

DATE: April 28, 2020

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Darrel Robertson, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Edmonton Public Schools' Nutrition Response to COVID-19
(Response to Request for Information #69)

ORIGINATOR: Nancy Petersen, Managing Director

**RESOURCE
STAFF:** Karen Linden, Nancy Petersen

REFERENCE: April 14, 2020, Board meeting

ISSUE

At the April 14, 2020, Board meeting the following information was requested by Trustee Draper:
That the Administration provide what supports are in place to help the Division's most vulnerable families address food security issues and how these supports are being communicated.

BACKGROUND

As part of Alberta's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Alberta's Chief Medical Examiner closed Alberta's classroom for traditional learning. Effective March 16, 2020, instruction for K-12 education transitioned to an online or distance learning model.

During regular operations, many schools provide students and families with access to a range of school-based wrap-around supports or services, one of which may be a school nutrition program. School nutrition programming is most typically provided as a response to high social vulnerability.

Since March 16, administration has been working with various school nutrition funders and service providers to put a plan in place to ensure 2019-2020 funding designated to support school nutrition can still support food security for Division students during this time. The Division has worked individually with each funder to develop a strategy that works best for their organization.

CURRENT SITUATION

The role that schools play relevant to nutrition and food security looks quite different during COVID-19 compared to traditional school nutrition programming; key points to note about school nutrition support during COVID-19 are:

- The Division's plan adheres to appropriate COVID-19 social distancing and food handling protocols.
- The intention of this support is to supplement other key sources of food security, not to be the main source of food security for a family.
- School-based nutrition support is typically universally available to all students; this new model is far more targeted to the families most in need. Principals or school staff play a key role in identifying their most vulnerable families and connecting them with these resources.

- The strategy has two main approaches, a food hamper program and a grocery store gift card program; each funder developed a strategy to support COVID-19 food security based on their capacity and the nature of how their funding is typically provided to Division schools.
- The 2019-2020 resources originally targeted to school nutrition programming remain directed to the schools receiving this support prior to COVID-19; these are primarily schools on the Division's High Social Vulnerability List.

As a response to COVID-19 and the concern for an increase in the number of families struggling with food security, there have been significant additional resources directed towards food security. These resources have come forward in multiple ways, including but not limited to:

- Additional funds being provided by existing school nutrition service providers.
- Provincial and federal COVID-19 funding aid to address food security.
- Local businesses, community groups and private citizens donating funds to help schools support families.
- Repurposing of other grants or donations towards food security.

There are two primary ways in which the Division is managing school-focused COVID-19 food security support: centrally through Strategic District Supports and at the individual school level where principals are leveraging support through their social capital and existing relationships.

The centrally coordinated efforts are focused around engaging with our current nutrition community partners, leveraging larger donations and the repurposing of previous funding. This work has included collaborating with e4c around shifting the School Nutrition Program to a family hamper program, securing additional funding from COVID-19 food security relief aid, working with Breakfast Club of Canada to repurpose their funding to a grocery gift card program, onboarding Hope Mission's family hamper program and connecting community donations to schools most in need. This work has focused to date primarily around the 60 schools on the Division's High Social Vulnerability List.

Individual schools are also working locally at the community level to leverage their current network of supports and relationships. Some schools have funding unique to their school in support of school nutrition; principals have worked to repurpose how these funds can continue to support families during COVID-19. Other schools have a key partner that is helping to ensure students and families have access to food. There are also examples where the community has rallied to raise funds to support food security for the students and families of a specific school.

In terms of how principals have been engaged regarding school-based food security during COVID-19, an initial message was sent to all school leaders from Assistant Superintendents on March 20, 2020, communicating the transition to a COVID-19 food security approach and providing a Division key contact for schools to reach out to if they were concerned about the food security of families in their school community. To further support this transition and an equitable allocation of resources, staff from Strategic District Supports mapped out all sources of centrally managed COVID-19 food security available to Division schools. From there, work was done directly with each school leader around what supports were available for their school community and the identification of those families most in need of support. Through this process, funds were moved from schools not requiring as much support to schools with more families in critical need of support. By working with each of the schools,

administration was also able to strategically allocate new funding or donations to where the need was greatest. During this work there also were some principals who indicated that at this time their school community was not in need of food security support; should this change in the coming weeks administration will work with these schools to put some supports in place.

To date, this work has focused primarily on schools with existing school nutrition programming and the remaining schools that make up the top 60 of the Division's High Social Vulnerability List. Administration anticipates that the number of families facing food security challenges will continue to increase over the coming weeks. The work being done centrally around COVID-19 food security is being planned out with key partners to allow for the ongoing expansion of support. The following is a summary of Division COVID-19 nutrition supports, as of Friday, April 17, 2020:

- Breakfast Clubs of Canada (BCC): 115 families across 16 schools have received a \$100 grocery store gift card through the influx of new funding; additionally, BCC repurposed funding across their 13 previously funded schools to support \$28,000 in grocery gift cards for families.
- e4c Family Hamper Program: 1,004 families across 32 schools will receive a monthly food hamper for the months of April, May and June
- Hope Mission Family Hamper Program: 103 families across seven schools will receive a monthly food hamper for the months of April, May and June; this hamper program will carry over into July and August should the COVID-19 situation remain similar to current conditions
- Heroes for Hunger: Jerry MacLachlan of Belmont Sobeys teamed up with Trustee Draper and Jenna Swankhuizen of the Walker Sobeys for Heroes for Hunger. Jerry and Jenna each contributed \$1000 and Jerry reached out across community for matched donations. To date more than \$15,000 has been raised and 100 families across 10 Division schools received a \$100 Sobeys gift card; this community driven initiative also supported 50 families in Edmonton Catholic Schools with \$100 Sobeys gift cards
- President's Choice Children's Charity School Nutrition Funding: Schools supported through this grant program have been given permission from the funder to repurpose the remains of this year's funding towards grocery store gift cards for families
- ECECAF Full Day Kindergarten grant: The Foundation worked with the funder to redirect the remaining \$16,604 of this year's grant (intended to support field trips) towards a COVID-19 grocery gift card program at five of the full-day Kindergarten schools

This summary does not include initiatives at individual Division schools. As indicated, many schools are working with members of their community to support food security for their families during this time. This generosity and caring is happening across our Division. These efforts are not coordinated or reported centrally, but the following are three examples of what this support looks like:

- Terra Centre is a critical partner to Braemar School and, during COVID-19, Terra has provided food security support for the schools' students.
- The Carrot Cafe raised money for grocery store gift cards for families of Spruce Avenue School; the Bank of Montreal agreed to match donations by another 50 per cent. Spruce Avenue School extended this support to Delton and John A. McDougall schools.
- Multiple partners support school nutrition at Sherwood School throughout the regular school year, including Food For Thought and Division Union Locals. When classes were cancelled, school staff leveraged all these supports to develop their own hamper program.

KEY POINTS

- COVID-19 required a significant shift in the delivery of school nutrition support.
- The Division worked with funders and service providers, as well as school principals to implement this shift in a timely and responsive manner.
- The Division's response efforts to food security reflect both centrally coordinated initiatives and individual school level responses.
- The intention of school-based food security during COVID-19 is to supplement other key sources of food security available in the community, not to be the main source of food security for a family.
- All Division food security efforts adhere to the safety protocols of both food handling and COVID-19.

NP:np