

# Why does a school food program for Canada need to be universal?

*Let's make sure ALL students are well-nourished and ready to learn!*

## What does “universal” mean?

A universal school food program means that, where a program is in place, all students in the school have access to the meal or snack that is offered. This is now the current policy in most provinces and territories.



## Why Universal?

Children and youth across socio-economic demographics are not eating well. A universal program would mean that all students can access healthy food and build healthy eating habits.

Through research and experience, we also know that school meal and snack programs are more successful at meeting the needs of students when everyone at the school is welcome to participate.

School food program providers have also learnt that children and youth eat better (try new foods and eat healthier options) when they eat with their peers.

Meal skipping and short-term hunger impact children across all socio-economics classes and children come to school hungry for many reasons (see image). School food programs should be widely accessible so that every child and youth is ready to learn.

## What's the issue with targeted programs?

Targeted programs (i.e. programs only offered to students whose families meet a low income threshold) increase parental resistance and reduce student participation because of the associated stigma and have proven not to be successful in meeting broader health goals.

Targeted programs cost a lot to assess student eligibility and take a lot of human resources to monitor.

In a research study by Raine, K., McIntyre, L., & Dayle, J. B. (2010), only a minority of the intended population of targeted programs was reached and the programs failed in their expressed mandate to feed hungry children.

Targeted programs also miss the huge opportunity to ensure that **all** of our children and youth access healthy food at school each day and learn the habits for a lifetime of healthy eating.