

Kenton Elementary School staff in Aurora know that when the basic needs of families are met, students are better prepared to meet academic challenges. As a school with one of the largest populations of students who are homeless in the Aurora School District, one of the most pressing basic needs of families and students is access to food over weekend breaks. Staff at Kenton planned and implemented the Totes for Hope program to address this need.

The Totes for Hope program is coordinated and run by volunteers from Kenton Elementary, including the Family Liaison, the Community Core Liaison, staff, and parent volunteers. These individuals meet each week to pick up food on Fridays and organize it in the school cafeteria after lunch. Families are then encouraged to help themselves at the end of the day.

Totes for Hope highlights the importance of understanding the school community and the needs of families and students, particularly in high poverty areas. By asking for family input, the planning committee provides families and students with the most useful and necessary food items to get them through the weekend. By offering Totes for Hope school-wide, families don't need to be identified individually and so may feel more comfortable picking up the bag of food.

By the end of the school year, Totes for Hope saw an increase in the number of families who participated and staff was able to determine that what was being provided to families was helpful. Staff at Kenton Elementary learned that not all students have access to necessary and basic items when outside of the school community, and by providing those items to students and families in need, schools can promote a stronger sense of unity and encourage student success.