



## OLIVIA CHOW MAYOR

September 30, 2024

Members of the Executive Committee,

Re: Building a Universal Student Food Program in Toronto

In my time as a City Councillor and Toronto's Child and Youth Advocate, I spoke with youth across the city - asking them what they would do if they were mayor for a day. One entry from Sylvia stood out above all the others. She submitted a drawing of a stick figure child holding up a shopping bag, her note read that she would ask God for money to buy groceries. This image and this need has haunted me ever since.

That's why today I am taking the next step as Mayor to build a Universal Student Food Program in our city. I am committed to making this happen. It exists in cities around the world and Torontonians deserve it too.

I am very proud to have helped establish Toronto's student food program when I was a school trustee and later a councillor. Today it helps to serve over 227,000 meals per day to kids across our city. But still there are over 100,000 kids across more than 220 public schools who do not have access to good food, including thousands in some of our lowest income neighbourhoods.

In fact, we have 21 schools that have the infrastructure in place, that are eligible, that have applied in the last two years, and have been denied because of a lack of funding. That means 8,000 kids at these schools don't have the same opportunities, they're stuck trying to focus and learn on empty stomachs. My first recommendation below puts us on a path to feeding these students in January 2025.

The rising cost of groceries is putting pressure on families in our City. In Toronto, nearly one in three food bank clients are children and youth. The reality is, in our city with so much wealth, we have thousands of kids going to school every single day hungry. When you're hungry, you can't learn. We need our kids to be able to focus on their teacher, not their hunger. We know that student meal programs increase attendance, improve math, science and reading scores, reduce dropouts, and create healthier communities.



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City Council and the Toronto Board of Health have a long history of offering nutritious meals at school through the Student Nutrition Program. This program is funded through municipal and provincial funding streams. The City of Toronto currently invests \$19.16 million annually and the Province of Ontario nearly \$9 million. School community contributions and fundraising alongside corporate donations also help to fund the program. And in its April 2024 Budget, the Federal Government announced the National School Food Program, where they committed hundreds of millions that we expect to soon flow here in Ontario.

With this alignment across orders of government and, frankly, across political parties - we have a big opportunity to make a universal school food program a reality in our city.

That's why I am recommending Executive Committee adopt the recommendations below.

### **Recommendations:**

- 1) City Council request the City Manager, in coordination with the Medical Officer of Health, to report to the November 2024 Executive Committee the funding, including intergovernmental contributions, and operational considerations required to deliver student food programs by January 2025 in the schools that applied for the 2023/4 or 2024/5 school years, were deemed eligible, but were denied due to funding constraints.
- 2) City Council request the City Manager, in coordination with the Medical Officer of Health, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, to report back by Q2 2025 on a vision and strategy for achieving a universal student food program where a universal mid-morning meal is provided in Toronto by the 2026/2027 school year; a clear strategic path to achieving a universal lunch program no later than 2030, and the decisions adopted under EX13.1 in April 2024 are included.

Sincerely,

Mayor Olivia Chow