

Our

Current Opportunity

Momentum is building for a school food program in Ontario.

2012: The province sets a target to reduce childhood obesity by 20% in five years.

2012: Ontario establishes the Healthy Kids Panel (HKP) to develop a strategy to achieve this target.

March 2013: The HKP presents No Time to Wait: The Healthy Kids Strategy (HKS) to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

Part 2 of the Strategy puts forward recommendations to “Change the Food Environment”, with Recommendation 2.8 focusing on establishing a universal Student Nutrition Program for all publicly funded schools across Ontario along with complementary food literacy education.

The Government of Ontario currently provides funding to support Student Nutrition Programs across the province. It is estimated that over the 2011-12 school year, close to 700,000 students participated in government supported breakfast, lunch and snack programs. The province has since made a number of additional funding commitments following the release of the Healthy Kids Strategy.

Alongside the provincial commitment of funding, some municipalities support SNPs in their jurisdiction. The City of Toronto has been a leader in this area: in its 2014 operating budget the city increased its investment for SNPs by \$1.77 Million, bringing its support to 14% of participating program costs.

In the meantime, evaluations of Ontario SNPs have shown that meal programs benefit academic achievement and learning outcomes, student health, classroom behaviour, school relationships, and a host of other indicators of student wellbeing. The significant efforts of coordinators, schools, and volunteers across the province are clearly making a difference.

While meals and snacks help students come to school ready to learn, these programs also offer major opportunities to bring related food literacy programming into schools. With the support of community partners, many SNPs across the province have been enabling students to learn about where food comes from, how to grow and prepare food, as well as to learn healthy eating habits that can last a lifetime.

With the release of the Healthy Kids Strategy, which places an emphasis on healthy school food environments, our current moment in time offers an opportunity to continue to expand the reach and impacts of these programs and to better enable our children and youth to develop healthy eating habits and food skills for life.

Join the momentum – Say Yes! to Good, Healthy Food in Schools

Recommendation 2.8 of the Healthy Kids Strategy: Establish a universal school nutrition program for all Ontario publicly funded elementary and secondary schools.

Leverage existing school nutrition programs, extending them to reach every child. These programs should include learning about where food comes from and how it is grown, as well as the hands-on experience of cooking and access to healthy foods for those coming to school hungry. Every effort should be made to ensure these programs are culturally sensitive. Consider engaging corporate sponsors and using a competitive social finance approach to fund breakfast and lunch programs where required. Ensure the programs incorporate the key features of successful school-based initiatives, including: ensuring a long-term commitment (i.e., at least 12 months), providing teacher training, integrating the nutrition program with the curriculum, promoting leadership from students and school food service staff, and involving parents at school and at home. The programs should also work to develop fundraising activities that promote healthy foods.

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