

March 21, 2024

The Honourable Chrystia Freeland
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
Canada
K1A 0A6

Dear Deputy Prime Minister Freeland:

Urgent Need for a National School Food Program

I am writing to you on behalf of the Simcoe County District School Board (SCDSB) to express our strong support for the establishment of a comprehensive national school food program. As advocates for student well-being, we believe that access to nutritious meals is essential for academic success and overall health.

The challenge:

Across Canada, many students face food insecurity, which directly impacts their ability to learn and thrive. Hunger and malnutrition hinder concentration, cognitive development, and overall educational outcomes. A 2022 Statistics Canada report shows that 6.9 million people in 10 provinces, including almost 1.8 million children, lived in households struggling to afford the food they need. As a school board, we witness first-hand the effects of food insecurity on our students, and we are committed to addressing this critical issue.

The solution:

A national school food program would provide consistent and equitable access to healthy meals for all students, regardless of their socio-economic background. By implementing such a program, we can:

1. **Enhance learning:** Proper nutrition positively influences cognitive function, memory retention, and concentration. When students have access to nutritious meals, they are better equipped to engage in learning.
2. **Promote health and well-being:** A well-balanced diet contributes to physical health, mental well-being, and overall resilience. By nourishing our students, we invest in their long-term health outcomes.
3. **Reduce stigma:** A universal program eliminates the stigma associated with receiving subsidized meals. All students benefit equally, fostering a sense of inclusivity and community.
4. **Support families:** A national school food program would alleviate financial strain on families, ensuring children receive nourishing meals during the school day.

Our request:

We support the Ontario Public School Boards' Association's (OPSBA) request for an allocation of \$1 billion over the next five years, with a minimum annual commitment of \$200 million, in the 2024 Federal Budget for the establishment and sustainable operation of a national school food program. We urge the federal government to collaborate with provincial and territorial counterparts, educational institutions, and community organizations to develop and fund this comprehensive national school food program. This program should prioritize fresh, locally sourced ingredients, cultural diversity, and sustainability.

Conclusion:

Deputy Prime Minister Freeland, we believe that investing in our students' nutrition is an investment in Canada's future. By working together, we can create a program that ensures no child goes hungry while pursuing their education.

We kindly request your support and advocacy for the swift implementation of a national school food program. Let us join forces to nourish our students and empower them to reach their full potential.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. We look forward to positive action that will benefit generations of Canadian students.

Sincerely,



Jodi Lloyd, Chairperson
Simcoe County District School Board

cc: John Brassard, MP, Barrie – Innisfil
Adam Chambers, MP, Simcoe North
Scot Davidson, MP, York-Simcoe
Terry Dowdall, MP, Simcoe-Grey
Doug Shipley, MP, Barrie-Springwater-Oro-Medonte
Hon. Doug Downey, MPP, Barrie-Springwater-Oro-Medonte
Hon. Jill Dunlop, MPP, Simcoe North
Hon. Andrea Khanjin, MPP, Barrie-Innisfil
Hon. Caroline Mulroney, MPP, York-Simcoe
Brian Saunderson, MPP, Simcoe-Grey
Ontario Public School Boards' Association
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