

How B Corps Are Filling the Gaps When Classrooms Are Closed

To Help Families, Businesses Offer New Food, Mental Health, and Educational Services



B The Change [Following](#)

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(Photo courtesy of World Central Kitchen)

Schools serve many roles in addition to being a place of learning: They are community hubs for social and emotional support, recreation centers, and sources of food — crucial components of everyday life and positive impact for students, families, neighbors, and staff members.

As COVID-19's emergence last spring forced the closure of schools and child care centers across the U.S. and Canada, people young and old felt the absence of these key services. Food insecurity levels climbed to record levels, summer camps and recreation programs were canceled, and parents and teachers turned to online options for education, mental health services, and entertainment.

Now, as the new school year begins, school districts across the U.S. and Canada have varying plans for online, in-person, or hybrid options — and uncertainty remains the rule for how the school year will progress. While the long-term effects of the reliance on distance learning and surrounding questions about inequality remain to be seen, Certified B Corporations that provide education, mental health, or food services are stepping up to help fill some of the gaps for families as they head into the school year.

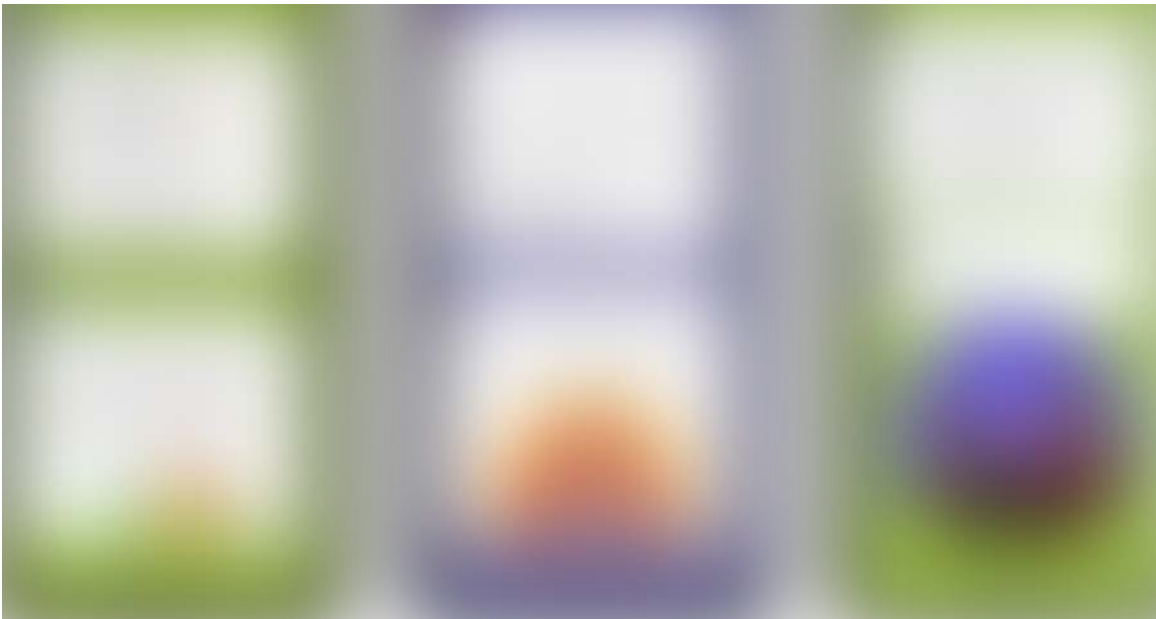
B The Change reached out on the B Hive, an internal communications network for B Corps, to find examples of businesses that are adapting their products and services to meet needs during the COVID-19 moment and help students, parents, and others in their communities during this time.

Making a Positive Impact on Mental Health

OneSeventeen Media is a longtime B Corp that also has two decades of experience working with schools to address the mental health needs of students in middle and high school. Their reThinkIt! app uses an analytics platform, the What'sUp? assessment plus a chatbot and live therapists, to provide virtual mental health care for kids, says Amy Looper, co-founder and COO of OneSeventeen Media.

reThinkIt!'s software assessment asks students questions to help them discuss and handle big and small problems, Looper says. Through a collaboration with IBM Garage-Austin and IBM Watson, the app analyzes student responses and can dynamically add follow-up questions that gather additional information about a child's emotional and mental state.





It has helped prevent a school shooting and nearly a dozen teen suicides, she says, while also reducing the number of disciplinary suspensions.

“Mobile devices are where most kids live for everything else, now they can use them to log in and have access to a tool that reduces their stress and anxiety,” Looper says. Using eight years of evidence-based research to shape questions for kids, reThinkIt! is able to collect six times more information about what’s on a child’s mind than they would share face to face. “Through our research, we’ve been able to demonstrate a statistically significant reduction in kids’ emotional distress,” Looper says.

Due to COVID-19’s increased stress and strain for families, the B Corp has accelerated development of a version of reThinkIt! for at-home use that will be sold direct-to-parents as well as through employers. The home-based app will include a feature so that kids can live chat with a certified therapist.

The community of Certified B Corporations knows that profits don't have to come at the expense of other stakeholders. [Learn more in this downloadable report.](#)

Filling a Community Need with Healthy Family Meals

Knowing that more than half of U.S. families rely on school lunches, and child and adult care food programs to feed their children each day, [Revolution Foods](#) acted quickly to fill some of these gaps — especially for low-income and food-insecure families — once schools closed during the COVID-19 shutdown. Since the start of the pandemic in March, the company has served over 30 million chef-crafted meals to students, families, seniors, and homeless residents across the country.

Working through USDA waivers that allow meal service through non-traditional programs, Revolution Foods has worked with school districts so meal service can continue for at-risk families while schools are closed. Now, as districts prepare for the new school year, Revolution Foods is providing new meal options including individual unitized meals and multi-day meal boxes that can be used for on-site or remote learning. The company has also published a [white paper](#) to share best practices for running COVID-era school meal programs with districts across the country.

Another B Corp in the food industry, [Paintbox Catering and Bistro](#), faced immediate changes when stay-at-home orders kept customers away while the restaurant and catering company's shelves still held plenty of food — and cut off children and families in its Regent Park neighborhood in Toronto from nutritious at-school meals.

That spurred Allison Gibson, director of operations at Paintbox, to deepen the business' focus on the social mandate and purpose she initiated eight years ago. As COVID-19 changed daily life, Gibson and her team transformed the B Corp into a retail food store and healthy food source that has since expanded to offer online shopping in partnership with online grocer [Nibbly.ca](#).

Nibbly is hiring Regent Park residents, prioritizing those with a barrier to employment, while tackling food insecurity among families in the community. Initiatives underway include a lower-priced customer-facing corner shop operated out of the Paintbox storefront in Regent Park and a fully subsidized grocery delivery program for Toronto residents in need, prioritizing Black families, continuing the company's long standing work to combat anti-Black racism.

Taking Learning Online Year-Round

Like other camps across the country, [Galileo](#) had to shift its summer educational plans. Instead of operating its more than 70 summer camps throughout the San Francisco Bay Area, the B Corp has turned to virtual offerings — which means it also can expand into online classes and camps for fall.

The new [Camp Galileo online](#) courses provide a complement to students' core curriculum by offering enrichment opportunities for students in pre-K to eighth grade during the week — including art, design and engineering projects — proven to spark innovation and build a growth mindset.

“Many families are grappling with how they will manage their children’s educational experience now that COVID-19 has interrupted the traditional start of the 2020–2021 school year,” says Viva Asmelash of Galileo. “These courses help address the gaps in distance learning and offer safe options for social interaction and joyful exploration.”



Wisdom Supply Co.'s Zero-Waste Back to School Kit.

Providing Sustainable Supplies

Wisdom Supply Co. based in San Francisco has introduced two Zero-Waste Back to School Kits that contain just the essentials, made from sustainable materials. The kits are minimal by design, as Wisdom Supply encourages families to check for supplies they have at home and purchase only what they need.

As Wisdom Supply co-founder Heather Itzla says, “Traditionally, teachers send a list of supplies to families that they are to purchase, or a link to a pre-made kit. We are the only option for school supplies that are not made of everlasting plastic or vinyl — even our shipping is plastic free.”

Educators can get supplies for their classrooms through the [Teacher Rewards Program](#), which provides a credit for some purchases.

For more on B Corps that are filling gaps in education and food services, see [a longer version of this article published by B Lab](#).

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B The Change gathers and shares the voices from within the movement of people using business as a force for good and the community of [Certified B Corporations](#). The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the nonprofit B Lab.

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