



## ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Report Date: September 7, 2016  
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Meeting Date: September 21, 2016

TO: Standing Committee on City Finance and Services

FROM: General Manager, Community Services

SUBJECT: Moving Towards a Healthy City for All - An update on enhancing access to food in schools

### **RECOMMENDATION**

THAT City Council grant \$80,000 to Strathcona Community Centre Association's community breakfast program for one (1) year from December 2016 to November 2017. Source of funding is the 2016 Community Services Grants Budget.

The above Recommendation authorizes a grant and requires eight affirmative votes for approval.

### **REPORT SUMMARY**

This report provides an update on a priority action of the four-year Healthy City Action Plan (2015-18) to provide school meals and food skills development in order to give children a good start in life and recommends a grant to continue support to Strathcona Community Centre's breakfast program.

The City currently supports food programs providing meals to 258 Vancouver Board of Education students and approximately 120 children and their families in Strathcona neighbourhood through \$400,000 annually. In 2015-16, approximately 1,600 of the 29,000 Vancouver Board of Education (VBE) elementary students were considered 'vulnerable' according to Social Services Index data. Approximately 1,150 of these students received meals through provincial, City, and other donor funding. Access to food is not necessarily the key area of concern for these students, and consequently VBE estimates the additional number of students needing school meals is closer to 250 than 450. These students attend an additional 52 schools. VBE is unable to expand the program to these students due to space, labour, and distribution constraints.

Given the context of stagnated income assistance rates, high rates of working poor (10%), high childhood poverty levels (22% city-wide), variable city-wide food supports for families, as well as existing VBE constraints in expanding meal services, VBE and City staff will explore a longer term approach to feeding students and funding meals. In the interim, based on positive program evaluation findings, City staff recommend continuing financial support to VBE's and Strathcona

Community Centre programs. There is already a funding agreement in place with VBE until June 2018, while Strathcona CCA's breakfast program requires a grant renewal for 2017.

### ***COUNCIL AUTHORITY/PREVIOUS DECISIONS***

**Vancouver Food Strategy** - In January 2013, Council adopted the Vancouver Food Strategy with goals to: Improve access to healthy, affordable, and culturally diverse food for all residents; Advocate for a just and sustainable food system with partners and at all levels of government; Support food-friendly neighbourhoods.

**Expanding access to healthy foods for school-aged children** - In December 2014, City Council adopted a motion to identify \$400,000 to expand access to healthy food for school-aged children. In December 2015, City Council designated \$50,000 towards a school meal program evaluation and \$75,000 towards the initiation of an alternate meal model. Council also asked staff to report back on the number of students needing meals who do not receive them.

**Healthy City Strategy** - In July 2014 Council adopted the Healthy City Strategy. In May 2015, the first four year action plan was adopted including an action to facilitate 1300 school breakfasts and food literacy development.

**Financial support to Strathcona Community Centre Association** - In 2014 and 2015, City Council approved social grants to Strathcona Community Centre Association (CCA) for food programming, and in 2016 for Strathcona CCA's community breakfast program.

### ***CITY MANAGER'S/GENERAL MANAGER'S COMMENTS***

The Healthy City Strategy provides an important framework and guide towards equity and social inclusion. Support for food programs for children at risk of hunger provides an opportunity to improve the lives of low income families. We look forward to furthering these efforts with the Vancouver Board of Education, Strathcona Community Centre and other partners. However, 22% of Vancouver's children come from low income families and addressing the root causes of poverty requires additional and coordinated policy responses from all orders of government, such as higher social assistance rates, living wage jobs, affordable housing, and accessible child care for all families who need it.

The General Manager of Community Services RECOMMENDS approval of the foregoing.

### ***REPORT***

#### ***Background/Context***

In December 2014, Council designated \$400,000 for enhancing student access to healthy food. Since December 2015, this annual funding has been divided between the Vancouver Board of Education (VBE)'s Food4Schools bagged lunch program (\$320,000) and Strathcona Community Centre Association's community breakfast program (\$80,000).

Social Planning and Research Council (SPARC) BC conducted an evaluation of the VBE and Strathcona programs between April and July 2016. The evaluation of the programs focused on acceptance and satisfaction of the meals from student and staff perspectives, as well as operations and impact. As part of the financial and grant agreements with the City, the VBE

and Strathcona CCA have also reported on their meal costing, green practices, and compliance with provincial healthy eating guidelines.

The evaluation of VBE's Food4Schools program showed that the program is meeting its short and medium-term outcomes of supporting student readiness to learn, as evidenced by participant surveys indicating 'some' or 'considerable' impact on the symptoms of hunger among elementary student participants, as well as improvement in their classroom behaviours, school attendance, and academic performance.

The evaluation of Strathcona probed for a wider set of measures, as the program aims not only to address hunger, but also to build food skills and engage the wider community. The evaluation showed that the program is meeting its four short term outcomes of ensuring access to healthy food; enhancing children's food/nutrition knowledge; facilitating children's positive engagement in the community; and ensuring access to healthy food in a manner that is inclusive to all.

For other evaluation findings and program information, see Appendix A.

### ***Strategic Analysis***

Between 2000-2013 (last data available), BC consistently had the highest childhood poverty rates in Canada (Canada 19%; BC 20.4%). Vancouver's childhood poverty levels are even higher than BC's (22% city-wide). Children are living in poverty in every census tract in the city. These statistics are aggravated by stagnated income assistance rates and high rates of working poor (10%). This context has led to city-wide student need for school food supports. There are many initiatives that aim to provide food for those who need it (see Appendix B), however, the reach is inconsistent within and between schools and neighbourhoods and there remain many gaps.

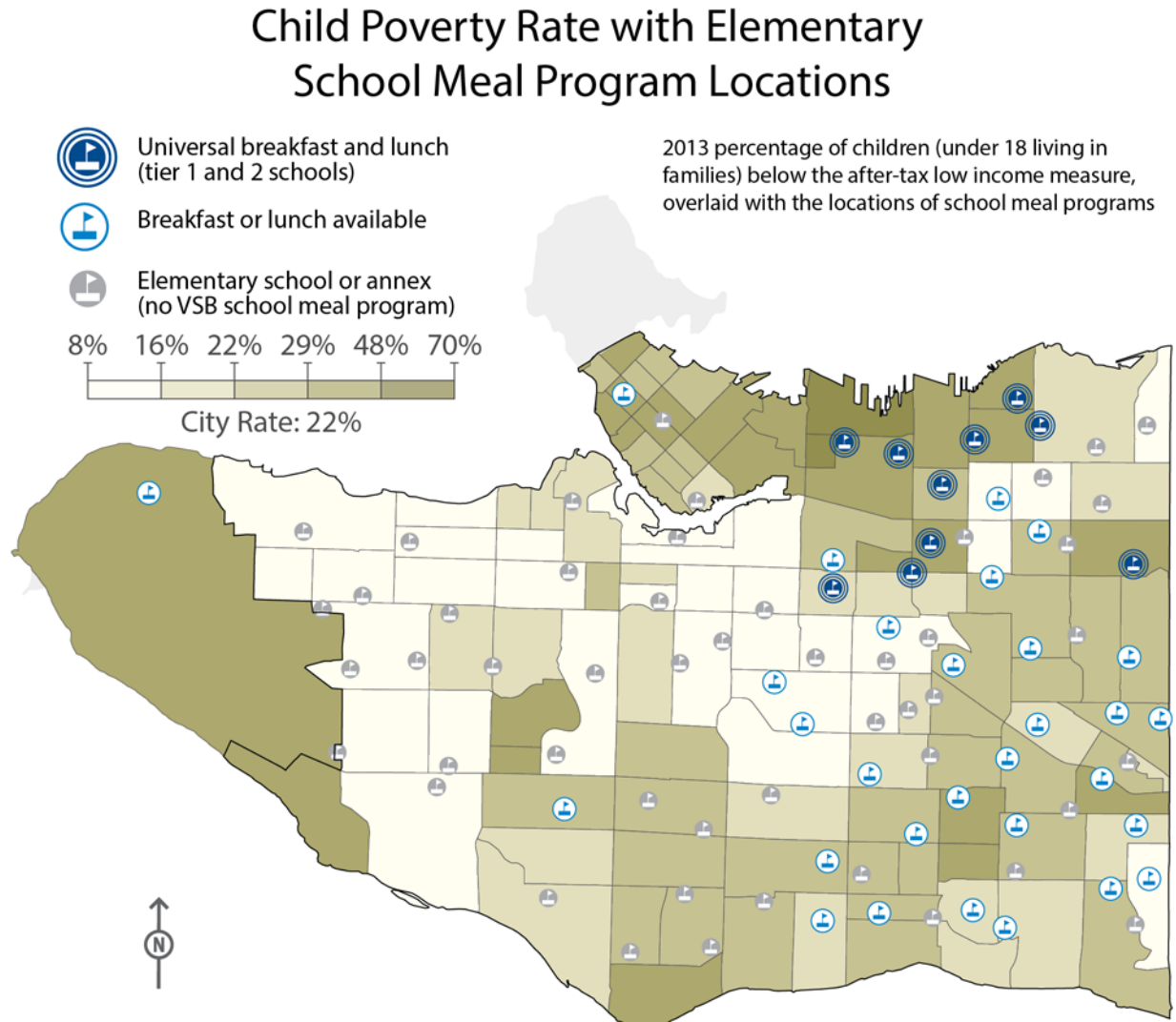
In 2015-16, approximately 1,600 of the 29,000 Vancouver Board of Education (VBE) elementary students were considered 'vulnerable' according to Social Services Index (SSI) data. VBE uses the Ministry of Education's SSI to identify the number of vulnerable students in each school based on the number of families who live on income assistance and the number of children who are in care. Approximately 1,150 of these 1,600 students received VBE meals through provincial, City, and other donor funding. Access to food is not necessarily the key area of concern for these students, and consequently VBE estimates the additional number of students needing school meals is closer to 250 than 450.

Table 1 outlines the number of VBE students and schools who received meals in 2015-16, as well as approximate numbers of students who may benefit from meals. Map 1 outlines the meal program geographic distribution by neighbourhood poverty rate.

Table 1 School based meal services for VBE elementary students 2015 - 2016

Funding source	Number of elementary students and schools	Total Funding	Costs per meal
City of Vancouver funded school meals	258 students across 17 VBE schools received daily lunch	\$320,000	\$7.09 / VBE delivered lunch
	Approximately 120 students and family members in the Strathcona neighbourhood received daily breakfast	\$80,000	\$2.82 / Strathcona CCA breakfast
CommunityLINK (BC) funded school meals	Approximately 900 elementary students in 19 schools received lunch and almost 600 received breakfast. VBE serves an additional 2000 meals to elementary students daily, which includes some that parents have paid or partially paid for. *Funding also supports meals for secondary students	\$2.4 million	\$7.09 / delivered lunch \$4.75 / onsite lunch \$4.54 / delivered breakfast \$1.80 / onsite breakfast
None	Approximately 250 students located in an additional 52 schools have been identified as vulnerable through the SSI data		N/A

Map 1 School meal programs (2015-16) by census tract childhood poverty rate



Data Sources: Vancouver School Board, January 2016, for school locations and types;  
 Statistics Canada, 2013 T1 Family File (Income Tax Returns) Census Tract Data, accessed through  
 Community Data Program, Canadian Council on Social Development.

Most schools have a small number of students (between one and 30 students) who may require food supports. For that reason, at all but the ten highest needs schools, VBE is using a model where they deliver meals. The off-site preparation and delivery increases the costs from \$4.75 to ~\$7.09 for lunch and from \$1.80 to \$4.54 for breakfast. While more costly than other meal programs, the delivered meal model reflects the realities of the distribution of need and compliance with labour agreements.

VBE reports that an estimated 250 additional students across 52 additional schools (average of five students per school) may benefit from meals to address hunger during the school day. However, expanding the meal program to meet the needs of the remaining students is not possible because of space constraints, labour agreements, and distribution logistics. For that reason, costing of an expansion of meal service cannot be provided. Catering of meals from off-site has not been proposed.

Given existing constraints in expanding meal services, VBE and City staff will meet to discuss a longer term approach to feeding students and funding meals. School meals represent a new area of collaboration for VBE and the City. It is important to establish a shared longer-term vision to help determine the role(s) that the City and funders can play and how to build on VBE's and other stakeholders' work.

In December 2015, City Council allocated \$75,000 towards an innovative meal model that had the added intention of meeting the City's other goals including food literacy, zero waste, and local food sourcing. Staff plan to carry forward the one-time \$75,000 allocation pending further conversations and identification of priorities. The hope is that with the development of stronger partnerships with VBE, funders, and other stakeholders, the funds may be leveraged and applied strategically to meet the needs of students in the long-term.

In the interim, City staff recommend continuing financial support to VBE's and Strathcona's respective programs. There is already an agreement in place with VBE until June 2018, and Strathcona CCA's program requires a grant renewal for 2017.

### *Financial*

The \$80,000 for Strathcona CCA Meal Program is already included in Community Services' Operating Budget, following Council motion to Expand Access to Healthy Food in Vancouver Schools in December 2014.

The \$75,000 designated in the CS Operating Budget for a school meal model will be carried forward.

### *CONCLUSION*

The investment that the City has made in feeding Vancouver's students has increased the number of students receiving healthy meals. Addressing the remaining need for food supports is not easily or quickly done given existing labour, space, and distribution constraints. The Vancouver Board of Education and City staff intend to work together to explore long-term strategies. The grant to Strathcona CCA will help meet goals of improved food access and increased food literacy for students and their families.

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## **School Meal Program Evaluation Results**

SPARC BC conducted the Vancouver Board of Education (VBE) and Strathcona Community Centre Association meal program evaluation between April and July 2016. The evaluation included on-site visits, surveys, focus groups, and conversations with students, school staff, as well as interviews with other food service specialists. The evaluation of the programs focused on acceptance and satisfaction of the meals from student and staff perspectives, as well as operations and impact.

The meal program evaluations show that both programs are very well received by staff and students alike with positive feedback in regards to a range of outcomes including behavioural improvements and attendance. All meals served are in compliance with provincial healthy eating guidelines.

### **Evaluation Results for the VBE Food4School Bagged Lunch Program**

Food4School serves 258 students across 17 elementary schools. The evaluation showed that social stigma did not appear to be a concern identified by student participants or staff. The majority of staff reported that there were processes in place to identify students requiring a meal and for ensuring that students and families receiving food supports are not unnecessarily identified.

Students were generally satisfied with the foods served. As would be anticipated, students expressed food likes/dislikes, but none were consistent to indicate needed menu changes. The meal size was considered to be too small by the majority of grade 4-7 students. Larger amounts of protein servings as well as fruits and vegetables were suggested by staff and students alike. VBE Food Services offers schools the ability to order a basket of meal additions to supplement the lunches and will ensure school staff are aware of the process for ordering it.

As for alignment with the City's green strategies, VBE has 100% waste separation at all sites. Food scraps and compostables are diverted. Foods are served in one-time use packaging, 72% of which are recyclable. VBE has been investigating changes that would increase the amount of recyclable materials used. Thirty-eight percent of the foods for the lunch program are produced or packaged in BC.

The VBE Food4School bagged lunch which the City funds costs \$7.09 per meal. The cost is higher than VBE's onsite lunch costs of \$4.75 per lunch or \$1.82 per breakfast, reflecting transportation costs from their secondary school site production kitchens. Costs between VBE and Strathcona's programs are not directly comparable as VBE's program requires delivery across 17 different schools. Additionally, VBE has constraints including an inability to accept food donations or allow volunteer labour for food preparation, service, or delivery.

### **Evaluation Results for Strathcona CCA Breakfast Program**

The Strathcona CCA breakfast program serves approximately 120 children and their family members each school day during the school year and on day camp days during the summer.

The Strathcona program targets a broad set of outcomes and thus the evaluation aimed to assess success at reaching these outcomes. Results showed positive reports of social connectedness between children, families and breakfast program staff and volunteers. Staff and caregivers reported that students ate more fruits and vegetables and had more positive attitudes towards eating breakfast as a result of the program. Staff also reported that the student volunteers increased their skills and confidence to prepare nutritious food for themselves, and that they had built self-confidence, social skills and / or leadership skills.

As for alignment with the City's green strategies, food scraps and compostables are diverted. The breakfast program uses reusable dishware, other than a small number of paper cups that are used when hot drinks are taken off-site.

The cost per breakfast is \$2.82 which includes all supply, equipment and staff costs, including staff time spent on the Breakfast Buddies initiative and the Gr. 6/7 food safe and nutrition workshops.

Caregivers suggested more variety in foods served, and staff plan to build on their one week menu rotation. Space limitations and overcrowding were commonly mentioned by caregivers and staff. Staff felt unable to promote the program more widely or encourage other families to attend given their limited space for seating and for dry food storage. In 2017, the Strathcona CCA will lead a functional programming study, in consultation with the City and VBE. The study will identify programming and space needs, and food programming will be included in that assessment. As a shorter term solution, food program staff will be speaking with school personnel at the beginning of the school year to let them know how their students can obtain breakfast despite space constraints. The evaluation also proposed staff training and support for working with families.



A Snapshot of Vancouver Food Programs serving Children and their Families

	Supports/ program	Provided by	Reach / Gap
In School	<p>Meal Programs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hot lunches</li> <li>- Bagged lunches</li> <li>- On-site breakfast programs</li> <li>- Bagged breakfast</li> </ul>	<p>Most programs are managed by VBE Food Services</p> <p>Programs are funded through BC Community LINK, City of Vancouver, and other donors including Breakfast Clubs of Canada, local banks, etc.</p>	<p>VBE serves approximately 3500 meals daily to elementary students, including full subsidies to 1,150 students across 40 schools.</p> <p>Approximately 250 additional elementary students are identified by the SSI (Social Services Index) as potentially being in need of food supports, but are not receiving any. They attend an additional 52 different schools.</p>
	<p>Donated food for food literacy / food skills teaching</p> <p>Food pantries or food on hand in schools or classrooms</p> <p>Grocery store vouchers for families</p> <p>Food hampers for families</p>	<p>Teachers / school staff</p> <p>PACs</p> <p>Greater Vancouver Food Bank</p> <p>Other outside groups (e.g. churches, firefighters, local businesses)</p>	<p>The reach of these initiatives varies by school and neighbourhood.</p>
Out of school	<p><u>Student oriented</u></p> <p>Breakfast Programs</p> <p>After school programs that include snacks</p> <p>Cooking clubs and</p>	<p>Neighbourhood houses; Community School Teams, Community Centres; Neighbourhood Food Networks; Greater Vancouver Food Bank; and many other agencies</p>	<p>The reach of these initiatives varies by school and neighbourhood.</p>

	Supports/ program	Provided by	Reach / Gap
	<p>programs</p> <p>Kidsafe (<i>Out of school care with meals and snacks</i>)</p>		
	<p><u>Family oriented</u></p> <p>Community kitchens</p> <p>Community Food Markets (<i>low cost pop-up food markets in targeted neighbourhoods</i>)</p> <p>Bulk Buying clubs</p> <p>Food Skills for Families Programs</p> <p>BC Farmers market nutrition coupon program</p> <p>Family dinners</p> <p>Food banks</p> <p>Backpack programs (<i>weekend food</i>)</p>	<p>Greater Vancouver Food Bank; Food Bank for Families</p> <p>Neighbourhood houses; Community Centres; Neighbourhood food networks and many other agencies</p> <p>For mapping of other free- or low-cost meals or groceries in the city, as well as other food assets visit Vancouver Coastal Health's recently developed map: <a href="https://goo.gl/3P9eoS">https://goo.gl/3P9eoS</a></p>	<p>The reach of these initiatives varies by school and neighbourhood.</p>