

Sharing at the Table:
Investing in Ontario's Children

Review of Ontario's Student Nourishment Program
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Prepared by:
Ontario Public Health Association
Food Security Workgroup

For the:
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About the Ontario Public Health Association

Founded in 1949, the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) is a voluntary, charitable, non-profit association. The OPHA represents individuals and Constituent Societies from various sectors and disciplines that have an interest in improving the health of the people of Ontario.

The mission of OPHA is to provide leadership on issues affecting the public's health and to strengthen the impact of people who are active in public and community health throughout Ontario.

The OPHA mission is achieved by providing the following:

- Education opportunities and up-to-date information in community and public health;
- Access to local, provincial and multi-disciplinary community health networks;
- Mechanisms to seek and discuss issues and views of members;
- Issue identification and advocacy with a province-wide perspective; and
- Expertise and consultation in public and community health.

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Executive Summary

The Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services commissioned the Food Security Workgroup of the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) to conduct a review process to answer several questions and make recommendations regarding the province's Student Nourishment Program.

The questions were designed to provide recommendations on three key elements of student nourishment programming:

- Outcomes and evaluation: **What should we aim to achieve through student nourishment programs?**
- Program offerings and required resources: **What nutrition education and what foods should be offered in student nourishment programs and what are the required resources?**
- Program management, delivery, funding, and community participation: **How should the province's Student Nourishment Program be managed?**

A process involving a literature search and over 140 key informants (who completed surveys and participated in brainstorming sessions in four regions of Ontario) led to the following advice and recommendations:

1. Student nourishment programs in Ontario should be offered universally across the province to achieve two main outcomes:

- **Improving student nutrition and health** (including obesity reduction), and
- **Increasing student readiness to learn** (including in-school hunger alleviation).

2. Programs should provide nutrition education by modelling appropriate behaviour. This includes, for example, serving nutritious food, being attentive to cultural and regional preferences, food safety and allergies, and providing opportunities for social interaction. Sharing food at the same table – or commensality – is a metaphor that captures the social and biological aspects of health and good nutrition.

3. Given the provincial government's commitment to Student Success and Healthy Ontarians, the additional financial commitment of \$4 million to the Student Nourishment Program and commitment to spending this money wisely, and the recent evolution of this program in Ontario, the following model is recommended:

- An **Inter-ministerial Steering Committee** to define province-wide policies and standards for student nourishment programs and to distribute funds to 36 "flow through" agencies. It is recommended that one of the following ministries – Children and Youth Services, Education, or Health and Long-Term Care – be the lead ministry. Membership on the steering committee should comprise each of these ministries and the following ministries: Agriculture and Food; Community and Social Services; Economic Development and Trade; Public Infrastructure Renewal; and Training, Colleges and Universities.
- A system of **36 Community Partners Programs** based on the **geographic boundaries of the 36 local health units**. This recommendation will harmonize the services and information/analysis capacities of public health that are integral to student nourishment programs: expertise in nutrition, food safety, epidemiology, health promotion, and the emerging Local Health Integration Networks.

Each **Community Partners Program** will:

- Receive funds through a “**flow-through**” **agency of its choice** such that accountability to the lead ministry can be achieved. This allows flexibility for agencies to operate optimally according to their local infrastructure. Possible agencies could include, but are not limited to, public health units, registered charities dedicated to a specific regional Community Partners Program, local non-government organizations, or board of education foundations. A process for selecting and approving the flow-through agency by each Community Partners Program should be developed.
- Operate with a **Steering Committee** (or equivalent) with representation from the local health unit (Registered Dietitian) and one member from each board of education in the regional Community Partners Program, and with other members representing program coordinators and the larger community as determined by the local Community Partners Program. Terms of reference, including accountability and leadership responsibilities, should be developed.
- Apply for funds from the lead ministry and be **directly accountable** for those funds

The recommended Community Partners Program model should have at least one central paid coordinator as well as one paid (part or full time) coordinator for each school site. While sustainable core funding is recommended, the proposed partnership model will continue to rely on volunteers and donations.

Setting the mandate and provincial standards

OPHA recommends that the Inter-ministerial Steering Committee establish policies and standards that will provide guidelines for effective and efficient management of student nourishment programs at the local level.

Establishing 36 Community Partners Programs, reflecting the geographic boundaries of health unit jurisdictions, allows for maximum utilization of health unit resources in both program delivery and evaluation.

The report recommends that health units share responsibility for student nourishment programs by: providing nutrition and food safety training for paid and volunteer staff, and nutritional or health risk assessment as requested; and participating in program evaluation related to nutritional and health status, and food safety inspections.

Recognition of *Breakfast for Learning*

The recommendation of a system of Community Partners Programs draws on the strengths of the model that has evolved under the leadership of *Breakfast for Learning* since 1996. OPHA recognizes the important contributions made by *Breakfast for Learning*, which was founded in 1992 as Canada’s only not-for-profit organization solely dedicated to supporting student nourishment programs across the country.

Costs, opportunities and investment

The recommended model will involve costs for the lead ministry of the Inter-ministerial Steering Committee; staff will be required to set policies, disperse funds to the 36 Community Partners Programs, and establish a monitoring system to guarantee alignment of the programs with the government’s health

and education objectives. Decentralization of the flow-through funds from *Breakfast for Learning* directly to the 36 agencies selected by the individual Community Partners Programs will neutralize this additional cost at the ministry level.

In the short term, cost efficiencies are not anticipated. However, student nourishment is an investment and long-term benefits, such as improved health and increased learning and productivity, are expected.

The proposed restructuring of the province's Student Nourishment Program offers unique opportunities for collaboration and partnerships across different sectors and jurisdictions. Four recommendations emerged from this review:

- Through an integrated initiative with ministries in charge of health, emergency measures planning, and economic development, develop a special funding envelope to provide all schools with kitchens to conform to food safety requirements.
- Through an integrated initiative with ministries in charge of agriculture, health, and economic development, undertake to coordinate year round school partnerships with farmers, greenhouse growers, dairies and other food industry groups for the provision of food to student nourishment programs.
- Utilizing the public interest in obesity, contextualize student nourishment programs as one of a set of healthy living (obesity reduction) initiatives that would involve municipal parks and recreation, an examination of food advertising, and elements of the document, *Call to Action: Creating a Healthy School Nutrition Environment*, published by the Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health School Nutrition Workgroup Steering Committee.
- Serving food focussed on health and nutritional outcomes may involve increased costs for food, personnel, and training. Addressing these increased costs should involve collaboration across community and government resources at both local and provincial levels.

Introduction

In May 2004, the Ontario government committed an additional \$4-million to community organizations that provide breakfast programs to children in the province's schools. The additional funding was intended to target children from low-income families and increased the total government commitment to the province's Student Nourishment Program to \$8.5 million annually.

In response to the government's announcement, the Food Security Workgroup of Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) sent a letter to the Premier congratulating him on assigning the much-needed money to the programs. For many years, academics and governments have been gaining a better appreciation of the importance of a broad range of factors that contribute to the health of populations. Good nutrition, adequate housing, secure employment, educational achievement, and clean air and water - all these factors and others known as the broader determinants of health play vital roles in creating and sustaining health. Governments play a key role in shaping determinants of health, as well as the delivery of health care services

Recognizing the importance of the additional funds for the Student Nourishment Program, the OPHA offered to support the government in decision-making about the most effective and efficient way to deliver funds to the programs. After several discussions, the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) invited OPHA to conduct a provincial review of the Student Nourishment Program and formulate recommendations based on a set of key questions.

These recommendations will guide the release of the additional funds to ensure nutritious food is served to schoolchildren to help achieve the government's key priorities of Student Success and Healthier Ontarians. With this review, OPHA had the opportunity to collect input from many partners in the community who are involved in the delivery of student nourishment programs across the province. It is important to note that the term "student nourishment" replaces the older term "breakfast programs." Today, programs are offered at different times during the day (before, during and after school), and in different formats.

Scope and goal of review

The broad scope of the review was the overall systemic context of the Student Nourishment Program in Ontario (rather than individual school-based programs). The primary goal was to provide the provincial government with recommendations regarding the most efficient and effective way to administer the \$8.5

Goals of Ontario's Student Nourishment Program

Student nourishment programs serve both educational and health outcomes as per the government's key priorities of Student Success and Healthier Ontarians (May 2004). Providing nutritious food to children and youth at the start of, or during the school day, in concert with education about the benefits of a healthy diet, will help improve nutrition and health and enhance readiness to learn.

Goals set out by the government for the province's Student Nourishment Program are as follows:

- Maximize the proportion of investment going toward food,
- Maximize the nutritional content of the food provided,
- Increase the number of children ready to learn at school by assisting in the alleviation of hunger and improving nutritional intake, and
- Increase the health and well being of children and youth by assisting in the reduction of child obesity.

million budget, and, in particular, advise on criteria to select a service provider to administer the funds. The review was also intended to provide advice on policy matters to guide long-term thinking.

Review questions

The review of the Student Nourishment Program was designed to identify recommendations on three key priority issues:

1. *Outcomes and evaluation.* What should we aim to achieve through student nourishment programs?
2. *Student nourishment program offerings and required resources.* What should student nourishment programs offer and what resources are needed?
3. *Program management, delivery, funding and community development.* How should the system of student nourishment programs be managed?

Based on the three priority issues, questions were developed by the MCYS in consultation with OPHA. See Table 1.

Table 1:

Review Questions

A. Outcomes and evaluation. *What should we aim to achieve through student nourishment programs?*

- A1. What currently exists in terms of student nourishment programs in Ontario?
- A2. What outcomes should we be striving for and measuring across the province?
- A3. How should we identify and address program gaps?
- A4. How do we build an evaluation mechanism?

B. Program offerings and required resources. *What should student nourishment programs offer and what resources are needed?*

- B1. What is the role of nutrition education in the delivery of student nourishment programs?
- B2. What types of food should be provided?
- B3. What preparation is needed for this food, and what infrastructure/training is necessary to support the programs in providing food?
- B4. What are the costs associated with delivering student nourishment programs?

C. Program management, delivery, funding and community participation. *How should the system of student nourishment programs be managed?*

- C1. What is the most efficient and effective way to deliver nutritionally sound student nourishment programs?
- C2. What are the best practices for delivering student nourishment programs?
- C3. What student nourishment program models should be considered?
- C4. What criteria should guide the selection of the best vehicle for delivering the overall government funding?
- C5. What funding models should be considered?
- C6. What is the role of community development in delivering student nourishment programs?
- C7. What is the best mechanism for supporting the participation of key stakeholders at the community level?

Methodology: The Review Process

To conduct the review, Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) drew on information from four sources:

- Literature search
- *Breakfast for Learning* data
- Environmental scan
- Regional brainstorming sessions

Literature search

A literature search (as a follow up to the Hyndman report cited in the list of references) was conducted in September 2004 with the support of Region of Waterloo Public Health. One document of particular importance is *Call to Action: Creating a Healthy School Nutrition Environment* (2004), published by the Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health School Nutrition Workgroup Steering Committee.

Breakfast for Learning data

Since 1996, *Breakfast for Learning* has been the agency through which the Ontario government has provided funding to student nourishment programs in the province. Founded in 1992, *Breakfast for Learning* is the only national, non-profit organization, which is solely dedicated to supporting child nutrition programs in Canada. As a key stakeholder, *Breakfast for Learning* was asked to provide data for the review process, and representatives were involved in the brainstorming process.

Environmental scan

An environmental scan was conducted through surveys sent to public health nutrition professionals, Community Partners Program coordinators (involved with *Breakfast for Learning* programs), and researchers and practitioners with expertise in student nourishment programs and food security. More than 40 responses were received. The Community Partners Program is described on page 12.

Regional brainstorming sessions

Brainstorming sessions were held in four regions of the province. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services and OPHA members in each region selected locations and invitees. Session capacity was limited to ensure effective discussion and input. A total of 91 stakeholders participated in the process. See *Table 2* for a summary list of the sectors and organizations that were represented in the brainstorming sessions.

**Table 2:
Groups and Sectors Represented in Brainstorming Sessions**

Session and Location	Number of Participants	Areas/Regions Represented	Sectors/Organizations Represented
Central Ontario (Toronto)	22	Durham Halton Hamilton Niagara Peel Simcoe Toronto York	Breakfast for Learning Community Agencies Community Partners Program Organizations Education Ministry of Children and Youth Services Public Health Social Services
Northern Ontario (teleconference)	28	Algoma Muskoka-Parry Sound Nipissing Sudbury Thunder Bay	Community Agencies Community Partners Program Organizations Community Sponsors District Social Services Administration Boards Education Ministry of Community and Social Services Public Health
Southwestern Ontario (London)	22	Chatham-Kent Elgin-St. Thomas Grey-Bruce Haldimand-Norfolk Huron Perth Lambton Middlesex-London Oxford Waterloo Windsor-Essex	Community Agencies Community Partners Program Organizations Education Health Care Public Health
Eastern Ontario (Kingston)	19	Algonquin and Lakeshore Frontenac Hastings Kingston Lanark Leeds-Grenville Lennox and Addington Northumberland Ottawa Peterborough Prince Edward Stormont, Dundas, Glengarry & Prescott Russell	Community Agencies Community Partners Program Organizations Education Health Care Ministry of Children and Youth Services Ministry of Community and Social Services Public Health

Review Findings

In this section, review findings in each of the three key areas – outcomes and evaluation; program offerings and required resources, and program management – are outlined.

Section A: Outcomes and evaluation

The key question in this area of investigation was what should we aim to achieve through student nourishment programs?

A1. What currently exists in terms of student nourishment programs in Ontario?

Breakfast for Learning reported that during the 2003/04 school year, there were 2,027 student nourishment programs supported by the Government of Ontario. These included 1,088 breakfast programs, 771 snack programs (morning and afternoon), and 168 lunch programs. An additional 572 other programs have also been previously funded but are not currently receiving funds from *Breakfast for Learning*.

Breakfast for Learning operates in partnership with the Ontario government under the terms of a Regular Service Contract through the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. Since 1996, the agency has managed contractual obligations and reporting requirements. This includes funding allocations for nutrition program grants and Community Partners Program grants, nutrition education resource materials, promotion and marketing metrics. Reports are submitted quarterly and annually. Ontario government funds are accounted for separately, and audited annually by accounting firm KPMG.

Breakfast for Learning receives applications for grants either directly from student nourishment programs, or through the local Community Partners Program. The Community Partners Program, currently active only in Ontario, gathers representatives from government, business, volunteer groups and community agencies that share an interest in supporting children. Through this program, paid coordinators from the community generate community involvement in the form of donations and volunteers, and disperse funds and resources among programs within a given region.

After grant applications have been processed by *Breakfast for Learning* and reviewed by the Ontario Advisory Council, the funds flow to the program either directly or through a Community Partners Programs Group Funder. There are no additional administrative fees associated with the flow of funds from this latter group.

The Ontario Advisory Council, comprised of volunteers from across the province, is mandated to review funding requests and make recommendations for grants to ensure equitable distribution of funds throughout the province. The Council operates under the following guidelines:

- Receive and evaluate all grants in a timely and effective manner,
- Make recommendations on allocations consistent with *Breakfast for Learning* principles, policies and procedures,
- Ensure equitable geographic distribution of funds within the province,
- Advocate on behalf of student nourishment programs, and

- Represent Ontario in all related national forums.

The agency allocated provincial funds for student nourishment programs during the 2003/04 school year as follows:

- 54% - Nutrition program grants,
- 25% - Community Partners Program
- 7% - Nutrition education materials
- 7% - Communications and fundraising
- 7% - Administration

Breakfast for Learning data shows that provincial government funds account for 9-12% of the total cost of student nourishment programs. The other costs are covered by contributions (financial and in-kind materials and services) from parents, community members, sponsorships, program partners, and one municipal government.

A2. What outcomes should we be striving for and measuring across the province?

The review process identified the importance of two outcomes to apply universally across all student nourishment programs: improved nutrition and health, and increased readiness to learn. Additional outcomes included social and cultural experiences that enhance health, community development and integration of provincial services. Program delivery outcomes were also identified. These include universal access, effectiveness and efficiency, flexibility and responsiveness. Outcome measurement is addressed by questions A3 and A4.

Improved nutrition and health

Most participants cited improved nutrition and health as a key outcome of student nourishment programs. This is consistent with the success reported in several evaluations on school meals. Improved nutrition was recognized as a contributor to overall (physical) health in both the short and long term.

Participants also cited “reducing obesity” as an outcome measure. However, the literature on childhood obesity suggests multiple interventions are required to reduce obesity, including interventions related to increasing physical activity.

Other issues around hunger and body weight, including eating disorders, add further complexity. For these reasons, reduction of obesity as an outcome measure of a student nourishment program is problematic.

Other examples of outcomes related to nutrition include:

- Providing nutritious foods,

Hungry or hungry?

Catch-22 around reducing obesity & feeding hungry kids who are poor

When food is abundant, dietitians encourage children to eat when they are hungry and to stop eating when they are full. This direction helps discourage over-eating, eating out of habit, or eating in response to other needs.

However, when the term “hungry kids” is used to describe “poor kids”, the phrase takes on a new meaning. The goal of feeding hungry kids is criticized for the stigma it imposes on children and parents of lower-economic status and the relative ineffectiveness of student nourishment programs in reducing poverty.

The dilemma poses ethical issues in fundraising. Most donors are motivated to help “hungry kids/poor kids” and the deeper dilemma is that student nourishment programs are heavily dependent on donations.

- Directing most of the funding to food,
- Designing programs to identify children at nutritional risk, and
- Situating programs in settings to access pre-school children and their families.

Increased readiness to learn

Increasing student readiness to learn is a key outcome of student nourishment programs. The literature reports increased attendance and ability to concentrate, and more cooperative behaviour in the school setting when children are well nourished while at school.

Social and cultural experiences that enhance health

Social and cultural aspects of health were implied in several outcomes. Modelling healthy eating and healthy choices to students was identified as a means to achieve healthy lifestyles. The opportunity to learn about different foods and to celebrate the variety of foods in different cultures is another example.

Educating parents and volunteers was also discussed as a desired outcome in the brainstorming sessions. However, some participants felt this was an inappropriate use of program funds. Viewing parental and volunteer education as a “side-effect” of student nourishment programs is one approach to this debate and such benefits are consistent with community development objectives.

Question C2 on best practices also identifies parental involvement as central to effective operation of a student nourishment program. However, some parents, especially those with limited income, time and resources, can also feel pressured by an expectation to contribute.

The involvement of parents and other adults was central to another important outcome – learning that adults care – which is one of the more profound benefits of student nourishment programming and links to the community development outcomes described below.

Being served food with dignity and the experience of routinely eating together at the same table (otherwise known as commensality) makes people feel they are valued. It is believed that commensality is the driver behind some of the reported success of student nourishment programs by increasing readiness to learn, school attendance, and positive interactions at school.

A determinants of health approach recognizes the multiple layers of responsibility for health, including the individual, family, school, workplace, community and media. The involvement of several different adult players, including teachers, principals, parents, and other volunteers in student nourishment programming, helps to mediate some of the tension for locating responsibility for healthy lifestyles between the individual (and family) versus the larger community and social systems.

Community development and integration of government initiatives

Student nourishment programs are generally seen as building community and family capacity and increasing the level of active commitment to (and understanding of) health.

Increased collaboration among government ministries and boards of health and education was urged as both an outcome and a means. The need for comprehensive social and health policies to support student nourishment programs and embed nutrition programming generally within a larger infrastructure was also encouraged. Opportunities to link with the Local Health Integration Networks, Early Years Initiatives, or emergency measures planning that might include kitchen retrofitting in schools are examples of initiatives that require collaboration among different government mandates.

Process delivery outcomes

Participants generally agreed on the following delivery outcomes:

- Universal access across the province and within programs,
- Effectiveness and efficiency,
- Flexibility and responsiveness to meet diverse community needs,
- Accountability and transparency to ensure equity, and
- Equitable and sustainable core funding.

Consistent with the discussion on best practices (see question C2), the review called for student nourishment programs to be universally accessible. Some participants felt that programs should be located in all schools while others mentioned the need to reach more children in alternate settings, such as Ontario Early Years Centres, residential complexes and faith centres.

Regarding efficiency, the need for prompt and timely distribution of funds was a top priority. Schools require confirmation of funds in June of each year and with minimal paperwork.

“Getting money where it needs to get” was also voiced on several occasions. This concern suggests targeting, which appears to be at odds universality as an outcome. The fact that funds are inadequate may explain the recurring reference to “getting money where it is needed” and the compromises that are required until universality with adequate funding is achieved. Efficiency is discussed further in question C1.

Flexibility was another theme in the brainstorming sessions. Participants cited the need to respond to the nutritional needs of diverse communities and the challenges posed by the various seasons. Some participants urged responsiveness in crisis situations. This outcome may also contradict the goal of universality; however, it suggests an opportunity for long-term emergency planning.

The importance of accountability for the use of funds (both government funding and donations) and a transparent process was widely expressed. Sub-themes focussed on increasing the percent of dollars spent on food and setting clear standards for the quantity and quality of food provided. Further discussion on food selection and related costs of delivery, preparation and infrastructure is in section B.

A3. How should we identify and address program gaps?

Use multiple types of measures and consult many stakeholders

To identify and address program gaps, the following approaches were suggested:

- Establish baseline measures by drawing upon information from existing student nourishment programs, child health and educational performance data, demographic trends (to predict enrolment changes and school openings/closings) and socio-economic status data.
- Consult with various stakeholders. This includes Community Partners Program stakeholders and coordinators, school level coordinators, school administrator groups, school principals, teachers, and guidance counsellors, as well as personnel from social service agencies and child care programs.
- Consult with students and parents who do not participate in student nourishment programs.

- Utilize local newspapers to monitor needs.
- Address the different program needs of rural versus urban communities.
- Address the special needs of summer programming and winter conditions.
- Understand what is working well in existing programs.
- Track programs that have not received funding.
- Assess capacity to sustain a program.

Establish provincial and regional policy and standards

To identify and address program gaps, clarity regarding desired program outcomes, and policies and standards at the provincial level are required. While development of policy and standards is seen as the role of the province, there should be flexibility in implementation that accommodates diversity in regional and local needs and resources.

Setting provincial policies and standards is central to determining whether or not programs should be offered, and the nature of the accountability. Clarifying questions around who owns the student nourishment programs and who is liable are specific elements in understanding accountability.

Establish a monitoring and reporting system

Standards and policies developed by the province will set the stage for a monitoring and reporting system. The need for a consistent system for student nourishment programs was widely encouraged.

Use local infrastructures

Work with and utilize local infrastructures to identify and address gaps in student nourishment programs. This was another message echoed in the review process. Communities understand their needs best. For example, participants from Northern Ontario identified special considerations or gaps, such as fewer businesses, a smaller volunteer pool and higher transportation costs. Communities best understand diverse settings (such as residential complexes or community centres) that might be utilized to fill gaps in programs.

A4. How do we build an evaluation mechanism to determine that student nourishment programs are achieving intended outcomes?

Outcomes and best practices central to evaluation

Clarifying intended outcomes and developing best practices are the first steps toward developing an evaluation mechanism. Stakeholders cautioned that without clarity on outcomes, evaluation processes might set up student nourishment programs for failure. The potential for this to occur is greater when there is an unrealistic expectation about the role of student nourishment programs in reducing obesity or poverty. (As discussed earlier, student nourishment programs can improve readiness to learn and nutritional status but are relatively ineffective in reducing either poverty or obesity.)

Use multifaceted, structured approach

Student nourishment programs should be evaluated on a regular basis using the intended outcomes and the program standards of *Breakfast for Learning's Best Practices* (3). At the provincial level, data and tools from the Ontario Ministry of Education could be used to evaluate a program's impact on learning and academic performance. Some school boards also have developed and applied behaviour profiles. (These profiles suggest a strong relationship between hunger and anger and that hunger interferes with learning and attendance patterns). Participants also suggested use of the Early Development Instrument from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services to measure changes in child development, and, at the local level, conducting site visits and interviews with school principals.

Evaluation research beyond monitoring would, of course, require appropriate involvement with and permission from parents. A caution was also expressed that data collection activity should not add undue paperwork on principals who are already overburdened.

The best practices guide includes elements such as the kind of food offered and number of students and meals served. Measuring nutrition impact (the amount and nutritional quality of food consumed) is easier than measuring long-term health impact; however, the opportunity to screen for nutrition problems (or risk) was mentioned as one of the opportunities available in student nourishment programming.

A quality audit process should be embedded in a system of mandatory reporting. Two recommendations were made here: keep the evaluation process simple and utilize professional expertise. These two points may appear contradictory but, in fact, suggest frustration with the current management and accountability processes for the Student Nourishment Program. The evaluation process ultimately needs to be grounded in a coordinated approach that uses (or develops) a sound database, and eliminates duplication of data gathering or reporting.

Data gathering and coordinating system required

While schools were viewed as the focus of an evaluation process, the need to have evaluation localized in a community context and monitored for change over time was expressed. Using a "determinants of health" framework with socio-economic status and demographic data and the involvement of epidemiologists from public health units was also encouraged.

Participants recognized the importance of data gathering but were also cautious about its complexity and limitations. They cautioned against creating a data gathering process that is time-consuming and draws conclusions from a small sample with too few factors over a short period of time.

Who should be involved?

Development of an evaluation framework should involve all stakeholders. Stakeholders also suggested engaging Community Partners Program coordinators and/or third-party evaluators and using existing evaluation mechanisms of the education and public health systems. Developing a framework would require an initial investment and ongoing funding for training and data analysis.

Section B: Program offerings and required resources

The key question in this area of investigation was what should student nourishment programs offer and what resources are needed?

B1. What is the role of nutrition education in the delivery of student nourishment programs?

Stakeholders recognized the importance of nutrition education but most believed that it should not be funded by government funds dedicated to the province's Student Nourishment Program. According to many participants, nutrition education was best offered to students through the school curriculum. At the same time, there was clear agreement that student nourishment programs can provide nutrition education by modelling good nutrition: serving healthy food models good nutrition to students. (Note that "healthful" is the grammatically correct term, but popular usage dictates the term "healthy.") Many participants suggested that teachers are partly responsible for "modelling" good nutrition and should be encouraged to eat with students as part of the program. While volunteers generally should be required to have some nutrition education, they should not be responsible for delivering nutrition education as part of their role in the programs.

All participants recognized the mandated role of public health for education on nutrition, food safety and food allergy concerns. It was agreed that nutrition education of volunteers and parents was best carried out by nutrition professionals in public health. The Community Partners Program coordinators are important players in linking public health units to the programs. For example, coordinators have often been required to adapt certain *Breakfast for Learning* materials to local student nourishment programs to ensure messages are consistent with the foods, meals or snacks provided in the local area. Both the school program coordinator and the Community Partners Program coordinator should have a good knowledge of nutrition in order to ensure that the programs deliver and model desirable nutrition practices.

The current practice of *Breakfast for Learning* in providing posters for nutrition education was received with mixed comments. Some participants appreciated the "fun facts" that provided an opportunity to educate parents. Others believed that the nutrition education materials (along with information on "safe communities") were wasteful of scarce program funds.

Nutrition policy for schools required

The need for a provincial school nutrition policy was a theme in most sessions. Many participants recommended that *Call to Action: Creating a Healthy School Nutrition Environment* by the Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health be used to guide the development of a province-wide policy.

B2. What types of food should be provided?

Healthy and culturally appropriate food served with tender loving care

Participants in the review generally agreed that student nourishment programs should provide healthy and culturally appropriate food, referring frequently to the *Call to Action* document of the Ontario Society of

Nutrition Professionals in Public Health. They asked for provincial guidelines that would outline not only how to operate programs, but also set out nutrient standards and food categories that would guide food acquisition, or refusal of certain donated foods. Facilities available for food preparation will impact which healthy foods can be served.

The importance of “tender loving care” or the TLC aspect of food was referenced in the review process. The experience of commensality (eating together at the same table) allows for the experience of TLC and such statements such as “you honour people by how you cook and serve food” and “food is good for your soul” express the sentiment. The term “corporate food” is often used to refer to commercially prepared foods with minimum nutritional value and little TLC. Although the phrase does not appear in the *Call to Action* classification of foods by nutrient value, it is worth noting. The TLC factor is believed to account for many of the health and community development benefits of student nourishment programs.

The decision regarding what foods to serve in a student nourishment program is more complex than it appears. While there is quick agreement on providing highly nutritious foods, other issues arise when dealing with not-so-nutritious foods and accepting or refusing donations:

- How does a student nourishment program balance the relationship with corporate sponsors who offer “corporate food”? Local partnerships often work out mutually beneficial and respectful arrangements between businesses and the programs. However, it is more difficult with national sponsorships to prevent the appearance of a mutual endorsement of programs or products.
- If donations of time, funds and food are integral to student nourishment programs, should all foods, including “corporate foods”, be graciously accepted? It is worth noting that, according to *Breakfast for Learning* (March 2004), provincial funding currently covers only 9-12% of Student Nourishment Program costs.
- Community development, including partnerships, is integral to student nourishment programs. Cooperating with a food bank, however, poses a dilemma if student nourishment programs are intended to be universal and not stigmatizing.
- Public concern about good nutrition and childhood obesity may position schools as the “food police.” Indeed, some principals have faced a backlash due to rigid “healthy food” requirements in student nourishment programs. Are schools ready to take on this role? One argument in favour suggests that if public funds are spent to provide food to support learning, schools should be required to model healthy choices

In summary, the need to focus on the nutrient value of food served in student nourishment programs is “motherhood”, but the practicalities of funding and preparation, combined with the transformative cultural and care experiences associated with food, make the decisions more complex. Once again, these issues are best resolved by provincial standards in concert with informed decision making at the local level.

B3. What preparation is needed for this food, and what infrastructure/training is necessary to support the programs in providing nutritious food?

Preparation

Every student nourishment program prepares food differently depending on a myriad of factors, such as time, scheduling, facilities, and volunteer support. Some programs serve snacks rather than meals. In

some communities, food is prepared at home and served at school. In one school, the staggered bus schedule allows only 15 minutes for serving and eating. The preparation needed to serve nutritious food will vary, and an examination of the infrastructure and training required, as well as the costs associated with delivering the programs (see question B4) will explain some of the variables.

Infrastructure and training

The following factors were identified:

Kitchen facilities: Student nourishment programs should have a kitchen equipped with a dishwasher, three sinks and a fourth for hand washing, a stove, a refrigerator, and a pantry for storage. Kitchen facilities allow for chopping, washing, storing, and cooking of a greater variety of foods and less reliance on pre-packaged food and disposable plates and utensils that are ecologically unsound. A kitchen also adds value to the school as a resource for the community.

Eating area: A dedicated eating area that is physically accessible with tables for eating in small groups was suggested as ideal. However, the literature also cites the value of food simply being available in classrooms in much the same way refreshments and meals are available for business meetings and conferences.

Transportation: This includes food pick-up and delivery. Transporting volunteers, especially in the northern regions of the province, is an additional factor.

Volunteer management: Volunteers need to be recruited, screened and trained.

Administration and related facilities: This includes administrative and financial record keeping, donor management and appreciation, office equipment and supplies, telephone and other utilities. Space for these activities is also required. On site security may also be needed.

Program development: This includes marketing the program, information sharing across programs and within the community, developing the program to meet changing needs, and evaluating program effectiveness.

Other considerations and opportunities

Outcomes related to community development and integration of provincial services outlined in question A2 are reinforced by some of the suggestions that emerged from this discussion:

- Work across provincial ministries to facilitate partnerships with food producers and to create opportunities for bulk purchasing and centralized delivery in large centres.
- Maximize the community development effect of student nourishment programs by involving other sites in the community, such as housing developments, faith centres, nursing homes and community centres.
- Involve high school students in co-op programs in the operation of programs.
- Integrate the emergency planning interests of several ministries to provide funds to build kitchens (that meet food safety standards) in existing and new schools and retrofit existing kitchens.
- Consider the effect of the “balanced school day” schedules on programming in that two meal and activity times (morning and afternoon) are available.

- Consider the need for summer programming if desired by a community.

B4. What are the costs associated with delivering student nourishment programs?

Breakfast for Learning provided the following data for setting up a student nourishment program:

Refrigerator, freezer, dishwasher, microwave	\$4,983
Dishes	\$ 268
Utensils	\$ 287
Small appliances	\$ 270
Total start-up costs based on 25 students	\$ 5,808
Total start-up costs based on 150+ students	\$16,726

Feedback from the brainstorming sessions and environmental scans provided more qualitative input to answer the question. While food was always mentioned as the most obvious cost, a breakdown of capital and operating costs is also very useful.

Capital costs

The provision of kitchen facilities that meet food safety requirements was one of the most costly and also frequently mentioned issues during the brainstorming sessions. As mentioned previously, participants recommended that funds be provided to install kitchen facilities (that meet food safety standards) in existing and new schools, and to retrofit existing kitchens.

A separate envelope of government funding is recommended for this work and associated food safety training was suggested. There was sensitivity in some communities to accepting government “handouts” so it is suggested that the funds be linked to a “public infrastructure” or “emergency measures planning” initiative. (This is, of course, is a Catch-22 scenario when programs are clearly asking for more money: one person’s “core funding” can be another’s “handout.”)

Operating costs

Operating costs involve those

Cost issues identified by participants

During the brainstorming sessions, two issues related to costing emerged: the cost/benefit analysis of depending on volunteers and the implications of increasing the amount of money spent on food.

Cost/benefit analysis of depending on volunteers: Participants indicated several advantages and disadvantages of depending on volunteers. Their contribution is enormous and offers benefits in building community and family capacity. However, managing a team of volunteers takes time, energy and money, and it is often difficult to assign a dollar value to this activity. The availability of volunteers to support a program also varies, and the need does not always match the resources in any given community.

Increase the amount of money spent on food and/or the percent of funding spent on food: This suggestion, while frequent, is not as easily done without attention to some practical issues as well as community considerations. Spending more money to buy food would have a disastrous impact on food quality if there were insufficient refrigeration or storage space, facilities for preparation or stoves for cooking. If advocates suggest spending more money (or a greater percent of funds) on food, it would be important to plan how the shortfall would be made up (i.e. increased funding or identification of cost efficiencies in the program).

related to the delivery, preparation and storage of food. Supplies, such as napkins, cutlery, plates, and cleaning supplies are also part of the cost of materials. Maintaining and repairing large equipment, purchasing and replacing smaller equipment and utensils are also operating costs.

Other operating costs include:

- *Staffing*. Community program coordination, local school coordination, and administrative and custodial services.
- *Transportation*. This includes food and supply delivery and pick-up, and volunteer travel (especially in northern and rural communities)
- *Administrative costs*. Rent, phone, facsimile, computer, communications, marketing and promotion, purchasing and accounts payable, and governance and accountability. Administrative costs vary program to program, and some of these costs are covered by partnership arrangements.
- *Fundraising*
- *Volunteer training and coordination*

Analysing program and unit costs

Analysis of program costs and unit costs should consider efficiencies of scale, regional variation, and in-kind contributions. Cost analyses should also be done within a long-term framework that sets out clear outcomes, standards and means of evaluation, as well as plans for sustainable funding and accountability.

Program development costs and opportunities

If student nourishment programs are intended to be an investment in health and learning, monies for program development should be incorporated into budgets. In many ways, it is timely to make certain investments: for example, kitchen facilities in all schools can be a community asset beyond student nourishment programs alone.

Forecasting demographic changes can also lead to astute long-term planning for school and community facilities. Maximizing local and provincial food production and purchasing arrangements would also serve complementary health, environmental and economic developmental goals.

Section C: Program management, delivery, funding and community participation

The key question in this area of investigation was how should the system of student nourishment programs be managed?

CI. What are the most efficient and effective ways of delivering nutritionally sound student nourishment programs?

Partnerships and local committees

The most efficient and effective way to deliver a nutritionally sound student nourishment program is by empowering local partnerships and committees. Participants articulated this message strongly. The use of the term “partnership” is used both generically, and as it refers to the Community Partners Program (CPP) model used in Ontario with *Breakfast for Learning*. In either case, having the right partners and links with broader community for food, space and other resources is important.

Linkages among schools and programs (to share learning, ideas and resources) are also important, and the CPP coordinators and regular coordinators meetings are central to meeting this objective. Conferences with school board level coordinators (by division), and conferences with volunteers (2-3 times per year) were also recommended.

The roles of CPP coordinators and paid coordinator positions at the school level allow for efficiencies both within and among student nourishment programs. The role CPP coordinators play in maximizing the effectiveness of volunteers (and their time) is important – and often the volunteers are teachers and other staff employed within the school. It was suggested that there be only one CPP per community to avoid duplication and to ensure one set of standards (and avoid confusion) at the community level: a model of at least one central paid CPP coordinator with paid (full or part time) school level coordinators was proposed.

In enlisting a wide range of support from within the community there were many ideas about partners to engage: public health units, schools and school boards, credit unions and financial institutions, local food banks, bargaining units, school councils, retired teachers associations, food industry, superintendents and directors of education, and food providers in the community. The diversity of this list suggests the many strategies and resources utilized by student nourishment programs, and some explicitly voiced the need to support local partnerships to avoid the dependence on *Breakfast for Learning*'s nation-wide sponsorships. Again, clarity in establishing desired outcomes and standards for student nourishment programming would streamline the nature and purpose of partnerships.

Efficiencies

Other suggestions regarding efficiencies included:

- Involving students in purchasing, financial and administrative work, serving and volunteer management. This opportunity can be explored and developed further through co-op education experiences
- Bulk buying and centralizing food purchasing.

- Creating school committees and developing annual plans for each school.

In terms of current practices of *Breakfast for Learning*, the resources spent on nutrition education and “safe communities” and the suitability of some materials (and the food ideas) were not regarded as efficient or effective.

C2. What are the best practices for delivering student nourishment programs?

Clear guidelines regarded food selection and food safety

In response to the question on best practices, the need for clear guidelines on food was emphasized and the document, *Call to Action: Creating a Healthy School Nutrition Environment*, was cited as a guide to best practices. Variability in the messages about food safety and nutrition received from different health units was also noted as a related problem. Clear guidelines would help shape sponsorships and inform decision-making regarding what foods should be accepted as donations.

The idea of a transition period for conforming to food safety standards was raised, as well as the possibility that student nourishment programs should have different standards from other food service operations. Standardized order forms and partnerships with local producers (oriented to sustainable agriculture) were also suggested. The labour cost for preparation of healthy foods was raised as well. See section B for more details.

Best practices vary by desired outcome: universality understood

Desired outcomes will drive best practices; therefore, clarity on the desired outcomes is critical. Program sustainability, delivery of nutritious food, and universality were understood to be the desired process outcomes of student nourishment programs. However, given the focus on nutrition and health, it was also suggested that evidence-based practice was more important than “best practices”. The discussion on food and health (question B2) describes some of the challenges in conducting the required research.

The communication of best practices, experiences with student nourishment programs, and evidence-based approaches were cited as important, not only for those involved in student nourishment programming, but also for the community at large in order to understand the long-term investment represented by student nourishment programs.

Effective partnerships and local programs in a provincial framework

The importance of partnerships and sharing across all sectors – education, agriculture, industry and public health to name a few – was identified. Recognizing the different capacities for participation (among communities and among parents) and understanding the roles of different players implied the need for an integrated policy framework. Participants in all sessions recommended local decision making within the framework of clear province-wide policies, guidelines and standards.

Resources

What resources are required for best practice delivery of student nourishment programs? Incentives for best practices, sufficient funding that would allow Community Partners Programs to apply best practices, and clarity on appropriate sponsorships were some of the resource issues raised in the context of best practices.

Participants shared ideas on innovative ways to access resources: bus companies and couriers donating services to transport food; fundraisers and community development specialists working with school boards; health units establishing foundations to support student nourishment programs; and, the advantage that *Breakfast for Learning* offers with nation-wide partnerships.

At the same time, however, participants understood the need for guidelines related to sponsorships. The risk of two-way endorsements, competition among community-based programs for scarce foundation moneys and other grants, and the reputations at stake in local communities where the subtleties of sharing donations beyond the community are not valued, are three examples of problems.

The following elements of best practices are used by *Breakfast for Learning* (3):

- access and participation (universality),
- efficient and participative program management,
- food quality,
- financial accountability,
- parental involvement and consent,
- safe, hygienic, welcoming and well supervised environment, and
- evaluation.

Participants identified all seven elements; the first three were identified as top priorities. In addition, they identified a need for more resources to pursue best practices, and, in particular, guidelines around sponsorship and fundraising.

C3. What student nourishment program models should be considered?

Community partnerships and provincial coordination

Essential to any student nourishment program model is the desire for community level decision-making within a provincial framework. At both local and provincial levels, partnership and collaboration will be required, and flexibility is an overarching goal. Communities are best able to identify their needs and determine the way they operate. Some may want to affiliate with programs, such as “Ontario Early Years Centres” or “The Good Food Box,” and they want that level of autonomy. A new program model would need to allow for policy development that distinguishes between issues that are mandated or coordinated provincially from those that involve decisions to be made at a local level.

“Cutting the cheques” is addressed more fully in question C4, but participants were keen to suggest alternative mechanisms for distributing provincial funds. Some argued for public health units as the transfer payment or “flow through” administrator suggesting they be required to work with a decision-making committee to run the student nourishment programs.

The role of public health in nutrition and health, its clear lines of accountability to the provincial government, and its longevity within the province were the strengths of this position. The fact that public health units cannot fundraise and the differences in past participation by public health units in student nourishment programs were the opposing considerations.

While there was no agreement on using public health units as the transfer payment administrator, there was strong support for a model that would establish local or regional partnerships that would determine the transfer payment administrator that would work best for the community. It was also suggested that only one partnership should focus on student nourishment programs in any one community and the partnership would be required to work within a provincial policy framework.

There was some discussion about flowing funds through school boards with a school wellness committee to oversee the use of funds. Concerns were raised around labour contracts, the fact that currently one school board might have as many as three Community Partnership Programs, and that, because staff in schools are already so overworked, they would possibly spend more funds on staffing than on food. Another more general concern was raised regarding contractual issues and the use of educational assistants in student nourishment programming.

Considering the existing model, which is based on administration of provincial funds by Breakfast for Learning, several strengths, weaknesses and opportunities were identified. The best practices guide, the mandated partnership involvement, and the contribution of Community Partners Program coordinators were widely recognized. Negative views or frustrations were expressed around the use of funds for nutrition education and certain materials on safe communities that seemed irrelevant, the delays in accessing funds, and centralized decision making regarding corporate sponsorships. Given that *Breakfast for Learning* has name recognition and nation-wide capacity, the case for staying with the model would require continued development of the best practices guidelines and attention to the issues raised by participants.

In summary, it was the discussions around school boards that identified contractual, structural and liability issues. It was the discussion about health units that drew attention to fundraising capabilities. The practice of Region of Waterloo Public Health in establishing a charitable foundation to receive funds for student nourishment programming is an important innovation in this regard. Some school boards are very sophisticated in their fundraising and community development expertise and practices.

Any change in the agency responsible for administering government funds must improve on the current model and not damage existing partnerships in the interim. Sending funds directly to a local or regional agency or steering committee that would choose an agency to receive (and be accountable for) funds was the main suggestion from both the brainstorming sessions and environmental scans.

Provincial policy and inter-ministerial collaboration

While there was a call for a direct transfer of funds to the local/regional level, there was an equally powerful message (from brainstorming sessions and environmental scans) to involve all the relevant ministries, with one lead ministry, to establish and oversee the policies and practices related to student nourishment programs.

Linking local and provincial responsibilities is important. Cited as an example was the Child Care Initiative, which involves three ministries working together to make a “seamless early years” model at the local level.

C4. What criteria should guide the selection of the best vehicle for delivering the overall government funding?

Participants suggest the following nine criteria be used to guide selection of the best vehicle for delivering government funding:

- A mandate consistent with the desired outcome of student nourishment programs;
- A partnership and collaborative orientation and capability, with an emphasis on ethical partnerships and practices;
- Community development experience, and an understanding of nutrition and determinants of health;
- Transparent and accountable decision making, and supportive of local decision making;
- Rural and urban representation, with a province-wide perspective;
- Capacity to develop the program and shepherd its sustainability;
- Administrative efficiency, including a user-friendly application process with timely distribution of funds;
- Clear and effective communication; and
- Relevant experience and expertise including marketing and fundraising.

C5. What funding models should be considered?

The funding model should reflect the intended outcome of student nourishment programming. If universality is selected as an outcome (as was the overwhelming preference of participants), the level of core and long-term funding should support this outcome.

Predictable and consistent funding allowing for full-time program coordinators is required, and the coordinators should not have to fundraise for their own positions. The funding model should also allow for equity of workload among Community Partners Program coordinators or their equivalents in different areas of the province.

Regional variability in terms of the cost of running a program should be recognized and direct allocation of funds to the local or regional level was preferred. The creation or utilization of existing community foundations would enhance the capacity for partnerships and fundraising at the local level.

The funding model should be flexible and recognize the in-kind donations of parents, including volunteer time.

The funding model should allow for long-term planning with a vision for student nourishment programming over a ten-year period. The *Healthy Babies, Healthy Children* model was suggested by some. Fundamentally, student nourishment programming should be seen as part of social and health policy, and not philanthropy.

Regarding links with other ministries, it was suggested that public health services (nutrition education and food safety) should be provided at no cost to student nourishment programs, and that the potential exists for innovative models that twin food producers and schools.

One-time funding (for building or significant equipment purchases) should be distinguished from operational funding, with the potential for special government “envelopes” to cover the former.

Most importantly, operational funding should be timely with confirmation of funds to schools by June of each year. Multi-year funding was preferred.

The funding model should take into account that it is easier to raise monies for food than staffing, and that incentives, such as matching donations, could be used to address this challenge.

Any funding model and system of cost analysis must consider regional and other factors that affect program costs and efficiencies. Accountability models must allow for both qualitative and quantitative data.

C6. What is the role of community development in delivering student nourishment programs?

Community development can be understood in different ways. The brainstorming sessions emphasized the importance of community partnerships and the involvement of sponsors and volunteers in delivering student nourishment programming. Elsewhere, including environmental scans and the literature, community development is also understood as the “side effect” of capacity building within the community through the skills learned and the knowledge gained in program delivery. School boards often employ community developers who participate in fundraising and broker other relationships that enrich both the school and the community.

The determinants of health approach is based on an understanding of health as both social and biological, and is, therefore, grounded in the structures and systems of our society. There is a mutually beneficial – or symbiotic – relationship between student nourishment programming and the community. The opportunity for collaboration among several ministries in supporting student nourishment programs will support in the outcome of community development.

Involvement of community members as a “means” of supporting student nourishment programming can also become an “end” for members of the community who feel immediate satisfaction and achievement. Critics of student nourishment programs argue that programs positioned as anti-hunger or anti-poverty initiatives can be humiliating for the “recipients” (both parents and children), and empowering largely for donors who feel a sense of “being able to do something.” The intended outcome of student nourishment programs is, therefore, extremely important to clarify. Removing student nourishment programs from the terrain of philanthropy is essential.

C7. What is the best mechanism for supporting the participation of key stakeholders at the community level?

The provincial student nourishment program should mandate and support local partnerships as they are key to developing and sustaining programs. Staff should be paid (or seconded) in both the Community Partners Program coordinator role and program coordinator role with equity in workloads across regions.

Other factors that would also support the participation of key stakeholders include:

- Community understanding regarding the intent of student nourishment programs, the roles and responsibilities of different personnel and partners who are involved, and the funding, decision-making and accountability processes;
- Involvement of local media and other public education mechanisms and events; and
- Embedding student nourishment programs in the larger social, health and economic development initiatives within a community.

Recommendations

On the basis of the review, which is summarized in this report, the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) respectfully makes the following recommendations to the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) regarding Ontario's Student Nutrition Program. The recommendations are organized according to questions provided to OPHA by MCYS.

Section A: Outcomes and evaluation

A2. What outcomes should we be striving for and measuring across the province?

- Improving student nutrition and health (including obesity reduction);
- Increasing student readiness to learn (including in-school hunger alleviation);
- Increased community capacity (community development and social determinants of health); and
- Process outcomes of the province's Student Nourishment Program should include:
 - Universal access across the province and within programs,
 - Effectiveness and efficiency,
 - Flexibility and responsiveness to meet diverse community needs,
 - Accountability and transparency to ensure equity, and
 - Equitable and sustainable core funding.

A3. How should we identify and address program gaps?

Establish provincial policies and standards for student nourishment programs:

- Establish a clear reporting and monitoring system directly from the local level to the province, and
- Utilize local infrastructures related to health, education and social services to identify and address gaps.

A4. How do we build an evaluation mechanism?

- Utilize professional staff and specialized evaluation tools from public health and education.
- The evaluation mechanism should be developed by the lead provincial ministry in consultation with the stakeholders at the community level.
- A quality audit process should be embedded in a system of mandatory reporting between the local Community Partners Program and the lead ministry.
- Best practices for student nourishment programming (3) and a determinants-of-health framework should be used to develop the evaluation mechanism.

Section B: Program offerings and required resources

B1. What is the role of nutrition education in the delivery of student nourishment programs?

- Nutrition education should be modelled in student nourishment programs; foods served should be consistent with *Call to Action: Creating a Healthy School Nutrition Environment*.
- Nutrition education should be provided to students as part of the school curriculum, and Student Nourishment Program funds should not be spent on nutrition education.
- Public health dietitians and public health inspectors should provide nutrition and food safety education to volunteers.
- Community Partners Program coordinators and student nourishment program coordinators should have a good knowledge of nutrition.

B2. What types of food should be provided?

- Nutritious food, attentive to cultural and regional preferences, food safety and allergies, and the opportunity for social interaction, should be provided.
- Provincial guidelines should establish nutritional and food safety criteria to guide the acquisition of food that is either purchased or donated.
- The *Call to Action: Creating a Healthy School Nutrition Environment* document is a useful resource to establish both provincial and school-based nutrition policy.
- Fruit, vegetables, whole grains and milk products were most widely recommended. Provision of these and other foods is desirable but may require kitchen facilities that are not available.

B3. What preparation is needed for this food, and what infrastructure/training is necessary to support the programs in providing food?

- Preparation of food in student nourishment programs involves washing, chopping, cooking, serving, storing, and the disposal of waste.
- The required infrastructure includes kitchen facilities (four sinks, counter, dishwasher, refrigerator, stove and utensils, storage space, and waste disposal space), eating area (dedicated space (ideal), and tables and chairs), transportation of food and other materials, administration (purchasing, reporting etc), marketing and communications, volunteer management, and program development in collaboration with community stakeholders.
- Training is required for volunteers, program coordinators and Community Partners Program coordinators.
- Infrastructure efficiencies with mutual benefits are suggested: centralized delivery in larger centres, bulk-buying across the province, partnerships with greenhouse growers and other producers, maximizing the use of other community locations, and retrofitting school kitchens to meet food safety standards and provincial emergency planning objectives.

B4. What are the costs associated with delivering Student Nourishment Programs?

- Capital costs related to kitchen facilities and food safety requirements impact what foods can be offered in a student nourishment program. Retrofitting school kitchens to meet the requirement of food safety standards (three sinks plus a hand-washing sink) is a barrier. A special funding envelope to address this need is recommended.
- Operating costs include food, related supplies, transportation, training and administration.
- Program development and evaluation should be incorporated into the next stage of the province's planning for student nourishment program.
- Program costing and unit costing should allow for both qualitative and quantitative factors, and be understood within diverse community contexts.

Section C: Program management, delivery, funding and community participation

C1. What is the most efficient and effective way to deliver nutritionally sound student nourishment programs?

- The Community Partners Program model developed by *Breakfast for Learning* is the most efficient model of program delivery as it attracts and maximizes the use of local resources. The role of Community Partners Program coordinators in brokering among the different stakeholders in a community is central to the efficiency and effectiveness of this model.
- An adaptation of the model, utilizing the geographic boundaries of the 36 public health units in Ontario is recommended, with the support or creation of local steering committees.
- Distribution of funds directly from a lead ministry to each of the 36 Community Partners Programs is recommended to achieve faster distribution of funds, and a system of accountability and monitoring with direct links between the 36 Community Partners Programs and the lead ministry.
- Regarding the goal to maximize the proportion of investment going to food, it is recommended that the Inter-ministerial Steering Committee address this issue. The priority is to ensure that each program allocates sufficient funds to meet nutrition standards.

C2. What are the best practices for delivering student nourishment programs?

- The province must establish the desired outcomes of student nourishment programs in order that best practices can be determined.
- Universality is recommended for Ontario's Student Nourishment Program.
- The lead ministry should set guidelines on nutrition requirements and appropriate foods and establish core sustainable funding so that best practices can be implemented.
- The best practices guide should include universality, food quality, parental involvement and consent, effective and participative program management, financial accountability, a safe and pleasing environment, and evaluation (3).

C3. What student nourishment program models should be considered?

- The recommended model is the creation of an Inter-ministerial Steering Committee at the provincial level, with a system of 36 Community Partners Programs based on the geographic boundaries of the province's 36 local health units.
- The Inter-ministerial Steering Committee, with leadership from one of Child and Youth Services (MCYS), Education, or Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC), will establish province-wide policies and standards for student nourishment programs and distribute funds directly to 36 "flow through" agencies. Membership on the steering committee to include MCYS, Education, MOHLTC, as well as Agriculture and Food, Community and Social Services, Economic Development and Trade, Public Infrastructure and Renewal, and Training, Colleges and Universities
- A system of 36 Community Partners Programs will harmonize the services and information/analysis capacities of public health (that are integral to student nourishment programs): expertise in nutrition, food safety, epidemiology, health promotion, and the emerging Local Health Integration Networks.
- Each Community Partner Program will operate with a Steering Committee (or equivalent) with representation from the local health unit (Registered Dietitian), one member from each board of education in the regional Community Partners Program, and with other members representing program coordinators and the community as determined by the local Community Partners Program. Terms of reference, including accountability and leadership responsibilities, will need to be developed.

C4. What criteria should guide the selection of the best vehicle for delivering the overall government funding?

- Criteria raised in the review included a mandate consistent with student nourishment programming, a partnership orientation, community development experience, transparent and accountable decision-making, rural and urban representation, a capacity to develop the program, administrative efficiency, clear and effective communication, and relevant experience.

C5. What funding models should be considered?

- The recommended funding model is based on direct allocation of funds to a Community Partners Program, which would receive funds through a "flow through" agency of its choice such that accountability to the lead ministry can be achieved.
- Possible agencies could include but are not limited to: public health unit, registered charity (dedicated to a specific regional Community Partners Program), local non-government organization with charitable status, or Board of Education foundation. A process for selecting and approving the flow through agency by each Community Partners Program should be developed.
- Each of the 36 Community Partner Programs should apply for funds from the lead ministry and be directly accountable for those funds

C6. What is the role of community development in delivering student nourishment programs?

- Community development plays an important role in student nourishment programs in providing both the food and the people “at the table”.
- Investing in children’s health and potential for learning is the central desired outcome of student nourishment programs, but the involvement of community partners in the process also provides knowledge, skills and a sense of agency that builds community and family capacity.

C7. What is the best mechanism for supporting the participation of key stakeholders at the community level?

- Empowering the Community Partners Program with a Steering Committee structure proposed in C3 and accountability to a lead ministry is the best mechanism for supporting the participation of key stakeholders at the community level.
- Integration of the shared interests of different sectors and jurisdictions can also be facilitated by the direct link between the community and the province.
- The lead ministry should facilitate collaboration to maximize shared interests. Examples of recommended collaborations include:
 - Integrate the work of ministries in charge of health, emergency measures planning, and economic development to develop a special funding envelope to provide (or retrofit) kitchens in all schools to conform to food safety requirements,
 - Integrate the interests of ministries in charge of agriculture, health, and economic development to coordinate year-round school partnerships involving farmers, greenhouse growers, dairies and other food industry groups for the provision of food to student nourishment programs.
 - Utilizing the public interest in obesity, work to contextualize student nourishment programs as one of a set of healthy living (obesity reduction) initiatives that would involve municipal parks and recreation, an examination of food advertising, and elements of the *Call to Action: Creating a Healthy School Nutrition Environment* document; and that would recognize healthy choice-making as a dimension of public policy as well as individual behaviour, having both short- and long-term consequences.
 - Recognizing that the provision of food focussed on health and nutritional outcomes may, in some cases, involve increased costs for food, personnel, and training, address these increased costs through collaboration across community and government resources at both local and provincial levels.

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