



ONTARIO PUBLIC
SCHOOL BOARDS'
ASSOCIATION

Leading Education's Advocates

Ontario Public School Boards' Association
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Cathy Abraham
President

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January 19, 2024

The Honourable Chrystia Freeland
Minister of Finance & Deputy Prime Minister
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario,
Canada
K1A 0A6
chrystia.freeland@parl.gc.ca

Re: Federal Budget 2024

Dear Minister Freeland:

As the federal government conducts its pre-budget consultations, we, the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA), are compelled to state our request that \$1 billion over five years, with a minimum \$200 million per year, be included in Budget 2024 for a National School Food Program. We are particularly concerned as there was no mention of this in last year's budget, which we found disheartening since a National School Food Program was initially introduced as part of Budget 2019, and then reaffirmed in the 2022 Budget's reference to mandate letters for the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development and the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Our Association strongly believes that the government should fulfill this election platform promise. By including this incredibly important societal need as part of Budget 2024, the government will demonstrate its commitment to school food and student nutrition. We know that all the provinces and territories are ready to work out agreements with the federal government on a cost-shared National School Food Program. Like Child Care Agreements, we are confident that federal funds could flow to the provinces and territories, each of whom have the structures in place to ensure money gets turned into more robust programs and quality food for students. This will make an incredible impact on the affordability issues families are facing, while also supporting Canadian students' achievement and well-being.

Many key stakeholders participated in the consultations conducted by the ministries noted above, and our support and comments can be found in the [National School Food Policy Engagements – What We Heard Report](#). Our Association is not alone in showing support of MP Serge Cormier's Private Member's Bill C-322, National Framework for a School Food Program Act.

As local public education advocates, we see first hand the struggles that our children, families, and communities are facing. Food insecurity is a national issue and rates have been rising at unprecedented levels. A 2022 Statistics Canada report* shows that 6.9 million people in 10 provinces, including almost 1.8 million children, lived in households struggling to afford the food they need.

When children and youth come to school hungry, it is difficult for them to focus on learning. This is an unfortunate reality for far too many students in our schools. Students must be fully prepared to face their learning day without worrying about where their next meal might come from. Simply put, children who are not hungry are more prepared to learn and participate in our classrooms and extra-curricular activities.

OPSBA has also advocated at the provincial level for continued support and funding but this must be reinforced by a coordinated national level of financial assurance.


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.

Much work has been done by the federal ministries, and also within our province. The time is now for a true financial commitment from the federal government to ensure this initiative becomes a reality. Our children and their families cannot wait.

On behalf of OPSBA, we look forward to the inclusion of dedicated funding to support a National School Food Program in Budget 2024.

Thank you for your consideration,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cathy Abraham". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Cathy Abraham,
OPSBA President

CC: The Honourable Jenna Sudds, Minister of Families, Children and Social Development

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association represents public district school boards and public school authorities across Ontario, which together serve more than 1.3 million public elementary and secondary students. The Association advocates on behalf of the best interests and needs of the public school system in Ontario. OPSBA is seen as the credible voice of public education in Ontario and is routinely called on by the provincial government for input and advice on legislation and the impact of government policy directions.