

## **Nourishing Young Minds – A Review of the Student Nutrition Program in Toronto**

<b>Date:</b>	June 8, 2012
<b>To:</b>	Board of Health
<b>From:</b>	Medical Officer of Health
<b>Wards:</b>	All
<b>Reference Number:</b>	

### **SUMMARY**

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This report highlights key elements of a review of the Student Nutrition Program, *Nourishing Young Minds*. Toronto Public Health conducted the collaborative review to examine how the City of Toronto can maximize the benefits derived from its investment in Toronto programs, while also strengthening program sustainability.

The recommendations from the review emphasize the best practice elements featured in the program structure in Toronto, as identified through comparison with international models. It proposes strategies to strengthen the sustainability of student nutrition programs that currently receive municipal grant funding, and recommends that a long-term funding strategy be developed to expand funding over time to schools that would benefit from having a student nutrition program.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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**The Medical Officer of Health recommends that:**

1. The Board of Health adopt the recommendations outlined in the Student Nutrition Program Review *Nourishing Young Minds*, specifically:
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  - a. That City Council endorse the vision of SNPs delivered in all Toronto schools so that students who would benefit can achieve the positive health, learning and behavioural outcomes that result from this key nutrition strategy.
  - b. That the Medical Officer of Health optimize the City's current investment in SNPs by ensuring that municipal funding is prioritized, as opportunities arise over the next 5 years, to breakfast programs in higher need schools.

- c. That the Medical Officer of Health report to the Board of Health, as part of the 2013 budget process, on a plan to increase the City's investment in a SNP funding partnership model.
  - d. That City Council consider as part of the annual operating budget process, an annual increase to the City's investment in SNPs equal to the annual amount of food inflation reported by the Nutritious Food Basket survey.
  - e. That City Council urge the Government of Ontario to provide annual adjustments to provincial SNP funding in consideration of the impact of food inflation.
  - f. That the Board of Health urge the Directors of Education of Toronto school boards to maximize the use of their current resources to support SNPs by:
    - i) Optimizing the allocation of space and equipment for local SNPs in schools, including the creative use of multi-purpose areas;
    - ii) Supporting staff time and involvement in local school-based SNPs in light of the growth of the programs;
    - iii) Exploring educational opportunities to teach cooking, food skills and nutrition to students; and
    - iv) Integrating innovative and creative food-related school activities with local SNPs.
  - g. That the Board of Health request the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care to consider SNPs as a key element in the *Childhood Obesity Strategy*, and furthermore, that this report be forwarded to the Minister's *Healthy Kids Panel* as input to its strategy development.
  - h. That the Board of Health reiterate its request to the federal government to provide core funding for SNPs across Canada, which, internationally, is a best nutrition practice for students to achieve improved health, learning and behavioural outcomes.
  - i. That the Medical Officer of Health engage key private, public and voluntary sector leaders in strategic discussions regarding a sustainable funding and growth plan for Toronto SNPs.
  - j. That the Toronto Partners for Student Nutrition work with experts to maximize efficiencies in food procurement, safe storage, and distribution.
3. the Board of Health endorse the request for a \$247,616 net increase to the 2013 Toronto Public Health Operating Budget to be distributed to existing student nutrition programs to cover the inflationary impact of increased food costs by school communities currently receiving municipal funding;
  4. the Board of Health forward this report to the Budget Committee for consideration during the 2013 Operating Budget process; and
  5. the Board of Health forward this report to the Premier of Ontario, the Ministers of Children and Youth Services, Education, Food, Agriculture and Rural Affairs, and Health

and Long-Term Care, the Toronto District School Board, Toronto Catholic District School Board, Conseil scolaire Viamonde, Conseil scolaire de district catholique Centre-Sud, the Toronto Foundation for Student Success, Angel Foundation for Learning, the Toronto Food Policy Council, the General Managers of the City of Toronto, Children's Services, and Parks, Forestry & Recreation.

### Financial Impact

An additional \$247,616 will be required for 2013 to offset the inflationary impact of increased food costs in programs currently receiving municipal grant funding. This recommended cost of living adjustment of \$247,616 would bring the student nutrition program base budget of \$3,819,580 within the Toronto Public Health Operating Budget to \$4,067,196 and is subject to the 2013 Operating Budget process.

Focus of Investment	Recommendation	Net Increase
<p><b>Existing Programs - Cost of Living Adjustment for two years for increased cost of nutritious foods</b> Provide an increase for all existing programs, based on the compounding effect of two years of food cost increases: 2011 (4.6%) and 2012 (preliminary 1.8%) Nutritious Food Basket surveys for Toronto (note: no 2011 cost of living adjustment was provided in the 2012 budget process)</p>	<p>Endorse additional municipal funds of \$247,616, to cover increased food costs, noting that the municipal grant funding for Student Nutrition Programs is meant for improving access to nutritious foods.</p>	<p>\$247,616</p>
	<p><b>Total net increase recommended</b></p>	<p>\$247,616</p>
	<p><b>New recommended base budget:</b> \$3,819,580 + \$247,616</p>	<p>\$4,067,196</p>

The Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this report and concurs with the financial impact information.

### DECISION HISTORY

On May 12, 2008, a motion was made at the Community Development & Recreation Committee (CDRC) meeting for a multi-year plan for student nutrition programs to be submitted for the 2009 budget process. The development of the plan was delayed to the following year, in order to assess the impact of a provincial funding announcement in July 2008 which required the implementation of student nutrition programs in 433 provincially designated Toronto communities. At the time, 242 of these provincially designated Toronto communities had student nutrition programs in operation.

In June 2009, a multi-year plan for strengthening Student Nutrition Programs in Toronto was presented to and endorsed by the Board of Health.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2009.HL24.3>

City Council approved a municipal enhancement in 2010 of \$541,249 for a cost of living adjustment (i.e. increased cost of nutritious food) for existing programs and to extend municipal funding to 30 of the provincially designated communities that had started new student nutrition programs since July 2008. The Board of Health also requested that a thorough program review occur that would aim at improving the long-term sustainability of the Student Nutrition Program, ensuring that programs could meet high nutrition standards, have adequate infrastructure and space, and be accessible in a non-stigmatizing manner.

In January 2011, a status report was presented to the Board of Health.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2011.HL1.6>

City Council approved a municipal enhancement of \$23,000 in the 2011 budget process for the impact of a 0.6% increased cost of food for existing student nutrition programs, based on the 2010 Nutritious Food Basket survey. Council did not approve a service enhancement to extend municipal funding to 30 additional student nutrition programs that were not receiving municipal grant funding, as outlined in the multi-year plan. The report indicated that the Student Nutrition Program review began in 2010 by Toronto Public Health in collaboration with the City of Toronto Social Development, Finance and Administration Division, Toronto District School Board, Toronto Catholic District School Board, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, and other stakeholders.

In January 2012, despite fiscal pressures and that the 2011 Core Services Review identified student nutrition programs as a possible area for elimination or reduction in City funding, Council approved a flat-line 2012 budget for existing student nutrition programs. This also meant that programs would have to absorb the impact of 4.6% inflationary increase in the cost of nutritious food, as determined by the 2011 Nutritious Food Basket survey.

## **ISSUE BACKGROUND**

Student Nutrition Programs help create healthier eating habits and help prevent obesity and the early onset of chronic diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease. The nutritious meals offered provide students with nutrients and energy they need to be ready to learn and participate in school. When offered as part of the school day, student nutrition programs can change the school culture and result in reduced absenteeism, less aggressive behaviour and fewer violent incidents. The programs are also a catalyst for community capacity building, community development and job skills training.

For the 2012/13 school year, preliminary figures indicate that 134,687 students will be participating in student nutrition programs that currently receive municipal grant funding; this number will likely increase after the late applications/appeals process is completed in the fall. At a minimum, provincial grant funding will reach an additional 7,529 students in 2012/13 in designated school communities that currently do not receive municipal grant funding.

Funding for the programs come from the City of Toronto, the Province of Ontario, local fundraising, and parental contributions. Appendix 1 provides a detailed government funding history of student nutrition programs in Toronto. Adequate core government funding is vital to developing high quality programs that meet nutrition standards and is critical to achieving and maintaining program stability.

## **COMMENTS**

### **Student Nutrition Program Review**

A review of the Student Nutrition Program was completed June 2012 (Appendix 2). The overall aim of the review was to identify how the City of Toronto could make best use of its investment in student nutrition programs to enhance the sustainability and impact of these community-based programs, while recognizing the limited resources available. It considered how program participation, fundraising capacity and parental involvement impact upon program success and sustainability.

### **International Student Nutrition Programs**

A literature review of 19 international student nutrition programs synthesized information concerning program goals, administration, funding, operations, parental and community participation, student participation, and program challenges. The international review confirmed that the model used in Toronto has many of the components of the international models. In many cases, Toronto has overcome some of the significant challenges others continue to face. Key findings from the literature review found that:

- the most common goal is to improve student health
- most student nutrition programs are administered through an education arm
- most are cost-shared, and include federal level support
- when a program is not offered to everyone, participating students feel stigmatized
- stigmatization negatively impacts participation

Furthermore, a list of characteristics of a 'gold standard' student nutrition program model was compiled, based on a combination of documented best practice, international programs, and input from subject matter experts, many of which are demonstrated in the Toronto model, including:

- program available to all students within a given school, with high rates of students participating
- students, parents, and community volunteers actively involved in program planning and operations
- majority of programs serve a meal or snack in the morning, that is culturally appropriate, nutritious and served in a safe manner
- a variety of funding sources support capital and operating costs
- local program committees and a partnership model maximizes access to expertise, skills, knowledge, support, training, etc.

## **Breakfast, Health and Learning Impacts**

Current literature linking obesity, poverty, breakfast consumption, health outcomes, and learning outcomes was reviewed. The findings validated that regular breakfast consumption and the provision of student nutrition programs in the morning hours have a positive impact on health, learning and behaviours for children and youth. In particular, breakfast consumption has been found to be an important factor in the prevention of overweight/obesity, which is a key public health concern. Since dietary behaviours established in childhood and adolescence track into adulthood, improving breakfast habits among students is a logical public policy approach to prevent childhood and adult obesity.

The review also noted that student nutrition programs are extremely beneficial to students in all socio-economic situations and best operate when all students are able to participate. Evidence demonstrates, however, that children of lower socio-economic status have more irregular breakfast habits than children of higher socio-economic status. Therefore, when funding is limited, the best use of finite resources is to direct funding to higher need school communities.

## **Program Challenges in Toronto**

The review also examined challenges faced by Toronto programs due to rising food costs and rapid growth, both in number of programs and number of students. It looked at the impact this growth has had on program sustainability. Between 1998 and 2012, student nutrition programs in Toronto have grown, from reaching 35,000 elementary students to 134,687 elementary and secondary students. During this same time period, the municipal investment grew from \$1.31 million to \$3.81 million. The result is a dilution of government funding to the point where the City is providing about 9% of the required funding per meal and the Province about 10%. This would amount to \$0.13 per elementary child per breakfast per day from the municipality alone.

Although the rate of growth at a local level is a response to community needs, how well that growth is managed or sustained is dependent on many factors, such as funds, need, commitment and capacity of school and volunteers, school infrastructure, participation by students, and coordinated support through partnerships. When one or more of these determinants are weak, programs often struggle to make ends meet. For example, in 2011 to reduce costs, about 38% of programs operated fewer days per week than planned, while 10% closed before the first week of April. They offered less food or poorer quality of food and/or offered the program to fewer students. Many programs try to save on the cost of food in order to reduce the financial pressure. Some programs are able to take advantage of bulk purchasing, but many find it difficult to acquire and maintain adequate food preparation, cooking, serving, and storage space in schools. Without adequate storage space, programs cannot take full advantage of bulk purchasing and related cost savings. The most successful programs are those where food and nutrition are imbedded in the school's overall programming, with student and school staff involvement.

The boards of education and local schools have been excellent partners in the Toronto Partners for Student Nutrition (TPSN) and are encouraged to keep seeking ways to

optimize the allocation of space and equipment for local programs in schools, including the creative use of multi-purpose areas. In each case, when a local student nutrition program does not have enough funds to operate fully, there are fewer opportunities for students to gain from the positive outcomes inherent in student nutrition programs.

### **Program Sustainability**

To help determine a direction on how to maximize the limited financial contribution to student nutrition programs, different administrative and funding models were examined in the program review. Research confirmed that many of the components of student nutrition programs in Toronto, including those for funding and organization, are best practice. A cost-shared partnership funding model, including multiple government levels, parental contributions, local fundraising, the private sector, non-government organizations, establishes a basis where each community can be committed to delivering a successful and sustainable program.

The review proposes a vision of breakfast/morning meal programs delivered in all Toronto schools so that students who would benefit can reap the health, learning and social benefits of student nutrition programs. The review indicates that the strengths and best practice elements currently featured by Toronto student nutrition programs are a good foundation. However to realize a positive outcome, a sustainable funding model, a strong governance model, efficient food procurement and distribution systems, a dedicated volunteer base, and strong oversight are essential. Increased municipal and provincial investments, as well as strong national level support for student nutrition programs, are critical. The review recommends gradually increasing the municipal investment to those schools that would benefit from having a program and continuing to prioritize the available funding to higher need communities. Given adequate levels of funding from a variety of sources, the current model used in Toronto can be viable and sustainable.

### **Realizing the Recommendations of the Review**

The review recommends a multi-year funding strategy be developed; this will come forth to the Board of Health in September 2012, moving into action many of the recommendations presented in the Student Nutrition Program Review *Nourishing Young Minds*. The strategy will establish priorities for an incremental growth in municipal funding for student nutrition programs, recognizing economic restraint in the City. The aim of the plan will be to ensure greater program stability of existing student nutrition programs to put them in a better position to meet the nutritional needs of Toronto's children and youth. It will also outline a plan to enable additional schools to address nutrition needs by starting and sustaining student nutrition programs.

### **Rising Cost of Food**

The total municipal grant for student nutrition programs is directed towards accessing nutritious food. The 2012 student nutrition program municipal grant was not adjusted to cover the 4.6% increase in food costs in Toronto, based on the 2011 Nutritious Food Basket survey, representing \$175,701. There is an impact of a 1.8% (preliminary figure) increase in the Nutritious Food Basket cost this year (i.e. inflationary pressure for the

2013 budget), which would represent another \$71,915, factoring in the compound effect of two years of food cost increases. A total of \$247,616 would account for the inflationary impact due to increased food costs in 2011 and 2012 (i.e. applied to 2012 and 2013 operating budget years). In the high need communities where most student nutrition programs are located, adjusting the program budgets for rising food costs is crucial.

## **CONCLUSION**

Evidence shows that children and youth who start their day with a nutritious breakfast are more likely to succeed in school and experience positive health and education outcomes, regardless of socio-economic family status. Today, childhood obesity and diet-related chronic diseases are threatening the health of our population. Difficult economic times and increases in the cost of nutritious food are making it harder for families to ensure the nutritional health and well-being of their children. Investing in children and youth early on will have long-term benefits for children, their families, their communities and the economy. For these reasons, student nutrition programs are sound public policy. To realize the full benefits of this vision, a gradual increase in public and private investment is required, as is advocacy to urge the federal government to share in the cost of a national student nutrition program.

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## **SIGNATURE**

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Medical Officer of Health

## **ATTACHMENTS**

Appendix 1: Toronto Student Nutrition Programs - Summary of Municipal and Provincial Funding 1998-2012.

Appendix 2: Nourishing Young Minds