

Update: Towards a Universal Student Food Program in Toronto

Presentation to the City-School Boards Advisory
Committee

February 26, 2025

Purpose and Agenda

- Provide a brief overview of the Student Nutrition Program.
- Provide an update on the City of Toronto expansion of the Student Nutrition Program.
- Inform the Committee of next steps for municipal expansion.

➤ Program Funding



Existing sources do not cover all program costs

Government Funding 2024-2025

- Federal Funding: \$4.7M
- Provincial Funding: \$8.5M
- City of Toronto: \$21.9M

Non-Government Funding

- Parent Fundraising
- Corporate Donations
- Grants

Non-Monetary

E.g., food, equipment, in-kind use of space, equipment maintenance, volunteer time and efforts, etc.

Fluctuates per year

➤ Student Nutrition Programs in Toronto



- Provide healthy breakfast, morning meal, lunch, and snack options
 - to over **243,000** students each school day (2024-2025 school year)
- Are run locally by parents, volunteers, and students, in collaboration with public schools
- Give students access to nutritious and safe food in a non-stigmatizing manner
 - especially important for those at risk for poor nutritional intake

➤ Impacts on Health and Student Success

Healthy school meals support student mental and physical health and positively impact food choices

Classroom Success

- Increased attendance and focus
- Improved test scores in math, science, reading
- More likely to graduate high school



Long-term Health Benefits

- Greater nutrition knowledge and healthier eating habits
- Reduced risk of chronic diseases
- Improved mental health



➤ Program Partnerships

Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS)

- Sets province-wide program operating and nutrition guidelines
- Provincial funder
- Toronto Foundation for Student Success (TFSS) is the lead agency that administers provincial funding in Toronto.

Student Nutrition Ontario (SNO)- Toronto

- Community partnership committee that provides funding, oversight, program support, monitors program quality and accountability. Members include:
 - Toronto Public Health (chair)
 - TDSB, TCDSB
 - Toronto Foundation for Student Success (TFSS)
 - The Angel Foundation for Learning (AFL)

Toronto Public Health

- Chairs SNO-Toronto
- Coordinates the annual government grant application processes for Toronto
- Lead role for nutrition and food safety expertise
- Inspects programs for food safety

School Boards

- Operationalize the program in collaboration with schools and parent community and, mobilize volunteers
- TDSB, TCDSB, CSV, CSCMA

➤ City of Toronto's Commitments and Intergovernmental Advocacy on Student Nutrition

The City of Toronto is a leader in advocating for and investing in student nutrition programs

- Student nutrition programs have existed in Toronto since the 1990s
- In 2012, City Council endorsed a vision for a universal student nutrition program which led to significant program expansion to hundreds of school communities over many years
- In October 2024, City Council committed to realizing a **universal morning meal for every student in Toronto by September 2026 and a universal lunch by 2030**
- In December 2024, City Council approved an expansion of the SNP to 23 additional school communities starting January 2025
- In December 2024, City Council declared food insecurity an emergency in the City of Toronto.
 - City Council also requested the Government of Ontario increase its financial commitment towards school food programs

➤ 2024-2025 Expansion



- In December 2024, City Council increased Toronto Public Health's budget by \$2.6M for the expansion of student nutrition programs in the 2024-2025 school year
- In January 2025, City of Toronto funded the first expansion of student nutrition programs since 2018 to **23 new public school communities** for the remainder the 2024-2025 school year – reaching **8,000 additional students** in Toronto

Student nutrition programs operate in 643 school communities representing ~75% of public schools (2024-2025 school year).

➤ 2025-2026 Expansion



As part of Budget 2025, Toronto Public Health's operating budget for student nutrition programs increased by \$6.886M to:

- Enable expansion to **25 additional school communities** for the 2025-2026 school year and grow existing programs— reaching **13,500 new students** in Toronto
- Provide continued funding towards the purchase of nutritious food for the programs launched in January 2025 – reaching 8,000 students

Next Steps:

- SNO-Toronto is reaching out to school communities in greatest need, which do not have a student nutrition program, to promote this funding opportunity and assist readiness assessments and funding applications.

City's Vision for Universal Student Nutrition Programs

City's vision for a universal morning meal by September 2026 and a universal lunch program by September 2030

- The City Manager's Office in collaboration with Toronto Public Health, will report back to Executive Committee in Q2 2025 with a vision and strategy.

 **Thank You**