



May 11th, 2023

The Honourable Michael Parsa, P.C., M.P.P.
Minister of Children, Community and Social Services
7th Flr, 438 University Ave, Toronto, ON M5G 2K8

Re: Request for increased funding for Ontario's Student Nutrition Programs

Dear Minister Parsa,

I'm writing to you on behalf of the Ontario Chapter of the [Coalition for Healthy School Food](#) (ON-CHSF). The ON-CHSF is a growing network of 75 non-profit and community-based organizational members and endorsers from across the province that include professionals from education, health, Indigenous, agriculture and food sectors as well as school boards and school community members – many of whom deliver school food and food literacy programs. Our Chapter is part of the national Coalition for Healthy School Food, Canada's largest school food network of more than 260 organizational members and 125 endorsers. Together we are working to advance school food in our province and in Canada.¹

We are writing to you to highlight the immediate and longer-term funding needs of Student Nutrition Programs (SNPs) in Ontario and to request a meeting to discuss this issue.

A growing body of research demonstrates that **school food programs can benefit students' physical and mental health, improve food choices, and lead to student success** (e.g. academic performance, student behaviour, and school attendance).² These programs help reduce the \$5.6 billion/year in costs due to nutrition-related chronic disease illnesses in Ontario. Well designed and non-stigmatizing SNPs also have broad, positive impacts on families, communities, and the economy by reducing household food costs, creating jobs, and strengthening Ontario's agri-food sector.²

Over the past two years, rising costs of food and higher program uptake have significantly outpaced provincial SNP funding and have left SNPs feeling strained and unable to meet current and rising needs in schools.³ Without immediate financial assistance from the province, **many Ontario SNPs will have to limit the food served throughout the week, or stop running their programs before the end of the school year;** some programs have already had to shut down for the year due to lack of funds. **This means that many children and youth will not have access to nourishing food at school.** Although many programs will be able to continue running until the end of the school year, student nutrition programs are reporting that the projected budget shortfall for future years is substantial.

¹ The national [Coalition for Healthy School Food](#) consists of member and endorser organizations from every province and territory. We are advocating for the creation of a universal cost-shared school food program that would see all K-12 students in Canada having daily access to healthy food at school.

² [The case for a Canadian national school food program](#). Hernandez et al., 2018; [Nourishing Young Minds](#). Toronto Public Health, 2012; [The impact of Canadian School Food Programs on Children's Nutrition and Health](#). Colley et al., 2018; [Coalition for Healthy School Food](#)

³ View recent media coverage from [Kingston](#), [Niagara](#), [Hastings and Prince Edward County](#), [Toronto](#), [Hamilton](#), [Ottawa](#) and [London](#).

The Ontario government was among the first provincial governments to fund school food programs in Canada and now provides an annual \$27.9M for SNPs in the province. Since Ontario's initial investment, all provincial and territorial governments now fund school food programs. In 2022-23, many governments increased their investment in school food's annual operating budgets due to greater participation and rising food costs including: \$500,000 in Newfoundland and Labrador; \$2 million in New Brunswick; \$2 million in emergency funding in Nova Scotia; \$1.3 million in Manitoba; \$6+ million in Quebec; \$214.5 million over three years in Budget 2023 in BC; and \$500,000 in the Yukon.

We know Ontario's student nutrition practitioners have greatly appreciated the additional support that MCCSS provided to SNPs throughout the pandemic, and for your recent statement that no student will go hungry under your watch. We ask MCCSS to again recognize the pressing need and to (1) allocate urgent funding to those programs who need it immediately, and (2) allocate increased core funding to programs for the 2023/24 and future school years, when significant shortfalls are expected. These investments are needed since there has not been a substantial annual increase to core Ontario SNP funding since 2014.

In our pre-budget submission in advance of the 2023 provincial budget we recommended that your government increase the annual investment in Ontario's Student Nutrition Program by 30% to reflect the 25-35% increases in food costs seen since the last increase to core SNP funding.⁴ The pre-budget submission includes additional school food investments for your government to consider, although we recommend that you explore the funding needs of SNPs across the province to understand the true cost increases that they have been experiencing and what an investment in the program could achieve.

We would appreciate an opportunity to meet with you to discuss the current situation and the future of SNPs in Ontario. We could also provide updates from other provinces and territories and from our Coalition's recent meetings with federal decision makers tasked with implementing the government's mandate to create a National School Food Program.

As the federal government prepares to release a National School Food Policy and invest in programs across the country, greater provincial investment in Ontario programs will be seen favourably. We believe that there is a great opportunity for Ontario to show further leadership on student nutrition at this time and to ensure students are well nourished during the school day.

Your attention to this urgent issue is appreciated. We look forward to speaking with you further.

Yours sincerely,



Sarah Keyes
Sustain Ontario

Coordinator, Ontario Chapter of the Coalition for Healthy School Food

⁴ Cost of Healthy Eating / Nutritious Food Basket reports: Toronto: \$835 in [2014](#) to \$1141 in [2022](#) (36% increase); Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox, and Addington: \$845 in [2014](#) to \$1099 in [2022](#) (30% increase); Ottawa: \$869 in [2014](#) to \$1088 in [2022](#) (25% increase); Sudbury \$848 in [2014](#) to \$1096 in [2022](#) (29% increase).

C.C. Premier of Ontario, Doug Ford

Honourable Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education

Honourable Peter Bethlenfalvy, Minister of Finance

Honourable Sylvia Jones, Minister of Health

Honourable Lisa Thompson, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services,
Logan Kanapathi

Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services,
Nolan Quinn

Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Education, Patrice Barnes