

**From:** [Debbie Field](#)  
**To:** [Board of Health](#)  
**Subject:** Item HL28.2 – 2021 Student Nutrition Program Service Subsidies.  
**Date:** May 9, 2021 5:45:13 PM  
**Attachments:** [Coalition for Healthy School Food City of Toronto May 10, 2021 Board of Health Submission.docx.pdf](#)

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Hello,

Attached please find and pasted in below, a letter for Item HL28.2 – 2021 Student Nutrition Program Service Subsidies.

I am also registered to making a deputation.

Thanks,

Debbie

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

By email to: [boh@toronto.ca](mailto:boh@toronto.ca)

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

Dear Councillor Cressy and Board of Health Members:

First, thank you to the members of the Board of Health for your leadership. It was great to read this report and the details of the February 18, 2021, City Council approval of 2021 municipal funding for Student Nutrition Programs of \$16,437,857. Also so good to hear that “most student nutrition programs were able to continue to operate” during COVID. Student Nutrition Programs are so important to the health and well being of children and youth in Toronto and the funding and vision of the City of Toronto when it comes to Student Nutrition Programs should be celebrated.

My name is Debbie Field, and I am the National Coordinator of the Coalition for Healthy School Food, a growing network of over 160 non-profit [member organizations](#) from [every province and territory](#). We are advocating for public investment in and federal standards for a universal cost-shared school food program that would see all children having daily access to healthy food at school. Building on existing programs across the country, we hope that all students will eventually eat a healthy meal or snack at school daily, in programs that will include food education and serve culturally appropriate, local, sustainable food to the fullest extent possible.

The City of Toronto is a leader in the funding and design of universal student nutrition programs that serve healthy food, fresh whenever possible and that integrates volunteers, parents, community agencies in the delivery of innovative programs. Some Toronto schools have also pioneered

programs that integrate students in preparing and serving the food, providing additional food literacy benefits and when feasible, serve locally grown food.

After decades of very little action at the federal and provincial levels, new developments have occurred in the last year. There is a wonderful opportunity for the Board of Health at your May 10 meeting to join with other voices in Ontario and across the Country to take a strong position on the need for universality in school food program delivery to avoid stigma, and the centrality of focussing on healthy food as the key benefit of student nutrition programs. Canada is the only G7 country without a National School Food Program and [UNICEF](#) has ranked Canada 37th of 41 wealthy countries when it comes to children's food security and nutrition. After years of grassroots advocacy the Federal Budget 2019 committed "to work with provinces and territories towards the creation of a National School Food Program." Covid-19 has demonstrated that school food programs are an essential service.

Here are some of the few examples of recent developments:

1.  
On February 22, 2021, the Canadian Food Policy Advisory [Council](#) was created to provide policy recommendations to the Federal Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Marie-Claude Bibeau. sub-committee of the Council, a School Nutrition Working Group will develop proposals to advance the creation of a National School Food Program for Canada. As the largest municipal funder of school food programs in Canada, the City of Toronto is a key stakeholder and has the opportunity to help shape the decisions of this new Advisory Council.
2.  
On January 28, 2021 the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) and the Council of Ontario Medical Officers of Health (COMOH) sent a joint [letter](#) to Premier Ford urging the province to better support Student Nutrition Programs (SNPs), as well as to encourage "Ontario Ministries to engage with federal partners to facilitate the development of universal SNPs across Ontario." The Coalition for Healthy School Food has heard from multiple sources that the federal government needs the provinces and territories to come to the table to ask for a jointly funded program with national standards.
3.  
In October 2020 Ontario Conservative MPP Daryl Kramp introduced Private Member's [Bill 216, the Food Literacy for Students Act](#). If passed, this landmark piece of legislation will mandate food literacy education in every grade in Ontario schools.
4.  
In April 2020, Gary Hoyer and Chinh Do of George Brown College released [Generating Success for Farm to School](#). Its recommendations include instituting a universal healthy school food program across Canada, complemented with a farm to school (F2S) approach. The authors argue that: "In Canada, a universal meal program coupled with a F2S approach would positively impact all students, their health and wellness, ability to learn and provide them with food literacy skills that may offer lifelong benefits." and "It would also support local farmers and producers."
5.  
Earlier in 2020, the [Vancouver City Council](#), the [Victoria City Council](#), [the Victoria District](#)

[School Board](#), the [Western Kings](#) and [Annapolis](#) Nova Scotia Community Health Boards all passed motions supporting *Cost-Shared Universal Healthy School Food Programs* and endorsing the Coalition for Healthy School Food to make it clear that they support universal programs that do not stigmatize participants and serve healthy whole food.

6.

On May 7, 2021 US Senator Bernie Sanders, Representatives. Ilhan Omar, Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, and Gwen Moore tabled the [Universal School Meals Program Act](#) to “permanently provide free breakfast, lunch, dinner, and a snack to all school children regardless of income, eliminate school meal debt, and strengthen local economies by incentivizing local food procurement”.

As you all know so well, *Our kids are not ok*. They do not access enough healthy food, they often have not developed a preference for healthy eating and they may live *shorter and sicker lives than their parents* because they have a greater risk of developing preventable chronic illnesses such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and cancer, which are all closely linked to dietary behaviour ([House of Commons Standing Committee on Health, 2007](#)).

As we get closer to the establishment of a National School Food Program, [strong guiding principles](#) will be needed so that schools can put into practice and model the revised [Canada Food Guide](#). Such a program would support students to develop the taste receptivity for nutritious foods, build food literacy skills, and has great potential to shift the eating habits of children and youth as well as those of their families. A well-designed program would also increase local food purchases and impact regional food production. Having students develop a palate for fresh vegetables, fruit and plant proteins is consistent with a diet that emits low amounts of greenhouse gasses, and a well-designed program would provide a practical opportunity for students to learn how to choose local and sustainable food, to minimize food waste, and to compost. We believe that there is no single other primary prevention intervention that could better support the health of our next generation.

The Toronto Board of Health can take a strong stand today that will have a big impact. In writing to senior levels of government we urge you to add concepts of universality and health to clarify your vision of the kind of school food program you want and the principles that are needed for good school food programs. We hope you will add your voice to others and confirm that you are in favour of a Universal, Cost-shared Healthy School Food Program and that you endorse the Coalition for Healthy School Food.

Yours sincerely,



Debbie Field,  
Coordinator Coalition for Healthy School Food

Debbie

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**Debbie Field**

Coordinator, Coalition for Healthy School Food

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May 10, 2021

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Toronto Board of Health  
Toronto City Hall  
100 Queen Street West  
Toronto Ontario

By email to: boh@toronto.ca

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