



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 Florida increased its overall graduation rate to 90 percent, the economic benefits from these 42,000 graduates would likely include as much as

- \$436 million in increased annual earnings and \$23 million in annual state and local tax revenues;
- 4,200 new jobs and a \$606 million increase in the gross state product.

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 130 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 184 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 Keosha Simmons, Lunch Pals Coordinator, or visit lunchpals.org

Thank you

P.S.: Here is a link to a video about Lunch Pals -

https://www.pcsb.org/cms/lib/FL01903687/Centricity/Domain/204/LUNCH_PALS_PKG.mp4

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Vision: 100% Student Success—**Mission:** Every child has someone who cares.

Lunch Pals is a partnership between Pinellas County Schools, Raymond James, and more than 85 businesses and community organizations.

