

## **2022 Student Nutrition Program Service Subsidies**

**Date:** May 2, 2022

**To:** Board of Health

**From:** Medical Officer of Health

**Wards:** All

### **SUMMARY**

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Student nutrition programs are meal and snack programs offered primarily in public schools. They help to ensure that children and youth at risk for poor nutritional intake have access to safe, adequate, and culturally appropriate nutritious food. Research shows that when students eat healthy meals at school they focus better, score higher marks in reading, math and science, and are more likely to graduate high school. Students develop healthier eating habits, which can lower rates of childhood obesity and overweight.

Programs depend on funding from the City of Toronto (the City), the Province of Ontario (the Province), student and parent contributions, community fundraising, school board fundraising, and corporate donations. Additional funding and support from the federal and provincial governments is needed to ensure sustainable programs.

The City's continued commitment to invest in student nutrition programs demonstrates its leadership among Canadian cities. This report outlines recommendations for the 2022 Student Nutrition Program service subsidy allocations, which includes a Council approved 2.5 percent cost of food inflationary increase of \$403,446 from 2021 base approved budget. The proposed combined allocations to the Angel Foundation for Learning (AFL) and the Toronto Foundation for Student Success (TFSS) total \$16,811,303, which includes \$173,135 held in reserve for appeals/late applications.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The Medical Officer of Health recommends that:

1. City Council authorize the Medical Officer of Health to enter into agreements and other suitable arrangements, on behalf of the City of Toronto, for the transfer of funds to the Angel Foundation for Learning (\$4,492,696) and the Toronto Foundation for Student Success (\$12,318,607) for the purpose of administering the 2022 approved municipal

funding (totalling \$16,811,303) to eligible student nutrition programs across the City of Toronto on terms satisfactory to the Medical Officer of Health and in a form satisfactory to the City Solicitor.

2. The Board of Health and City Council reiterate their requests to the Provincial Government to increase its grant funding investment proportionally to match the increased City of Toronto investment.

3. The Board of Health and City Council reiterate their requests to the Federal Government to provide core funding for a national school food program.

4. The Board of Health forward this report to the Federal Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, the Federal Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, the Federal Minister of Health, the Ontario Minister of Children, Community and Social Services, the Ontario Minister of Health, the Ontario Minister of Education, the Toronto District School Board, the Toronto Catholic District School Board, le Conseil scolaire Viamonde, le Conseil scolaire catholique MonAvenir, the Toronto Foundation for Student Success, the Angel Foundation for Learning, the Daily Bread Food Bank, and the United Way.

## **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

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The 2022 Approved Operating Budget for Toronto Public Health includes funding of \$16,841,303 gross and net for municipally-funded student nutrition programs as follows:

1. \$16,541,303 toward the cost of nutritious food for eligible existing programs at 606 school communities across the City.

2. \$300,000 toward the cost of nutritious food, capacity building and assessment for eligible independent schools at 10 school communities across Toronto.

This report recommends an allocation of \$16,811,303: \$4,492,696 to the Angel Foundation for Learning and \$12,318,607 to the Toronto Foundation for Student Success, which includes all funds held in reserve as outlined in Tables 1 and 2.

There is no financial impact associated with this report beyond what has been approved in the 2022 Approved Operating Budget for Toronto Public Health.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed the report and agrees with the financial impact information.

## **DECISION HISTORY**

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At its meeting held on February 17, 2022, City Council adopted Item EX30.2 "2022 Capital and Operating Budgets" and approved 2022 municipal funding for student nutrition programs of \$16,841,303.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2022.EX30.2>

At its meeting held on June 8, 2021, City Council adopted Item HL28.2 "2021 Student Nutrition Program Service Subsidies" and requested the Federal Government to provide ongoing core funding for a universal national school food program and requested the Provincial Government to increase its grant funding investment proportionally to match the increased City of Toronto investment.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2021.HL28.2>

## COMMENTS

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### **Student Nutrition Programs are run by students, parents and volunteers**

Student nutrition programs are community-based meal programs that operate primarily in schools and a few community sites. Most are breakfast and morning meal programs providing energy and nutrients to students to support their learning and development over the school day. These programs also create opportunities for community capacity building, volunteering and job skills development, which align with City priorities. Student nutrition programs are run locally by students, parents and volunteers.

### **Community Partnership Model Supports for Student Nutrition Program**

Student Nutrition Ontario-Toronto (SNO-Toronto) recommends the allocation of municipal and provincial funding to Toronto's student nutrition programs, provides program support and monitors program quality and accountability. SNO-Toronto is made up of a committee and two sub-committees, including an Allocations Sub-Committee. The SNO-Toronto Committee is comprised of student nutrition stakeholders, including representatives from Toronto Public Health (TPH), Toronto District School Board (TDSB), Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB), AFL, TFSS, and two community representatives. Standardized meal costs per student are used to estimate program costs and are adjusted annually for food inflation, when applicable.

### **Annual Review of Applications**

The joint application process for municipal and provincial student nutrition program grants began in January 2022, when all currently funded student nutrition programs in Toronto were notified of the grant opportunity. Staff from each SNO-Toronto partner agency assisted program applicants to complete grant applications.

Annually, applications are reviewed by a panel of staff from Toronto Public Health, the TDSB, the TCDSB, TFSS and AFL using standardized review procedures and following conflict of interest guidelines. The Applications recommended for funding are forwarded to the SNO-Toronto Committee for approval. The process satisfies the requirements laid out in the *City of Toronto Community Grants Policy*, approved by City Council on July 16, 2019 in Item [2019.EC6.19](#).

### **Summary of Allocations and Recommendations**

The SNO-Toronto committee received and approved the following recommendations for the distribution of municipal funds for existing programs as outlined in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1 - Summary of Allocations and Recommendations: Existing Programs

| <b>Foundation</b>   | <b>Funding Amount</b> |
|---|-----------------------|
| Angel Foundation for Learning<br>(166 school communities)                                     | \$ 4,492,696          |
| Toronto Foundation for Student Success<br>(440 school communities)                            | \$ 11,918,607         |
| Toronto Foundation for Student Success<br>(held in reserve for late applications and appeals) | \$ 130,000            |
| <b>Total</b><br><b>(606 school communities reaching 217,167 participants)</b>                 | <b>\$ 16,541,303</b>  |

The money held in reserve for appeals and late applications will be used to make adjustments to the allocations as required prior to December 31, 2022. The entire municipal grant for existing programs is distributed to programs and directed towards the cost of nutritious food.

Table 2 - Summary of Allocations and Recommendations: Independent School Expansion

| <b>Foundation</b>  | <b>Funding Amount</b> |
|--|-----------------------|
| Toronto Foundation for Student Success<br>(10 independent schools reaching 2,211 participants) | \$ 186,865            |
| Toronto Foundation for Student Success<br>(held in reserve for late applications and appeals)  | \$ 43,135             |
| Toronto Foundation for Student Success<br>(for community capacity building)                    | \$ 40,000             |
| <b>Sub-Total</b>   | <b>\$ 270,000</b>     |
| Administered by TPH to support the assessment process  | \$ 30,000             |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>\$ 300,000</b>     |

The municipal expansion for independent schools continues through to December 31, 2022, when the money held in reserve for appeals and late applications will be used to make adjustments to the allocations as required. The municipal grant, except for the portion allocated to community capacity building and assessment, is distributed to programs and directed towards the cost of nutritious food. The funds for community capacity building are allocated to align with the current capacity and program coordination model used by the SNO-Toronto partnership with a focus on supporting the operational needs of new programs in independent schools.

All student nutrition programs approved for funding will receive municipal funding in instalments. They must meet program requirements, including financial reporting to their respective foundation, to receive subsequent instalment cheques.

### **Use of Municipal Budget Enhancement for 2022**

The 2022 allocation of the municipal investment continues to support the vision endorsed by the City in 2012 to strengthen and grow student nutrition programs in Toronto, by:

- Focusing investment on breakfast/morning meal programs;
- Strengthening existing programs; and
- Strengthening the partnership funding model.

For the Toronto Public Health 2022 Operating Budget, City Council approved an increase of \$403,446 to total \$16,841,303 for student nutrition programs. This funding aligns with the 2022/23 school year. The enhanced funding will help existing programs offset some of the increased food costs. The municipal funding level, as a percentage of the funds needed to run a fully funded program, will drop slightly from 18.7 percent in 2021/22 to 18.2 percent for the 2022/23 school year.

Also, \$300,000 of the 2022 municipal base funding will support student nutrition programs for eligible independent schools that meet needs-based eligibility criteria, an initiative that began in 2019. Between 2019 to 2022, 47 independent schools expressed interest in offering student nutrition programs with 11 demonstrating that they meet needs-based eligibility criteria, plus potentially three additional schools pending the results of the needs assessment underway by Statistics Canada. Not all eligible schools applied for funding. In 2022, a portion of the independent school expansion funds was also allocated towards programs offered by independent schools which existed prior to the 2019 expansion in order to alleviate some of the funding pressure experienced by all municipally-funded programs. The grant appeals and late application process which will conclude by December 31, 2022 may change these numbers.

### **Impact of COVID-19 on Student Nutrition Programs**

Toronto Public Health continues to meet regularly as part of the SNO-Toronto partnership to identify and understand school community needs and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on student nutrition programs.

To support the safety of children during the pandemic, student nutrition programs have modified their delivery models and adapted their menus to reach in-school and remote learners. Some program delivery modifications resulted in increased food costs over and above the documented inflationary increase to food experienced during the pandemic. For example, most programs turned to purchasing pre-packaged food items directly from the distributors (e.g., single-serve yogurt, single-serve cheese string, single-serve apple slices) or where possible bagged snack items per student (e.g., apple, cheese string, half whole wheat pita placed in paper bag per student). Programs reported that these extra steps increased program delivery costs, at a time when extra volunteers and extra funds were not readily available. To help mitigate some of these additional costs, the TFSS and AFL, together with their respective school boards, worked with corporate and community partners to obtain and deliver donated and deeply discounted food for student nutrition programs.

Student nutrition programs which were paused earlier in the pandemic due to public health mandated restrictions have been able to safely reopen as public health restrictions lifted. In particular, most before-school breakfast programs and afternoon-time lunch and snack programs have resumed. It is anticipated that programs will take at least another school year to rebound to pre-pandemic operations in terms of volunteer capacity, delivery models and menus, as well as evolution of in-person versus remote learners.

The 2022 grant application process highlighted an unmet need, possibly influenced by the continued impact of the pandemic on strained communities and families. During the 2022 grant application cycle, there were 13 applications received from schools not previously funded for student nutrition programs requesting funds to reach almost 9,000 additional students. In addition, 15 sites currently funded for at least one student nutrition program requested funds to offer an additional program to meet the growing need within their student population. SNO-Toronto could not recommend expanding the student nutrition program to meet this need, as doing so would have reduced the funding provided to existing programs.

### Provincial Funding

The TFSS is the Lead Agency for the Ontario Student Nutrition Program funded by the Ontario Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services and is accountable to ensure provincial program criteria is met. The TFSS subcontracts with the AFL to administer the provincial funding for programs located in TCDSB sites and support program-level community development. Programs will receive their provincial funding at the same time as their municipal funding.

The 2022 provincial investment for Toronto's student nutrition programs has yet to be confirmed; however, it is not expected to change from the current funding for 2021. In 2021/22, the Government of Ontario's investment in Toronto's student nutrition programs was as follows (Table 3). The one-time provincial 2021 funding was part of the federal Safe Return to School funding and had separate reporting requirements compared to the main provincial funding received. While the province has provided one-time funding enhancements in the past several years to support program implementation, a cost of food increase has not been consistently applied year-over-year to the provincial base funding. Given the significant increases to the cost of food in recent months, additional provincial support is needed for student nutrition programs.

Table 3 - Summary of 2021 Provincial Funding Investment

| <b>Funding Use</b>  | <b>Funding Amount</b> |
|---|-----------------------|
| Base funding for new and existing programs towards food cost                              | \$ 6,340,170          |
| One-time funding to reach and support remote learners and address COVID-19 delivery costs | \$ 3,153,847          |
| Community development and administration funding  | \$ 2,147,638          |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>\$11,641,655</b>   |

## **Federal support for national school food program**

The Board of Health and City Council have a history of advocacy to the federal government for a national student nutrition program. The 2022 Federal Budget included the following statement. "Over the next year, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development will work with provinces, territories, municipalities, Indigenous partners, and stakeholders to develop a National School Food Policy and to explore how more Canadian children can receive nutritious food at school". A financial commitment was not included in the 2022 Federal Budget.

During the pandemic, federal funds towards school food programs were included as part of the Emergency Food Security Fund administered via Breakfast Clubs of Canada, of which slightly over \$2 million flowed to Toronto student nutrition programs as administration by the TFSS.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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Medical Officer of Health