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June 15, 2020

**Attention: Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services
Regarding 2021 BC Government Budget Priorities**

Dear Committee Members,

This submission is written on behalf of the membership of the BC Chapter of the Coalition for Healthy School Food (BC-CHSF), a growing network of non-profit and community-driven organizations from all corners of the province. Our 40+ members, endorsers and supporters include professionals from health, education and agriculture and food sectors, as well as school community members across the province – many of whom work with schools to deliver or support breakfast, lunch, snack or other nutrition or food literacy programs. As a provincial chapter of the national [Coalition for Healthy School Food](#), the BC-CHSF conducts outreach, research and advocacy to ensure that federal and provincial governments are working in close consultation with school food stakeholders towards the phased development of a universal, healthy school food program that meets the diverse needs of BC's school communities.

Summary

The BC Chapter of the Coalition for Healthy School Food is calling upon the Government of British Columbia to commit to a universal, cost-shared healthy school food program for all K-12 students, based on a shared belief that all children and youth in BC should have daily access to healthy food at school. We recommend that the Government of BC invest in the first steps towards a universal, cost-shared, healthy school food program via 1) six new school food pilot projects, 2) a dedicated provincial School Food Fund for existing programs, and 3) the assembly of a multi-stakeholder provincial school food task force. This investment would advance multiple provincial priorities including promoting the health, well-being and education of BC children, strengthening and stimulating local agriculture and food sectors, and building a low carbon economy. The investment would also significantly reduce the \$3.3 billion in costs of the treatment and productivity losses due to nutrition related conditions in BC, including excess weight and low fruit and vegetable consumption ([BCCDC, 2018](#)).

Rationale & Background

Children have a right to adequate and nutritious food to enable a healthy life; yet, Canada ranks 37th of 41 high income countries in ensuring children have access to nutritious food ([UNICEF, 2017](#)). In BC, one in ten households (11.8%) are considered food insecure and one in six children live in households experiencing some level of food insecurity (15.6%) ([BCCDC, 2016](#)). Less than four in ten Grade 7-12 students eat three meals a day on school days ([McCreary Centre Society, 2018](#)). Furthermore, children in BC consume insufficient and unhealthy diets; only 15% of BC children eat the recommended daily servings of fruits and vegetables irrespective of their socio-economic status ([Attorp et al., 2014](#)). This combination of food insecurity and low food literacy rates negatively affects a child's physical and mental health as well as academic performance, with long-term public health implications.



Around the world, universal school food programs that achieve food literacy and healthy eating behaviours from a young age are increasingly recognized as a foundational health promotion policy. [Evidence](#) points to the value of universal school food programs both to address poor nutrition, and to encourage positive health and education outcomes in children from all socio-economic backgrounds ([Oostindjer, 2017](#)). Combined with poverty reduction strategies, school food programs can also alleviate the burden of food insecurity felt by families. This is particularly evident in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic; families, school districts and community organizations have quickly [pivoted their activities and funds](#) to ensure students still have access to food during this time of heightened food insecurity.

Today, Canada remains the only G7 nation without a national school food program. This doesn't mean school food programs don't exist; in BC, 75% of school districts report having a meal program in at least one school ([Smith, 2018](#)), which are generally run at a school or school district scale and rely on parents, non-profit organizations or other members of the school community to develop and run. While there is some provincial guidance and funding for school food (e.g. via CommunityLINK), 81% of these school food programs rely on additional charitable funds, which often have long waitlists for support. Furthermore, districts and schools in BC have variable baselines of experience, equipment, infrastructure and relationships. The current patchwork of school food programming reaches only a small percentage of BC's 530,000 students, and does not meet the needs of hungry and undernourished students. According to the BC Teachers' Federation, 80% of teachers have at least some students who arrive at school hungry, without any food for lunch or snacks; in response, teachers contribute a total of \$3.85 million per year to meet the needs of hungry students in BC public schools ([BCTF, 2015](#)).

There is a growing movement for healthy school food in BC, and there are countless examples of innovative and successful programs in all corners of the province – programs that source from local farms, incorporate food literacy education, foster school-community connectedness, and promote lifelong healthy eating. Building off these successful programs, we believe that investment in the development of a universal, healthy school food program could help address the root of widespread public health, educational and economic issues. This is especially pertinent in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the effects of which are [expected to impact children](#) for many years both in BC and globally. In addition to addressing immediate food needs and promoting long-term positive health outcomes in children and youth, school food programs could be used to stimulate and support local food economies, including providing a stable market for farmers and a source of employment for chefs and other food service workers.

Investing in healthy school food programs could also support a number of existing provincial mandates. For example, it could support the 2018 Auditor General's recommendations for collaboration between Ministries of Health and Education on a number of healthy eating initiatives, as well as implementation of the new BC Curriculum, which is conducive to hands-on food systems education. Lastly, farm to school program models offer an opportunity to support the Ministry of Agriculture's objectives to encourage the development and adoption of buy local policies for public sector institutions.

Given this alignment, we believe that the time is right to build on [federal momentum for a national school food program](#), and commit to healthy school food programs across BC. With investment from the provincial government, there is an opportunity for BC to be a leader in Canada to showcase what a healthy, universal, education-based, community-centric school food program can look like.



Recommendations

The BC Chapter of the Coalition for Healthy School Food urges the BC Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services to act on our shared understanding that provincial government financial support is critical to the long-term health and well-being of students, school communities and local food economies across the province. We have three recommendations for moving this work forward in BC:

1. Invest in six new school food pilot projects across BC

Evidence suggests that the creation of a universal school food program should be implemented in phases, and research has shown that these programs are more likely to be effective when designed in partnership with the local community and when interventions are piloted. We ask that the Province of British Columbia work with Coalition for Healthy School Food members and other stakeholders from multiple sectors and Ministries (through a multi-stakeholder task force - see recommendation #3) to design, fund and implement six new school food pilot projects across the province. The Coalition recommends that these pilots comply with the Coalition's [guiding principles](#) based on best practices (e.g. universality, health promotion, and connection to curriculum and community), and that there is a robust evaluation plan in place to guide future programs, policies and funding.

2. Create a dedicated provincial School Food Fund

This fund will complement the national Coalition for Healthy School Food's request for a [one-time investment of \\$200 million](#) to create a federal School Food Fund for infrastructure, equipment, staffing and other expenses needed to support the health and wellbeing of children, families and communities and to stimulate the Canadian economy during the COVID-19 recovery. In BC, a dedicated School Food Fund -- distinct from existing CommunityLINK funding which often competes for other priorities -- could offer essential support for schools, districts and community organizations to continue, expand and enrich existing school food programs. This Fund would provide small grants for infrastructure, equipment, as well as expenses associated with staffing, administration, research, evaluation and other needs identified in the recent Tri-Ministry K-12 Public School Food Survey.

3. Assemble a multi-stakeholder provincial school food task force to support the development of universal, cost-shared healthy school food programs for all K-12 students in BC

We ask that the Provincial Government create a task force to explore the long-term implementation of a universal, cost-shared healthy school food program in all school districts across the province. This task force should include stakeholders from diverse school communities who are impacted by school food programs, including representatives and members of the Coalition for Healthy School Food that are running school food programs on the ground. This task force would develop and implement pilots, while exploring costing and other models needed in the development of universal, cost-shared healthy school food programs province-wide.

THE COALITION
FOR HEALTHY SCHOOL FOOD



Your attention to this urgent issue is appreciated.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Gambling'.

Samantha Gambling
Provincial Coordinator, BC Chapter of the Coalition for Healthy School Food
Administered by the Public Health Association of British Columbia

CC:

Minister Fleming, Ministry of Education
Minister Popham, Ministry of Agriculture
Minister Dix, Ministry of Health