

Food insecurity in the greater Houston area is at an all-time high of 13% composed of 973,990 residents, of which over half live below the poverty line. Additionally, 1 in 4 children in the greater Houston area is also food insecure. Many struggle to receive proper nutrition as more than 33% of Texas children do not eat any vegetables, and 23% do not eat fruit on any given day.

Hunger and nutrition are issues that adversely affect students and their learning environment. Impacted students have lessened educational and behavioral outcomes in classroom settings. Having access to school meal programs has been shown to have better results in student test scores.

### **How it Works:**

An estimated 75% of all Houston Independent School District students qualified for free or reduced-price lunch in the 2017 to 2018 school year. Unfortunately, many of these fresh meals go to waste, about 530,000 tons. The Zero-Waste Program will enable schools to repack meals and provide them to students, ensuring they have access to a nutritious meal that may be consumed later in the day. The program thereby reduces food waste while ensuring students have a guaranteed source of nutrition.

### **Elements:**

- Once all lunch groups/periods have been served, the remaining food will be repackaged in microwavable containers.
- These packaged meals can then be distributed to students at the end of the day, following local health and safety guidelines.

### **Expected Outcomes:**

- Increased cognitive performance, attention, memory, visual processing, and problem-solving, which collectively promote greater academic performance
- Increased standardized test scores
- Decreased absenteeism and tardiness
- Reduced risk of malnutrition and reduced parental stress

### **Precedent:**

Similar programs have been implemented in Texas and around the country.

**San Antonio ISD:** San Antonio ISD began with one school food pantry that redistributed left-over non-perishable lunch items, which has now blossomed to 10 food pantries across San Antonio ISD campuses.

**Tarrant County:** Like San Antonio ISD, Tarrant County schools began to redistribute hot meals after lunchtime to students and their families with help from Texas Christian University.

### **Cost:**

There are minimal costs associated with implementing a Zero-Waste Program in schools; however, we assume significant cost savings per student in terms of instruction. The costs involved are limited to bulk containers and associated studies. Minaret Foundation shoulders both administrative support and training.