



Picture retrieved from <https://www.riohondoisd.net/page/food-services>

## BETTER TOGETHER: HOW TEAMWORK AND COMMUNICATION EXPANDED SCHOOL BREAKFAST ACCESS

Rio Hondo Independent School District (ISD) is in the charming town of Rio Hondo, Texas. The district serves 1,420 students across one elementary school, one middle school, and one high school. Rio Hondo ISD is dedicated to fostering lifelong learning among its students by providing an environment that promotes academic achievement, critical thinking skills, and personal growth. Rocio Madrigal, the School Meals Director, is dedicated to enhancing access to school meals, improving meal quality, and keeping a steady stream of communication and feedback about her program to benefit students, families, and district staff.

### Rio Hondo's School Breakfast Program

The district serves breakfast in the cafeteria and breakfast in the classroom at the elementary school, and both GNG and cafeteria services are available at the middle and high schools. They operate 100% Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), which offers no cost breakfast and lunch to all students

The successes at Rio Hondo have resulted from a few key strategies, including a concerted effort by Rocio to increase communication with students, families, teachers, and the superintendent; something Rocio began 7 years ago when she was promoted to School Meals Director. Additionally, Rocio surveys the students every 6 months to get feedback about current and possible menu items. The students recently opted to add waffles and pancakes to the menu, which Rocio happily incorporated, garnering positive student feedback! Breakfast menus are displayed on screens in every school to promote the meals.

With grant funds from No Kid Hungry, the district purchased two new breakfast carts (one for the middle school and one for the high school) to expand the Grab and Go (GNG) program by increasing food pick-up locations. Since implementing GNG, participation rates have increased by 2,765 breakfasts served/month to reflect 75% breakfast participation across all campuses. By introducing coffee to their menu (a result of a student suggestion), they reached an average daily participation rate of 80% in the high school.

## Effective Strategies to Enhance School Breakfast Programs



- **Communication:** Depending on your district, consider using various communication methods. These can include surveys, anonymous questionnaires, and forums where students and teachers can ask questions or provide suggestions. You might also hold focus groups during class, encourage teachers to casually survey their students, or organize online meet-ups, such as Facebook gatherings or coffee chats with parents. Building relationships with students and staff is essential, it can help to engage in conversations and schedule meetings with administrators. For example, Rocio met with her superintendent to talk about the importance of school breakfast, and the superintendent's receptivity and support enabled Rocio to expand her breakfast program, increase access, and serve more enjoyable foods.
- **Adapting:** Making essential changes to your program to improve access to school meals is important. This may involve applying for a grant to purchase necessary equipment and implementing requested modifications, such as changes to the menu or the addition of new items.
- **Awareness:** Promoting the program is essential for ensuring that both students and teachers are aware of the menu options. To improve visibility, include pictures of the menu items on the school meals website, announce the daily menu items in morning announcements, and actively seek feedback from the community.

Future plans include investing in a food sealing machine to help with packaging GNG meals. They also plan to purchase tablets to monitor the GNG meals and easily count the meals served.

Rocio's passion for ensuring that students receive nutritious meals drives her relentlessly to improve the dining experience at Rio Hondo. She never gives up despite facing challenges and receiving suggestions that have sometimes led to setbacks. Rocio continually adjusts her program to provide students with the proper nutrition to learn, play, and grow!

To learn more, please visit us at:  
<https://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org>

**“When students make suggestions, I strive to implement them as soon as possible, if not immediately, to demonstrate that their input is valuable to our program.”**

**Rocio Madrigal**

A Rio Hondo, TX school meal team member prepares GNG carts for meal delivery.

