



## COMMUNITY RESOURCE CENTER

The goal of the Community Resource Center (CRC) was to supplement resources for families in District 49, specifically food and clothing. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the district was provided the opportunity to give out food boxes. However, the minimum the district could take was 160 and there was concern the

boxes would not be picked up. To everyone's surprise all the boxes were gone within the first 20 minutes. This showed the district there was a strong need for food, specifically healthy food. District 49 partnered with Care and Share, a local food bank, through many different avenues (food boxes, Mobile Market, and now, sustainable food pantry on campus). With ESSER funds and the support of the superintendent, District 49 was able to secure a location and purchase a refrigerator, freezer, racks, flooring, and storage. Local community groups painted, sorted clothes, unboxed, and displayed items, and volunteered when the Community Resource Center opened.

The assistant superintendent acknowledged there was a need for these resources, specifically in the feeder pattern of schools. He was able to find a space to dedicate to the center. The Title 1 and ESSER office provided guidance, resources, input and feedback on the planning and implementation of the center. The district also worked with partners at Care and Share for the supply of food and different food programs available in the area. The district social workers, Title 1 Family Engagement Liaisons, and school counselors were integral in spreading the word about the food pantry and alerting the center about families in need of clothing.

The Community Resource Center is available to students and families to break down basic need barriers so that students can focus on being in school and learning. Schools that are lacking snacks can pick up from the center to support student success in school as well. Students that are not adequately clothed for school run the risk of getting sick or not being able to walk to school in inclement weather. The CRC is there to provide these two critical components of life when families are unable to do so themselves.

The CRC successfully fed approximately 60 families every other week in its inaugural two months of being open. The CRC surveyed families initially to see what kind of food they would like access to as well as hours of operation to maximize the number of families the center could help. The pantry is consistently utilized and most of the food is gone at the end of the day. Some challenges have included figuring out how much food to bring in each week, how to advertise to non-school associated community members, and maintaining a solid group of volunteers to staff the center. There has also been an outpouring of clothing donations, and the amount of space available to store the clothes has grown smaller.

For districts hoping to replicate this program, be sure you can handle the capacity of what you are starting. Purchase a bigger refrigerator, freezer, and more shelving than you think you will need. Sand Creek Zone Community Liaison, Lauren Stuart, shared, "It doesn't have to be perfect to start. You don't need the signs, the logo, the perfect place to support families. Start small and improve as you go."