



Editorial

Momentum is building for a school food program for Canada

Debbie Field^a and Carolyn Webb^{b*}

^a Coordinator, Coalition for Healthy School Food

^b Coordinator, Sustain Ontario Education Network, and Coalition for Healthy School Food Animator

School food programs are [increasingly being recognized around the world](#) as a valuable health promotion policy and essential to the health, well-being and education of students. [Research](#) is also showing that school food programs can support a wide range of population-level impacts relating to education, community, economic development, domestic agriculture, families, and the environment.

Over 388 million children in at least 161 countries (83 percent of all countries globally) receive free or subsidized school meals at school. While Canada is one of the only industrialized countries still without a national school food program, we're at a critical tipping point in terms of seeing the federal government, as well as provinces and territories, advance school food policies and invest in children and youth across the country.

The Coalition for Healthy School Food was established in 2014 to work towards the goal that every child and youth in Canada would access a healthy, affordable and culturally appropriate meal or snack, in a

non-stigmatizing manner, at school every day. We do this through advocacy at the federal level, strengthening commitments from provinces and territories, local governments and school communities, and supporting replication, networking and sharing of best practices for the thousands of diverse school food programs and models across Canada. The Coalition has grown to over 200 member organizations from every province and territory and over 100 endorsers.

Through consultation with members and supported by global best practices and researchers across the country, particularly the article in this Journal by Hernandez, Engler-Stringer, Kirk, Wittman, and McNicholl "[The case for a Canadian national school food program](#)" - Vol 5 No 3 (2018), the Coalition has developed 8 [guiding principles](#) that we advocate for as critical for a thriving school food program: (1) health promoting; (2) universal; (3) cost-shred; (4) flexible and locally adapted; (5) committed to Indigenous control over programs in Indigenous communities; (6) a driver of community economic development; (7) promoting

*Corresponding author: cwebb@sustainontario.ca

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of food literacy; and (8) supported by guidance and accountability measures. These principles have formed a common basis of unity among our members and have informed all of our recommendations to government.

Through our central coordination and the efforts of our members, we have seen significant movement at the provincial and federal levels. In September 2021 the [Liberal Party of Canada committed to](#) “develop a National School Food Policy and work towards a national school nutritious meal program with a \$1 billion dollar investment over five years (...) to help children grow and learn”. In December 2021 the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Marie-Claude Bibeau and Minister of Families, Children and Social Development Karina Gould’s [mandate letters](#) included to work together and “with provinces, territories, municipalities, Indigenous partners and stakeholders to develop a National School Food Policy and to work toward a national school nutritious meal program.”

It is also a very exciting moment for school food around the world. Last year, the global [School Meals Coalition](#) was formed to advocate for “A healthy meal for every child, every day” everywhere in the world by the year 2030. Our Canada-wide Coalition signed the School Meals Coalition declaration and Canada has just recently signed on, becoming the 61st country to add their voice to this crucial commitment.

We’re at a tipping point towards our goal of ensuring that all children and youth can access healthy food at school. With momentum building for a Canada-wide school food program, and with many provinces and territories making their own investments and developing programs, we have a collective and unprecedented opportunity to influence the design and direction of school food programs, policy and funding for Canada and impact the lives of children and communities across the country.

The Coalition for Healthy School Food is very excited to welcome this edition of Canadian Food Studies / La Revue canadienne des études sur l’alimentation, which includes four articles on the issue of youth and food. We’re so pleased to see research on this theme that will inform the development of school food initiatives across the country.

We thank all of those who have contributed to the current body of knowledge, and we encourage more contributions. If you are inspired to examine and support recommendations relating to school food programs, we’ve identified a number of research areas that could use further study, including:

- What are the benefits and risks of a pay-what-you-can vs. a model that is free for users?
- Which sectors and players should be involved in program implementation and how could different models be successfully put into practice?
- How can federal and provincial governments work together to ensure the quality of programs?
- How can effective monitoring and assessment take place?
- How can federal and provincial governments provide appropriate guidance relating to nutrition, donations, and other program aspects?
- How can a Canada-wide Program avoid food and packaging waste?
- How do we ensure that a program does not include brand or product marketing to children?
- What costing models should we explore to inform a program for Canada?
- How can we encourage local food procurement?

- How can food literacy education complement and build on the provision of meals and snacks?
- How can a Program support openness, inclusion and equity?

It's an exciting time for school food programs across the country. We encourage you to join the momentum.

Debbie Field is the **Coordinator of the Coalition for Healthy School Food**. Debbie has been involved in promoting and improving school food programs for decades. A longstanding community activist in a variety of social movements, Debbie believes passionately in the power of grassroots campaigning. Debbie is also an **Associate Member, Centre for Studies in Food Security**, Toronto Metropolitan University. Debbie has an honour's B.A. in Sociology from Trent University, a Masters in Adult Education from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and an Honorary Doctorate of Laws from York University.

Carolyn Webb is the Coordinator of Sustain Ontario's Edible Education Network and supports communication and animation with the Coalition for Healthy School Food. She has spent the last 10 years facilitating knowledge sharing, resource development and advocacy relating to school food across the country. Carolyn has a BSc in Environmental Sciences from the University of Guelph and a Master's degree in Adult Education and Community Development from OISE at the University of Toronto. She is passionate about enabling collaboration and collective efforts that support people and the planet.