



STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

Nutrition in Full-Day Kindergarten

Date:	May 8, 2013
To:	Community Development and Recreation Committee
From:	General Manager, Children's Services
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	

SUMMARY

The benefits of proper nutrition on students' health and the impact it has on their abilities to learn and participate in school have been well-established in research and accepted by service providers in Toronto. With the implementation of Full-Day Kindergarten (FDK), four and five year olds enrolling in FDK at school no longer receive a lunch as they did when they were in licensed child care. While there are a number of programs offering nutrition services to young children, there is no comprehensive and coordinated approach to ensure that children in FDK programs receive the necessary nutrition to support positive early learning outcomes for young children. Specifically, there are very limited opportunities for children to receive a hot lunch during the school day.

This report suggests actions for better addressing the nutritional needs of all children in FDK. These include continuing the strategy of expanding Student Nutrition Programs and advocating for clear policy direction from the Province that is informed by government and community partners in the health, early learning and education sectors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager, Children's Services, recommends that City Council:

- 1) request the Ministry of Education to develop a policy position on nutrition in Full-Day Kindergarten that includes a coordinated approach across all interested Ministries and addresses the needs of younger children now entering the school system for FDK; and
- 2) request that the General Manager, Children's Services, affirm to the Toronto Partners for Student Nutrition Steering Committee, the Division's support of the continued expansion of Student Nutrition Programs as per the Toronto Board of Health's position and for universal school nutrition programs as recommended by the Healthy Kids Panel Report.

Financial Impact

The 2013 Approved Operating Budget for Children's Services includes \$1.4 million gross \$0 net for Transformation and Stabilization activities associated with the transition to FDK, which includes grants in several categories, including the bagged lunch grant. In addition, the 2013 Approved Operating Budget for Public Health includes \$5,300,380 gross and net for Student Nutrition Programs. The combined provincial-municipal funding for 2013/2014 school year for Student Nutrition Programs in Toronto is expected to be \$10,636,888 (Provincial share estimate \$5,336,508 and City funding \$5,300,380).

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

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting of September 19, 2012, the Community Development and Recreation Committee requested that the General Manager, Children's Services, in consultation with the Medical Officer of Health, report to the Community Development and Recreation Committee on options for maintaining nutritious, hot lunches as part of the all-day kindergarten program for subsidized and full-fee children.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2012.CD15.7>

ISSUE BACKGROUND

The importance of good nutrition for improved student outcomes has been noted by several providers of services for children in Toronto. The Toronto District School Board's Student Nutrition Handbook, for example, asserts that "students participating in nutrition programs are able to concentrate better, retain and apply information more effectively, and are more likely to demonstrate positive behaviours and relationships with peers". The Toronto Catholic District School Board has indicated that Student Nutrition Programs

"provide better outcomes for children and youth by providing nutritious meals/snacks so that students are ready for learning..." Toronto Public Health includes among the benefits of Student Nutrition Programs, the following:

- Providing nutrients and energy so that students are ready to learn and participate in school
- Creating healthier eating habits
- Helping prevent obesity
- Supporting better scores in math, reading and science

Despite consensus on the behavioural, health, and learning benefits of student nutrition programs, currently there are no provincial or school board expectations for the provision of lunch or other nutrition program for four and five year olds in Full-Day Kindergarten (FDK). School boards do take other measures to address the nutritional needs of enrolled children. For example, to raise parent awareness regarding the importance of packing nutritious snacks and lunches, boards provide families with educational materials to encourage healthy eating and lunch preparation¹ and all public school boards provide information for local parents and volunteers regarding Student Nutrition Programs. In schools where student nutrition programs operate, many include FDK students.

Nutrition Programs for Students

Currently, a variety of programs, providers, and funders of nutrition programs for students operate in Toronto. These are outlined below.

Student Nutrition Programs (SNPs)

Student Nutrition Programs (SNPs) provide breakfast, lunch and snack programs across Ontario for elementary and high school students. SNPs engage in local fundraising and are initiated at the school level. Once established, any child at the school can participate regardless of the family's ability to contribute financially to the program. These programs are community-based, run mostly by volunteers (such as parents) with support from teachers and school staff. The Toronto Foundation for Student Success is the lead agency for the provincial grant for SNPs in Toronto. The program sets out nutrition standards based on Canada's Food Guide.

In 2012, 682 SNPs served approximately 144,000 healthy meals or snacks to Toronto children and youth on a daily basis. (This is approximately 38.9% of all children living in Toronto under the age of 12).

In Toronto, government grant funding for student nutrition programs is available from the City of Toronto and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. In addition to parent contributions and fundraising, there are several charitable organizations that support

¹ For example, see <http://www.tcdsb.org/ProgramsServices/SchoolProgramsK12/Documents/Home%20Links%20Nutrition%20Matters.pdf>

nutritional goals in schools across Canada. For example, Breakfast for Learning is a charitable organization that provides funding for school breakfast, lunch and snack programs across Canada. In 2011, the organization supported over 5,000 programs across the country, including SNPs. Breakfast Clubs of Canada is another organization dedicated to providing services and funding to school breakfast programs.

The 2013 Approved Operating Budget for Toronto Public Health includes funding of \$5,300,380 gross and net for SNPs, which provides \$5,076,996 towards the stabilization of the existing SNPs and \$222,912 for the expansion of the program into 19 additional schools beginning in the 2013/2014 school year. The combined provincial-municipal funding for 2013/2014 school year in Toronto is expected to be \$10,636,888 (Provincial share estimate \$5,336,508 and City funding \$5,300,380).

Other programs

Many licensed child care programs provide children in care with a morning snack prior to children leaving for school and one or two snacks in the evening between 3:30 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.

Private providers and catering companies cater food to individual schools based on individual parent orders, with full costs paid by families who opt to have their children participate. These may be single site operations or operate on a franchise model. For example, Real Food for Real Kids caters food for many child care programs, camps, and school-based programs.

The 2012 Approved Operating Budget for Toronto Children's Services provided a temporary grant of \$78,545 gross \$0 net, funded by a one-time provincial Child Care Stabilization grant. The grant provides funding to child care centres (with a current service contract with the City for child care fee subsidy) to provide a bagged lunch to children escorted to FDK programs and attending child care before and after school. The 2013 Approved Operating Budget for Children's Services includes \$1.4 million gross \$0 net for Transformation and Stabilization, which includes grants in several categories including the bagged lunch grant. The grant is available to operators who had previously provided lunches for this age group. The availability of this grant is expected to continue as a transitional measure until FDK is fully implemented. However, it is not a sustainable solution as the initial provincial funding was not ongoing, and because child care operators are transitioning away from caring for four and five year olds during the core school day where FDK is available.

Each of these models has drawbacks for certain children and families. Private programs depend on parent fees, with many parents unable to afford additional fees for a prepared lunch. Other programs have funding sustainability challenges as Toronto Public Health has reported with respect to SNPs, or have limited reach as with children in licensed child care, which only account for approximately 17% of all children under 12 years-old in Toronto.

Currently, children in FDK in schools with SNPs receive a morning meal or two snacks, depending on how the individual program is organized. Practices vary in schools without SNPs, where some schools ask parents to send snacks to school with their children and others provide a snack.

It is clear that there is not a consistent approach to student nutrition across the Province. Children in FDK are as young as 3.8 years old and could benefit from a consistent approach to nutrition in schools. As FDK nears full implementation in 2015, the absence of a formal nutrition component has been one of the key concerns associated with the otherwise valuable and popular program.

COMMENTS

Lunch and Full-Day Kindergarten

When FDK is implemented in a school, there is no longer a mechanism for a child care centre to provide lunch to 4 and 5 year olds. Children in FDK are in a universal school program during the core school day, which includes the lunch period. Full fee and subsidized children in some child care centres have historically had their lunch and supervision provided through parent fees and fee subsidy, an option that is eliminated in the universal FDK program. Child care operators are focusing their resources on FDK before- and after-school programs, and on providing care to younger children. As a result, lunch costs are not covered by child care funds. Children have the option to remain at school for lunch, which is supervised, or to go home. During school hours children are the responsibility of boards of education and no longer fall under the nutritional requirements of *Day Nurseries Act* regulations, which apply to licensed child care. Children's Services Division at current funding levels and with a wait list for fee subsidy of approximately 20,000 is not able to provide the funds for lunch and supervision of children attending the board-operated FDK program. Child care centres operating FDK before and after school programs establish fees based on before and after school hours. These programs do not provide supervision during school hours and must be offered on a full cost-recovery basis. Consequently, child care centres' costs do not extend to children who are enrolled in the school program.

Conversely, many older children (six to 12 year olds) in child care continue to receive a lunch through the child care centre's lunch program. It is important to note that from a food guide perspective, children are grouped by age according to their nutritional needs: 4-8 years, 9-13 years and 14-18 years. It is difficult to differentiate the nutritional needs of four and five year olds from those of slightly older children. A whole school approach would better ensure that the positive effects of proper nutrition are felt more broadly.

Trends

Investments in student nutrition are currently trending towards morning meals (see the Student Nutrition Program review at <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2012.HL15.3>). Evidence demonstrates that children who start their day with a nutritious breakfast are more likely to succeed in school and experience positive health and education outcomes, regardless of socio-economic family status. Additionally, the TDSB in May 2012 released a research report *Feeding Our Future* that shows that breakfast/morning meal programs are the most important for students. Investments in student nutrition may deliver higher returns if they are directed to morning meals instead of lunch.

Other best practices include breakfast or lunch programs being available to all students within a school; students, parents, and community members being involved in volunteering; and a variety of funding sources being accessed to support capital and operating costs.

During the 2013 Operating Budget Process, Toronto City Council approved a \$1.48 million enhancement to the Student Nutrition Program (SNP) as proposed by the Medical Officer of Health (MOH) and recommended by the Board of Health. The main goal of the enhanced funding is to assist existing programs in accessing nutritious food, as well as to allow up to 19 schools located in areas of higher need to start a morning meal program. The expansion of the Student Nutrition Program and shift towards morning meals are two developments that should inform how nutrition is delivered in schools.

ACTIONS

The issue of student nutrition affects all students, not just the 17% enrolled in child care. Since FDK is a universal, provincial program, it is important that the Province be involved in addressing the nutrition gap with a more comprehensive approach to nutrition for all school-aged children (including 4 and 5 year olds). Parents with children not in licensed child care have historically had to provide lunch and snacks for their school-aged children. However, the issue also has broad implications for a number of municipal and provincial policy objectives, including reducing childhood obesity, ensuring children are ready to learn and supporting vulnerable families who may not have the resources to ensure that nutritional goals are met. As such, the education, early learning and health sectors, including all orders of government and school boards should be involved in developing a sustainable solution.

Developing a Provincial Policy on Meeting Nutritional Goals in Full-Day Kindergarten

The recent Healthy Kids Panel report to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, released March 4, 2013, made a number of recommendations related to nutrition, including one for universal school nutrition programs. The provincial government is taking leadership in a number of ways on this issue. For example, the Ministry of

Education is implementing FDK, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services is the source of the provincial SNP grant, and the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care has demonstrated a policy interest in student nutrition. However, there are no provincial guidelines or policies that indicate who is responsible for nutrition in Full-Day Kindergarten as part of a seamless early learning and care experience for children, or the nutritional standards that should be met (as the DNA does in licensed child care). Best practices suggest that a "school-age" approach should be taken, one that consistently addresses the nutritional requirements of all children attending school.

Supporting the Expansion of SNPs

In 2012, the Board of Health and City Council endorsed reports by the Medical Officer of Health to strengthen and expand the Student Nutrition Program over the next 5 years. This five-year plan calls for a shared funding model with each of the following sectors ideally contributing 20% of total projected annual program costs by 2017: municipal, provincial and federal governments, the private sector, and parents/local communities. More recently, Toronto Public Health submitted a report to the Board of Health supporting the Ontario Healthy Kids Panel report recommendation for universal school nutrition programs, noting that Student Nutrition Programs in Toronto and across the Province are chronically underfunded. The Board requested that the Province of Ontario increase its Student Nutrition Program funding, starting in year one of the proposed implementation plan, as an additional milestone. Together with the City Council-approved expansion plan, this recommendation signals the current attention paid to this issue and support for this model of delivery.

In support of the five-year plan and shared funding model for Student Nutrition Programs, City Council requested that the Medical Officer of Health undertake enhanced fundraising efforts with the private sector and strong appeals to provincial and federal governments for increased funding for the Student Nutrition Program, noting that City Council may review its allocation based on future government and corporate partnerships.

CONCLUSION

A stronger and expanded Student Nutrition Program would reach more students, including students in FDK, in the future. SNPs are supported by good research and resources and have a centralized governance structure to effectively direct funding and apply best practice for better results (i.e. by targeting schools and by focusing on morning meal programs). These programs reach entire schools and as such represent a broader approach to student nutrition than lunch provision to 4 and 5 year olds.

The Medical Officer of Health has reviewed this report and concurs with the recommendations.

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SIGNATURE

(original signed)

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