



## Coalition for Healthy School Food

Hon. Wayne Easter, PC, MP, Chair  
Standing Committee on Finance  
House of Commons, Parliament Buildings  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A9  
By email to: [wayne.easter@parl.gc.ca](mailto:wayne.easter@parl.gc.ca), [FINA@parl.gc.ca](mailto:FINA@parl.gc.ca) and [finapbc-cpb@parl.gc.ca](mailto:finapbc-cpb@parl.gc.ca)

February 19, 2016

***Re: Join most provinces in supporting non-profit school meal programs in the federal budget***

Dear Mr. Easter and Members of the Standing Committee:

The [Coalition for Healthy School Food](#) is a growing network of 32 non-profit groups from every province and the North seeking a substantial financial investment phased-in over 5 years by the federal government in a cost-shared Universal Healthy School Food Program that will serve a healthy meal or snack at little or no cost to students daily.

Poor diet is the leading risk factor for disease and death in Canada and globally. When children attend school hungry or undernourished, their energy levels, memory, problem-solving skills, creativity, concentration, and other cognitive functions are all negatively impacted. Universality is vital to our proposal. Hunger in the classroom, even when means-tested meal programs are available for low-income children, can exacerbate feelings of isolation and stigmatization among the children that need help the most. Former Chief Public Health Officer, Dr. David Butler Jones, noted that arriving at school without having eaten breakfast at all is common among the general teen population (near 50% in one study).

Historically, the federal government has provided no funding for school food programs, even in federally funded schools in First Nations communities. National investments and political leadership could help spur fundamental public health benefits and redress social inequality in our most important and vulnerable social infrastructure—children and youth—at the place where equal opportunity can matter most: school. Canada is one of the few industrialized countries without a national school food program. Our patchwork of provincially funded programs reaches a small percentage of Canada's 5 million students. Please advise that applications to build/retrofit school kitchens qualify for federal infrastructure grants.

The Coalition will continue to urge provinces and territories to consider school nutrition in the context of the renewed Health Accord with the federal government and to make their provincial budgets more conducive to disease prevention and child protection. We believe that investment in school meals is a prudent use of public funds on fairness and public health grounds, and could help lead to improvements in productivity and reduced health care costs in the long term. However, the Committee could consider defraying the costs by adding an excise tax on sugar-sweetened beverages, closing the GST/HST/PST exemptions for nutrient poor foods (e.g., sugar breakfast cereals and large packages of donuts), and increasing taxes on alcoholic beverages and tobacco products.

Respectfully, on behalf of the Coalition for Healthy School Food Steering Committee,

Bill Jeffery, LLB, Executive Director  
Centre for Health Science and Law (Ottawa)  
[billjeffery@healthscienceandlaw.ca](mailto:billjeffery@healthscienceandlaw.ca)

Sasha McNicoll, Coordinator  
Coalition for Healthy School Food  
[schoolfood@foodsecurecanada.org](mailto:schoolfood@foodsecurecanada.org)