



2021

ANNUAL REPORT



**Northwestern
Health Unit**

www.nwhu.on.ca

Northwestern Health Unit recognizes that its work, and the work of its community partners take place on traditional Indigenous territories across the province.

We acknowledge that we are on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe Peoples, in lands of importance to Treaty 3, Treaty 5, and Treaty 9. We wish to recognize the long history of First Nations and Métis Peoples in Ontario, and show respect to them today and always.



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Health Unit

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OUR HISTORY

Northwestern Health Unit can trace its history back to 1948 when Order in Council 1005/48 created the Kenora-Keewatin Area Health Unit. At that time, the health unit catchment area included Kenora, Keewatin, Jaffray Melick and nearby townships like Redditt, Haycock and Pellatt.

In 1952, Dryden and Machin Township were added, and the name changed to Kenora, Keewatin-Dryden District Health Unit. In 1956 we saw the addition of Sioux Narrows, Balmertown and Red Lake. By 1962, Fort Frances and some of the organized townships in the Rainy River District were added and the name of the Health Unit was

changed to Northwestern Health Unit and in 1965, Sioux Lookout joined. Finally, in 1968, the remainder of the Rainy River District, including Atikokan, Emo, and Rainy River, joined and NWHU became a District Health Unit, serving the entire Kenora and Rainy River Districts.

Dr. George Large was the first full-time Medical Officer of Health, arriving in May 1948, and Dr. R.J. Whitaker was the first Chairman of the Board of Health, a position he held with distinction until 1968. Mr. Don T. McLeod, who was also the Town Clerk for Kenora, held the post of Secretary-Treasurer from 1948-1975.

ABOUT US NOW

The present catchment area of the Health Unit is about 171,288 square kilometres with a population of 82,000, which has increased from 12,000 people in 1948. The number of staff has grown from six in 1948 with a budget of \$25,000 to 160 staff in 2022 with a budget of approximately \$15,720,000.

Led by a Medical Officer of Health and a Chief Executive Officer, the health unit provides a wide range of services under the authority of the *Health Protection and Promotion Act*, related legislation, regulations, and service standards. We work with individuals, families, groups, partner agencies and communities to provide services with a goal of improving the health of our residents.



Our Sioux Narrows office is one of 13 offices throughout our catchment area.



MISSION, VISION & VALUES

OUR MISSION

Improve the quality and length of life in our communities:
healthy lifestyles, longer lives, lived well.

OUR VISION

We are recognized as a valued and integral partner in health.

OUR VALUES

Respect

We treat all people with respect and dignity, and value diversity and inclusiveness.

Integrity

We act with honesty and adhere to the highest ethical principles as an organization and as public health professionals. We are accountable for our actions and embrace transparency to empower public scrutiny.

Equity

We recognize that some people or groups do not have the same opportunities as others for health and success because of systemic discrimination. We actively work to change these policies, practices and structures, internally and in society, to achieve equality of opportunity for all.



WHAT WE DO

HEALTH PROMOTION

Promoting health of the public by changing knowledge, attitudes, practices and environmental supports for health-related behaviours.

DISEASE and INJURY PREVENTION

Preventing or limiting substance misuse, injuries and reducing dental decay and infectious diseases.

HEALTH PROTECTION

Reducing risks to human health caused by unsafe food, water, air or other health hazards.

POPULATION HEALTH ASSESSMENT and SURVEILLANCE

Monitoring and understanding the health conditions and issues in the area.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Coordinating our planning and response to emergencies such as forest fires, floods, pandemics or chemical spills with local partners and municipalities.



BOARD OF HEALTH

The Board of Health for Northwestern Health Unit is made up of eight members from local municipal councils and up to three members appointed by the Province of Ontario.

Municipal members are appointed for the duration of their term in public office, which is usually a 4-year term. Provincial members are appointed for a term, the length of which is decided by the Minister of Health.

The positions of Chair and Vice-Chair rotate annually.

Board of Health 2021

Chair - Doug Lawrance

Municipal appointee for Sioux Lookout, Ignace, and Pickle Lake

Vice Chair - Sharon Smith

Municipal appointee for Kenora

Executive Member - Shayne MacKinnon

Municipal appointee for Dryden and Machin

Executive Member (alPHa rep) - Trudy Sachowski

Municipal appointee for Ear Falls, Red Lake

Jerry O'Leary

Municipal appointee for Kenora and Sioux Narrows - Nestor Falls

Wendy Brunetta

Municipal appointee for Fort Frances

Sally Burns

Municipal appointee for Atikokan

Jim Belluz

Municipal appointee for Alberton, Dawson, Chapple, Morley, La Vallee, Rainy River, Emo, and Lake of the Woods

Nicole Brown

Provincial Appointee as of January 17, 2020



Message from the **BOARD CHAIR**

The message from the Chair last year started with – ‘We will remember 2020 as the year of COVID-19’. How then do we remember 2021? Perhaps as the year we wanted to forget COVID-19, put it in the rear-view mirror and get on with our lives. But COVID kept reappearing and for 2021, kept NWHU staff and Board occupied. The uncertainty of waves and counter-measures became difficult for everyone. Through that uncertainty our NWHU Public Health team provided strength of leadership and purpose. The NWHU Board of Health is extremely grateful for, and proud of, all NWHU Staff.

The Board is very aware of how much this pandemic has both put Public Health at the forefront and sidetracked it at the same time. The evidence of the catch-up work required in all of our normal programs is clear in this report. Catch-up will take at least as long as COVID and will soon become the focus of public health. We sincerely hope that COVID is one object that becomes smaller and smaller in our rear-view mirror.

On behalf of the Board, thank you to all – Staff, Board, Partners, Public - for your efforts and perseverance throughout 2021. We look forward to beginning a message from the Chair without reference to COVID.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dlawrance".

Doug Lawrance
Chair, Board of Health



Message from the **CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER and MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH**

When reflecting on 2021, we are overcome with emotion and pride. It was another challenging year full of unknowns and overwhelming workloads, however, it was also a year of hope, teamwork, and resilience. In terms of COVID-19, the year included high case numbers, widespread public health restrictions, lockdowns, and of course, the vaccine roll-out. For most of the year, nearly all NWHU staff were redeployed from regular work into pandemic response roles, and they once again showed their passion and dedication for public health.

COVID-19 vaccine clinics were a major part of NWHU's work in 2021. In addition to offering a significant number of mass immunization clinics for first, second, and booster doses, we also worked with partners to reach vulnerable populations at smaller pop-up clinics. NWHU served as the COVID-19 vaccine depot for the region and provided many local partners with vaccines so they too could provide access to the vaccine.

Staff, partners, and volunteers worked at our clinics tirelessly to vaccinate as many people as possible in a short period of time. The commitment and dedication of all these individuals was incredible, and we are forever grateful to them. Our vaccination rates are among the highest in the province and in addition to thanking our staff, partners, and volunteers, we must also thank the public. It was humbling to see the response of our residents who took immediate action through vaccination and by following public health measures to protect themselves, their friends and family, and our communities.

There are many components of a strong pandemic response. Our staff did outstanding work on case and contact management, infection prevention and control, outbreak management, supporting schools, businesses and workplaces, communications, COVID-19 hotline, and outreach to vulnerable populations. We also acknowledge our corporate service teams who supported all our COVID-19 work and were given additional tasks on top of their regular workload.

As difficult as 2021 was for public health, we take away many positives from the year. Largely, it proved that when we all work together, we can make the impossible possible. Collectively, we saved lives and we made our communities safer places to live.

Marilyn Herbacz
Chief Executive Officer
Northwestern Health Unit

Kit Young Hoon
Medical Officer of Health
Northwestern Health Unit



Total NWHU Revenue & Expenditures by Funder

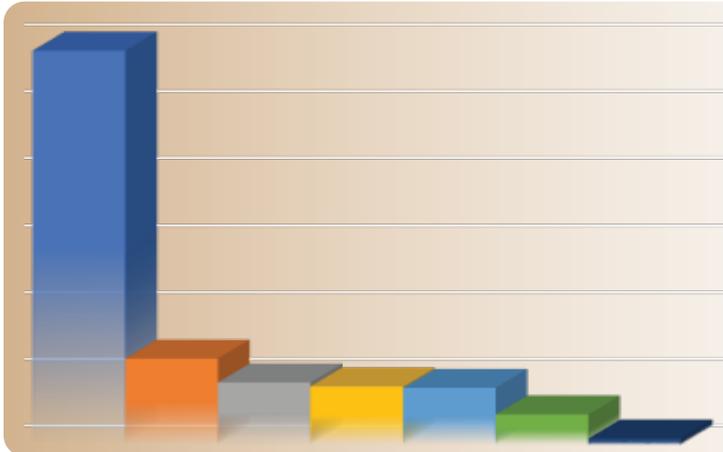
2021 REVENUE \$ 22,207,365

2021 EXPENDITURES \$ 20,772,459



Ministry of Health	\$ 15,551,875
Ministry of Children, Community/Social Services	\$ 2,821,042
Municipalities	\$ 2,342,773
Other Revenue and User Fees	\$ 836,006
Federal Grants	\$ 655,669

Ministry of Health	\$ 14,704,117
Ministry of Children, Community/Social Services	\$ 2,471,432
Municipalities	\$ 2,342,773
Other Revenue and User Fees	\$ 704,933
Federal Grants	\$ 549,204



Total Expenditures

Salaries and Wages	\$ 11,784,898
Employee Benefits	\$ 2,580,435
Other Program Expenses	\$ 1,865,461
Purchased Services	\$ 1,743,708
Building Occupancy	\$ 1,703,526
Capital Additions	\$ 905,867
Travel	\$ 188,564
TOTAL	\$ 20,772,459

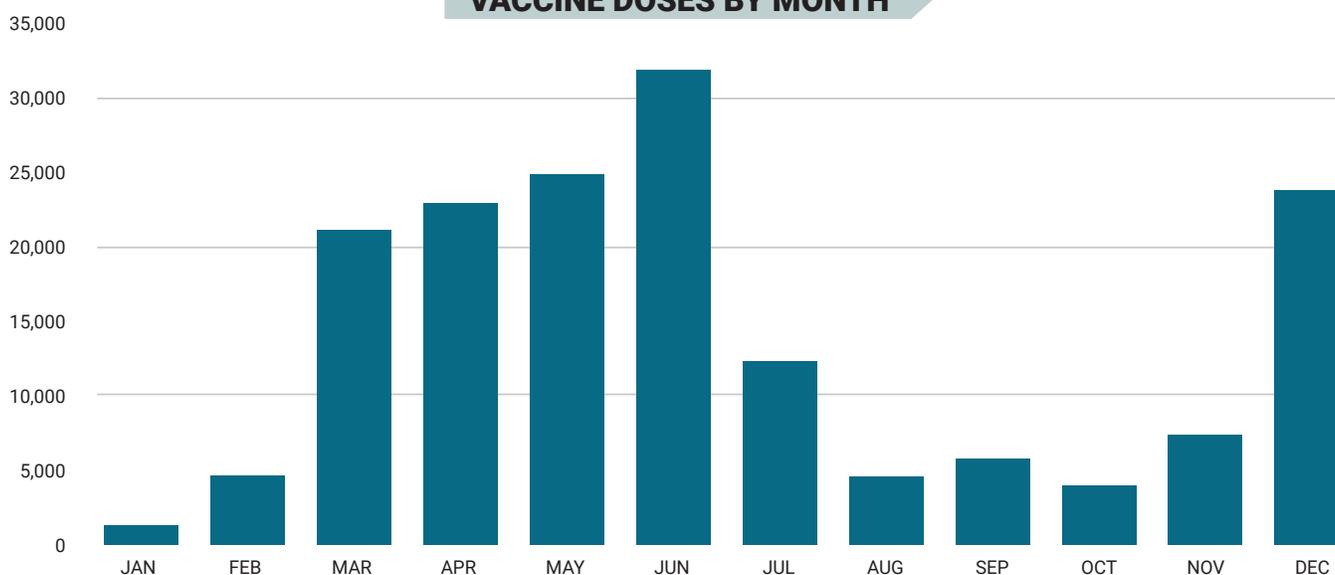


In 2021, over 164,000 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine were given in the NWHU catchment area by all providers combined. Fifty percent of those doses were given at mass immunization clinics. Vaccines were given in 68 communities across the region through a variety of agencies and clinic types.

As of year end, the NWHU region had the highest first dose coverage rate in Ontario, and the third highest second dose rate when compared to other health units.

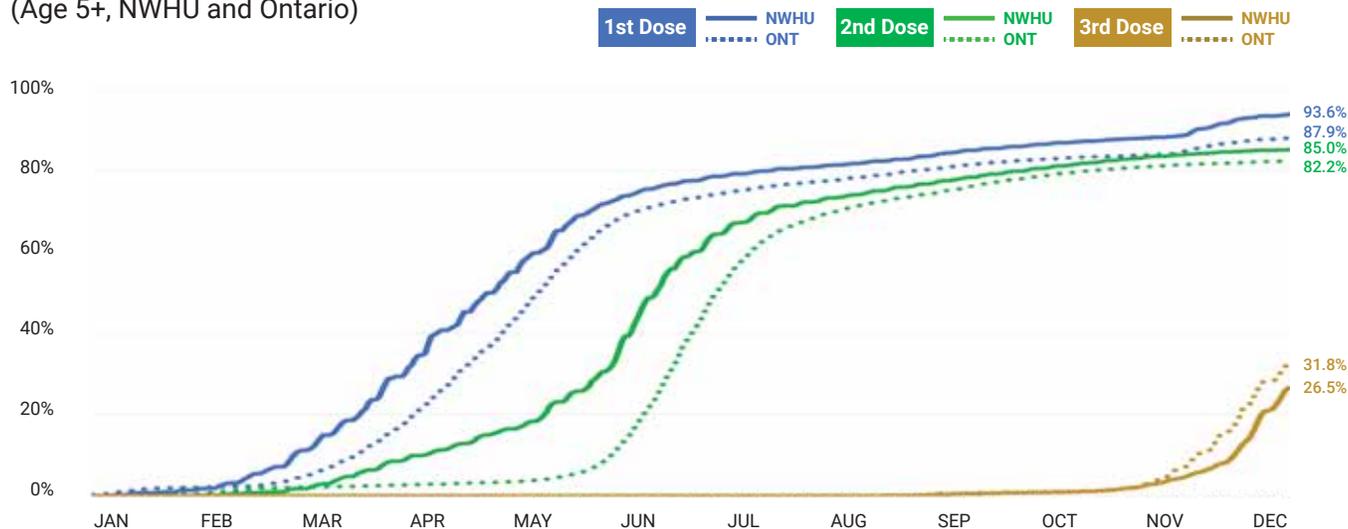
We also had the highest percent of doses given through mass immunization and mobile clinics in the province. In total, approximately 450 mass clinics were held in the NWHU catchment area.

VACCINE DOSES BY MONTH



CUMULATIVE VACCINE COVERAGE

(Age 5+, NWHU and Ontario)





“ Client Comments from the VACCINE CLINICS

“The staff were incredible with my 7-year-old who was getting her first dose.”

“Very well organized - short waiting periods - information on side effects was shared with patients.”

“I took my daughter to get vaccinated and she is extremely scared of needles but the nurse who was administering the vaccine was amazing to deal with. We took up a bit of her time as there was a lot of calming my daughter to help her get vaccinated, but the nurse was great and ultimately a huge part of why my daughter ended up agreeing to get vaccinated.”

“Even though the staff looked exhausted, they were extremely friendly and knowledgeable about all aspects of the vaccine.”

“Very organized and professional. Very competent staff and volunteers.”

“It was quick and efficient and everyone was so friendly!”

“Everyone in our clinic was friendly and helpful. I needed to take some extra time - I wasn't quite ready yet and thankfully they didn't herd me through. Others went before me until I was prepared. Paramedic Donna was awesome. She did my first shot as well!”

“Ran like clockwork. Using the NWHU booking system was a much easier way to book the appointment!”

“My child has a needle phobia. The staff showed a lot of respect and patience.”

“Was very well staffed and ran like a well-oiled machine. Kudos to NWHU for the great job.”

“Everyone working was so friendly and patient. When someone didn't know the answer, there was someone else on site who did and staff always the ability to help - they even got the QR code on my phone for me!”

“I must commend the NWHU clinic staff. They were so kind and helpful, not only to their clients, but also to each other. It speaks volumes about the organization.”

– NWHU vaccine clinic client



The importance of our **VOLUNTEERS AND PARTNERS**

Our clinics would not have been as successful without the dedication and commitment of our staff, volunteers, partners, and casual employees. Over 220 volunteers stepped up to play a part in our clinics. They spent tireless hours at the clinics, helping to ensure our clinics were safe and efficient. In addition, over 100 partners and casual staff worked at our clinics. Their work helped us to vaccinate thousands of people rapidly to fill the urgent need to protect the residents of our communities.

The enormous support we received was humbling and we are forever grateful for their contribution to our clinics. Amazing things happen when we all work together for a common cause.

“It was my pleasure to support the clinics! I wish I could have done more. The organization, structure and processes you had in place were so well thought out. I volunteer for many things, and it was so easy to support this work due to the planning and organization you had in place. Hats off to all involved!”

Mass immunization clinic volunteer





CASE AND CONTACT MANAGEMENT

Throughout 2021, NWHU received 1,770 positive PCR test results for COVID-19. NWHU followed up with each case plus 3,662 contacts of cases in total. By contacting these individuals rapidly, the NWHU case and contact management team was able to help reduce the spread of COVID-19 in the region. For most of 2021, our area's incidence rate per 100,000 was significantly lower than the provincial rate, as seen below in the table, COVID-19 Case and Contact Statistics 2021.

	Caseload Management		Incidence per 100,000	
	Cases	Contacts	NWHU	Ontario
January	87	297	107.2	563.6
February	217	430	267.5	219.6
March	218	712	268.7	350.5
April	247	738	304.4	783.5
May	120	342	147.9	425.8
June	25	52	30.8	84.8
July	10	18	12.3	36.2
August	23	42	28.3	108.4
September	46	360	56.7	138.3
October	26	104	32.0	90.6
November	46	319	56.7	130.9
December	705	248	869.0	1,156.2
TOTAL	1,770	3,662	2,181.7	4,088.5

NWHU followed up with 1,770 individuals who tested positive for COVID-19 and 3,662 contacts to ensure those who needed to isolate did so. Their work helped prevent the spread of COVID-19 to other local residents.

➤

To:

All Staff

Send

Subject:

5500 CALLS!

In the last **2 weeks** we had asked for help to make calls for those that needed a 2nd dose appointment. Together you have made around **5500 phone calls** which resulted in over 2300 appointments going into our booking system. That is amazing!

Thank you to everyone for your hard work and dedication.

In 2021, our COVID-19 Hotline responded to over **16,000** pandemic-related phone calls from the public. Most questions were related to COVID-19 symptoms, close contacts and isolation, and help for booking vaccinations. In addition to the calls, our staff also replied to website chat queries, emails, and social media messages totaling, more than **25,000** interactions.





Program **STATS and STORIES**

HEALTHY BABIES HEALTHY CHILDREN

In 2021, HBHC ran three sessions of virtual prenatal classes, with a total of 85 participants. Each session ran over a few weeks and was made up of five classes that were 1.5 hours long. Participants had initial phone visits with their local Public Health Nurse to discuss early or private pregnancy information before being connected with the PHN facilitating classes. Those who chose to participate received a resource package with class instructions and resources supporting class content. On-line classes followed a format similar to the in-person classes and covered a wide range of topics.

After participating, **100%** of post-class survey respondents noted they learned something new in classes and planned to use the information in their lives.

SPEECH PROGRAM

In 2021 we saw some preschool children returning to in-person speech and language services. It was exciting for clinicians to interact with children face to face once again! We continued to offer virtual services as well, and our clinicians found innovative ways to connect with children and families via technology. Through green screens children could see their Speech-Language Pathologist or Communication Assistant at the beach, in a boat, or perhaps with a favourite character! Virtual services remain in place for some clients and will likely be a tool used for the future, particularly if families have difficulty accessing transportation or we experience poor weather conditions.



Clear face masks are a PPE must for delivering speech and language services.

READY TO QUIT

Despite COVID-19 the Ready to Quit program continued to provide cessation support to clients across our catchment area by connecting with them virtually. Ready to Quit is a 12-week program that provides free Nicotine Replacement Therapy and support to clients who are quitting tobacco. NWHU staff supported 41 clients in communities that do not offer other tobacco cessation supports by providing free NRT (patch, gum, lozenge and spray) and behaviour change support and strategies (either through our staff or through Smokers' Helpline).

Busy year for the NWHU **DENTAL HEALTH PROGRAM**

UPDATED DENTAL EQUIPMENT in IGNACE

During the pandemic significant renovations were made to the Ignace clinic to modernize the antiquated equipment and help us to provide optimal care to the residents of Ignace. The COVID-19 pandemic made it harder for the citizens of Ignace to take care of their dental health. Our team was thrilled to see them again – and safety was our top priority. Our dental team used their training to help keep dental procedures safe during the pandemic all of which meant even more safety measures than before, such as extra personal protective equipment (PPE). Although staff may have had a few more layers of PPE on, it was a major milestone to be able to get back to helping northwestern Ontario residents maintain good oral health.



Angela Groves, Registered Dental Hygienist along with the first client to visit our new upgraded clinic.



The mobile team will provide preventive dental care and treatment out of two state-of-the-art fully-equipped dental offices.

NORTHWESTERN HEALTH UNIT and GREEN SHIELD CANADA PARTNER TO CREATE INNOVATIVE DENTAL PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAM

In March of 2021, Northwestern Health Unit (NWHU) and Green Shield Canada (GSC) announced they are partnering on an innovative dental public health program that would offer access to dental care through several dental clinics, mobile dental buses, and private practice providers throughout the region, all at no cost to eligible patients.

Green Shield Canada's Green Door Project will provide an annual gift of \$120,000 for three consecutive years to allow NWHU to offer cost-free care for hundreds of eligible low-income adults in the NWHU region who are currently unable to access regular dental care.

"Despite strong evidence that oral health is directly linked to overall lifelong health, many adults in the NWHU area don't qualify for public programs and don't have insurance coverage for dental care," explained Zahid Salman, president and CEO, GSC. "We are committed to filling that gap by providing care to those in need and by creating programs like the Green Door Project," added Salman.

EXPANDED SERVICES FOR SENIORS

The Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program (OSDCP) allowed us to expand our services to seniors aged 65 or older, who have no dental coverage and meet financial eligibility requirements. The OSDCP covers dental exams and assessments, preventive services, restorations, x-rays, oral surgery, anesthesia, endodontic treatment, periodontal services and dentures.



Dr. Walkiewicz with an OSDCP client who received services on the mobile dental office.

Communications Team launches **NEW NWHU WEBSITE**

NWHU staff worked hard to develop a new website, which was launched publicly in the fall of 2021. Website traffic was remarkably high during 2021, and it was critical throughout the transition that the public continued to have access to COVID-19 information and data. The launch was successful through coordination and careful planning, and the team continues to receive positive feedback from the public about the new site's functionality and look.

2,300

new Facebook fans in 2021
2,100 Facebook posts in 2021
up **25.7%** from 2020

421,000

clicks on our Facebook posts in 2021
88,000 post engagements (likes/shares/comments)

1,100

followers on Instagram; 439 new in 2021;
a **157% increase**

1,600

Twitter followers in 2021
1,400 tweets in 2021



Awards from the Rainy River District Chamber of Commerce



Marilyn Herbacz and Jim Belluz accepted the awards on behalf of all staff.

The Rainy River District Chamber of Commerce awards were held in late 2021. At the event, Northwestern Health Unit was honoured to win two awards. The first was the Award of Excellence and the second was Business of the Year (16+ employees).

Marilyn Herbacz, CEO and Jim Belluz, Board of Health member attended the ceremony and graciously accepted the awards on behalf of all staff. "These awards acknowledge the hard work, dedication, energy and resilience of NWHU staff. I am so proud of our staff and honoured to call them my colleagues," said Herbacz.



Reaching out to regional **SCHOOL BOARDS**

Brain Waves Virtual Program

Brain Waves is a neuroscience-based educational program for grades 4-6, which provides children with a new awareness of the brain and spinal cord, and provides them with simple strategies to prevent injury. An interactive component of virtual program included live quizzes and helmet fitting tips.

Delivered by the Chronic Disease Prevention (CDP) injury prevention lead, over 100 students from nine different elementary schools joined the session. Of those who completed an evaluation, 85% said they learned new information and 85% planned to use the information.

School-Based Food Programs

We pivoted funding normally allocated to school-based meal and snack programs into community food programs and partners who ensured students continued to have access to healthy food and beverages. Over \$142,000 of funding was reallocated from April to August 2021, reaching approximately 1,200 children and youth.

COVID-19 Question and Answer Sessions

Two virtual sessions were held, one for grade 4-6 students and another for grade 7 and 8. The

grade 4-6 sessions featured a live Q and A with Dr. Young Hoon, where students were invited to submit their questions for her to answer. The sessions included an interactive trivia game and positive mental health component to offer coping strategies for students who deal with worry and stress related to the pandemic. The sessions were facilitated by the CDP mental health lead.

The participation levels were impressive. From the grade 4-6 cohort over 34 classrooms from 20 different schools signed up, and we reached a total of 351 students.



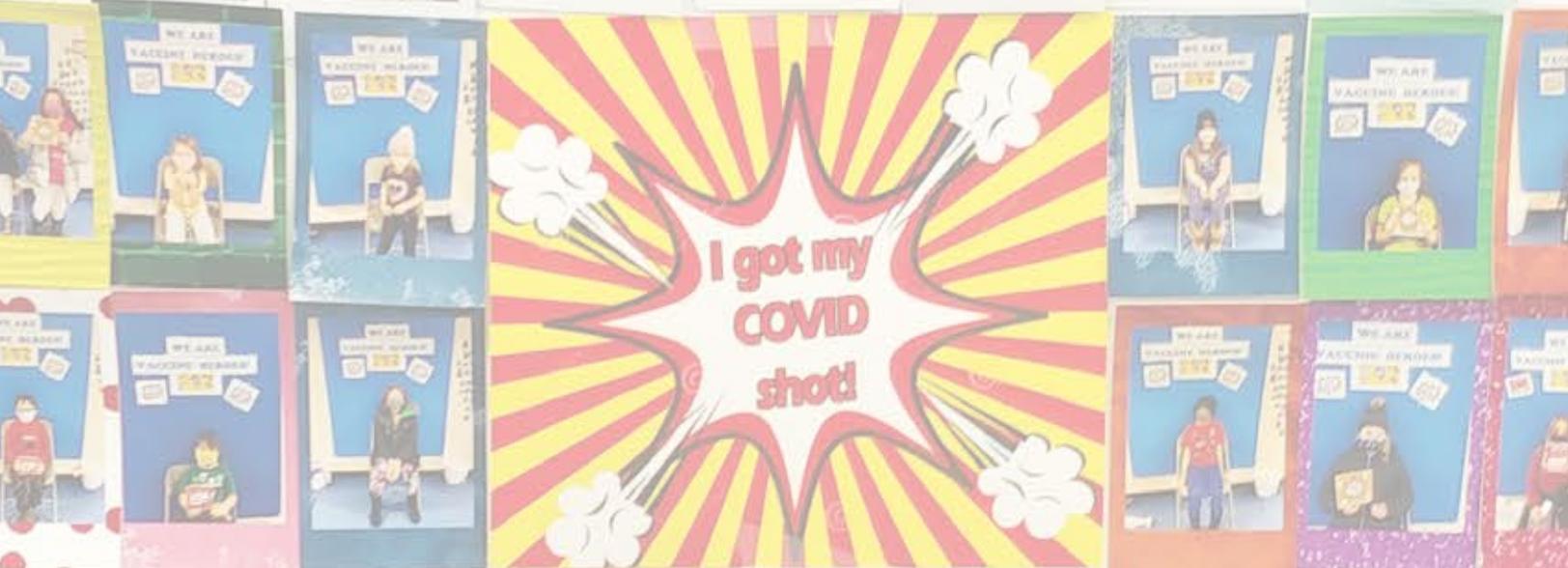
Youth Vaccine Session

Dr. Young Hoon did a live on-line Q & A about COVID-19 vaccination for students aged 12 and older. An estimated 300 youth were in attendance

and asked many insightful questions about the virus and how to protect themselves.

COVID-19 Protocol Guidance

We continued to meet regularly with school boards to support implementation of COVID-19 prevention protocols, as new school reopening guidance was released in Sept 2021.





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