

Press Clippings 09-26-20 to 09-28-20

---Press Clippings---09/28/2020
There are no U-46 related news stories.

---The Courier-News---09/27/2020

U-46's new Meals on the Bus service distributes 23,000 breakfasts and lunches in its initial week

By: Rafael Guerrero



Craig Skowron attaches a "free meals" sign to a school bus Friday to alert people to School District U-46's new Meals on the Bus program.

When Sarah Paulson wants to pick up the meals School District U-46 is providing while students are out of school, all she and her daughter have to do is head to a parking lot in their Elgin apartment complex.

Thanks to the district's new Meal on the Bus program, they no longer need to make the mile-long trek to Coleman Elementary School, where 8-year-old Lily goes to school.

On Friday, they picked up several days' worth of food for Lily, including a sub sandwich, cranberries, carrots, milk, a cereal bar and other items.

"We tried to get down to Coleman when we could," said Paulson, who lives in the Blackhawk Apartments complex. "But sometimes it is difficult with the homeschooling. ... We definitely prefer the school bus."

The district is continuing to offer meal pickups at schools but is trying to make it easier for families by adding 37 more locations in places like apartment complexes, parks and other neighborhood spots.

Thanks to new service, they were able to deliver 23,000 meals in just the first week it was offered, officials said.

"A lot of parents and families were saying they were homebound and couldn't get to a school to pick up meals," said Elena Hildreth, U-46's food and nutrition services director Elena Hildreth. "The times weren't convenient for them because of the school schedules.

"(Transportation Director Jeffrey Prowell) came up with the idea of partnering with transportation and it just kind of kicked off from there," she said.

Prowell said it's also a way to provide work for 17 of his bus drivers. With U-46 schools closed right now because of the pandemic, school bus operations have been limited to practice runs, transporting out-of-district students to U-46 specialized programs and busing students to out-of-district programs or SAT exams, he said.

"I think it's great for families, but I also think (Meals on the Bus) is great for the bus drivers," Paulson said.

Added Hildredth: "The kids really look forward to seeing that school bus in the neighborhood."

Each driver is paired with two food and nutrition workers, and the teams make about three stops per weekday in neighborhoods in Elgin, South Elgin, Bartlett, Streamwood and Hanover Park.

There is no requirement for students to attend U-46 schools in order to participate in the program.

Bus stops will last from 40 minutes and two hours, depending on the number of families who live near it. All of the are meals, but some come with instructions on how to heat them.

The three stops bus driver Cindy Norton makes with nutritionist services staff members Craig Skowron and Christi Gerard are to Blackhawk, Kennington Square Apartments in Elgin and Canterbury Fields Park in Hoffman Estates.

Some of the busiest stops will deliver hundreds of meals in one day, officials said.

"People have been very, very receptive, very kind and appreciative out in the communities," Hildredth said. "There are people out there hurting really bad, it's really awful."

Landlords also have been understanding, welcoming the meal distribution and trying to get the word out through emails or correspondence with residents, she said.

After just one week, Skowron said they could see their stops were "gaining momentum."

"We're meeting (people from) all walks of life right now. This effort increases your faith in people," Norton said.

"For me, it's special to see people coming together" for the common good, she said. Some people have asked if they can volunteer, she said.

Meals on the Bus will continue for as the district can provide it, Hildredth said. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has approved free meal waiver flexibility through Dec. 31.

District officials say they have distributed more than 2 million meals since March through its 40 school pickup sites.

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