

Needy families at Daytona school getting weekend food help

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DAYTONA BEACH — Campbell Middle School is joining a Food Brings Hope program that provides groceries to feed needy families on weekends, and two West Volusia schools may be next.

Beginning Thursday, 35 families who have children attending Campbell will start getting 40 pounds of groceries and frozen meat a week to carry them through the weekend when their children aren't eating at school through the federally-subsidized free and reduced-price meal programs.

Food Brings Hope, a nonprofit organization that benefits homeless and economically disadvantaged children in Volusia County, is sponsoring the program in cooperation with Halifax Urban Ministries.

"What we found is even the kids who have breakfast and lunch at school don't have enough food to eat on the weekends," said Forough Hosseini, founder of Food Brings Hope and senior vice president of Daytona Beach-based ICI Homes. "We wanted to make sure these kids are healthy."

Food Brings Hope started a similar food distribution program at Westside Elementary School in Daytona Beach last year and also operates a food pantry at University High School in Orange City.

Two Pierson schools — the town's elementary and Taylor Middle-High — have requested the weekend take-home food program as well and Hosseini said she expects they'll start operations soon.

She said Food Brings Hope takes advantage of the buying power of Halifax Urban Ministries, another nonprofit that operates a food pantry and serves homeless and needy families, to put together food packages that provide nine meals for a family of four and deliver them to participating schools.

Campbell Principal Craig Zablo expects the weekend grocery program to help improve students' performance at school.

"Students who are hungry can't do their best in school," Zablo said in a news release announcing the program. "Hunger makes it hard to concentrate. With the assistance of Food Brings Hope, we're not only going to help feed students and their families, but also positively impact students' grades and behavior."
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Hosseini said the weekend food assistance also is expected to help parents who often have to choose between feeding their families and paying rent to be able to do both.

The Food Brings Hope program Hosseini founded six years ago provides after school activities, meals, academic incentives and outings to sports and cultural events for students at participating schools.