

LONGER SCHOOL YEAR BREAKS LEAVE SOME HUNGRY, WITHOUT A SOURCE OF FOOD

By Molly Archer
editor-in-chief

Hungry students in the Oxford School District who have little to no access to food outside of school may struggle even more during the longer holiday breaks such as Thanksgiving and Christmas break.

The organization Love Packs provides small packages of snacks and other goods to students who need a source of food at home. According to Love Packs Vice President Camie Bianco, between Oxford and Lafayette schools, around 190 Love Packs are currently being distributed weekly to students that find it difficult to get food at home.

"In both the city and the county, there's definitely an issue [with hunger]," Bianco said. "I think people don't think so because when they see Oxford, they see more affluence but there's actually a lot of kids who are hungry. We have kids who are homeless. We have kids who are living in substandard housing and just don't have enough food."

During summers in Oxford, people have the option to eat free meals with the summer feeding program, but with longer breaks during the school-year such as Thanksgiving and Christmas, the school does not have any programs that ensure these students full meals.

"As a community, we need to try and help those kids, and a lot of it is, sadly, that if nobody ever says anything to you, you don't really know," Bianco said. "Another issue we face is sometimes people are really proud, and they don't want to ask for help. We see that with Love Packs. So I guess as a community—as a country—we need to figure out how you do that.

How do you help somebody without making them feel bad?"

According to Bianco, some students or guardians neglect to take the Love Packs because they are self-conscious of their situation. This often limits the already slim source of food that the student has.

"What we've seen is that the older kids struggle with getting the help. As you get older, you realize things, so our older kids sometimes are embarrassed," Bianco said. "We're always looking for ways to make it not embarrassing or to help somebody without putting a stigma on them because they don't want to be labeled something you feel is negative."

Camie Bianco
Love Packs VP

According to school counselor Regina Carothers, the parents of one student do not want the student bringing home the Love Packs, so the student comes to the counselor's office regularly to get food and stashes as much as possible in their backpack to bring home.

"Yes, there are students who are truly hungry, and then there are those who are just so choosy that may not be in as much need as you might want to think," OHS Counselor Sarah Breithaup said. "It's kind of hard to differentiate that."

Along with Love Packs, Oxford School District has free and reduced lunches to help those students and families

who may have trouble paying for meals.

"I feel that it [free and reduced lunch] helps the kids in our district to be able to at least get two free meals a day," Oxford School District's Assistant Director of Child Nutrition Jeanette Clements said. "We have a lot of kids in our district that go home and don't eat anything. I feel like the more kids that we can get qualified and get the word out that this is available—because I feel like some don't know—that we can make sure that these kids are eating because it might be the only meal that they get in the day."

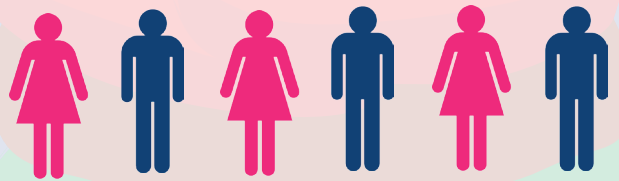
According to Clements, almost 40 percent of OHS has free or reduced lunches, but 37 percent of those students are not taking the opportunity to get food from the cafeteria.

"I do feel like some aren't eating because they feel embarrassed that they get to eat free and what that means, and nobody should be embarrassed," Clements said. "I think it's a great thing."

To qualify for free or reduced lunches, a child or family must receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), or if the student or someone in their household is a foster child then they are eligible for reduced prices or even free lunch. If the income of a student's household is below a certain percentage, they are also eligible to have their lunch price reduced to 40 cents a day.

"I want them to know that they should never go hungry," Breithaup said. "I feel like that's part of our mission of the school district and child nutrition is we don't want any child to go hungry."

HUNGER IN THE U.S.



1 OUT OF EVERY 6 KIDS ISN'T GETTING THE AMOUNT OF FOOD HE/SHE NEEDS

38% OF OHS STUDENTS RECEIVE FREE OR REDUCED LUNCH

181 OF THESE STUDENTS DO NOT PICK UP THEIR LUNCHES

TO QUALIFY FOR FREE OR REDUCED LUNCH, A HOUSEHOLD MUST:

RECEIVE AN INCOME AT OR BELOW 130% OF THE POVERTY INCOME THRESHOLD FOR FREE LUNCHES.

OR

RECEIVE AN INCOME BETWEEN 130 AND 185% OF THE POVERTY INCOME THRESHOLD FOR REDUCED PRICES ON LUNCHES.

SOURCE: NO KID HUNGRY ORGANIZATION AND THE USDA
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