



# Joe Cressy 周凱捷

City Councillor | Ward 10, Spadina-Fort York

December 13, 2020

Toronto Board of Health

## Re: Student Nutrition Program Support for Remote Learning

Colleagues,

The pandemic has resulted in many rapidly changing challenges to the Student Nutrition Program, which Toronto Public Health (TPH) and our school community partners have been working hard to mitigate since March 13 when the Province of Ontario closed schools across the province. Before the pandemic, thousands of vulnerable children and youth received a daily nutritious meal in school through the Student Nutrition Program. To support students during the rest of the spring term, funds were re-allocated to distribute grocery food gift cards to families in need with children who attend schools with nutrition programs.

During the partial return to in-class learning this fall, TPH and school community partners have continued to work through a wide range of challenges.

The Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) Student Achievement Board of Trustees, on December 3, 2020, approved a motion to "request the Province and Toronto Public Health to ensure that student nutrition funding is distributed with adequate flexibility to support students learning remotely, and to provide additional funding as required to continue in-school program delivery while expanding to support remote learners."

Recommendation 1 below responds to the request for flexibility. Within the existing framework of agreements and funding, the Medical Officer of Health will provide a formal communication clarifying that municipal funds may be used to support students learning remotely. Our school community partners -- the Angel Foundation for Learning, the Toronto Foundation for Student Success, and the two English-language school boards -- will have the flexibility to tailor to local needs the use of existing municipal funds for student nutrition programming as the pandemic situation continues to evolve.

Even with these changes, it is anticipated that there will continue to be challenges to ensuring that all students who would otherwise benefit from student nutrition programs are supported in the winter term, including increased food costs, requirements for safe program delivery, limited access to volunteer help, and ongoing changes to the number of students learning in-class, learning remotely, and temporarily isolating.

That is why I am recommending the Board of Health support the call to the Province to cover the extraordinary pandemic-related costs faced by student nutrition programs supporting in-school and remote learning. The Province of Ontario has not increased its funding commitment for local student nutrition programs in Toronto since 2017.

I am also recommending the Board of Health reiterate the request to the Government of Canada to provide core funding for a National School Food Program, which was a goal in the 2019 Federal Budget.

Additionally, TPH staff have identified a modest amount of additional funding that is likely to be available to be allocated relatively quickly for the winter school term, from the reserves held for late applications and appeals to the Student Nutrition Program. City Council authority is required to reinvest these funds into enhancing existing local student nutrition programs.

Finally, I am recommending the Board of Health request the Medical Officer of Health report back early in the new year with additional information on resource requirements to ensure that students who rely on the Student Nutrition Program continue to be supported whether they are learning in class or remotely. The necessary work is already underway with our school community partners.

No child should have to learn on an empty stomach in Toronto. The Student Nutrition Program is even more critical this year, when so many families are facing immense hardship, for supporting the success of thousands of vulnerable children and youth.

**Recommendations:**

1. The Board of Health request the Medical Officer of Health to take appropriate action to enable the municipal student nutrition program funds to be used for the purchase of nutritious food for students who are learning remotely, who otherwise would have accessed a student nutrition program.
2. City Council and the Board of Health request the Province of Ontario to make available sufficient funds to cover the extraordinary pandemic-related costs faced by student nutrition programs supporting in-school and remote learners, including increased food costs, requirements for safe program delivery, and limited access to volunteer help.
3. City Council and the Board of Health reiterate the request to the Government of Canada to provide core funding for a national school food program.
4. City Council authorize the Medical Officer of Health to reinvest any funds that remain unspent after assessing applications from the late applications and appeals period towards providing additional funding to existing municipally-supported student nutrition programs.
5. The Board of Health request the Medical Officer of Health to report to the January 18, 2021 meeting of the Board of Health with an update on additional resource needs and any other challenges facing municipally-supported student nutrition programs in Toronto.

Sincerely,

Joe Cressy  
Chair, Toronto Board of Health