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Elgin food challenge collects \$30,000 to fight hunger



Twenty-two Elgin and Burlington area schools and their corporate partners raised nearly \$30,000 for Food for Greater Elgin's Change for Hunger Challenge.

Rick West | Staff Photographer



Madhu Krishnamurthy

Twenty-two Elgin and Burlington area schools and their corporate partners raised nearly \$30,000 for Food for Greater Elgin's (<http://www.foodforgreaterelgin.org/>) Change for Hunger Challenge.

The money could feed one person for 39,879 days or provide carts of food for 1,495 families of four.

"It's been phenomenal," said Michelle Frampton, director of community outreach for Food for Greater Elgin. "It's just an incredible community endeavor. We all came together to fight hunger. We did more than double our amount raised from last year."

For last year's challenge, 14 partnerships raised \$14,500. More than 15 businesses were partnered with schools, providing an additional \$500 per school.

This year eight new schools and several large corporations joined for the first time.

"This is absolutely about a community coming together and recognizing that hunger is an issue and that we can change it together," Frampton said.

Twenty U-46 schools and two Burlington Central Unit District 301 schools joined the challenge. Participating schools and business sponsors were honored for their efforts Wednesday at the "Champions of Change" ceremony at the Food for Greater Elgin offices. Each school received an inscribed ceramic plaque to hang in their schools.

"Our goal is ultimately to also bring on board some of the private schools and some of the schools in other communities as well," Frampton said.

It's the third year Elgin Area School District U-46 has partnered with Food for Greater Elgin. The district's schools raised more than \$15,000.

"It's exciting to see more of our schools partnering with businesses each year for this challenge," U-46 CEO Tony Sanders said. "It's inspiring to see students of all ages make contributions. It's important for them to know they are making a difference in our community."

Each school put its own spin on the fundraisers, from fifth-graders doing social action projects to elementary schools offering incentives for penny donations, Frampton said.

Fox Meadow Elementary School in South Elgin raised the most money -- \$2,071.12 -- over three weeks.

"It's really cool," Principal Sjoukje Brown said.

It's the school's first year participating in the challenge. Students tied fundraising with the PBIS (Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports) tenet of "caring for others, the school, community and ourselves," Brown said.

"That's our school pledge," Brown said.

In the first week, students collected pennies on Monday, nickels on Tuesday, dimes on Wednesday, quarters on Thursday, and spare change on Friday.

"We would announce at the end of the day the amount of money, who was the highest, second highest, and third highest," Brown said. "It became a competition to see which class could beat all the other classes."

The second week students collected canned and nonperishable food items, and in the third week paid \$1 to be allowed to wear pajama bottoms on Friday.

"The kids were so excited that they were helping other people," Brown said. "Every day it was like, 'Did we win?' "

Yet, the challenge is not meant to be a competition among schools, Frampton said.

"It's never about who can raise the most ... \$500 is the challenge we are posing to them, but even if you raise \$5, you change five or six people's lives," she said. "I never want them to feel like they haven't done enough."