



SCHOOL FOOD SHIFT

PROGRESS REPORT ON CREATING
HEALTHIER SCHOOL FOOD ENVIRONMENTS
IN THE CAPITAL REGION 2020



School Food Shift Collaborative

ABOUT THE COLLABORATIVE:

The School Food Shift Collaborative is a group of organizations leading efforts at the community level in partnership with school, health and food production sectors to improve school food environments. This is the second year of the initiative. This report summarizes the development of the Healthy School Food Framework as well as progress over the past year towards collaborative goals. The participating organizations are CRFAIR, Farm to School BC, Island Health, Food Share Network and LifeCycles.

RECOGNITION

This report is embedded within a full range of initiatives across the School Districts powered by and with, many community partners and supporters. This report only covers a small sampling of the work being done in our communities. We thank everyone for their commitment, and hope to increase our efforts together as we move forward. This work would not be possible without funding and support of our partners, this includes: Vancouver Foundation, Victoria Foundation, Farm to School BC, and the Horner Foundation.



The School Food Shift Collaborative promotes healthy and sustainable food systems. This considers our relationships with each other, and the land and waters of this region. We endeavour to honour the land and its treaties by strengthening our relationship and responsibilities to them. We live and work on unceded Coast Salish Territories*, specifically of the Lekwungen (Songhees and Esquimalt Nations) and WSÁNEĆ (Tsartlip/WJOLELP, Tseycum/WSIKEM, Tsawout/SÁUTW, and Pauquachin/BOKECEN Nations) Peoples.

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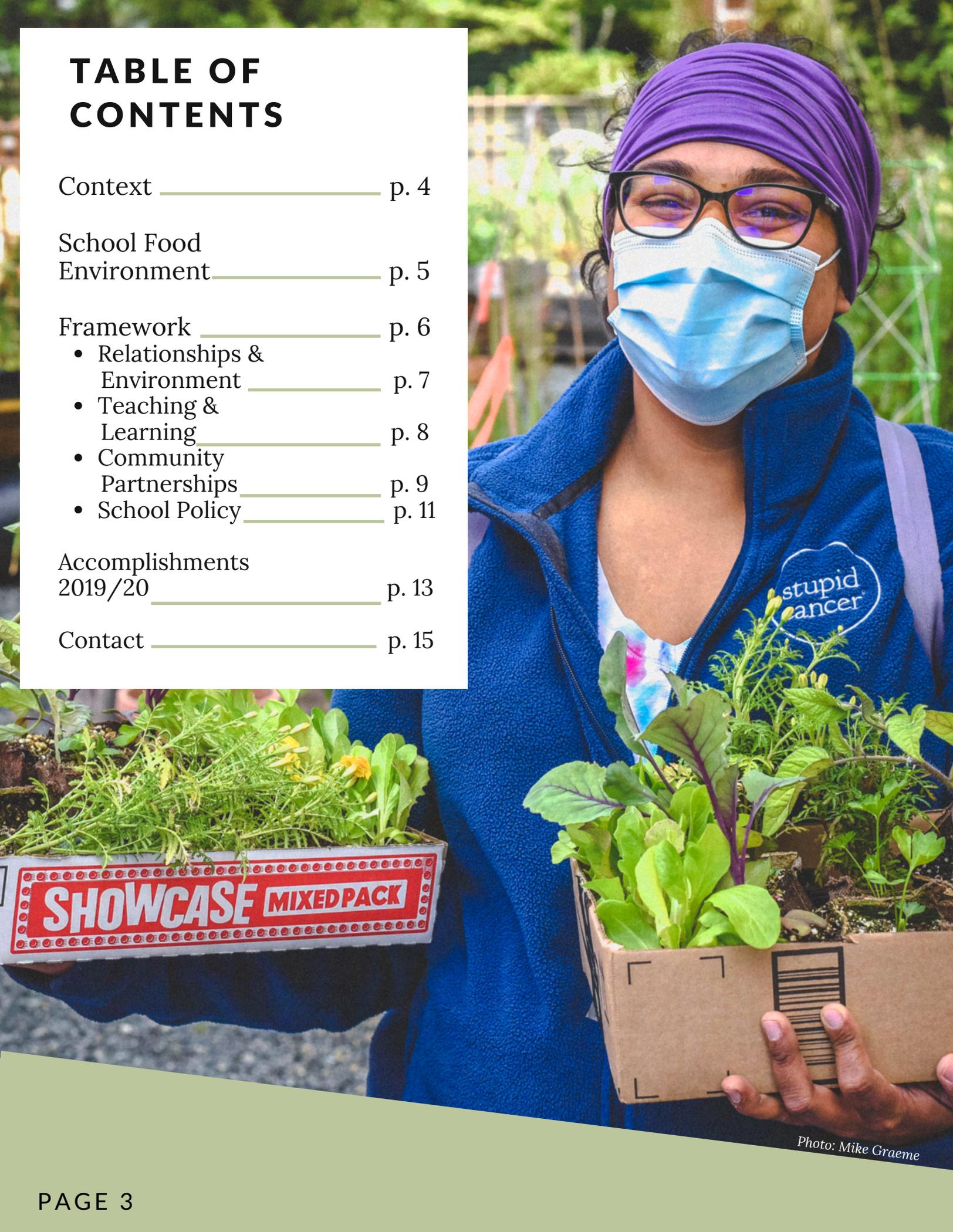


Photo: Mike Graeme

SCHOOL FOOD SHIFT | CONTEXT

The School Food Shift collaborative is one of several key strategies to address the Good Food 2025 Collective impact initiative of the Good Food Network in the Capital Region. School Food Shift collaborators are working to promote healthy food environments in schools. This includes incorporating healthy, sustainable food into schools through policies, programs and built environments. We are seeking to weave food into the fabric of schools to help make students and staff healthier and schools more rooted in community and place. This work is directly linked with that of the broader Farm to School Network.

The past year has seen plenty of change and emerging opportunities to improve school food environments across the Capital Region. COVID 19 brought to light the reality of food insecurity among youth and we saw how much families rely on schools to provide meals and snacks for students.

All across our region school districts, with the support of community organizations and local funders, mobilized to continue providing food for students and families when schools were shut down. Connections to local food and food rescue were also established during this time, with fresh food being distributed alongside frozen meals.

Members of our collaborative have continued to deepen their relationship with regional school districts, who have shown an increased willingness to consider innovation in school food programming, including: food literacy, growing on school grounds, and school meals.

The following report outlines some of what's been accomplished in this past year and highlights some promising practices from our region.

Improving School Food Environments

The School Food Shift collaborative continued to meet and develop a plan to support a renaissance in school food programming and food literacy. This includes incorporating healthy, sustainable food into schools through policies, programs and built environments.

SCHOOL FOOD ENVIRONMENTS

Children and youth need to be healthy in order to be able to learn and grow to their full potential. An important part of staying healthy is eating well. Children and youth consume 1/3 of their daily food at school each day. Canadian research has shown that at school, many children are not eating a healthy balance of foods; specifically they are not getting the vegetables and fruit, whole grains, milk and alternatives that their bodies need to grow and be healthy (Tugault-Lafleur, 2019).

Policies and programs that influence the food environment in schools are recognized by the government as important in influencing the health (and learning) of students, which is why the BC Ministries of Agriculture, Health and Education came together to administer the School Food Environment Survey 2020.

The purpose of this survey was to “Gain a better understanding of the food environments and local food procurement in BC public schools.” This survey explored areas such as infrastructure, policies, use of guidelines, procurement, meal and snack programs and funding. The findings from the survey will be used to inform policies, programs and guidelines for schools.

Healthy eating according to Canada’s Food Guide is not just about what foods are consumed but also about the how and where they are eaten. The physical and social environment can be important enablers in supporting (or discouraging) healthy food choices and habits. Schools are a place for students to be learning how to stay healthy and food literacy is a key component in that learning. How students eat at school is an important moment of learning; a moment that is governed both by what is included and by what is excluded.



SCHOOL FOOD SHIFT FRAMEWORK

This framework for change is based on the Comprehensive School Health Framework and can be used to promote and assess Healthy Food Environments in Schools. It is important to understand each area and how it connects to your school approach.

Actions for each framework area vary. This report provides an overview of the principles alongside a description of some promising local practices, with the hope that it can inspire and support school communities to take action.

1

RELATIONSHIP & ENVIRONMENT

How do we build healthy school food environments that mesh with local food systems?

2

TEACHING & LEARNING

Food Literacy helps us to understand our food systems as well as have the skills and knowledge for healthy diets. How can schools lead in supporting food literacy through their programs and practices?

3

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Healthy school food environments can be developed and amplified by working with ready and supportive community partners.

4

SCHOOL POLICY

Until now, many school food initiatives have been single projects led by school champions. Having clear and supportive policy and programming to promote and create healthy school food environments is critical for widespread adoption and sustainability.

RELATIONSHIP & ENVIRONMENT

PROMISING PRACTICES

Positive interactions with our environment and support for those who tend to the land and waters, such as farmers, fishers and other harvesters, can directly result in healthier environments. We have seen many efforts in the past couple years to make a universal meal program in all schools a reality. If we can link to local farms and chefs to ensure this reality is embedded and supportive of local agriculture and other traditional foods, we will benefit from a stronger and more resilient food system - better food for students and increased food literacy.

Harvest for Knowledge is a project bringing Indigenous plants and traditional knowledge to schools that reside on the traditional lands of the Lekwungen Peoples of the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations. This work started with an Indigenous plant garden and sacred medicine garden planted at Victoria High School and now there are gardens at 6 schools in school district 61. The gardens honour the land and the students have the opportunity to develop a relationship with the land, the plants and animals traditional to these lands. The other component is to honour the language of the land. Each garden has signage with QR codes, when scanned lead to audio of the traditional names of the plants spoken in the Lekwungen language. Hereditary Chief Edward Thomas and Elder Dr. Elmer George provided the translation and recorded spoken plant names.

The Songhees and Esquimalt Nations provided knowledge and support to this project and the land for each garden received a traditional land blessing prior to the ground being planted with traditional plants. Champions within the schools, the school district (Sarah Rhude, SD61 Aboriginal Arts and Cultural Facilitator) and community partners (Aaren Topley, Farm to School BC) brought this project into being and it was supported with funding through the Horner Foundation. It is hoped that students for generations to come will continue to enjoy and learn in these gardens and that the gardens will continue to grow and provide beauty and opportunities for learning from the land on school grounds.

For further information see [this video](#) on the project.



TEACHING & LEARNING



PROMISING PRACTICES

GARDEN EDUCATION SUPPORT COORDINATOR

A new position with School District 62 was created, the Garden Education Support Coordinator. The position was advocated for by teachers in the district and is currently being funded by the Horner Foundation. The garden educator supports garden learning and care while collaborating across the district to further planning and action to support more outdoor learning and food gardening.



Programs and curriculum to build food literacy in schools is gaining momentum. Most schools in the region now boast food growing activities and gardens at elementary, middle and high school levels. Food literacy efforts are moving beyond the Food Studies curriculum. They are extending into a range of activities from student run school salad bars to garden experiments to career pathway programs in farming and food preparation.

2019/20 saw the launch of two extremely valuable initiatives in the Capital Region that will build capacity and connection among School Districts and better embed food literacy within school curricula and pedagogy.

Last summer was the second year of the highly successful "Seed the City Summer Youth Program", created by Lifecycles Project Society, and run in partnership with TOPSOIL and SD61. Students enrolled in the program gained experience in a multitude of farming, gardening, horticulture and business practices while earning credits towards graduation. Students helped grow over 755 pounds of vegetables at Reynolds Secondary and Spectrum Community School. This produce was shared with students and their families, sold at a local farmer's market, and 300 pounds were donated to the Food Share Network.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Across the CRD there are organizations that are working to support schools to develop and implement school food programs. Organizations include not for profits, service clubs, municipal governments, Island Health and local businesses including farmers. By working together we are able to unleash additional expertise and resources to support a wide range of efforts. If you are looking at launching a new program, stop and look around you. There is likely someone who has experience or resources in the community that can help you in your efforts.



PROMISING PRACTICES

SCHOOL MEAL PILOT PROGRAMS

Members of School Food Shift conducted an exploratory of alternative school meal program models and met with school districts, third party food providers, and community organizations this past winter and spring. The goal would then be to set up pilot programs to showcase the potential of including food rescue and locally sourced food in school meal programs. Inspiration and direction has come from seeing success with a variety of school meal program models in other parts of BC, such as New Westminister, and across Canada in PEI where programs are being supported by school districts and government.

GET GROWING! CITY OF VICTORIA

The first few weeks after the start of the pandemic, a seedling distribution initiative emerged with the aim of motivating citizens in the Capital Region to grow their own food. Two of the School Food Shift partner organizations, Lifecycles and Farm to School BC coordinated a 3 week long seedling distribution that saw over 12,000 seedlings distributed to School District 61 schools and families. A total of 1050 families received seedlings, as well as 12 school gardens. The distribution survey found that over 30% of families that received seedlings were first time growers.

Over 12,000 seedlings distributed to School District 61 families, with a total of 1050 families receiving seedlings

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

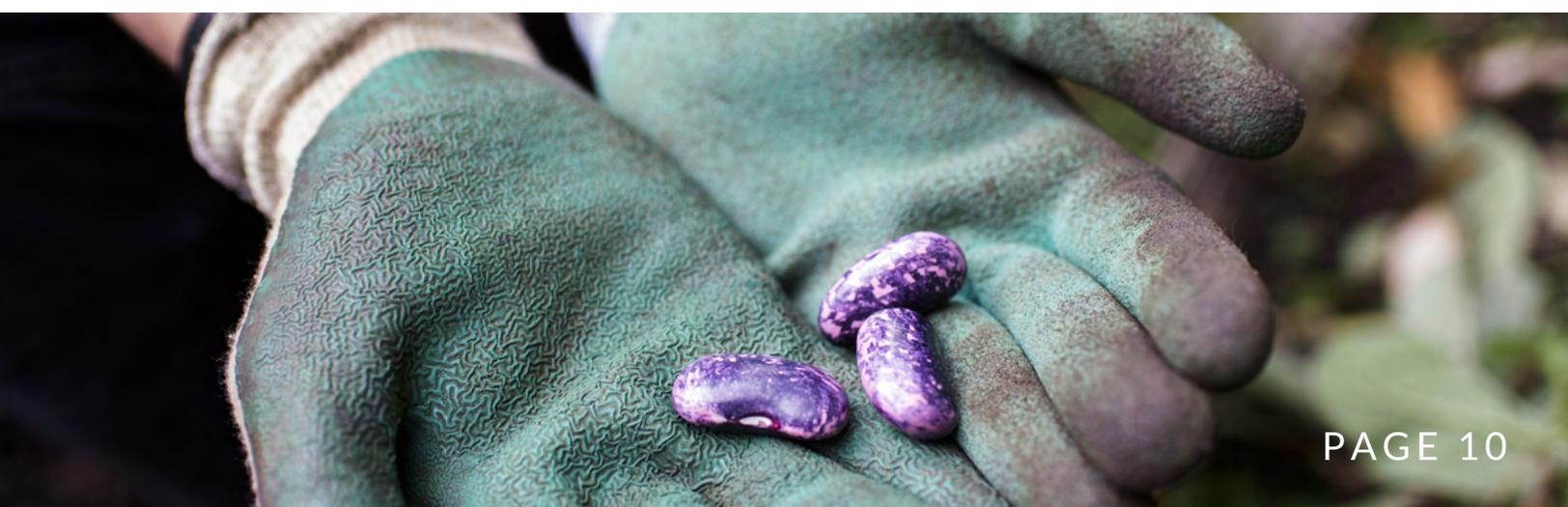
PROMISING PRACTICES

FARM BUCKS

The South Island FarmHub supported by the Rapid Relief Fund administered by the Victoria Foundation saw the creation of a regional farm bucks program. The program provides funding to the School Districts to purchase fresh local foods from regional farms providing this fresh produce to students and their families. In total, \$150,000 in “farm bucks” has been distributed among School Districts 61-64. With the support of the South Island FarmHub, a local aggregator that connects buyers with producers, the farm bucks will be directly utilized by the school districts in the form of hamper programs, school lunches, salad bar programs, and culinary programs.

FARM TO SCHOOL REGIONAL ADVISORY

Multiple members of the School Food Shift sit on the regional advisory committee hosted by Farm to School BC. This committee meets bi-monthly, with a goal of bringing the regional School Districts to the table to discuss emerging best practices in school gardens, and school farms, among other food related programming. This past year we were successful in hosting multiple meetings that brought school district 61-63 to the table to discuss their progress in these areas. This evolution has been especially exciting as we have seen more sharing of resources, and a willingness to support one another among the districts, something that will boost cooperation and school food initiatives greatly.



SCHOOL POLICY

In order to support healthy school food environments in schools and across districts we see the potential to embed policy and practice more formally into school systems. Many schools have one-off initiatives, with each new project requiring time, effort and negotiation with the different parties involved.

Having broader supportive policy frameworks is an objective of the School Food Shift, in order to support programs operating in a supported and sustainable way.

PROMISING PRACTICES



UNIVERSAL SCHOOL MEAL PROGRAM

The Coalition for Healthy School Food is a group of over 137 organizations from across Canada advocating for a national school food program. The group is seeking an investment by the federal government in a cost-shared Universal Healthy School Food Program that will enable all students in Canada to have access to healthy meals at school every day. Building on existing programs across the country, all schools will eventually serve a healthy meal at little or no cost to students.

In BC, 75% of school districts report having a school meal program in at least one school (Smith, 2018). These programs are run at a classroom, school or school district scale and largely rely on parents and other members of the school community to volunteer, develop and fund. This patchwork of programming does not meet the needs of all students. We need the development of national standards, as well as significant investment from federal, provincial and municipal governments and collaboration between stakeholder groups to create a universal program for all children and youth. Having a system that celebrates and links to local food providers and systems is essential in this goal.

The School Food Shift Collaborating organizations have signed on as partner organizations with the BC Chapter and the National Coalition for Healthy School Food . We have attended national meetings and support campaign communication. We believe that positioning our work in alignment with the Coalition will greatly benefit progress in this region.

SCHOOL POLICY

PROMISING PRACTICES

SCHOOL DISTRICT 61 GREENING POLICY

The working relationships with the School Districts grew exponentially this past year. School Food Shift members Janelle Hatch and Marcus Lobb worked closely alongside school district 61 staff to develop a comprehensive school greening application and process, as well as the initial steps in organizing a district level working group that would support all school greening projects. The Greening application form was created to provide clear direction and support for schools looking to build and expand school gardens or other educational greening projects on school grounds. The document was developed with input from Facilities Management and Indigenous Education Division. The form and process purpose is to track how school gardens are being used as learning settings, and ensure they are given the proper support needed to thrive and remain sustainable over years. The emergence of this process and committee has been catching the attention of other school districts on Vancouver Island, particularly School District 62, who is looking to adopt a similar model, with the full cooperation of SD61.





SCHOOL FOOD SHIFT PROJECT ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN THE CAPITAL REGION 2020

Formal Collaboration between community actors and School District staff grows to expand to additional School District participants through the Farm to School Advisory.

- School Districts embark on the creation of the School Greening Policy and practices in relation to school gardening and schoolyard projects.
- Feasibility study of shifting school meal programs to combine local food with rescued food.
- Launch of the SI FarmHub and distribution of \$150,000 to regional School Districts that will leverage \$300,000 towards purchasing local food from farms for school meal and food literacy programs.
- Linking school food growing efforts to the Get Growing Victoria initiative distributing 12,000 seedlings to over 1000 families and 12 school gardens.
- Link local efforts to National Coalition for Healthy School food and support national initiatives and campaigns.
- Support establishment of School Garden Educator to work across school communities in School District 62.

NEXT STEPS

Good Food Shift Collaborative

A woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a grey jacket, is looking down at a garden. The garden is filled with green plants, including what appears to be a pea plant with a white flower. The background is a bright, sunny outdoor setting with more greenery and a clear sky.

It is our hope to continue to build on the work in the past year and reach out to the various partners who were identified as supporting schools in the region during the time of COVID 19. The pandemic has sadly shown us the sheer volume of students whom are experiencing food insecurity, and also how many of these families rely on the public school system to fill in the gaps of daily meals and nutrition. We have also seen the power of collaboration and the ability to respond and we are looking at how to continue to mobilize these efforts and connections further.

The School Food Shift Collaborators will continue to work with the Farm to School Network and Advisory to advance work in schools across the region as well as connect these efforts to the broader work of Island Health, the Good Food Network and beyond.

CONTACT INFORMATION



The Good Food Shift Collaborative includes: Linda Geggie; lgeggie@telus.net (CRFAIR), Matthew Kemshaw; matthewkemshaw@gmail.com (Garden Education Support Coordinator, SD62), Janelle Hatch; Janelle.Hatch@viha.ca (Island Health), Sonya Yli-Kahila; coordinator@foodsharenetwork.ca (Food Share Network), Marcus Lobb; capitalregion@farmtoschoolbc.ca (Farm to School BC) and Joan Stonehocker; joan@lifecyclesproject.ca (Lifecycles Project Society). We want to thank every individual, initiative and organization highlighted in this report whose continuous passion and work is a vital part of our communities.

