

Ontario Prebudget Submission 2027

Strengthening Ontario's School Food System

Breakfast CLUB of Canada®

Breakfast Club of Canada

In Canada, food insecurity affects millions of children daily, hindering their ability to learn and thrive. 32% of Ontario children are facing this unfortunate reality. In collaboration with many school community partners across the country, Breakfast Club of Canada (BCC) is dedicated to ensuring children have an equal chance to succeed by providing access to nutritious breakfasts in a safe and supportive environment.

With over 30 years of experience, BCC has become a cornerstone in the fight against school food hunger, working with its community partners to support more than 5,600 programs nationwide, reaching more than 2 million students and supporting approximately 940,000 breakfasts daily from coast to coast to coast.

The State of School Food in Ontario

Breakfast Club of Canada recognizes and appreciates the Government of Ontario's responsiveness in being the third province to sign the National School Food Program (NSFP) bilateral agreement with the federal government in October 2024, and we thank you for the implementation of the Healthy Students, Brighter Ontario (HSBO) Campaigns in 2023 and 2025.

Thanks to the bilateral agreement under the NSFP, Ontario's existing Student Nutrition Program (SNP) has significantly expanded over the past two years with the intent to offer access to all public schools across the province. However, the program's decentralized structure means that access to nutritious breakfasts or lunches remains uneven, with no guarantee that every student can participate.

The need for a robust school nutrition program providing equitable access to all students in Ontario comes at a critical time. Grocery costs remain a top concern for Ontario families facing persistent cost-of-living pressures. International trade tensions and uncertainty surrounding food supply chains further reinforce the need for sustained investment in school food programs. Yet public funding in Ontario covers only $0.22 per child per day, one of the lowest rates in Canada. By comparison, an estimated minimum of $2.00 is needed to provide a breakfast in a school setting, depending on the region. This gap leaves too many students at risk of starting their school day on an empty stomach.

Recommendation 1

That the Government of Ontario make student nutrition a top priority by strengthening the existing program through a whole-of-government approach.

As one of the 46 endorsers of the Ontario School Food Policy Recommendations, Breakfast Club of Canada requests that the Government of Ontario further strengthen the provincial system through cross-ministerial alignment using a school food mission-oriented framework.

As recommended in the BCC Brief on Bill C-15, supported by the World Food Programme Centre of Excellence Against Hunger, the NSFP Act is the first step toward a comprehensive, robust approach using school feeding as a mission-oriented framework, as proposed by Mazzucato and Doyle (2025). Governments can actively direct economic development toward long-term strategic goals through coordinating mechanisms that engage all sectors—shifting from a social program approach to a concrete school food economic mission that aligns social, environmental, health, industrial, and food system policies.



School food is deeply cross-sectoral, engaging education, health, agriculture, the environment, and Indigenous relations—making it a natural lever for interministerial collaboration that generates both short- and long-term public value. By designing school food policies and procurement practices around mission-oriented criteria, the government can turn public expenditure into a collective investment in productive capacity, territorial development and systemic resilience.

Beyond its social importance, school food is a powerful economic lever. By strengthening local supply chains, creating jobs, generating economic activity in communities, and supporting better educational and health outcomes for children, student nutrition programs deliver meaningful and lasting economic returns.

Recommendation 2

That the Government of Ontario recognize the Ontario Student Nutrition Program (SNP) and First Nations Student Nutrition Program (FNSNP) as budget priorities and commit to gradually increase its current annual support of $38 million by 50% ($19 million) over the next three years, including $7 million in 2027 to match the federal NSFP annual investment in the province.



Building on the 2023 Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) program review, our 2026 Ontario Pre-Budget submission, and the more recent Ontario school food visioning process, most student nutrition stakeholders have called for increased provincial core funding to address rising food costs and enable existing programs to meet their many operational needs. More predictable multi-year funding for community delivery partners, Indigenous partners and impact accelerators such as Breakfast Club of Canada is needed to build a robust Ontario program that aligns with the NSFP policy ambitions.

We acknowledge the MCCSS SNP Implementation Working Group, which focuses on key cross-ministerial priorities, including procurement and distribution models, data collection and reporting, and the Local Planning Partnership to support volunteer recruitment and community fundraising. To leverage the potential of this important engagement framework and to accelerate program impacts, it is crucial for the Government of Ontario to sustain and grow its school nutrition funding so it can protect the community delivery network, reduce pressure on families and ensure that federal dollars of $45 million per year leave Ontario with stronger long-term capacity.

Many programs face barriers to operations and expansion, including inadequate kitchens, storage, transportation, staffing, and volunteer capacity. Predictable investment in infrastructure, logistics, and staffing would help address these systemic challenges and strengthen Ontario's SNP and FNSNP.

Priorities 2027-2030: Strategic Investment Opportunities

Building on the government's additional $5 million in 2025 for the SNP and FNSNP, Healthy Students, Brighter Ontario partners (BCC, Student Nutrition Ontario, and the Schad Foundation) have identified four strategic investments, totalling $19 million, to strengthen Ontario's school food system. Each initiative could be delivered in collaboration with partner organizations for greater accountability and impact.

While the strategic investments below do not directly address other key issues such as sustainable staffing support and the SNP nutrition guidelines update, they represent short-term opportunities for the Government of Ontario to accelerate meaningful impact in priority program areas.

Extend Support for Indigenous Schools:

We recognize the recent MCCSS expansion of support to all FNSNP in Ontario, and we recommend building on this commitment to support communities with cultural and traditional program adaptations. Breakfast Club of Canada is willing to build on its current collaboration with the MCCSS Child Well-being branch to support culturally appropriate First Nations school food programming.

BCC draws on more than 20 years of experience building proactive, adaptive, and trust-based relationships with First Nations communities. Through close collaboration with key Indigenous partners, we will continue to act as an ally to communities and facilitate important discussions around self-determined programming.



Capital Fund for Equipment:

A pooled fund to help schools purchase essential kitchen equipment, such as commercial fridges, commercial toasters, and warmers. As one of the 10 School Food Infrastructure Fund recipients, BCC has recently witnessed the direct impact of infrastructure investments that enable effective delivery of school food programs, with outcomes including improved nutritional quality, procurement capacity, and student access. A permanent provincial capital fund for equipment and essential infrastructure would strengthen the capacity to meet rising demand, adapt to evolving challenges, and ensure children receive fresh, nutritious, Ontario-made foods.

Fresh Local Food Transition Fund:

To advance Ontario's Buy Ontario priorities, clearer guidance is necessary for school nutrition programs to incorporate more Ontario-grown food and leverage local procurement within existing models. Through its dedicated nutrition, food procurement, supply and logistics teams, Breakfast Club of Canada is ready to collaborate with the Government of Ontario on such a strategy. With over 30 years of expertise and a strong track record of innovation and cross-sector collaboration, BCC negotiates directly with agri-food partners to improve nutritional quality and sourcing; strengthens over 40 community food hubs and supply chains across the country; and operates a provincial group purchasing model offering approximately 70% locally sourced products in over 600 Quebec schools.

Building on this expertise, in 2025 BCC launched Better Nutrition for Children at School, a structured initiative aimed at revising its food offerings by fall 2026. Delivered in collaboration with Institute of Nutrition and Functional Food (INAF) and Équiterre (Farm to Cafeteria Canada in Quebec), and supported by the Ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation (MAPAQ), this initiative spans multiple phases—from nutritional assessment and menu improvement to co-creation with food industry partners—reflecting a mature, evidence-based approach ready to be adapted and scaled nationally, including in Ontario.

Student, Volunteer and Staff Engagement Fund:

Simple, flexible grants and engagement tools, provided to schools through regional lead agencies and community partners. These would help school staff recruit, recognize, and retain volunteers such as students, parents, and community members, helping programs run more effectively. With decades of experience in student and community engagement, Breakfast Club of Canada would be pleased to support the Ministry of Education and MCCSS in jointly launching a province-wide student recognition program that includes recognized volunteer hours in the elementary grades.

Conclusion



Growing economic pressures on families, compounded by international trade tensions and the vulnerability of food supply chains during periods of commercial uncertainty, have reinforced the importance of investing in school food programs. These programs not only support children's health, learning and development, but also strengthen local agriculture, promote Ontario-made food, enhance school food system resilience, and advance social equity.

With these recommendations, the government has a unique opportunity to strengthen Ontario's foundation by ensuring every child and youth, especially the most vulnerable, has access to the nutritious food they need to thrive. By building on this foundation collectively and over the long term, Ontario can unlock the program's vast, multidimensional potential—supporting families today while shaping a more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable food system for generations to come.

As an Imagine Canada-accredited partner to Ontario Lead Agencies, Indigenous communities and the Ontario School Food Visioning participants, Breakfast Club of Canada stands ready to help the Government of Ontario deliver quickly and efficiently, with implementation and value for money. Sustained public funding can protect the community delivery network, reduce pressure on families and ensure that federal dollars leave Ontario with stronger long-term capacity.

We thank the Government of Ontario for its consideration and welcome the opportunity to discuss our submission further.

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