

Summer Feeding Power Lunches

August 2016

Our school nutrition staff proudly served over 276,000 free meals to children during the summer. As an educator, I am excited that we also have an opportunity to provide learning opportunities at some of these sites. Whitfield County Schools, the Early Education Empowerment Zone (E3Z), and Dalton State College (DSC) have teamed up to deliver science and literacy lessons based upon the Georgia Standards of Excellence at these lunch sites. Dr. Sharon Hixon, dean of the DSC School of Education, works with her students to organize and prepare lessons for these “power lunches.” She shared the information below with me about the weekly summer events.

How likely are children to sit outside during the Dog Days of Summer in northwest Georgia to learn about magnets, the human body, and worms? Well, they are more likely to do this than one might think. More than 30 children at two summer Power Lunch sites took part in these lessons each Friday. Children ages one to thirteen poured into the sites to take part in activities that have included looking for worm castings, making composting cups, fishing with magnets, and interacting with books read aloud. Two DSC teacher candidates planned and delivered the lessons with the assistance of student volunteers. These activities were made possible through a planning grant from the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement.

Rigo Gonzalez, a senior teacher candidate at DSC, details the impact of the program on one child at his Power Lunch site.

“One child answered on his survey at the beginning of the summer that he did not like science because nobody was at home who could help him. Now, he is coming each week to participate in the science activities.”

Some of the children are attending for their third summer. Recently, one of the children was overheard asking for more books because, as she put it, “I like books.” At the end of last summer, she also wanted to know if the lessons would return this summer. Children were thrilled when the teachers of the “little school” set up their lessons in her neighborhood.

While these lunch lessons impact the children, they are also powerful learning tools for teacher candidates volunteering at the sites. DSC sophomore Rebecca Elliott is learning how to interact with children who do not speak English as their first language.

“I don’t speak Spanish. I try to say a word in Spanish and the children giggle at me. Then, I show them the object and I tell what it is in English. They will tell me what the object is in Spanish.”

As dean of the School of Education at DSC, I [Dr. Sharon Hixon] believe these experiences with children who come to school with a Spanish-language background will impact Rebecca as she continues her coursework and as she interacts with non-native speakers of English in the public schools. Rebecca’s experiences working at the Power Lunch sites will provide her with additional insights as she is introduced to best practices for working with English Language Learners. Teacher candidates are also learning a great deal about lesson planning and what is needed to be a lead teacher. As Rigo Gonzalez said, “It’s awesome that I have my own little classroom. I am the one that is responsible for planning the lessons and helping the volunteers to learn ”If he can teach in the hot sun with cats and dogs running through the middle of the lesson, then classroom management in a traditional classroom should be much easier," Hixon said.

When asked about the benefits to leading a Power Lunch, secondary biology education major Hunter Spence said, “I believe these experiences will enable me to better connect with my future students. I hope having worked near some of their homes will enable us to see each other with a little more respect while making learning as enjoyable as possible.”