



Pictures by Rockbridge Co Public Schools: On the left, Tracy Hinty and Daphne Stickley in front of the 'Bridge the Hunger Gap' van. On the right, is the RCPS FNS staff.

SPOTLIGHT ON EQUITY ROCKBRIDGE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

In Rockbridge County, school and community members embrace a culture of looking out for each other. Rockbridge County Public School (RCPS) educators and administrators know that students experience their greatest successes when families, the larger community, and the school division work together. To that end, RCPS school leaders are partnering with families and outside organizations to ensure that students have access to school meals regardless of any potential barriers such as language, work schedule, or homes that are in rural, hard to reach locations.

For years, RCPS has worked alongside community organizations and collaborated with leaders within those communities who are able to reach out to families and relay information about meal services and other food program benefits such as the recent P-EBT cards. These relationships have led to networks of trust and a culture of looking out for all members of the community.

Although RCPS has long provided a translated version of its online meal order form to support families for whom English is not a first language, it was staff relationships and parent feedback that led RCPS School Nutrition Supervisor Daphne Stickley to reach out during the pandemic to additional staff including community member, substitute teacher and bus driver Amy Moore and English Learner Teacher/Coordinator Rachel Braun.

As Moore traveled door-to-door to provide food and information for families, students and parents helped her spread the word to additional community members who worked away from home during the day about how and when to access school meals and other resources. Multilingual families aided Braun in spreading the word bilingually by phone call, text and home visit to neighbors and their extended friends and families in the region.

Despite the geographic isolation and challenging road conditions which prevail in portions of the RCPS community, these types of collaborations between staff and the community are advancing food access for families across the school division.

"I will continue to work with staff, administrators, teachers and our community partners to improve what we have started, to continue to reach out to families to help those marginalized individuals who are raising children, to help grandparents who are not used to asking for help. We will do all that we can to reach those who need us."

Daphne Stickley, RCPS School Nutrition Supervisor

Below are additional collaborations and solutions that have been put into place to support students. RCPS:

- Visited -staff made the effort to go door to door and meet with families to be certain that food was delivered to all children.
- Partnered - with community organizations including Washington and Lee University Campus Kitchen program, the Rockbridge Area Relief Association and churches and other community organizations that share the same goals of ensuring food access for all community members. The result of this partnership is a community coalition called Rockbridge Feeds. Rockbridge Feeds is dedicated to ensuring that families have the resources necessary to meet their needs, including but not limited to that of providing nutritious food for children in the community.
- Prioritized -leaders prioritize relationships and communication between families and staff. Leadership has partnered with EL Teacher/Coordinator Rachel Braun to ensure that families are able to provide feedback and ask questions in their home language, after work hours and via text message, phone call, email or in person visits. This allows multilingual families to convey what supports are meeting their needs and what adjustments are still required, and it has allowed the school division to serve additional students and their families.
- Applied for grants -the School Nutrition Department has collaborated with Tracy Hinty, Supervisor of Federal Programs, to apply for a No Kid Hungry grant with which it has purchased a van. RCPS staff use this van to deliver meals for students whose homes are not accessible by bus.
- Built relationships -has partnered for many years with the Washington and Lee University Campus Kitchen program to provide a backpack snack program.
- Maintain -staff will continue existing collaborations with the Washington and Lee Spanish Department to provide meals for a 2022 summer learning program designed to provide enrichment and learning activities for students, including English learners, in the region.