



Hon. Wayne Easter, PC, MP, Chair
Standing Committee on Finance
House of Commons, Parliament Buildings
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A9

August 5, 2016

By email to: wayne.easter@parl.gc.ca, FINA@parl.gc.ca and finapbc-cpb@parl.gc.ca

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 commends the Government of Canada on its focus on child health and poverty in the 2016-17 federal budget. We are nonetheless concerned about the state of school food in Canada. Unlike most industrialized countries, Canada has no national school food program: only a small portion of our five million students have access to school food programs, putting them at risk for physical and mental health issues and lowered success at school.

The Coalition for Healthy School Food is a growing network of 34 non-profit groups from every province and the North seeking federal investment in a cost-shared national Universal Healthy School Food Program that will serve a healthy meal or snack at little or no cost to students daily.

The Coalition for Healthy School Food recommends the Government of Canada invest social infrastructure funding in building and retrofitting school kitchens. This will allow for healthy meals to be served at school and for children to learn important food skills.

Poor diet is the leading risk factor for disease and death in Canada and globally. Canadian children face significant challenges related to healthy eating: only one-third of children between the ages of four and 13 eat the recommended number of servings of fruits and vegetables; one-third of elementary-school students and two-thirds of secondary-school students do not eat a nutritious breakfast before attending school; and one-quarter of the calories in children's diets are from foods not recommended by *Canada's Food Guide*. This environment has led to serious health problems among Canadian children: one-third are overweight or obese, and children are being diagnosed with chronic diseases historically seen only in adults.

Poor diet and food insecurity can also lead to educational nonperformance. When children attend school hungry or undernourished, their energy levels, memory, problem-solving skills, creativity, concentration, and other cognitive functions are all negatively impacted.

School food programs have been shown to increase children's consumption of healthy foods, reduce the risk of chronic diseases, and improve mental health. School food programs also improve educational outcomes and increase graduation rates by reducing hunger in classrooms, a known barrier to concentration and learning. Furthermore, school food programs have the potential to create thousands of new jobs and to grow local economies by investing in local agriculture and food businesses.

Research has demonstrated a link between food and cooking skills and healthier food choices in children



and adolescents. Building school kitchens will not only give children access to healthy foods and improve their food skills but will also create long-term jobs for food service providers and home economics teachers.

Historically, the federal government has provided no funding for school food programs. 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.

Respectfully submitted,

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