

June 23, 2025

Executive Committee
City of Toronto
Toronto City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Dear Members of the Executive Committee,

On behalf of TEW 4400, thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the City's renewed School Food Program report. We have been proud, long-standing champions of universal school nutrition, and we greatly appreciate the City's ongoing commitment to expanding equitable access for all students.

Every day, our members who prepare and serve school meals, teach culinary arts, and deliver direct student support witness firsthand how hunger impacts health, learning outcomes, and a child's sense of inclusion. We are committed to ensuring that no student is left hungry at school, and equally committed to ensuring that the dedicated staff who deliver these essential programs have access to secure, decent jobs with opportunities for skill development and career progression. Investing in a universal, professional school food system is not only an investment in children's well-being but also in Toronto's local workforce and economy.

Our Proposal: A Universal School Lunch Pilot Program

TEW 4400 is pleased to submit a detailed proposal for a Universal School Lunch Pilot Program for consideration by the Toronto District School Board and the City of Toronto. We strongly believe that a universal lunch program should serve as the cornerstone of comprehensive school nutrition. By establishing robust, sustainable lunch service models now, we lay the groundwork to expand into high-quality breakfast and snack programs in the future. Lunch must be the anchor, ensuring that school food provision moves beyond fragmented or volunteer-based initiatives to an integrated, citywide system that supports all students.

In developing these pilots and future programs, we also recognize the unique nutritional needs of students in special education settings. Many special education students face dietary challenges or deficiencies linked to specific medical conditions, medication side effects, or restrictive diets. We believe that any universal lunch program must be designed to address these needs, providing inclusive, flexible nutrition supports so that every student has access to meals that truly support their growth, learning, and well-being

Why Pilots Are Critical

Pilot projects allow us to test, refine, and scale universal school lunches responsibly. Specifically, they will enable us to:

- Evaluate centralized kitchen operations and delivery models;
- Measure impacts on student participation, behavior, and academic outcomes;
- Adapt services to the diverse contexts of Toronto's schools and communities;
- Build strong support among families, school staff, and the broader community to ensure long-term sustainability.

Recommended Pilot Initiatives

To support an evidence-based, phased rollout, we propose three complementary pilot models:

1. **Culinary-Focused High School Pilot (Thistletown Collegiate Institute Model)**
This model combines culinary arts education with daily lunch preparation and service. Students gain valuable, hands-on training in food preparation and hospitality through apprenticeship opportunities with colleges, while directly providing fresh, nutritious lunches to their peers. Notably, this model also includes capacity to prepare and deliver meals to nearby seniors' residences, extending its benefits beyond the school community to help address local senior food insecurity and strengthen intergenerational community connections. This dual impact supports workforce development, community service, and optimal use of existing school kitchen facilities.
2. **Lunch Pilot in Schools with Existing Infrastructure**
This model builds on schools already offering breakfast or snack programs. It introduces a full lunch service using current kitchens, staff, and community partnerships. Different delivery methods including cafeteria service, classroom delivery, and grab-and-go options will be tested for feasibility and effectiveness.
3. **Lunch Pilot in Schools Without Existing Programs**
For schools without existing food programs, this model establishes lunch service by utilizing centralized kitchens or off-site meal preparation. Meals will be delivered using efficient, inclusive systems that accommodate students with dietary restrictions and accessibility needs, all while maintaining cost-effectiveness.

Each pilot is designed to generate reliable data, inform best practices to move toward a sustainable, equitable lunch strategy.

Next Steps

This is a critical moment for Toronto to move beyond fragmented, volunteer-dependent food supports and build a professional, universal school nutrition system that not only nourishes every child but also creates and sustains quality, stable jobs for local workers. A well-designed universal lunch program is an investment in both student well-being and a resilient, skilled workforce that can deliver consistent, high-quality services in every community.

TEW 4400 looks forward to working in partnership with the City, and community stakeholders to make this vision a reality. Thank you for your leadership and your commitment to the health, well-being, and success of Toronto's students.

Sincerely
TEW 4400