



Student Nutrition Program: Impact of Municipal Plan 2013-2018

Date: June 28, 2018
To: Board of Health
From: Medical Officer of Health
Wards: All

SUMMARY

Student nutrition programs are community-based meal and snack programs that operate primarily in schools. Because eating breakfast positively impacts health and increases cognitive ability, most are breakfast and morning meal programs. Student nutrition programs are run locally by students, parents and volunteers and are funded through multiple sources. Program support is provided by Student Nutrition Ontario-Toronto (formerly called Student Nutrition Toronto), which is a partnership of Toronto Public Health, public school boards, two school board foundations, a community development agent and community representatives.

In 2012, the City of Toronto renewed its commitment to the student nutrition program by endorsing a vision and increasing funding, demonstrating the value it places on the well-being of Toronto's children and communities. This report summarizes the progress that student nutrition programs have achieved since 2012, and identifies some of the remaining program gaps for future consideration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Medical Officer of Health recommends that:

1. The Board of Health direct the Medical Officer of Health to consider opportunities to address the identified gaps in student nutrition programs and work with Student Nutrition Ontario -Toronto to develop a plan to address these needs.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no financial impact associated with this report.

DECISION HISTORY

On October 26, 2015, the Board of Health endorsed [HL7.2 Student Nutrition Program: 2016 Operating Budget Request and Municipal Funding Plan to 2018](http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.HL7.2) (<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.HL7.2>), a revised municipal funding plan to strengthen and expand student nutrition programs in Toronto which extended the municipal funding plan to 2018 and realigned it with the revised provincial expansion.

COMMENTS

2012 - 2018 Progress

City Council endorsed a student nutrition vision

In 2012, City Council endorsed the vision that student nutrition programs be delivered in all Toronto schools so that students who would benefit can achieve the positive health, learning and behavioural outcomes that result from this key nutrition strategy. Also in 2012, the Ontario Healthy Kids strategy recommended that student nutrition programs be offered in all public schools, recognizing the contribution which these programs make towards children's health and readiness to learn. Over the following six years, substantial progress has been made towards achieving these visions.

Since 2012 the number of student nutrition programs have increased significantly

In 2012, the City of Toronto endorsed a five-year growth plan to provide municipal funding for more programs in Toronto¹. At the same time, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS), the ministry which funds and oversees student nutrition programs, established its own aggressive expansion plan. The collective impact of municipal and provincial expansion mandates resulted in significant growth in Toronto with over 200 new programs in higher need communities (See Table 1). All but six programs receiving provincial funding also receive municipal funding.

Table 1, Reach of Municipal Investment

	<i>Number of sites</i>	<i>Number of programs</i>	<i>Number of students</i>
2012	435	649	135,880
2018	609	801	209,420
Percent increase	40	23	54

Increased funding provides stability for programs

Chronic government under-funding created significant challenges for student nutrition programs, which impacted their sustainability. In 2012, programs were left with the challenge of raising approximately 80 percent of the program costs and to ensure

program quality. Increased funding from both the Province and the City has significantly enriched the programs over the past 6 years (See Table 2). While the municipal funding was designated to the purchase of nutritious food, the provincial funding also included core start-up and on-going funding, and funds to support administration, community development, and equipment needs. This stable municipal and provincial funding has helped programs manage better when funding from other sources were variable month-over-month. In 2012, the City contributed nine percent towards the cost of nutritious food; by 2018 the City's contribution has reached 19 percent. The 2018 municipal investment is \$14,360,117. The 2018 provincial investment is **\$8,487,808**.

Table 2, Summary of Funding Status²

	<i>Provincial investment</i>	<i>Municipal Investment</i>	<i>Other contributors³</i>
2012	\$5,716,508	\$3,819,580	\$4,530,432
2016	\$8,797,408	\$9,992,366	\$5,426,003
Percent increase	35	62	17

Municipal investment includes inflationary increase

The increasing cost of nutritious food is an added pressure for student nutrition programs. From 2012 to 2017, food costs for a three-food group morning meal increased from \$1.04 to \$1.18 per elementary student, representing a 12 percent increase⁴. To relieve the burden of increasing food cost, an increase for the annual cost of food inflation has been approved in the Toronto Public Health (TPH) base operating budget.

An improved governance structure is in place

The Student Nutrition Ontario -Toronto (SNO-Toronto) Strategic Council has been established consisting of senior staff from the City, the school boards, the chairs of the school foundations, and community representatives. This group has been meeting to collectively identify ways to further improve the sustainability and quality of student nutrition programs.

Program supports have been enhanced

During the 2016/17 school year, 8,000 parent and community volunteers contributed 324,000 hours to support program operations. SNO-Toronto provides a coordinated network of support to program coordinators and volunteers to develop parent/volunteer/community capacity to support local programs. Priority areas include food safety, menu planning, financial reporting, volunteer management, fundraising, infrastructure needs, and program operations. From 2013 to 2017, TPH trained 3,356 program coordinators and volunteers in safe food handling practices and understanding and applying the nutrition guidelines established by the province.

A provincial review strengthened accountability

In 2015, MCYS (through an external consultant) conducted a review of the Ontario Student Nutrition Program model. Among many findings, the review reports that programs are well delivered and that Student Nutrition Ontario (SNO), a network of 14

Lead Agents⁵ through which the provincial funds are transferred, has emerged as a sector leader acting as a strategic and operational body. The recommendations included policy, operational and administrative changes to help develop a cohesive provincial program, leading to efficiency and sustainability. The report called for stronger sector collaboration and partnerships, a sounder resource allocation model, and improved data management.

Enhanced coordination among Provincial Lead Agents improves program capacity

To date, the SNO has actively implemented several of the ministry program review recommendations, including developing province-wide program branding (hence, the Toronto partnership name change to SNO-Toronto), increasing partnerships with suppliers/corporations, developing standard training resources and videos, and supporting effective food procurement practices. These efforts are to enhance student nutrition programs across the province.

Food procurement options have yielded better pricing

In 2013, MCYS provided ongoing funding for each Lead Agent to employ one Food and Logistics Co-ordinator to explore food procurement processes that would enhance program operations and lower food cost. The groundwork they began has been leveraged by the SNO in their actions to develop province-wide partnership relationships. Through the leverage of 4,200 programs and 900,000 participants province-wide, SNO has established partnerships with over a dozen organizations of various size and scope to provide opportunities for access to food, equipment and other products essential to program delivery at reduced costs. In Toronto, programs can now use this group purchasing power to access competitive prices for food and products.

New provincial program guidelines were issued

In April 2018, new provincial student nutrition program guidelines were released with new requirements for the Lead Agents including reporting requirements and performance indicators. These new guidelines provide the opportunity for Lead Agents to utilize an equity lens by implementing two levels of program funding (base and enhanced) based on the socio-demographic and learning outcomes of the students attending the schools. Additionally, the guidelines now explicitly provide the opportunity for independent schools to apply for provincial funding based on demonstrated need.

Current Gaps

Despite the numerous successes outlined above, program gaps, and therefore future opportunities exist.

Advocacy for provincial and federal funding

Most programs are not able to raise sufficient funds to run at full capacity. To deal with a funding shortfall, programs often reduce the number of meals served or offer fewer servings with smaller portions. In 2012, the City envisioned a funding model whereby each sector (federal, provincial, municipal, parental/local contributions, corporate donations) would each contribute 20 percent of program cost. Today, the province's contribution is approximately 10 percent, and federal funding remains non-existent, while the municipal contribution is 19 percent. The Board of Health has a long history of

advocacy to the federal government for a national student nutrition program. On June 13, 2018, the Senate adopted a motion urging the Government of Canada to initiate consultations with various groups, including the provinces, territories, and Indigenous people, to develop an adequately funded national cost-shared universal nutrition program and on June 26, 2018 City Council endorsed this Senate motion.

Equipment is aging and/or is not appropriate for optimal programming

Physical infrastructure and equipment can have a profound impact on student nutrition programs. An initial capital investment will often result in both lower operating cost (as food can be prepared more efficiently on-site) and improved program quality (better menus, more student involvement and food skill building). Many programs continue to utilize residential equipment, which also limits program capacity. Much of the capital equipment is now approximately 10 years of age (or more) and in need of replacement or repair. SNO-Toronto is exploring options to address equipment challenges.

Not all schools have student nutrition programs

Programs operate in 435 school communities; however there are approximately 800 publicly funded schools and 300 independent schools in Toronto. Student nutrition programs have a positive impact on students' health, learning and behaviour outcomes. City Council's 2012 vision for student nutrition programs extended to all students who would benefit from the program.

The Medical Officer of Health will work with SNO-Toronto to develop a plan to address these gaps in student nutrition programs in Toronto.

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SIGNATURE

Dr. Eileen De Villa
Medical Officer of Health

¹ In 2015, the municipal plan was extended to 2018.

² The most recent set of complete funding summary data is from the 2016/17 school year. The 2017/18 program year is in progress and programs continue to raise funds and operate.

³ Excludes donations (e.g., food, vouchers, and equipment) which also make a significant impact on program operations.

⁴ When items required to prepare and serve the meal are factored in, the cost per meal increases. In 2018, the total estimated cost to purchase, prepare and serve a three-food group meal for an elementary child is \$1.69.

⁵ The Toronto Foundation for Student Success is the provincial lead agent for Toronto.