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In school classrooms, breakfast is served

Grant funds free meal program that seeks to eliminate hunger for elementary students

by Sarah Nemeth | Staff Writer

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Free breakfasts in class will be coming to Langley Park-McCormick Elementary School, thanks to support from a group geared toward eliminating hunger in America.

The school, which already serves free and reduced price lunches to many students, on Monday received a grant from the “got breakfast?” Foundation to provide breakfast to all students in their classrooms.

The initiative — which is providing a combined \$35,000 in grants to four school districts — is part of the foundation’s Classroom Breakfast project, which helps to eliminate time and staffing constraints to serving students breakfast in a cafeteria setting.

“This represents nothing less to me than a dream come true,” said Langley Park-McCormick Principal Sandra Jimenez at a press conference at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C.

“The reason that I wanted a breakfast program is because the children are hungry.”

The school, located on 15th Avenue off Merrimac Drive, has a Latino population of about 80 percent. Of those, about 40 percent have little or no proficiency with the English language, and only 10 percent of the school’s parents speak English.

“Many parents can’t help at school because they don’t speak English,” Jimenez said.

“This [initiative] is going to help bring the community together.”

According to the foundation, serving breakfast in the classroom helps students learn. Its research also showed that when breakfast is served in class as opposed to in a cafeteria or other school venue, the number of students participating doubled and often tripled.

It also prevents the stigma for children who have to leave class to eat breakfast and reduces teasing from non-participating peers, said Kate Houston, deputy director of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Food and Nutrition Service.

In Langley Park, some students don't get breakfast because their parents — in some cases reliant on day labor jobs — simply cannot afford food during a slow workweek.

“I have many parents who, in the winter especially, don't maintain a job,” Jimenez said, adding funds for school meals can often run low.

“If they have breakfast money, they get maybe a piece of cheese and two pieces of bread and no milk. And if you don't have any money, you don't get anything.”

The worry runs from rent to clothing to food, said Kim Propeack of Casa de Maryland, a Silver Spring-based group that advocates for immigrant workers.

“There are a lot of families in the Langley Park area that really struggle to survive,” she said. “There's a lot of resource sharing between families.”

But if those resources run out, children often go without.

“We can look around at everyone to make sure it gets done, but the school system has a real interest in making sure students [succeed],” she said.

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