



May 10, 2021

Councillor Joe Cressy, Chair Board
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:

My name is Sunday Harrison and I am the Executive Director of Green Thumbs TO. We are a for-impact food and nature literacy program in three adjoining dense urban neighbourhoods in downtown east Toronto. We partner with schools, City and community agencies to help foster urban agriculture, greenspace enjoyment, physical and mental health benefits. We promote environmental education by doing.

Several of the schools I work with also have student nutrition programs and I can tell you how important those programs are to the health and well being of those students.

So I am here today to thank you for that funding. I wish you also funded garden programs but it is good to know that the funding you provide does a great deal to make those schools better green learning environments. We see the added impact of student nutrition programs paired with garden programs, where students see the produce they have grown with their own hands, in the lunchroom.

I see a real need for helping children learn how to be in nature and that is why I was so pleased to see the recent private members bill from Ontario MPP Daryl Kramp introduced [Bill 216, the Food Literacy for Students Act](#) in the Ontario Legislature.

If passed, this landmark piece of legislation will mandate food literacy education in every grade in Ontario schools.

I think it would be great if you asked for more information about this.

I am here today as a member 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, all schools will eventually serve a healthy meal or snack at little or no cost to students. These programs will include food education and serve culturally appropriate, local, sustainable food to the fullest extent possible. See our [guiding principles](#) for what our ideal school food program looks like. In addition to our member organizations, the Coalition's vision is [endorsed](#) by government agencies and other organizations.

I recently attended a webinar on School Food Programs in Brazil hosted by the Ryerson Center for Studies in Food Security and the Coalition for Healthy School Food and I was so pleased to learn more about the ambitious targets that the government there set, that 30% of all food in school food programs is sourced from local farmers. I think we can do the same in Canada.

Deepening the Farm to School approach could yield multiple benefits for students and for farmers. The federal government has recognized how important farming is in mitigating climate change, and regenerative agriculture, paired with Farm to School programs, would teach valuable lessons in remaking our food system to actually mitigate climate change instead of contributing to it. I know we forget how dependent we are on our local farms, here in downtown Toronto, and a Farm to School relationship could begin to address this gap. School gardens and farm trips could follow from a commitment from the federal government for a universal, cost-shared healthy school food program.

Last March 11, 2020, the Toronto District School Board moved


- a) That the Chair send a letter to the federal government to urge the government to follow through with its intention to invest in a national school food program, based on the attached draft letter;
- b) That trustees be encouraged to meet with their local Members of Parliament to discuss the importance of a national school food program.

The "attached draft letter" was drafted by me and my colleagues at the Environmental and Sustainability Community Advisory Committee of the TDSB, and the motion was brought to the TDSB by the Programs and Services Committee. That letter included the following statement:

As the consequences of climate change are becoming more widely known and understood, a national school food program would also provide an opportunity to deepen our educators' and students' understanding of environmental sustainability as it relates to a healthy diet and a sustainable food system. Students not only learn from explicit curriculum, but also learn through the "hidden" curriculum (the actual practices and school cultures in which they learn by example and through activity).

The Toronto Board of Health can take a strong stand today that will have a big impact. I hope you will add your voice to others like the City of Vancouver and Victoria 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,



Sunday Harrison