

# More funds needed to chew away at child hunger, public schools say

Edmonton public schools want more money and know-how for school nutrition programs, district leaders said Tuesday.



*JANET FRENCH*

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Published on: November 8, 2017 | Last Updated: November 8, 2017 6:00 AM MST



Students at M.E. LaZerte School line up for breakfast as part of the school's nutrition program. *ED KAISER / POSTMEDIA*

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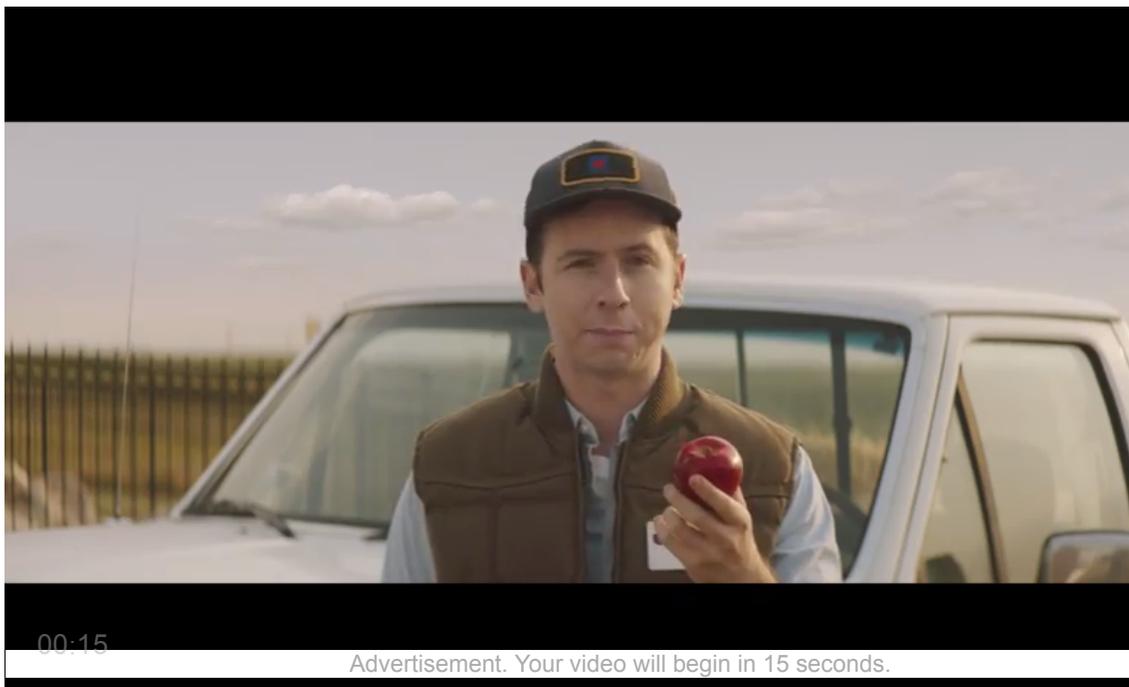
“The need is much greater than what’s currently being provided,” Edmonton Public school district superintendent Darrel Robertson told the school board at a Tuesday meeting.

He wants school districts, government ministries and the university to collaborate to find a more effective way to tackle child hunger in schools.

### A Food Banks Canada hunger count in 2016

([https://www.foodbankscanada.ca/getmedia/6173994f-8a25-40d9-acdf-660a28e40f37/HungerCount\\_2016\\_final\\_singlepage.pdf](https://www.foodbankscanada.ca/getmedia/6173994f-8a25-40d9-acdf-660a28e40f37/HungerCount_2016_final_singlepage.pdf)) found food bank usage jumped 18 per cent last year in Alberta. Of the more than 79,000 people who used an Alberta food bank in a one-month span, nearly 40 per cent were children, the survey found.

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### A provincial school lunch program

(<http://edmontonjournal.com/news/politics/alberta-school-nutrition-pilot-program-expanding>), which was an NDP promise in the 2015 election, started a year ago in 33 schools across Alberta. This spring, it expanded to give all 61 school boards \$141,000 each to run meal programs in select schools.

Edmonton Public Schools runs a breakfast program at Inglewood School and a breakfast and lunch program at Norwood School.

The board hired University of Alberta nutrition researcher Sangita Sharma to evaluate the program at its two sites.

Sharma presented preliminary results of her work to the board Tuesday. Her team helped tweak the offerings to serve foods that packed more of a nutritional punch. Although the programs provided just a fraction of the calories children need in a day, they succeeded in serving food that met some or all of the recommended daily intake of many key nutrients, she said.

Sharma said she would like another \$75,000 to look more in-depth at the implications of the program on students' physical and mental health, attendance, academics and more.

A nutrition program exists in some form in every Edmonton public school, managing director strategic support services Nancy Petersen said in an interview Tuesday. Sometimes, it's an informal routine for a handful of hungry students.

Principals organize the funding and operation of each program, Petersen said. It's a learning curve of finding donors, training staff in proper food handling and organizing equipment. It would save time if there was one place principals could turn to learn how to run a program, she said.

"This doesn't happen on the side of the sink in the staff room," Petersen said.

Board chairwoman Michelle Draper said trustees will discuss whether they should lobby government for money to help evaluate the provincial nutrition program.

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**Doug Burnett** · Edmonton, Alberta

I think it is important for schools unfortunately to pick up the pace and feed these kids whose parents and or guardians failed them.

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**Chris Blair**

Fresh Fruit, a jug of Milk and a box of Cereal, and a toaster with a loaf of Bread beside it. It's called a Continental Breakfast and it's served for next-to-nothing at hotels all over the world. If it's really come down to having to feed people's kids for them, then the above mentioned items cover the vast majority of a person's nutritional requirements for the morning. No reason we need to be hemorrhaging taxpayer dollars on this.

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