

DATE: March 19, 2024

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Board Chair Julie Kusiek

SUBJECT: Letter Supporting National Framework for a School Food Program Act

RESOURCE STAFF: Karen Mills, Director Board and Superintendent Relations

REFERENCE N/A

ISSUE

The Board Chair is seeking approval to send the attached letter in support of a national framework for a school food program to federal ministers whose portfolios have an education and/or student health component and all Alberta Members of Parliament.

BACKGROUND

On March 9, 2023, Acadie-Bathurst MP Serge Cormier introduced private member's bill C-322, *An Act to develop a national framework to establish a school food program*, for first reading. On December 6, 2023, the second reading was completed and the bill was referred to the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. When introducing the bill, MP Cormier stated that the bill, "would empower the minister of employment and social development to consult with the Minister of Health, representatives of provincial and territorial governments responsible for health and education, other relevant stakeholders in those fields and representatives of indigenous governing bodies to develop a national framework to establish a school food program to ensure that all children in Canada have access to healthy food.

As outlined in the bill, the framework will:

- set out the criteria for determining whether a food is healthy, taking into account Canada's Food Guide;
- indicate which meals and snacks, at a minimum, must be offered in schools under the program;
- take into account the different circumstances in which children live, including cultural diversity, and the resulting dietary requirements;
- take into account the rights and priorities of First Nations, Inuit and Métis;
- provide for measures to avoid stigmatizing pupils who use the program;
- provide for measures to foster the use of local and sustainable food systems;
- take into account existing local initiatives and infrastructure, build on existing school food programs across Canada and use best practices from other jurisdictions; and
- promote evidence-based healthy food education in schools across Canada."

RELATED FACTS

- Our Division schools see the need for school nutrition every day. There are currently 31 Division schools supported through provincial Student Nutrition Program funding.

- Since the pandemic, schools across the Division have seen an increase in students and families facing food security challenges. This reflects the current context in the Edmonton area around food security, as outlined in Edmonton Social Planning Council's A Look at Food Security in Edmonton report from 2023. This report highlights an increase in the number of Albertans facing food insecurity from 2011 to 2022 (up from 12.3 per cent to 20.3 per cent), with the number of children impacted by food insecurity identified as 21.7 per cent, up from 17.9 per cent.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Board authorizes the Board Chair to send the letter, in Attachment I, to federal ministers whose portfolios have an education and/or student health component, with a copy to the Alberta Minister of Education and the Alberta School Board Association.

OPTIONS

Based on the information provided in this report, the following options are considered most appropriate:

1. Authorize the Board Chair to proceed as requested.
2. Authorize the Board Chair to proceed with an amended letter.

CONSIDERATIONS and ANALYSIS

- Several school boards in Alberta are being encouraged to write to their MPs to show support for this bill.
- On February 26, 2024, the Government of Alberta [announced an additional \\$5 million](#) in funding for school nutrition programming in the 2023/2024 school year.

NEXT STEP

Upon approval, the letter will be sent to the following individuals:

- The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P. Prime Minister of Canada
- The Honourable Chrystia Freeland, P.C., M.P. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance
- The Honourable Marci Ien, P.C., M.P. Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth
- The Honourable Mark Holland, P.C., M.P. Minister of Health
- The Honourable Ya'ara Saks, Minister of Mental Health and Additions and Associate Minister of Health
- The Honourable Jenna Suds, P.C., M.P. Minister of Families, Children and Social Development
- The Honourable Ziad Aboultaif, P.C., M.P., Edmonton Manning
- The Honourable Randy Boissonnault, P.C. M.P., Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages, Edmonton Centre
- The Honourable Michael Cooper, P.C., M.P., St. Albert-Edmonton
- The Honourable Blake Desjarlais, P.C., M.P., Edmonton Griesbach
- The Honourable Matt Jeneroux, P.C., M.P., Shadow Minister for Supply Chain, Edmonton Riverbend
- The Honourable Mike Lake, P.C., M.P., Edmonton-Wetaskiwin
- The Honourable Kelly McCauley, P.C., M.P., Edmonton West
- The Honourable Heather McPherson, P.C., M.P., Edmonton Strathcona
- The Honourable Tim Uppal, P.C., M.P., Edmonton Mill Woods
- The Honourable Serge Cormier, P.C., M.P., Arcadie-Bathurst

The letter will be copied to Alberta's Minister of Education and the Alberta School Board Association.

ATTACHMENTS and APPENDICES

ATTACHMENT I Letter template

JK:km

Date

[Member of Parliament's Full Name (with honorifics as necessary)]

[Constituency Office Address]

[City, Province Postal Code]

Dear (MP's NAME),

Re: Private Member's Bill C-322 – National Framework for a School Food Program Act

We are writing to you today in strong support of MP Serge Cormier's Private Member's Bill C-322, National Framework for a School Food Program Act. Specifically, we are requesting that you work with your caucus colleagues to seek unanimous consent of this Bill in support of children and youth across Canada.

Our school board has been following the process of this Bill with great interest. It is heartening to see that the Bill has passed second reading and has been sent to committee. However, it will still need the support of those on the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. We fully support the concept of a universal national school food policy and program for all public schools with certain requirements as described below. As the preamble to the Bill states, "*almost one in five children reported to school or to bed hungry sometimes, often or always because there was not enough food at home.*" In a country as developed and wealthy as ours, this is simply unacceptable. In fact, Canada is currently the only country in the G7 that does not have a national school food program or national standards^[1].

This type of program could provide a variety of benefits for students, including:

- Improving access to nutritious food for students, allowing all students to focus on learning in school
- Addressing food insecurity and the resulting anxiety and mental health challenges that affect students
- Improving the social determinants of health for marginalized communities
- Promoting healthy eating habits, choices, and lifestyles
- Increasing food literacy
- Supporting local agriculture and traditions; and
- Supporting a healthier and more sustainable food system.

A national school food policy and program would also help ensure that all children have the nourishment they need to learn and grow and improve their health and well-being. Additionally, it can also contribute to the development of a more sustainable food system by supporting local and sustainable food production, and local economies through the creation of jobs.

We suggest that any federally supported policy/program to provide food (breakfasts, meals, snacks) must meet the following minimum requirements:

- Be present at every publicly funded school and accessible at no cost to students or care providers, school or boards/districts/authorities
- Be offered in a manner that is stigma-free
- Support culturally appropriate local food producers
- Have no marketing to children and youth

Given the widespread need across Alberta and Canada, and the extraordinary diversity of approaches school divisions take in forming partnerships to support those in need, there is a strong need for the federal government, in partnership with provincial ministries and school boards, to commit to a National School Food Policy. A national policy would set a standard both for securing food for schools and ensuring it is delivered consistently, sustainably, and within a context of transformative action to end poverty, improve students' health and achievement outcomes and build cultural and economic success.

The Policy should be followed up by the rollout of a National School Nutritious Meal Program, and with it the \$200 million per year that the Government of Canada committed to in 2021. An investment in Budget 2024 in a national school food program will support both families and school food providers, who have been struggling due to the affordability crisis.

On behalf of Edmonton Public Schools, we look forward to continued engagement on this critical issue for children and youth and encourage you to vote to pass Bill C-322 as soon as possible. For more information, please review the Employment and Social Development Canada [National School Food Policy Engagements – What We Heard Report](#).

Please do not hesitate to contact me directly by email at trustee.julie.kusiek@epsb.ca or by phone at 780-429-8087 should you wish to discuss the importance of this [legislation](#).

Best Regards,

Julie Kusiek
Chair

[1] According to [Breakfast Club of Canada](#), and as reported by [CBC](#) and the [Globe and Mail](#)