



Milestone Demonstrates School's Strong Commitment to Keeping Students Happy and Healthy As Pandemic Hits Year Mark

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East St. Louis, Illinois – March 22, 2021 – The past 12 months have arguably been some of the most tumultuous for students and their families, but the one thing they haven’t had to worry about as their lives turned upside down is where their next meal would come from. The dedicated school lunch heroes at East St. Louis School District 189 have worked tirelessly to safely prep, cook, pack, and distribute meals to those students who need it. There is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to keeping kids healthy and fed this year, and school districts across the country quickly adopted new strategies and service models, from delivering scratch-made meals by bus to transforming classrooms into cafeterias.

When schools shut down last March, East St. Louis School District and foodservice partner Chartwells K12 went above and beyond to feed students and families. Efforts included:

- **COMPREHENSIVE MEALS:** Chartwells K12 traditionally provides students with breakfast and lunch meals and quickly ramped up this service in the Grab and Go format. Over time, they added snacks and supper as part of the daily distribution to comprehensively serve students.
- **ACCESSIBILITY:** Through coordinated efforts, daily meals were transported into the community for distribution. Not all students live close to a school campus, so efforts expanded to deliver meals to 26 neighborhood sites across the community, including at public housing complexes and community centers. Additional partners, Illinois Central Bus and Touchette Regional Hospital, supported meal distribution by providing staff and fleets to deliver Grab and Go meals.
- **WEEKEND AND HOLIDAY DISTRIBUTIONS:** Students received a large Grab and Go box that provided meals through weekends and even longer school breaks. Regardless if it was a three-day holiday weekend or a two-week winter break, Chartwells K12 ensured students had meals to carry them through to the next service date.
- **PARTNER SITES:** During school closure and remote learning, a number of churches and non-profit organizations opened their doors to provide students a safe and supportive learning environment during the day. Chartwells K12 delivered hot breakfasts and lunches to these locations so students could continue to focus on remote learning without worrying about hunger.

“Our students rely on their schools for more than just education. A school provides stability in many aspects - particularly breakfast and lunch,” said Arthur R. Culver, Superintendent of East St. Louis School District 189. “When the COVID-19 pandemic forced us to close schools last March, we knew it was critical to continue providing our students with meals.”

He continued, “While it’s been difficult, the silver lining of this pandemic is that it showed us what an incredible community we have in East St. Louis. Our teachers, staff, parents, volunteers, and food service team came together and focused on feeding kids and supporting our community, and for that, we are deeply grateful.”

Since the onset of the pandemic, Chartwells K12 has worked with East St. Louis and thousands of other schools to ensure students across the country do not go hungry. Every day, more than 55 essential food service workers in District 189 have been

dedicated to keeping “lunchtime” a bright spot during an otherwise uncertain time. To date, Chartwells K12 has served more than 275 million meals since the pandemic began across the country.

“Our number one priority is making sure we are feeding kids and keeping them happy and healthy, no matter where they are,” said Carl Nowicki, Senior Director at Chartwells K12. “As more students return to school, we’re prepared to serve them safely and for those who stay home, they can depend on us for their next meal.”

East St. Louis and Chartwells K12 are providing meals for students in school and remote for the remainder of the academic year and into the summer months. This includes:

- **IN-PERSON STUDENTS:** Students attending school in-person receive both breakfast and lunch in the classroom. Additionally, at the end of the school day, these students are provided a snack and supper meal to take home to eat.
- **REMOTE LEARNING STUDENTS:** Students engaged in remote learning are provided access to a Grab and Go meal package each Monday through Friday. Students or their family member can pick up the free Grab and Go Meals, which contain breakfast, lunch, snack and supper in one bag. These meals are available for pickup at multiple locations across the community.
- **WEEKEND AND HOLIDAY DISTRIBUTIONS:** Students continue to receive a large Grab and Go box prior to weekends and school breaks.

For more information and to stay up-to-date on meals, deliveries and more, please visit: www.estl189.com.



About East St. Louis District 189

East St. Louis School District 189 is focused on providing rigorous, high quality education and exceptional educational experiences to the nearly 6,000 students within the community. Our vision is for students to be supported physically, socially, and emotionally in a safe and nurturing environment to achieve academic success that prepares them for college, the workforce, and citizenship in the 21st century. For more information, visit www.estl189.com. Follow more great stories @estl189 on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).