

## **Student Nutrition Program: Provincial Funding During COVID-19**

**Date:** March 8, 2021

**To:** Board of Health

**From:** Medical Officer of Health

**Wards:** All

### **SUMMARY**

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This report responds to a motion passed at the January 18, 2021 Board of Health meeting requesting the Medical Officer of Health to report on the status of additional emergency pandemic funding for student nutrition from the Province of Ontario at the March 22, 2021 Board of Health meeting.

Student nutrition programs contribute to the health and wellbeing of students through providing nutritious food choices and have been demonstrated to improve learning outcomes among children. Toronto Public Health continues to monitor the evolving COVID-19 situation with schools and works with student nutrition programs, school boards and their foundations to ensure the safe operation of student nutrition programs.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The Medical Officer of Health recommends that:

1. The Board of Health receive this report for information.

### **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

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There is no financial impact resulting from the adoption of the recommendation in this report.

## DECISION HISTORY

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At its meeting on January 18, 2021, the Board of Health requested the Medical Officer of Health to report back in March 2021 on the status of additional emergency pandemic funding for student nutrition from the Province of Ontario.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2021.HL25.5>

## COMMENTS

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### **Province announces one-time nutrition funding to support remote learners**

In October 2020, while the Province broadened the purpose of its Provincial student nutrition program funds to include providing nutrition support to remote learners who otherwise would have accessed a student nutrition program, no additional funds were made available at that time.

On February 1, 2021, the Province announced<sup>i</sup> that it allocated \$10 million towards the Ontario Student Nutrition Program in order to reach and provide nutrition support to remote learners and address COVID-19 delivery challenges. These funds are provided through the federal Safe Return to Class Fund. Based on preliminary conversations with the Toronto Foundation for Student Success, we anticipate Toronto will receive approximately \$3 million of one-time funding to be administered by the Foundation as the contracted provincial lead agency. This funding may be used to support students in any publicly funded school board and must be used by the end of August 2021, enabling support to summer school students as well. This amount will be in addition to \$8,487,808 of Provincial funds directed to student nutrition programs in Toronto for the 2020/21 school year.

As reported in the January 18, 2021 update to the Board of Health, an average of 30% of students who attend Toronto District School Board and Toronto Catholic District School Board schools were learning remotely during fall 2020. Remote learners, who previously accessed their in-school student nutrition program before COVID-19, do not have that same access during the 2020/21 school year. This equity gap is concerning since student nutrition programs operate in schools that reach proportionally more students who experience greater levels of socio-economic challenges. Toronto Public Health estimated that \$15.5 million in additional funding would be required to support remote learners not able to access their student nutrition program for the 2020/21 school year (January to June in the four school boards). Of that, the additional approximately \$3 million of Provincial funding will provide some needed nutrition support to remote learners, but the reach will be limited.

### **Federal support for food security organizations includes student nutrition programs**

On December 18, 2020, the federal Ministry of Agriculture and Agri-Food announced details regarding its second phase of the Emergency Food Security Fund<sup>ii</sup>, where \$18.5 million will flow to Breakfast Club of Canada, a national non-profit organization providing

funding support for breakfast programs across the country. Details about the allocation process have not been provided by Breakfast Clubs of Canada to date.

### **Student Nutrition Ontario-Toronto remains committed to supporting programs**

The Student Nutrition Ontario-Toronto (SNO-Toronto) partnership continues to meet regularly to identify and understand emerging needs and take collaborative action to support student nutrition programs. At its January 2021 meeting, SNO-Toronto reviewed and reaffirmed its funding decisions applied in September 2020 and also welcomed the flexibility provided by the Board of Health in December 2020 to use municipal funds to support our most vulnerable remote learners, as well as in-school learners, through student nutrition programs. Funds to programs will also continue to flow monthly to ensure agility to adjust funding allocations in the event that breakfast programs are able to reopen or schools are closed again.

### **CONTACT**

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### **SIGNATURE**

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Dr. Eileen de Villa  
Medical Officer of Health

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<sup>i</sup> <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/60193/ontario-making-additional-investments-to-keep-students-and-staff-safe>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.canada.ca/en/agriculture-agri-food/news/2020/12/government-of-canada-rolling-out-100m-in-added-support-to-food-security-organizations-during-covid-19-pandemic.html>