



Cy-Hope's Backpack Feeding Program

Program Director – Jennifer Palomo

Cy-Hope was birthed in 2011 by a core group of people concerned about the growing number of children in our community living in poverty. We set a mission to mobilize the entire Cy-Fair community to provide opportunities for underserved children to succeed in life.

According to the statewide hunger-relief organization, Feeding Texas, 14.8% of Harris County's overall population and 21.2% of its children were considered food insecure in 2018. Due to the pandemic, those numbers rose significantly. When schools shut down due to COVID, Cy-Hope quickly pivoted to coordinating mega and mini food distribution events for our Backpack Program partner, the Houston Food Bank and expanded our summer feeding program, feeding over 109,000 families.

The Houston Food Bank, serves 352,238 FRL students throughout Harris County, spread out over 21 school districts. Cy-Fair ISD ranks number two in the number of FRL students (55,981 FRL out of 117,446 total students) behind Aldine ISD (57,819 FRL out of 67269 total students). Through our Backpack Feeding Program, Cy-Hope aims to eliminate food insecurity for free-and-reduced-lunch students in Cy-Fair ISD. Cy-Hope started the backpack program with 2 schools and 80 students. We currently serve 52 schools and an average of 723 students weekly. We had six distribution centers this summer, distributing 350 bags per week.

Over 50% of Cy-Fair ISD students rely on free-and-reduced lunches. This program provides food for the most food-insecure of these students each weekend and over holiday breaks. The pandemic has prevented Houston Food Bank from having volunteer groups bag food for the Backpack Program. Because of this, they selected Cy-Hope to pilot on-site assembly of Backpack Buddy food bags. Houston Food Bank also asked Cy-Hope to pilot food lockers to improve access to food assistance for older, underserved students who do not want the stigma of carrying a backpack of food home. Cy-Hope got a grant from Houston Methodist to purchase the first food locker; we are working with Jersey Village High School to have it operating by October 2021. Students will receive a code to use over a 72-hour period to get food. There will be 18 lockers with two schedules to help 36 families. They can go online and order the food, including produce, dairy, as well as non-perishables. Cy-Hope also hopes to help homeless students through the food locker system.