

December 1, 2020

MPP Daryl Kramp,  
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**Re: Comments on Bill 216 - Food Literacy for Students Act, 2020**

Dear MPP Kramp,

The Middlesex-London Health Unit (MLHU), supports Bill 216 – *Food Literacy for Students Act, 2020*.

Food literacy is an important life skill encompassing much more than food and cooking skills<sup>1</sup> and is essential for a solid foundation of healthy eating behaviours. We are pleased that Bill 216 would require school boards to offer experiential food literacy education to all Ontario students in grades 1 through 12. This addition to the Ontario curriculum will help to ensure that all children and youth develop vital skills to inform food choices throughout their lives. Evidence demonstrates that hands-on, experiential learning about food contributes significantly to increasing vegetable and fruit consumption for students aged 4-18 years<sup>2</sup>. As well, youth (18-23 years) who have self-perceived cooking skills are more likely to have positive nutrition-related outcomes 10 years later (i.e., more frequent preparation of meals including vegetables, and less frequent consumption of fast food)<sup>3</sup>.

The benefits of food literacy and cooking programs extend beyond healthy eating behaviours. Research indicates these programs also improve psychosocial outcomes such as resilience, socialization, self-esteem, and quality of life<sup>4</sup> which aligns with the Ministry of Education's focus on Mental Health and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Skills<sup>5</sup>. We live in the most complex food environment in human history<sup>6</sup>. Evidence-based food literacy education relevant to today's food environment is necessary to improve the health of current and future generations<sup>7</sup>. Including food literacy in curricular expectations will help prepare Ontario students for academic and personal success while teaching important life skills and play an important role in addressing society's burden of chronic disease.

Nutrition and food literacy are key factors that contribute to both physical and mental well-being while also reducing the risk of certain chronic diseases. MLHU Registered Dietitians, with expertise in food literacy and curriculum development, are well positioned to support schools in implementation of an enhanced food literacy curriculum.

Sincerely,



Christopher Mackie, MD, MHSc, CCFP, FRCPC  
Medical Officer of Health and CEO  
Middlesex-London Health Unit

CC: Honorable Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario  
Honorable Christine Elliott, Minister of Health and Deputy Premier of Ontario  
Honorable Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education  
Honorable Ernie Hardeman, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs  
Honorable Lisa Thompson, Minister of Government and Consumer Services  
Members of the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly  
Teresa Armstrong, MPP London—Fanshawe  
Terence Kernaghan MPP London North Centre  
Hon. Monte McNaughton, Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development and  
MPP Lambton—Kent—Middlesex  
Peggy Sattler, MPP London West  
Honorable Jeff Yurek, Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks and MPP  
Elgin-Middlesex-London  
Loretta Ryan, Executive Director, Association of Local Public Health Agencies

#### References

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- 2) Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario), Mensah G. (2016). Evidence Brief: Impact of food skills programs on fruit and vegetable consumption among children and youth. Toronto: Queen’s Printer for Ontario.
- 3) Utter, J., Larson, N., Laska, M., Winkler, M., & Neumark-Sztainer, D. (2018). Self-Perceived Cooking Skills in Emerging Adulthood Predict Better Dietary Behaviors and Intake 10 Years Later: A Longitudinal Study. *Journal of Nutrition Education Behaviour*, 494-500.
- 4) Farmer, N., Touchton-Leonard, K., & Ross, A. (2017). Psychosocial Benefits of Cooking Interventions: A Systematic Review. *Health Education & Behaviour*, 167-180.
- 5) Ontario Ministry of Education. (2019). Mental Health and Social Emotional Learning in Ontario Schools. <https://www.ontario.ca/document/health-andphysical-education-grades-1-8/social-emotional-learning-sel-skills> (accessed Nov 18 2020)
- 6) Slater, J (2017). Food literacy: A critical tool in a complex foodscape. *Journal of Family Consumer Sciences*, 109(2). 7) Slater, J. (2013). Is cooking dead? The state of Home Economics Food and Nutrition education in a Canadian province. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 37: 617–624
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