all students attending a school, the programs for youth are targeted to those most at-risk. These include students living independently on social assistance, those who are pregnant or have children, from low-income households or those looking for a safe haven to attend at the end of the school day. Although targeted to those most in need, these programs are accessible by all to avoid stigma and to promote healthy eating to all youth attending the school or community site.

Community-based student nutrition programs serving youth that are structured and supervised in the after-school hours, can also be effective strategies for promoting community safety. U.S. statistics show that youth are at the highest risk of being a victim of violence between 2 p.m. and 6 p.m. and the peak for juvenile crime is from 3 p.m. to 4 p.m., the first hour that most students are dismissed from school. In addition to offering a safe haven and nutritious food, after-school student nutrition programs for youth combined with other programming, can help youth learn new life skills, improve their grades and develop positive relationships with peers and adults.

While the elementary programs serve 1 in 4 Toronto children, the youth programs have been serving only 1 in 30 youth. By November 2005, 119 programs serving 6,254 meals and snacks to at-risk youth had applied for municipal funding to support their programs. This demand far exceeded the funds available, so that only 73 programs serving 4,007 youth will receive a subsidy in 2005/2006. The Steering Committee was forced to apply more stringent funding criteria to late applicants since the funding could not meet the need. Only programs operating since March 31, 2005 and serving youth under age 21 were considered. Funds were also restricted to only 1 program per site and were prioritized according to neighbourhood income. As a result, only 2 of 48 late applicants were funded and these are both located in neighbourhoods where 25.51-67.80% of families live under the Low-Income Cut-Off.

The City's investment in providing 25% of the total costs to reach 1 in 20 or 6,031 at-risk youth in 2006/07 would be a net increase of \$296,954.

Access for Toronto's Neediest Elementary & Middle Schools

Expansion of the student nutrition program is warranted in 22 of the City's neediest elementary and middle schools, according to the Toronto District School Board's Learning Opportunities Index and the Toronto Catholic District School Board's family income data by school. Expansion to these 22 schools would achieve student nutrition program implementation in the fifty neediest schools across Toronto and serve an additional 12,000 children.

The City's investment in growth to provide student nutrition programs in the 22 neediest elementary and middle schools would cost a net increase of \$465,120.

Service changes to begin to meet the student nutrition needs of Toronto's children and youth would require that \$1,137,054 be added to the current Community Partnership and Investment Program base budget of \$2,399,340.

This would bring the municipal contribution to \$3,536,394.

Provincial Funding

Provincial funding has dropped from 21.5% of total costs in 1998 to 8% in 2005 for the 2005/06 school year. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services has committed to provide 10-15% of program operating costs and advocacy is on-going to ensure this is achieved. Fortunately, the \$1,439,455 provided by the Province for 2005/2006 does not designate specific amounts to programs serving either children or youth, so that those left unfunded by municipal subsidies will still receive

some provincial funding. Provincial funding also serves other needs unmet by municipal funding, such as new programs in the first year of operation, capital requests for equipment and/or infrastructure and staff for community capacity building.

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