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The Coalition for Healthy School Food is the largest school food network in Canada.



THE COALITION
FOR HEALTHY SCHOOL FOOD

What is the Coalition for Healthy School Food?

We are Canada's largest school food network with over 320+ member organizations and 140+ endorsers from every province and territory. We advocate for the creation of a universal cost-shared national school food program, that would see all K-12 students having daily access to healthy food at school.

Building on existing programs across the country, our vision is that all schools will eventually serve a healthy meal or snack at little or no cost to students. In time, these programs will include food literacy education and serve culturally appropriate, local, sustainable food to the fullest extent possible. See our [guiding principles](#) for what our ideal school food program looks like.

Our mission is to work with partners across Canada to:

- ✓ Advocate for a universal cost-shared healthy Canada-wide school food program;
- ✓ Strengthen commitments from provinces and territories, local governments and school communities; and
- ✓ Support replication, networking and sharing of best practices for the thousands of diverse school food programs and models across Canada.

Context

The Coalition welcomes the launch of a National School Food Program with a \$1 billion commitment over five years in the 2024 federal budget. We congratulate the government on its June 2024 release of the comprehensive National School Food Policy. This will allow us to build a strong Canada-wide school food program over time. We are very pleased at how closely the Policy aligns with the Coalition's 8 Guiding Principles and recommendations, which we have developed based on research and best practices from Canada and around the world.

Benefits of School Food Programs



Health



Women and Families



Sustainable Environmental Practices



Education and Academic Success



Mental Health and Wellbeing



Economic growth and Job creation

Benefits of School Food Programs

Health

School food programs can:

- ✓ Increase children's consumption of healthy foods (e.g., fresh vegetables, fruit, whole grains, and plant-based proteins).
- ✓ Benefit children's lifelong eating patterns (regardless of income, social background and family circumstances).
- ✓ Reduce students' risks of chronic disease and improve their physical development.
- ✓ Help build food literacy.
- ✓ Enable schools to model and bring to life [Canada's Food Guide](#).
- ✓ Be a natural extension of Canada's Healthy Eating Strategy and Food Policy for Canada.

The economic burden and preventable cost of nutrition-related disease in Canada is estimated at \$13.8 billion annually. This would shift if our children and youth were supported to access healthy food and build healthy eating habits in line with Canada's Food Guide.

Women and Families

School food programs can:

- ✓ Support families who struggle, for a variety of reasons, to introduce minimally processed healthy foods into children and youths' diets. This is made more challenging for parents working long hours.
- ✓ Support children who are unable to access healthy food.
- ✓ Take the pressure off the family budget, especially in light of rising costs of food.
- ✓ Reduce the need for parents to rely on unhealthy and ready-made highly processed foods.
- ✓ Benefit women, who invest a significant amount of time preparing food for school.

The [Rockefeller Foundation and the Center for Good Food Purchasing](#) found that while school meal programs in the US cost \$18.7 billion per year to run, they provide nearly \$40 billion in human health and economic benefits.

Sustainable Environmental Practices

School food programs can:

- ✓ Help students learn about food systems and how to take positive environmental action.
- ✓ Help students develop a palate for fresh vegetables, fruit and plant-based and wild proteins (consistent with a diet that emits low amounts of greenhouse gasses).
- ✓ Stimulate public food procurement, which has become seen as an important "game changer" to support and promote more sustainable food systems.
- ✓ Facilitate the reduction and management of food waste.



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Education and Academic Success

School food programs can:

- ✓ Improve academic achievement, attendance, punctuality and graduation rates.
- ✓ Improve students' ability to pay attention, alertness, and performance on math, reading, and other standardized test scores.
- ✓ Improve students' interpersonal behaviours, discipline, and cooperation.

A [Toronto District School Board evaluation](#) found that students who consume a morning meal most days show at least a 10% increase in skills such as independent academic work, initiative and conflict resolution, and are more on track for high school graduation.

[Re-imagining School Feeding](#), a World Bank Group document, prefaces their report with "Countries need to prioritize learning, not just schooling. Children must be healthy, not hungry, if they are to match learning opportunities with the ability to learn."

A [study of the Swedish school lunch program](#) demonstrated that pupils exposed to the program during their entire primary school period have 3 percent greater life-time earnings.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

School food programs can:

- ✓ Reduce behavioural issues including bullying, aggressive behaviour and violence, anxiety and depression.
- ✓ Support improved mental well-being, confidence and self-esteem when universally delivered in an inclusive, culturally-appropriate and non-stigmatizing way.

Economic Growth and Job Creation

School food programs can:

- ✓ Create jobs and related opportunities for food service workers and local food producers.
- ✓ Support stronger and more resilient local food systems as well as rural economies.

A [preliminary analysis](#) shows that if \$1.6 billion per year was spent on food, and if Canada modeled Brazil where 30% of these funds are spent on local agriculture supporting family farms, the program could contribute \$4.8 Billion in domestic food purchases by 2029.

An investment in school food programs would stimulate job creation. [Looking to the US as an example](#), the ~62,000 jobs needed to run a strong program in Canada could stimulate the development of as many as 207,700 new jobs.

More data and references are available on [the Coalition for Healthy School Food's Impact Page](#).