



Johnston County Public Schools

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Eight more schools sign on for Share Table initiative

Students at eight more schools in Johnston County can now take advantage of an innovative meal program that allows them to share extra food with classmates that would otherwise be discarded.

JCPS School Nutrition Services introduced the first Share Tables at West Smithfield Elementary in December 2018. The initiative, now in nine schools, seeks to serve students who may still be hungry after regularly scheduled breakfast and lunch meal times during the school day.

"This is benefiting our students who may need an extra meal while they are at school," said Director of School Nutrition Dana Edwards. "We know our students rely on our meals at school because they don't have the same benefit at home. Receiving extra items may help them get through the end of their day."

Since West Smithfield Elementary piloted the program, eight more schools have adopted the initiative. Presently Cleveland Elementary, Corinth-Holders Elementary, Glendale-Kenly Elementary, North Johnston Middle, Pine Level Elementary, Selma Elementary, South Smithfield Elementary, and Wilson's Mills Elementary have all added Share Tables to their schools.

"The Share Table prevents food from going to waste and helps children who may be hungry later in the day," said Pine Level Elementary Principal Allen Sasser. "Making sure our students are getting the nutrition they need during the day helps them better perform in the classroom."

The program offers a place where students can place unopened food and drinks that they choose not to eat or drink. This provides an opportunity for other students to take additional helpings of food or beverages from the Share Table at no cost to them.

The Share Table allows students to share food items that would be discarded. The key to acceptable items is that they must be "non potentially hazardous foods," meaning these items do not have to be time or temperature controlled for safety.

While students have the opportunity to take items from the table during lunch, many schools are delivering the extra items to students in the classroom during their designated snack time.

“You should see their faces. These students are so grateful,” said West Smithfield Elementary Principal Sharon Bryant. “They are so thankful for us being able to provide them with a snack for whatever reason, whether they left it at home or if they didn’t have something to bring. It gives our students a feeling of not being left out.”

According to Edwards, only items that came from the school’s cafeteria can be placed on Share Table. Items from home are not allowed.

Items that can be placed on the Share Table include:

- Pre-packaged food that has not been opened or eaten
- Unopened, wrapped or individually packaged food and beverages (excluding milk)
- Fruits with inedible peel (example: orange or banana)
- Fruits or vegetables with edible peel must be individually wrapped or in a sealed package

“Adding food to the Share Table makes me feel good because I know I’m not just throwing it away and wasting it,” said Cleveland Elementary student Ava Wilson. “I like knowing I’m giving someone else something.”

Edwards added that due to federal guidelines, staff are not allowed to take food from the cart.

“I hope that we can continue to expand this program throughout Johnston County Public Schools,” said Cleveland Elementary Principal Maureen Hanahue. “It’s very easy for schools to implement, and it’s benefiting our students.”

Edwards said she has heard from several other principals who are interested in implementing a Share Table at their school in the future.

PHOTO1: Second grade students Sofia Campos (left) and Haleigh Jones (right) enjoy their school lunch together at Pine Level Elementary.

PHOTO2: West Smithfield Elementary kindergarten student Alaisha Watson eats a school lunch in the cafeteria.

PHOTO3: West Smithfield Elementary kindergarten student Mesk Sarama enjoys a school lunch.

PHOTO4: Preschool student Nicolas Faison enjoys eating in the Cleveland Elementary cafeteria at an early age.

PHOTO5: Cleveland Elementary Principal Maureen Hanahue (left) and preschool student Peyton Myers have lunch together in the school’s cafeteria.

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