



Make an Impact

Raymond James

Ronald Diner

Director, Strategic Community Partnerships

Across the nation, school districts and school leaders are experiencing overwhelming challenges to educate students and increase high school graduation rates. These challenges are staggering as they relate to students in poverty, particularly African American and Hispanic students.

The business community and community organizations can play a major role to help overcome these challenges, and we can do so at no cost. The result will also be a more vibrant community for everyone, and increased opportunities for profits for all of our businesses. According to the Alliance for Education, if just half of Florida's dropouts from the class of 2010 had stayed in school and earned diplomas, there would be \$322 million in increased earnings, \$254 million in increased spending, and 2,750 new jobs created over their lifetimes.

In addition, to a more vibrant community, if a greater percentage of our students graduated from high school and went on to post-secondary education or career training, there would be:

1. Lower taxes as a result of less community funds spent on law enforcement, courts and incarceration.
2. More opportunities to sell our products locally.
3. Increased local sources of qualified employees.
4. More of an attraction for prospective employees to locate here from outside the area.

What can businesses and community organizations do to significantly help address the barriers to learning? What can we do that the schools cannot do alone – that will be very impactful - and has virtually no cost?

Pinellas County Schools has reached out to our community stakeholders to ask our staffs, and ourselves, to get involved as mentors to students who need us most – to become Lunch Pals. In only 30 minutes at lunch time once a week, we can make a difference at a nearby elementary or middle school. The total time commitment is less than one hour, including the travel time to and from the school.

Frequently the challenges facing the schools are the result of the daily challenges faced by many children in their daily lives – poverty, homelessness, single parent households, parents in jail. As a consequence many children arrive at school each day with these burdens, resulting in low self-esteem and worries, making it difficult for them to be ready to learn and succeed. These students will especially benefit from an additional caring adult in their lives – a Lunch Pal whose encouragement can help them better manage the trials facing them.

Preliminary outcomes from students currently involved in Lunch Pals are already showing positive impacts. The impact to business and community organizations is very positive as well.

Studies show that:

- Organizations that practice social responsibility significantly outperform their counterparts.
- Americans are more likely to support products that support a cause they care about.
- Employees that rate their organization's citizenship higher are more committed to and trusting of their employer, resulting in a willingness to recommend their employer as a good place to work.

You would be joining with Raymond James and more than 40 other Lunch Pals partners, including Eckerd College, Stetson University College of Law, St. Petersburg College, City of Clearwater, Tech Data, Juvenile Welfare Board, St. Petersburg Police Department, and others – all of whom are providing Lunch Pals to a partner school near their workplace. At Raymond James alone, there are more than 100 employees (including myself) making a difference as Lunch Pals to students at Mt. Vernon Elementary School.

On behalf of Raymond James and Tom James, and with the full endorsement of Superintendent Dr. Michael Grego, we hope you will join with us so that together we can make a difference. You can become an important partner.

To join Lunch Pals or for additional information, please contact me or Susan Schneck, Lunch Pals Coordinator, or visit www.lunchpals.org

Thank you.

P.S.: Here is a link to a video about Lunch Pals - <https://vimeo.com/130334630>

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Lunch Pals

A partnership between Pinellas County Schools and Raymond James

Supported by more than 40 business/community organization partners

RAYMOND JAMES

