

To: Government of Canada

c/o Minister of Families, Children and Social Development Karina Gould

c/o Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food - Marie-Claude Bibeau

c/o Minister of Health - Jean-Yves Duclos

From: Nova Scotia Advisory to the Coalition for Healthy School Food

Date: December 16, 2022

**RE: Consultation on a pan-Canadian School Food Policy**

Thank you for the opportunity to inform the Government of Canada's process to develop a pan-Canadian school food policy to guide the expansion of school meal programming based on common principles and objectives. [The Nova Scotia Advisory to the Coalition for Healthy School Food](#) (NS-CHSF) supports this work towards a pan-Canadian school food program.

The NS-CHSF brings together stakeholders from regions and sectors across Nova Scotia to engage in dialogue, share resources, and advocate for the development of a pan-Canadian school food program that meets the diverse needs of NS school communities based on the [Coalition's Guiding Principles](#). The NS-CHSF is composed of a diverse range of community organizations and advocates who make up our steering committee and general membership. Our endorsers include municipal governments and major provincial health institutions.

The NS-CHSF strongly agrees that a pan-Canadian school food policy is urgently needed to nourish students so they can learn, play and grow at school. It is imperative that adequate funding through a cost-shared model can be locally adapted to meet the unique needs of each school and community, while also creating accountability for shared standards based on evidence.

Regarding the 7 shared objectives outlined in your [discussion paper](#), NS-CHSF offers the following recommendations:

**1. Improve access to school food and mitigate financial barriers**

- 1.1. Acknowledge that high quality, universal school food programming can improve the food security of children who participate. However, it will not alleviate poverty, or address the root cause of household food insecurity. Income measures - including increases to minimum wage, increases to income assistance, and a disability benefit - are needed.
- 1.2. Promote universal access to school food programs, with the goal of moving towards universal participation, as essential to inclusive education.
- 1.3. Support on-the-ground human resources to build community partnerships, create supportive school food environments, implement evaluation frameworks, and support youth engagement. These human resource needs will include: food

service finance clerks, food service managers, dietitians, and cafeteria workers paid living wages (including sick pay and professional development days).

## **2. Prevent stigma**

- 2.1. Build youth leadership roles in school food as a way to reduce stigma as they take ownership of their involvement and are empowered to effect change. Youth often want nourishing, delicious food and deserve choice and dignity.
- 2.2. Account for urban and rural differences in risk of stigma. There are different considerations for high school food programs in urban areas compared to rural areas in Nova Scotia. Youth engagement is needed at the school level to truly avoid stigma and create a program that serves students.
- 2.3. Take care to ensure that programs remain free of stigma in the long term with ongoing evaluation and engagement of school communities

## **3. Enhance nutrition and promote lifelong healthy practices**

- 3.1. Ensure food literacy and food skills are embedded in the program to build food knowledge and skills beyond the school years. Children and youth need these important lifelong skills, and there is currently a huge gap in this area.
- 3.2. Engage children and youth, in age appropriate ways, in program design and delivery. Students need to have buy-in and be part of the program to champion, promote, and engage in hands-on learning. Make school food cool!
- 3.3. Take care to create a policy that avoids promoting diet culture, and instead promotes intuitive, mindful approaches to eating, along with body positivity.

## **4. Ensure a flexible approach that leaves room for local adaptation**

- 4.1. Work with provincial groups, including the NS-CHSF, to ensure engagement and collaboration with the many partners who are currently working on school food.
- 4.2. Federal policy should provide guidelines, but remain adaptable to local contexts, allowing flexibility in sourcing, payment models, and menu design.

## **5. Offer culturally appropriate programming that is mindful of dietary requirements**

- 5.1. Provide guidelines for involving the local community in menu planning and ensuring cultural dietary requirements are met. Localizing control over procurement will enable more control to make culturally relevant food choices.

## **6. Ensure accountability and governance**

- 6.1. Determine what accountability looks like to youth and local communities, in addition to accountability to governments

- 6.2. Focus the accountability for adherence to nutrition standards on Provincial Education departments, rather than cafeteria workers. All such accountability measures should focus on capacity building to address systemic challenges to implementation.
- 6.3. Create a framework for regular, ongoing youth engagement and feedback mechanisms as this policy is implemented. This will create meaningful leadership opportunities for youth.

#### **7. Supporting local and sustainable food systems and economies**

- 7.1. Prioritize Black and Indigenous vendors. Black and Indigenous communities need to be engaged in school food program development and supported to take advantage of opportunities for community economic development.
- 7.2. Provide guidelines and supports for prioritizing local and regional procurement. For example, incorporate sustainable seafood into resources for menu development and procurement.
- 7.3. Ensure school food programs offer jobs that pay a living wage, with benefits.

We look forward to ongoing collaboration on a pan-Canadian School Food Policy as a key component of nourishing our next generation so they can reach their potential in school and in life.

Signed,



Lindsay Corbin

On behalf of the Nova Scotia Advisory to the Coalition for Healthy School Food