
2008 BUDGET BRIEFING NOTE

Enlargement of Supplies for School Food Programs

Issue/Background:

At its meeting on April 23 and 24, 2007, City Council referred Community Development and Recreation Committee Item 3.6, entitled “Enlargement of Supplies for School Food Programs” to the Budget Committee for consideration during the 2008 budget deliberations.

Key Points:

Enlarging Supplies through Partnerships with the Restaurant Association

Toronto Public Health was directed to investigate the enlargement of supplies for school food programs (including clear nutritional and hygienic standards) using a partnership with the City’s restaurant association while continuing its efforts to encourage the provincial and federal governments to establish full universal school meal programs.

Toronto student nutrition programs are community-based with the vast majority of funding and support for food and supplies coming from parental donations, local fundraising and volunteers. Municipal funding provides 12.9% of their total estimated costs while provincial funding provides 6.6%. The Toronto Partners for Student Nutrition are always looking for opportunities to maximize the potential of these nutrition programs through community partnerships.

All program sites are inspected by Toronto Public Health Inspectors at a frequency according to their risk assessment and are subject to provincial food premises regulations like any other food-service establishment. All programs must adhere to the Nutrition Standard for Toronto Student Nutrition Programs for Children and Youth, which details portion sizes, acceptable foods and unacceptable foods. Toronto Public Health Registered Dietitians monitor all programs for adherence to the Nutrition Standard, through on-site visits during each school year. To educate program volunteers and coordinators about food safety and nutrition requirements, 20 mandatory workshops are held throughout the City during each school year. These workshops train between 400 and 500 volunteers each year. At least one person who has attended the training within the past 2 years must be present on site whenever a program is operating.

Initial discussions held with a representative of the Toronto Restaurant Association highlighted the identified needs of student nutrition programs, as well as potential opportunities to collaborate to address these needs. Potential examples identified: provision of food skills education by certified chefs to at-risk youth, provision of food-service equipment to many sites lacking adequate facilities and access to food distribution systems to remove barriers to programs accessing vegetables, fruit and milk products. While both the Toronto Partners for Student Nutrition Steering Committee and the Toronto Restaurant Association representatives are open to exploring such collaborative ventures, they have not been able to schedule a mutually convenient meeting time.

Toronto Public Health staff members continue to actively support the Children's Health & Nutrition Initiative, a proposal to make safe and healthy food available to all of Canada's children, led by Olivia Chow, MP. This proposal requests federal government funding of \$250 million in the first year with incremental increases every year for five years and would provide 30% of total meal costs per child per day across Canada. Toronto Partners for Student Nutrition Steering Committee and the Toronto Board of Health continue to request the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services to provide funding that matches municipal levels for Toronto student nutrition programs.

Engaging Colleges/Universities Regarding Food Handler Training

Ontario Public Health Units are mandated to provide food safety information and to provide nutrition information, consultation and support to all non-profit community groups, including student nutrition programs. In Toronto, student nutrition program volunteers are required to attend a 2-hour workshop, consisting of one hour of food safety education by a Public Health Inspector and one hour of nutrition education by a Registered Dietitian. This workshop has been customized to provide practical information relevant to student nutrition programs and attendance is mandatory to receive municipal funding. While this continues to be a mandated public health service, there is no need to pursue colleges or universities for these services at this time.

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