

ANDERSON COUNTY SCHOOLS
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Media Release



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Top left, Sam Compton of Second Harvest (green shirt, center) explains the delivery schedule to staff and students at The Learn Center. Top right, students and staff at The Learn Center unload Food for Kids. Below, the food distributed each Friday to elementary school children across the county will be delivered to and stored at The Learn Center, saving time and resources for Second Harvest and providing a community service opportunity for students at TLC. Children receive single-serving, nutritious food that can be prepared with little help or supervision required.



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SECOND HARVEST'S 'FOOD FOR KIDS' PROGRAM MEANS BETTER WEEKENDS, BETTER MONDAYS

Hundreds of Anderson County school students will come back to school on Monday a little better fed and ready for the week ahead, thanks to the Food for Kids program.

A collaborative effort of Second Harvest Food Bank of East Tennessee and public elementary schools in the food bank's 18-county service area, the program discretely provides nutritious, easy-to-prepare food for approximately 900 students in Clinton, Oak Ridge, and Anderson County each Friday afternoon during the school year.

The students carry the food home in their backpacks for the weekend, helping families that may be struggling to make ends meet.

Teachers and school administrators, who help identify those students and families who can use the support, contact parents to enlist their acceptance of the program and then make sure the food gets into the children's backpacks before they head out at the end of each week.

"Reports of improved self-esteem, behavior, and concentration among participants are common," said Second Harvest's Youth Programs Manager Sam Compton.

"In addition to simply being told that by their students that they are hungry, teachers observe kids hoarding food from the lunchroom, taking food from other children's trays, and even taking food from the trash cans so that they'll have something to eat after school and over the weekend.

"This program helps meet a basic need."

The three local school systems comprise the first county to fully coordinate single drop-off points, which has a real impact for the program coordinators, according to Compton.

"It makes a big difference for us to drop off at just three locations for the 19 schools in the county," Compton said. "Needs are rising and resources are being stretched. We are seeing double-digit percentage increases across the board.

"That's what's so exciting about delivering here," Compton said, sitting in the cafeteria at The Learn Center, the Anderson County Schools' alternative school.

"In a single stop, we can drop food for The Learn Center, Head Start, and all nine elementary schools in the Anderson County system, and then get to other systems in this area, which is a lot faster than having to make 11 separate deliveries."

In Oak Ridge, food is delivered to First United Methodist Church; Clinton City Schools' food goes to North Clinton Elementary.

As part of a community service effort, the students at The Learn Center will help unload and store the boxes of cereal and breakfast bars, juice and fruit cups, beef stew and more that are delivered about every four weeks for ACS students.

Then each week, they'll help assemble the packages of food that school staffers will pick up while making other stops, packages that ultimately make it into the backpacks of children before they head home for the weekend.

Gary Houck, principal at The Learn Center, said he sees the effort as beneficial to the students at his school.

"This gives our kids a chance to feel special as they accomplish an important task," Houck said. "They are providing a real service."

To be reasonably sure that children will have an adequate supply of food between distribution periods, Second Harvest suggests that two items each from the grain, fruit, dairy, and protein groups are provided for each child, Compton said.

He pointed out that the food has to be "shelf-stable" so that no refrigeration is required, nutritious, and well within its expiration-date period. The single-serving items must also be simple to prepare so that children can manage without help from adults.

"All that means that children in any circumstances can benefit," Compton said, "from the most vulnerable to those who do have some support.

"We make every effort to ensure that enough food from each group is delivered, and we want to be sure that children taking food home to households with younger siblings get a total of eight items for each child in the household."

Compton, who has been with Second Harvest for six and a half years, said he was pleased that Anderson County Schools had expanded its participation to include all its youngest children this year. In the past couple years, he said, only Lake City Elementary and The Learn Center were involved.

He said the cost per student is about \$100 per year, or an average of \$2800 per school, and he said Second Harvest is seeking sponsors across the region to help meet the growing need.

"Our cost is about \$2.18 per child, per week," he said. "And we are able to stretch those dollars much farther than anyone can imagine.

“We buy by the truckload and the pallet to get the lowest prices, and we purchase through the Food Bank network to increase our purchasing power.”

Compton said Second Harvest is able to buy three to four times the food a donor’s money can buy at retail.

“And where school systems will work with us like the systems in Anderson County are, it helps even more,” he added.

“Anderson County is the only county in the area we serve that is doing the single drop-off point for each school system,” Compton said. “We love it.”

Second Harvest is supported by donations from individuals, businesses, faith-based organizations, and service groups. They are affiliated with United Way in all the counties they work in, including Anderson County, Compton said.

The expansion of the program in Anderson County was one of Kim Guinn’s goals for the school system this year.

Guinn, who leads the school system’s Coordinated School Health program, said she was pleased that the effort would feed even more children than last year.

“Expanding this to all our elementary schools and coordinating the effort through The Learn Center will help families during tough economic times and help Second Harvest share its resources even more widely in our communities,” she said.

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