

May 10, 2021

Councillor Joe Cressy, Chair  
Toronto Board of Health  
Toronto City Hall  
100 Queen Street West  
Toronto Ontario

By email to: boh@toronto.ca

***Re: Item HL28.2 – 2021 Student Nutrition Program Service Subsidies.***

Dear Councillor Cressy and Board of Health Members:

I am writing the Toronto Board of Health to recommend to the federal government that they fund a universal cost-shared school food program that includes Farm to School approaches.

My name is Gary Hoyer, a professor at George Brown College in Toronto. I have been researching the benefits of Farm to School activities and school food programs for several years. Investigating the benefits that healthy local food and a food literacy education, both hands-on and theoretical, provide students and the community.

Our research included a survey and interviews of stakeholders and a comprehensive review of evidence-based scientific literature, we also developed healthy local food snack recipes and delivered almost 40 culinary and theoretical workshops for middle and secondary school students in the GTA, including Toronto Board of Education schools. You will find our report here: *Generating Success for Farm to School.*

Our research and review of literature successfully linked the proven benefits of a healthy diet for children to Farm to School approaches and activities. It demonstrated the benefits of healthy local foods and a food literacy education for student's academic success and future well-being as adults. It also showed how involving the community enhances rewards for all stakeholders. Fundamentally, however, the research demonstrated that children's health and welfare, and academic success suffer without a nutritious breakfast and lunch. Based on the results, we are advocating for a National, Universal, Cost-shared Healthy School Meal Program.

Our workshops included a food literacy brainstorming session, followed by a cooking laboratory. (Please find the Cookbook and Kitchen Manual we produced for the workshops here: *Fresh & Local - Farm to School.*) The workshops were well received; students enjoyed the hands-on cooking while teachers and administrators loved the food literacy

assembly. There were many requests for us to return to deliver additional workshops for other classes, and the word got around to other schools who contacted us to ask if we could arrange sessions for them. We kept adding names to a waitlist but were not able to satisfy demand. The requests and positive feedback demonstrated a need for student food literacy education. Teachers and administrators agreed that it should be embedded in both primary and secondary school curriculum.

It was often a challenge delivering the culinary workshops as schools, even in a specific district, had a wide range of infrastructure. Some had no food service facilities, while others enjoyed a full kitchen and cafeteria. Adding the necessary infrastructure for schools to produce and deliver healthy local meals and snacks or developing an alternative such as an off-site commissary kitchen with delivery capabilities is critical but costly. It will require cross-governmental funding and should be part of a good National School Food Program.

It was wonderful to hear that City Council again approved municipal funding for student nutrition programs and that most programs could continue during COVID-19. These programs are critical to the health and well-being of children in Toronto. The City of Toronto is a leader in funding, designing, and delivering a universal student nutrition program that offers students healthy fresh food, integrating volunteers, parents, and community agencies. Toronto schools have pioneered programs that integrate students in preparing and serving food locally grown when possible, providing additional food literacy benefits. But the city needs more support. School is the best place to provide students with healthy food. All Canadian students should receive meals through a National School Food Program, based on the proven benefits of healthy local food, food literacy education, and community involvement.

I endorse the Coalition for Healthy School Food and join them in advocating for a National, Universal, Cost-shared Healthy School Meal Program. One with well-chosen federal standards so that all children can enjoy cost-free daily access to healthy food at school, culturally appropriate, local, sustainable food with both hands-on and theoretical food literacy education tied to the curriculum.

I hope the Toronto Board of Health supports the Coalition and strongly urges policymakers at the federal and provincial levels to support and create a universal cost-shared school food program embedded with Farm to School approaches, providing the necessary infrastructure to deliver school food service.

Best Regards,

Gary Hoyer

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