



October 1, 2021

Jagmeet Singh (MP, Burnaby South), Leader of the NDP

Sent by email to: [Jagmeet.Singh@parl.gc.ca](mailto:Jagmeet.Singh@parl.gc.ca)

Dear MP Jagmeet Singh,

**On behalf of the Coalition for Healthy School Food and its [170+ organizational members](#), we are writing to congratulate you on being re-elected and the election of the other NDP MPs.**

We were pleased to read of the New Democratic Party's commitment in the [2021 election platform](#) to Partner with provinces and municipalities to establish a national school nutrition program that will provide every child with healthy food and food literacy skills. As you know Liberal Party of Canada's platform also included a commitment to a \$1 billion dollar investment over five years. The Bloc Québécois supported school food in their responses to the [Stop Marketing to Kids Coalition](#) and the [Quebec Chapter](#) with a focus on seeking federal transfer payments to provinces and territories.

We are writing today to ask the NDP to **work with the Liberals to advance this issue**. Given that this issue **has broad popular support and endorsement across political parties, we believe that it is one that the government could immediately advance**. All provinces and territories and a growing number of cities already invest in school food. Our Coalition is working with these governments to build their interest in partnering with the Government of Canada to welcome federal standards and funding.

We sent [this](#) letter to PM Trudeau, asking that his government include the development of a universal, healthy School Food Program for Canada in the mandate letters of the next Minister of Health, Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, (responsible for the implementation of social programs such as childcare), and Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food (responsible for the Food Policy for Canada).

The Canadian Food Policy Advisory Council has made school nutrition one of its top four priorities to advance. We are proud that the Coalition's members include school food implementation partners from across the provinces and territories. The process to begin developing and implementing a School Food Program for Canada with federal standards and funding can begin today.

**In these mandate letters, we recommend including the term "healthy"**, aligning with the 2019 Canada's Food Guide, to keep the program focused on improving the physical and mental health of future generations. **We believe that it is also essential to anchor the principle of "universal"**, meaning that all children in a school where a program is offered would have access to that program and that eventually, every student in Canada would have a healthy meal at school each day. Canadian research has confirmed that targeted programs with means-testing can produce stigma, decrease participation rates and create expensive bureaucratic systems to monitor. A School Food Program for Canada that is universal and without means-testing can help level the playing field and ensure that all students are able to access a

healthy meal or snack each day. It would, however, not be a replacement for needed income supports for the unacceptable number of Canadians living in poverty.

A federal investment should also aim to enable students to develop the skills and literacy needed for a lifetime of healthy eating, help students be ready to learn at school and support environmentally sustainable procurement to address the climate emergency as we highlight in our [Submission in advance of the 2020 budget](#). A School Food Program for Canada would have a positive impact on all families, particularly women who invest a significant amount of time preparing food for school. Investing in school food would enable the federal government to advance multiple government commitments, including the [Food Policy for Canada](#), the [Healthy Eating Strategy](#), and advancing Canada's [Sustainable Development Goal](#) commitments.

In our [2022 budget](#) submission, we recommend a \$2.7 billion annual investment in a School Food Program for Canada to fill the gaps in programming that already exists on the ground. We calculated this based on: 5,575,691 students (Stats Canada) x 190 school days at an average of \$5.00 per school meal (including the cost of food, labour, equipment and northern food allowance) = \$5.4 billion annual cost. This is similar to Finnish school food program costing calculated by Ruetz & McKenna (2021). We will be happy to share this calculation with key government staff as they develop the federal program.

Through stakeholder consultations, we have developed [8 Principles](#) to guide the development of a School Food Program for Canada that we recommend to the government. These include federal nutritional standards, conflict of interest safeguards that prevent programs from marketing unhealthy food and specific products, a framework for consistent Canada-wide program evaluation, and that programs be locally-led and controlled. These principles also stress the importance that the government consult with Indigenous Nations and leaders and **provide separate additional funding to Indigenous Nations and communities** to advance Indigenous-led school food initiatives.

Our Coalition includes members from across the not-for-profit sector including community-based school food program implementation partners from all provinces and territories, Indigenous leaders, as well as many of Canada's most recognized national health, education and philanthropic organizations. We represent a broad and deep network within civil society that can credibly and capably mobilize community support, help to design and refine successful models of school food delivery and lend direct support to the delivery of future programs. We are ready to work with the federal government and all other government jurisdictions in Canada to help develop the best possible School Food Program for Canada. **Please let us know if we can provide more information:** [schoolfood@foodsecurecanada.org](mailto:schoolfood@foodsecurecanada.org) or 416 537-6856.

Sincerely,



Debbie Field, Coordinator, Coalition for Healthy School Food

cc.: Gisèle Yasmeen, Executive Director, Food Secure Canada, 176 member organizations of the Coalition for Healthy School Food.