

Attachment 1: Background on Student Nutrition Programs

Summary of Evidence on the Impacts of Student Nutrition Programs

Research demonstrates that student nutrition programs reduce stigmatization when offered universally to all students, and support student mental and physical health. Furthermore, research shows that participating students focus better, achieve academic success, develop greater nutrition knowledge, and healthier eating habits. These positive impacts are shown to continue into adulthood resulting in long term positive health behaviours, such as reduced diet-related chronic disease^{1,2}. Student nutrition programs also positively impact families, the broader community, and the greater economy by reducing household food costs, fostering job opportunities, and strengthening the local Agri-food sector^{2,3}. These programs also create opportunities for community capacity building, volunteering, and job skills development, which align with City priorities in [Toronto's Poverty Reduction Strategy](#).

Student Nutrition Ontario-Toronto Partner Roles and Responsibilities

Student Nutrition Ontario-Toronto (SNO-Toronto) is a community advisory partnership, which provides oversight, monitors program quality and accountability, recommends the allocation of municipal and provincial funding, and provides program support to student nutrition programs in Toronto. SNO-Toronto is comprised of representatives from Toronto Public Health, Toronto District School Board (TDSB), Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB), Angel Foundation for Learning (AFL), and Toronto Foundation for Student Success (TFSS). The table below outlines the roles and responsibilities of the partner agencies.

Organization	Roles and Responsibilities
Toronto Public Health	Stewards municipal funds; has a contractual relationship with the AFL and TFSS for the administration of municipal funds; chairs the partnership; administers the annual grant application and renewal process; provides nutrition and food safety training and expertise, nutrition quality assurance, and food safety inspections.

¹ Colley et al., 2018. The impact of Canadian School Food Programs on Children's Nutrition and Health. <https://dcjournal.ca/doi/10.3148/cjdpr-2018-037>

² Haines & Reutz, 2020. Comprehensive, Integrated Food and Nutrition Programs in Canadian Schools: A Healthy and Sustainable Approach. The Arrell Food Institute. The University of Guelph. https://arrellfoodinstitute.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/SchoolFoodNutrition_Final_RS.pdf

³ The Economic Rationale for Investing in School Meal Programs for Canada: multi-sectoral impacts from comparable high-income countries. The Arrell Family Foundation. Reutz et al., 2023. https://amberleyruetz.ca/assets/uploads/ruetz-consulting_the-economic-rationale-for-investing-in-school-meal-programs-for-canada.pdf

Organization	Roles and Responsibilities
School boards	Operationalizes and integrates the program into the school day in collaboration with schools and parent communities, supports program operations, provides space, maintains equipment, mobilizes parents and volunteers.
Angel Foundation for Learning, and Toronto Foundation for Student Success	<p>Fundraises, administers government grants and other donations, ensures program accountability, supports local fundraising, trains coordinators to operate programs, supports volunteer recruitment, coordinates in-kind donations.</p> <p>The Angel Foundation for Learning administers the municipal grant to programs affiliated with the TCDSB. The Toronto Foundation for Student Success administers the municipal grant to programs affiliated with the TDSB, Conseil scolaire Viamonde (CSV), Conseil scolaire catholique MonAvenir (CSCMA), independent schools, and community locations.</p>

2025 Grant Application and Review Process

The joint application process for municipal and provincial student nutrition program funding for the 2025-2026 school year launched in December 2024 and closed mid-February 2025. All currently funded programs were invited to submit a renewal application. The list of approximately 200 public school communities without a student nutrition program was reviewed against indices, produced by the Ministry of Education, and the TDSB and the TCDSB. The indices use sociodemographic data of where students live to measure challenges that impact student success. Outreach for program expansion was prioritized to school communities demonstrating the highest need among their student demographics.

Staff from SNO-Toronto partner agencies assisted applicants to complete grant applications. All applications were reviewed by a panel of staff from Toronto Public Health, AFL, and TFSS using standardized review procedures. The applications recommended for funding met municipal and provincial funding criteria and were forwarded to the SNO-Toronto Committee for approval. Standardized meal costs per student were used to estimate program costs, which are adjusted annually for food inflation. The process satisfies the requirements laid out in the *City of Toronto Community Grants Policy*, approved by City Council in 2019 (Item [2019.EC6.19](#)).

Other Program Pressures and Unmet Need

The 2025 grant application process highlighted increased community demand. Fifty (50) applications were received from elementary and secondary school communities not previously funded for student nutrition programs, requesting funds to reach over 20,000 more students. Also, 21 sites currently funded for at least one student nutrition program

requested funds to offer an additional program to provide 3,500 more meals per school day to meet a growing student need. SNO-Toronto was unable to extend funding to all new applicants, as the 2025 program expansion was prioritized to 32 elementary school communities demonstrating highest student need. A second round of outreach to priority school communities is underway to confirm the remaining 18 new programs.

The main operating pressures faced by student nutrition programs continue to be the increased cost of food and increased program participation. The additional municipal investment will alleviate some of the pressure. Often programs do not receive or are challenged to generate funds from other sources. An additional operating pressure exists for the new expansion programs. Although the City extends municipal core funding to the new student nutrition programs, without matching funds from the province or federal governments, the long-term sustainability of these programs will be impacted. Additional funding from the federal and provincial governments is needed to ensure all programs can be sustainable.

Government of Ontario Funding

The Ontario Student Nutrition Program, funded by the Ontario Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, is administered by 14 lead agencies across Ontario. Toronto Foundation for Student Success is the lead agency in Toronto and is accountable to ensure provincial program criteria are 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 Government of Ontario's 2025 investment for Toronto's student nutrition programs has yet to be confirmed; however, the base funding is not expected to change from the base funding for 2024. The table below outlines the Government of Ontario's investment in Toronto's student nutrition programs in 2024-2025. While the Government of Ontario has provided one-time funding enhancements over the years to support program implementation, a cost of food increase has not been applied to the provincial base funding since 2016. Given the significant increases to the cost of food and demand for new programs, additional provincial support is needed for student nutrition programs.

Summary of 2024 Government of Ontario Funding: Funding Use	Funding Amount (\$)
Base funding for existing programs towards food cost	\$6,340,170
Community development and administration funding	\$2,177,868
Total	\$8,518,038

Government of Canada Support for National School Food Program

On April 16, 2024, the federal government confirmed the creation of a National School Food Program. The federal investment of \$1 billion over five years aims to provide meals to 400,000 more students nationally each year, in addition to those served by

existing student nutrition programs. As of March 10, 2025, all provinces and territories signed onto the agreement.

In Ontario, the federal funding is transferred through the province to its contracted lead agencies for local administration; in Toronto TFSS is the lead agency. For the 2024-2025 school year, \$4.78 million in federal funding for Toronto programs was received in January 2025 to be used by June 2025. This first year of federal funds is intended to increase the sustainability of existing programs by alleviating some operational challenges, providing supplementary food through bulk purchasing, supporting delivery logistics, acquiring equipment for bulk purchasing to maximize cost efficiency, and replacing broken or outdated equipment. Funds have been allocated to existing programs experiencing the greatest financial challenges. The 2025 Federal budget is not confirmed. Additional support is needed from the federal government to provide a universal program where all school-aged children have access to a daily nutritious meal.