

Department of Finance and Treasury Board  
PO Box 187  
Halifax NS B3J 2N3

Date: January 27, 2022

**RE: Provincial Budget 2022-23 and economic recovery via a school food program**

Dear Honorable Allan MacMaster,

The COVID-19 crisis has revealed that food, and in particular school food, is an essential public good like P-12 education and healthcare. Everyone deserves access to nourishing food in order to be healthy and achieve their potential. Strong and resilient food systems are the backbone needed to keep us safe and food secure. Nova Scotians feel this more acutely now than ever. COVID-19 has exposed, yet again, the critical importance of Canada [catching up with other G7 nations](#) by developing and implementing a national school meal program.

In December, the Prime Minister tasked both [Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Marie-Claude Bibeau](#), and [Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Karina Gould](#), with developing a national school food policy and working towards a national school nutritious meal program. This followed the October 2021 election platform commitment to spend [\\$1 billion over five years](#) to work with “provincial, territorial, municipal, Indigenous partners and stakeholders to develop a national school food policy and work towards a national school nutritious meal program.”

As we deal with the immediate and long-term effects of COVID-19 with an eye to economic recovery, schools are ideal settings for infrastructure stimulus spending projects. The investment in school food infrastructure would help enhance existing programs, expand programming and provide a [substantial boost to our agricultural, food service and construction sectors](#) across the province.

Overall, this program supports the NS Minister of Agriculture’s mandate to encourage and increase local food consumption. It provides an opportunity to review procurement policies to bring more local, healthy foods into our public institutions and further the relationships between agriculture and schools specifically. An investment in healthy school food and a universal lunch program supports multiple ministerial mandates.

Schools provide geographic equity across Nova Scotia, and school food programs provide the setting for job creation and industry renewal. Consider school retrofits; new kitchen and

cafeteria construction; local food procurement-agribusiness; the hospitality industry via employment opportunities for cooks, chefs and food service workers; retail supplies and equipment purchase along with professional services (accounting, dietitians, architects); and the list goes on. Internationally, school meals have shown to be one of the most successful drivers of improved health, education and economic growth, with the equivalent of a [\\$3 to \\$10 return](#) on every dollar invested.

This letter is to request the NS Government provide funding in the 2022-2023 budget to ready the NS Education system to receive school food program funding from the federal government.

Specifically, we request funding to support the following activities:

- Undertake a provincial consultation of stakeholders, including parents, to ensure buy-in and assess program needs respecting the diverse nature of NS communities, with special consideration for BIPOC families and cultural appropriateness
- Dedicate matching funds for infrastructure required to deliver school food programs<sup>1</sup>
- Revise procurement policies to facilitate more local foods into schools
- Develop a food literacy curriculum for integration into school food programs
- Evaluate existing pilot programs that show potential for Nova Scotia
- Devise regular training and professional development opportunities for all food service workers and ensure appropriate compensation, i.e. living wage
- Invest in regional coordinators to support procurement, overall coordination, training, and adherence to school food program standards

[Canadian research](#) shows that school food programs increase consumption of healthy foods, reduce the risk of chronic disease, and improve mental health, positively influencing children's nutritional knowledge, dietary behaviours, and food intake. School food programs improve educational outcomes and increase graduation rates by reducing hunger in classrooms, a known barrier to concentration and learning. They help students feel connected and that they belong—feelings that have been eroded during COVID-19. A universal healthy school food program would have a positive impact on families, particularly women who invest significant time preparing food for school.

Evidence-based healthy public policy and strong leadership have carried us through this pandemic. The same can guide us on a path of economic recovery. Today, we are urging you to invest in our provincial infrastructures to augment the federal commitment to help strengthen the health and wellbeing of all Nova Scotia children and to build resiliency into our existing food system.

**MLAs and members of the Budget Committee, it is time to put forward the significance of this program. We ask you to take action to advance this program in the upcoming 2022-2023 budget.**

On behalf of the Nova Scotia Coalition for Healthy School Food<sup>2</sup>,



Margo Riebe-Butt  
Executive Director, Nourish Nova Scotia

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<sup>1</sup> The Arrell Food Institute's [Report on School Food in Canada](#) noted that most schools lack the necessary staffing and infrastructure to support healthy eating; also of note, the issue of food literacy and the need to teach food skills in an integrated and comprehensive manner.

<sup>2</sup> The **Nova Scotia Advisory CHSF (NS-CHSF)** brings together stakeholders from regions and sectors across Nova Scotia to engage in dialogue, share resources, and collaborate on collective advocacy towards the development of a Canada-wide school food program that meets the diverse needs of NS school communities based on the Coalition's [guiding principles](#). The NS-CHSF is comprised of over 38 contributing community organizations plus a steering committee and general membership.