



STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

A Five Year Plan for Strengthening Student Nutrition Programs in Toronto

Date:	June 3, 2009
To:	Board of Health
From:	Medical Officer of Health
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	

SUMMARY

During the 2009/10 school year, municipal and provincial funding for student nutrition programs in Toronto will provide over 108,000 children and youth with access to nutritious foods in schools and community sites. At a minimum, provincial funding will reach almost 20,000 additional students.

Student nutrition programs help to create healthier eating habits and to prevent obesity and the related early onset of chronic conditions such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Nutritious meals and snacks provide students with the nutrients and energy they need to be ready to learn. They can also alleviate short term hunger resulting from food insecurity among children living in low income families. Student nutrition programs also provide a positive setting for children to meet and socialize and an opportunity for food skills training and social connections for parents and volunteers in the community.

As poverty in the City deepens as a result of the economic downturn, a greater level of municipal investment is needed to ensure that student nutrition programs are available and can be sustained in priority neighbourhoods where families live in poverty and struggle on a daily basis to meet basic needs. Additionally, as the cost of food continues to increase, funding levels must continue to keep pace with inflation.

This report outlines a plan for the next five years to strengthen student nutrition programs by addressing the needs of priority communities while ensuring that existing programs across the City continue to thrive and are better able to meet the nutritional needs of Toronto's children and youth. The report also envisions a Toronto where all students have access to a high quality, sustainable student nutrition program in their school or community. The plan incorporates the rising cost of food as well as an incremental

increase in municipal funding for 146 new school communities that are eligible for provincial funding, but not municipal funding, in 2009/10.

As the student nutrition program continues to grow in response to community need, it is recommended that a program review be undertaken to evaluate how program participation, fundraising capacity and parental involvement impacts upon program success and to identify the optimal organization and funding model to ensure long term sustainability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Medical Officer of Health recommends that:

1. the Board of Health endorse a five year plan to extend municipal funding incrementally to all provincially designated school communities over 2010-14, including annual funding increases to address the cost of nutritious food;
2. the Medical Officer of Health initiate a program review of the Student Nutrition Program in collaboration with the City of Toronto Social Development, Finance & Administration Division, Toronto District School Board, Toronto Catholic District School Board, Ministry of Children and Youth Services, and other stakeholders, to recommend the most appropriate organization and funding model to support program growth and sustainability;
3. the Board of Health reiterate its request to the federal government to provide core funding for a national universal student nutrition program;
4. the Board of Health forward this report to the Budget Committee for consideration during the 2010 Operating Budget process; and
5. the Board of Health forward this report to the Community Development and Recreation Committee, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, the Toronto District School Board, the Toronto Catholic District School Board, the Toronto Food Policy Council, Toronto Foundation for Student Success and the Angel Foundation for Learning.

Financial Impact

Five Year Plan To Extend Municipal Funding For Student Nutrition

Budget Year (School Year)	Projected Request for Increase in Food Costs	Additional Number of New Designated School Communities	Projected Municipal Enhancement Request for New School Communities	Total Municipal Enhancement Request	Total Municipal Funding
2010 (2010/11)	\$240,894	30	\$300,355	\$541,249	\$3,796,576
2011 (2011/12)	\$113,897	30	\$274,141	\$388,038	\$4,184,614
2012 (2012/13)	\$125,482	30	\$237,617	\$363,099	\$4,547,713
2013 (2013/14)	\$136,328	30	\$241,261	\$377,589	\$4,925,302
2014 (2014/15)	\$147,608	26	\$273,208	\$420,816	\$5,346,118
Total		146			

The Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

DECISION HISTORY

On May 12, 2008, a motion was made at the Community Development & Recreation Committee (CDRC) meeting for a five-year plan for student nutrition programs to be submitted for the 2009 budget process. The plan was delayed to the 2010 budget process so that the impact of the enhanced provincial funding for student nutrition programs could be fully assessed.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

The earliest form of a student nutrition program in Toronto was initiated by Dr. Charles Hastings, Toronto's Medical Officer of Health from 1910 to 1929. Dr. Hastings concluded that many of the children in Toronto's low-income neighbourhoods suffered severe malnourishment, which he tried to address by distributing free milk in schools. While Dr. Hastings recognized an individual's personal responsibility for his or her own health, he also emphasized that society as a whole must care for all citizens irrespective of their class or other origins.

Today, student nutrition programs continue to provide children and youth with access to nutritious food. They also provide a positive setting for children to meet and socialize and they provide food skills training and social connections for parents and volunteers in the community. Funding comes from the City of Toronto, the Province of Ontario and fundraising and parental contributions at the local level. Appendix A provides a detailed funding history of student nutrition programs in Toronto.

In 1998, an administrative structure was established with mechanisms to support programs and to ensure program quality and accountability. This structure, now known as Toronto Partners for Student Nutrition, is a partnership comprised of student nutrition stakeholders, including Toronto Public Health (TPH), school boards and their

foundations, and community representatives. Funds are allocated to programs by the Toronto Partners for Student Nutrition Steering Committee.

Student nutrition programs in Toronto have grown tremendously since 1998 when 35,000 elementary students were reached with municipal funding of \$1.31 million. By 2008, student participation had increased to over 90,000 students with municipal base funding of \$2.799 million. Despite an increase in overall funding, there has been a reduction in the proportion of total program costs covered by municipal funding, due to increased participation rates and increased food costs of approximately 27% over the previous nine years.

In 1998, provincial funding for Toronto programs was approximately \$800,000, contributing about 21.5% of total program costs. Despite increasing to \$1.38 million for program grants by 2007, the provincial funding level dropped to about 6% of total program costs.

In 2008, the provincial government increased funding for student nutrition programs in Toronto to \$3.96 million for a three year period (2008-2011) to provide up to 15% of total program costs for breakfast/morning meal programs in 433 provincially designated school communities in Toronto. There was also an additional yearly commitment of \$1.14 million for community development and administration costs and a one-time grant of almost \$2 million to support start-up costs. This funding is part of the province's Poverty Reduction Strategy and is provided through the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. The Toronto Foundation for Student Success is the lead agency for this provincial funding for the Toronto region.

Student nutrition programs in provincially non-designated school communities are only eligible for the provincial base grant, as are programs in designated communities not meeting the breakfast/morning meal criteria (i.e., lunch, dinner, snack programs); the base grant provides a lower level of provincial funding, estimated to be 7-8% of total programs costs for the 2009/10 school year.

During the 2009 budget process, the Board of Health endorsed a request of nearly \$1.48 million to cover increased food costs for existing student nutrition programs and to provide municipal funding to 191 new provincially designated school communities that were eligible to start student nutrition programs with provincial funding. City Council approved an increase of \$455,987, to bring the municipal base funding to \$3,255,327. This included municipal funding for an additional 45 school communities which is projected to cover 10.7% of total program costs. The Province recently announced an enhancement to the designated program funding of \$88,114.00 for the 2009/10 school year, an increase of approximately 3.2% to offset the increased cost of food. Thus, for 2009/10, the total amount of provincial funding for Toronto's Student Nutrition Program is \$5,336,508.00.

COMMENTS

Dr. Hastings' visionary approach is still relevant nearly a century later. Improving the nutritional health of all Toronto children is a matter of public health importance. Only with adequate core government funding can high-quality, sustainable and universally accessible student nutrition programs contribute to meeting the nutritional needs of Toronto's children and youth. To realize this vision, a larger investment of municipal and provincial funds is required, as is advocacy to urge the federal government to share in the cost of a national student nutrition program. The current level of funding is simply not adequate to meet the growing need for and increased costs associated with student nutrition programs in Toronto.

Benefits of Student Nutrition Programs

The key role of student nutrition programs is to ensure that children and adolescents at risk for poor nutritional intake have access to safe, adequate, and nutritious food at school. School feeding programs have consistently been shown to have a positive impact on student health by preventing or reducing hunger and promoting optimal physical, cognitive, and social growth and development. The programs encourage students to make healthy food choices which support the development of life-long healthy eating habits and aid in the prevention of overweight, obesity and chronic diseases.

Student nutrition programs also contribute to making school environments healthier places to eat, learn and play, with benefits for students, staff and parents. The presence of student nutrition programs in schools stimulates enhancements to the health and physical education curriculum. For example, some schools have developed school food policies, initiated school gardens and environmental projects, and offered nutrition and health programming aimed at parents and staff, such as newsletters, training sessions and workshops. Public Health Dietitians and Nurses who support student nutrition programs are available to assess the overall school nutrition environment and make recommendations for improvements.

In addition to nutritional and health benefits, these programs are often a catalyst for community capacity building, community development and job skills training. Each student nutrition program has a local program committee comprised of parents, school staff, community volunteers, and sometimes students. The role of the committee is to plan, administer and improve the nutrition program which develops volunteers' skills in the areas of program coordination, communication, record-keeping and community outreach. It is estimated that in an average month in Toronto, over 1,400 volunteers are working between two and five hours per day with student nutrition programs, equivalent to more than 88,000 volunteer hours for the school year.

Many schools that fundraise successfully are able to provide volunteers with an honorarium or can pay program coordinators a small hourly wage which helps supplement modest household incomes of program staff and volunteers. Providing opportunities for low-income women to help support their families with wages or honoraria serves as an economic stimulus, as families are able to spend more money in their local community on groceries, clothing and other basic needs. In addition, the

confidence, leadership skills and job training these women gain has resulted in at least 50% of program coordinators gaining full-time or other employment over the past ten years. Similarly, many women who volunteer with student nutrition programs go on to work as paid program coordinators. Some programs also involve youth in the planning, preparation and distribution of food, leading to improved food skills and helping youth to gain employment, become more self-sufficient and improve their future food security.

Student nutrition programs can also play an important role in increasing community safety and reducing violence. American statistics show that after-school is the peak time for youth to commit crime, be a victim of crime, be in a car accident, smoke, drink alcohol or use illicit drugs. High quality supervised after-school programs have been proven to reduce crime, prevent other risky behaviours, improve school outcomes and teach positive values and life skills. Offering food as part of after-school programs improves the quality of these programs, attracts participants and keeps them coming back on a regular basis. Student nutrition programs that are offered as part of the school day can change the school culture and result in reduced absenteeism, less aggressive behaviour and fewer violent incidents.

A Five Year Plan for the Student Nutrition Program in Toronto

TPH, in consultation with the Toronto Partners for Student Nutrition Steering Committee, has developed a five year plan to incrementally grow the student nutrition program so that all provincially designated programs within the City will receive municipal funding by 2014. The plan also accounts for ongoing increases in the cost of nutritious food.

Rising Food Costs

The rising cost of food is an ongoing pressure for the Student Nutrition Program. TPH monitors the cost of healthy eating in Toronto by costing out an annual Nutritious Food Basket, using a standardized protocol provided by the Ministry of Health Promotion. Over the past nine years, food costs in Toronto have risen by 27%, while the average yearly increase has been in the 3% range, which is higher than overall inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index. While Nutritious Food Basket results for 2009 have not yet been released, preliminary results indicate that the cost of food in Toronto has risen sharply over the last year, in the range of 7.4%, consistent with the Consumer Price Index which documents a 7.9% increase in the overall cost of food in Ontario between March 2008 and March 2009. The Consumer Price Index identifies significant increases in the cost of fresh fruit (19.3%), fresh vegetables (26.5%), bakery and other cereals products (8.4%), and dairy products and eggs (5.6%), all products which are used in student nutrition programs.

The formula for allocating municipal funds for student nutrition programs is adjusted yearly to take into account rising food prices. For example, in 2007 funding was based on a breakfast cost of \$1.21 for an elementary student, whereas in 2009, the same breakfast costs \$1.31. For 2010, this will jump to \$1.41. When multiplied by the number of participating students, the increased cost of providing nutritious meals and snacks has meant that a large proportion of service enhancement dollars goes to keeping up with the

rising food costs rather than being able to fund new programs in provincially designated communities where families are known to live in poverty.

Funding must keep pace with inflationary changes in food prices, or nutritional quality will suffer. As a result, the Toronto Partners for Student Nutrition Steering Committee has been forced to limit the number of new applications approved for funding so that existing programs can continue to meet nutrition standards. In particular, any new applications in non-designated communities are not being considered for municipal funding.

Projected Costs for the Student Nutrition Program 2010 - 2014

The total costs to run student nutrition programs in Toronto in 2009/10 are estimated to be \$40.8 million. This includes \$27.9 million for existing student nutrition programs as well as \$12.9 million to support 191 new provincially designated school communities that may initiate programs¹. With a total of \$7.3 million in municipal and provincial funding available for direct program costs in 2009 (\$3.25 million in municipal funding and \$4.05 million in provincial funding²), the funding gap for 2009 is estimated to be \$33.5 million. This is the amount local communities would be expected to raise to fund the programs.

The total program costs are projected to rise to \$44.6 million in 2010/11. An additional \$240,894 in municipal funding is required in 2010 to offset the 7.4% increase in food costs. A further enhancement of \$300,355 would provide 2010 municipal funding to 30 of the new elementary school communities which are initiating a program in 2009/10 with no municipal funding, for a total municipal base budget of \$3,796,576.

The following chart summarizes a five year plan for extending municipal funding to all provincially designated school communities; an annual review is required before submitting specific recommendations in each budget year. These projections include an estimated 3% increase per year beyond 2010 to offset increased food costs based on the historical average, but do not consider factors that are more difficult to anticipate and control, specifically student participation rates and levels of parental contributions and local fundraising. The projected municipal enhancement requests in 2010-2014 are based on the municipal funding level in 2009/10, and do not take into account unplanned growth in student participation in funded programs. This issue is discussed later in this report.

¹ This is assuming that all 191 new provincially-designated school communities initiate student nutrition programs in 2009/10. Thus far, 106 of the 191 school communities plan to initiate programs and it is anticipated that others will submit an application during the fall 2009 appeals/late applications process.

² Additional provincial grants of \$1.14 Million and \$0.144 Million are reserved for community development and administrative costs, respectively.

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Program Sustainability Issues

The Student Nutrition Program in Toronto has experienced rapid growth over the past decade. While this level of growth is responding to community needs, the ongoing pressure on the program due to rising food costs and increasing participation rates, along with the program's dependence on parental contributions and fund-raising, threatens the sustainability of the program.

Partially Funded Program Model

The proportion of program costs funded through government sources in 2009 ranges from 12-23% (see Appendix B for details). This means that school communities must look for between 77% - 88% of their program costs from other sources, such as parental contributions, fundraising and other donations. With limited staff and parental capacity to implement fundraising and already constrained family food budgets, the shortfall in funding is an ongoing challenge for program coordinators.

For school communities that initiate programs, but are not able to successfully fundraise or obtain parental contributions and other donations, the nutritional quality of food served will likely suffer. Often portion sizes and the number of food groups offered are reduced. For example, half portions of fresh vegetables and fruit are given instead of the full portions required by the Nutrition Standard. More costly nutritious food such as milk, yogurt and cheese may be served less often or not at all. Other school communities may be forced to reduce intensity or frequency of the nutrition program. For example, a snack may be offered four days per week instead of five, or the program may close before the school year is complete as money runs out. Limited resources for paid program staff and insufficient volunteers may lead to over-reliance on packaged, processed foods rather than fresh foods that require preparation.

One additional impact of a partially funded system is that the principle of universality suffers. Student nutrition programs should be non-stigmatizing programs that benefit all students regardless of a family's socio-economic status. With inadequate funding, many youth programs have not been offered universally to all students. While elementary programs are more universal, running in every City ward, and reaching about one in three students, the youth program is pragmatic in focusing on ensuring food access to those

with the greatest needs. Approximately one in six youth is reached through student nutrition programs.

Growing Participation Rates

During the last decade, participation in student nutrition programs has more than tripled, from about 35,000 students in 1998 to approximately 108,726 students in 2009. Another 44,000 students will be reached if all of the new designated school communities initiate a program with provincial funding. Many of the communities which have not yet submitted an application are deterred by a lack of municipal funding and inadequate community capacity to generate fundraising and parental contributions and are considering piloting a program as an initial step.

As the number of students participating in nutrition programs has increased the proportion of program costs covered by government sources has decreased. This has placed a significant burden on program staff/volunteers to continue to meet nutrition standards with fewer funds per student. Despite putting into place mechanisms to control the steady growth of student nutrition programs in Toronto (e.g., moratorium on new programs), the number of participants continues to increase as established programs have expanded to serve a greater number of students per day and/or increased the frequency of the program.

The announcement of enhanced provincial funding in 2008 had further implications for growing participation rates. To be eligible for enhanced funding, school communities in provincially designated sites had to commit to providing a universally accessible breakfast/morning meal five days per week. Whereas some existing programs were only operating 2-4 days per week, they were now required to operate daily. Furthermore, 191 new school communities were encouraged to initiate breakfast/morning meal programs.

The proposed five year plan to enhance municipal funding for student nutrition programs does not address unplanned growth in student participation. Rising participation rates pose a major challenge in program planning and sustainability.

Local Fundraising, Parental Contributions and Volunteerism

Student nutrition programs in Toronto are community-based and community-driven programs that rely on volunteers and other sources of funds to make up the difference between actual program costs and funding provided by provincial and municipal governments. Ideally, the difference in funds is made up by a combination of parental contributions, fundraising, obtaining food or in-kind donations from local businesses, and utilizing volunteers.

Program participants are typically asked to make a financial contribution toward the student nutrition program; however, all students are invited to participate regardless of ability to pay. The level of parental contributions collected varies widely as programs try to find a delicate balance between ensuring that principles of universality are met and at the same time encouraging families to contribute as much of the requested fee as possible. In reality, many school communities lack the parental involvement, resources

and capacity to contribute enough time and money to support high quality student nutrition programs at the levels needed for long term sustainability.

Considerations for the Future

The Toronto Partners for Student Nutrition Steering Committee has identified several priorities over the next five to ten years to better meet the nutritional needs of children and youth and to demonstrate benefits beyond nutrition. There is a desire to improve food preparation, storage and distribution channels to ensure that food dollars can be stretched further by enabling programs to take advantage of bulk purchasing with an emphasis on locally-produced food. Purchasing local foods may save the program money while at the same time supporting local farmers and providing fresh, nutritious food to Toronto children. There is also the potential for increased costs associated with a local food approach, as evidenced by other local food initiatives in the City of Toronto. Other environmental approaches being considered are the expansion of school food gardens and reducing food waste and packaging. The partners are also in the process of developing a database that will track program statistics to facilitate information sharing, track program outcomes and report in a consistent and accurate manner.

Program Review

In view of the many issues and pressures identified above, a thorough program review with the lead funding agencies is being recommended. This review will aim to improve the long-term sustainability of the Student Nutrition Program, ensuring that programs can meet high nutrition standards, have adequate infrastructure and space, meet the principles of universality and be offered in a non- stigmatizing manner. The review will look at the challenges currently faced in responding to increased participation rates, substantial program growth due to changing provincial funding priorities, and a partially funded program model dependent on unrealistic levels of fundraising and parental contributions. It is recommended that the program review be initiated in 2010 by Toronto Public Health in collaboration with the City of Toronto Social Development, Finance and Administration Division, Toronto District School Board, Toronto Catholic District School Board, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and other stakeholders.

Toward a National Student Nutrition Program

Canada is one of the few developed countries without a nationally funded student nutrition program. Over the past five years, child and youth advocates, including the Toronto Board of Health, have been vocal in urging the Canadian government to invest in children's health through a national student nutrition program. School meal programs that are subsidized at the national level exist in the United States, Japan, Sweden, Finland, Italy, France, India, the United Kingdom, Brazil and elsewhere.

Several non-governmental organizations, including FoodShare, Breakfast for Learning and the Centre for Science in the Public Interest, have taken strong leadership roles in working with political leaders to advocate for a national student nutrition program in Canada. The recommended program model being put forward is similar to the approach developed in Toronto where universally accessible, non-stigmatizing nutritious meals and snacks are available to all Canadian children and youth (up to 18 years) and where

community development is a key component, so that schools, local community agencies and parent groups are all involved in operational planning. A background advocacy paper is available at

http://www.breakfastforlearning.ca/en/how_to_help/documents/Backgrounder_National_Nutrition_Program.pdf

Conclusions

While childhood obesity and diet-related chronic diseases are threatening the health of our population, an economic downturn and sharp increases in the price of nutritious food are making it even harder to ensure the nutritional health and well-being of Toronto's children and youth.

The City of Toronto is a leader among Canadian municipalities in advocating for and funding high quality student nutrition programs. However, only with adequate core government funding can high-quality, sustainable and universally accessible student nutrition programs be developed to meet the needs of the City's children and youth. To realize this vision, a larger investment of municipal and provincial funds is required, as is advocacy to urge the federal government to share in the cost of a national student nutrition program.

A five year plan for incremental growth in municipal funding for student nutrition programs is being recommended to better address the health and nutrition needs of Toronto children and youth while recognizing economic restraint in the City. The goal of the plan is to provide municipal funding support to all new student nutrition programs in provincially designated school communities over the next five years while keeping pace with the cost of food. A review of the Student Nutrition Program is recommended to identify the optimal organizational and funding model to support program success and long term sustainability.

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SIGNATURE

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Medical Officer of Health

ATTACHMENTS

Appendix A: Toronto Student Nutrition Programs: Summary of Municipal & Provincial Funding 1998-2009

Appendix B: Proportion of Student Nutrition Program Costs Covered by Core Government Funding in 2009

Appendix A

Toronto Student Nutrition Programs Summary of Municipal & Provincial Funding 1998-2009

Year (School Year)	Total Municipal Funding	Total Provincial Funding
1998 (1998-99)	\$1,310,500	\$ 802,422
1999 (1999- 2000)	\$1,310,500	\$1,123,401
2000 (2000-01)	\$1,791,800	\$1,240,656
2001 (2001-02)	\$1,880,000	\$1,370,841
2002 (2002-03)	\$1,955,340	\$1,527,001
2003 (2003-04)	\$1,999,340	\$1,019,351
2004 (2004-05)	\$2,499,340	\$ 637,501 ⁽¹⁾ <u>1,200,000</u> ⁽²⁾ \$1,837,501
2005 (2005-06)	\$2,399,340	\$1,439,455
2006 (2006-07)	\$2,599,340	\$1,444,008
2007 (2007-08)	\$2,799,340	\$1,444,008
2008 (2008-09)	\$2,799,340 ⁽³⁾	\$1,956,000 ⁽³⁾ <u>5,248,394</u> ⁽⁴⁾ \$7,204,394
2009 (2009-10)	\$3,255,327 ⁽⁵⁾	\$5,336,508 ⁽⁶⁾

Notes:

Provincial funding to 2007 included up to \$120,000 for community development. Provincial funding is administered through the Toronto Foundation for Student Success.

- (1) one-time funding for capital expenditures;
- (2) actual funding allocation for program grants and community development;
- (3) one-time grant for 2008 allocated for start-up costs, equipment and other program resources in provincially designated communities;
- (4) new annual base funding for 2008 comprised of:
 - \$1,444,008 existing annual base funding (\$1,235,008 program grants, \$65,000 community development and \$144,000 administration); both designated and non-designated communities eligible
 - \$2,729,386 for existing and new morning meal programs in designated school communities only
 - \$1,075,000 new community development funds
- (5) new annual base funding for 2009 comprised of:
 - \$2,799,340 existing base funding for 2008
 - \$55,987 economic factor adjustment of 2% from 2008 budget
 - \$400,000 service enhancement for additional increased food costs and initiation of new programs in provincially designated school communities
- (6) new annual base funding for 2009/10 comprised of:
 - \$1,444,008 existing annual base funding (\$1,235,008 program grants, \$65,000 community development and \$144,000 administration); both designated and non-designated communities eligible
 - \$2,817,500 for existing and new morning meal programs in designated school communities only
 - \$1,075,000 community development funds

Appendix B

Proportion of Student Nutrition Program Costs Covered by Core Government Funding in 2009

A. The following Student Nutrition Programs will receive approximately **23% core government funding** (10.7% municipal + 12% provincial):

- 242 existing elementary and youth programs in designated school communities
- 25 new youth programs in designated school communities
- 20 of 166 new elementary programs in designated school communities

B. The following Student Nutrition Programs will receive approximately **19% core government funding** (10.7% municipal + 8% provincial):

- 115 existing elementary and youth programs in non-designated school communities (and those in designated school communities that do not meet the criteria of a daily morning meal)

C. The following Student Nutrition Programs will receive approximately **12% core government funding** (0% municipal + 12% provincial):

- 146 of 166 new elementary programs in designated school communities (Note: So far, 61 of the 146 school communities have initiated programs)