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THE JUNIOR LEAGUE OF AUSTIN PROVIDES FOOD FOR 1,400 STUDENTS THROUGH FIT – FOOD IN TUMMIES WEEKEND BACKPACK PROGRAM
FIT kicks off 2017 with Pep Rallies to promote healthy eating

AUSTIN – The Junior League of Austin (JLA) is tackling childhood hunger in Central Texas head on. Today the JLA FIT – Food In Tummies program held a pep rally at Del Valle Independent School District’s Baty and Hillcrest Elementary schools. In collaboration with Del Valle ISD, JLA manages the FIT program, which provides easy-to-prepare weekend meals for approximately 1,400 students every Friday for 34 weeks during the regular school year.

“It is never acceptable for a child to go hungry, and sadly, it’s a reality in Austin,” said The Junior League of Austin FIT Chair Elissa Pate. “Too many students experience food insecurity and do not get enough to eat over the weekend. FIT exists to fill the gap when school meals aren’t available.”

Right here in Central Texas, nearly 90 percent of students in the Del Valle ISD are considered economically disadvantaged and rely on school meals served as a part of the National School Lunch Program. Studies show that children who go hungry over the weekend have higher rates of absenteeism, difficulty concentrating, and negatively impacted classroom behavior.

“Studies show that when a child doesn’t have enough food over the weekend, it takes until Wednesday to recover, with the cycle starting all over again on Friday,” said The Junior League of Austin President Sarah Valenzuela. FIT is making a real, tangible difference in the lives of these children by ensuring that they have food to eat over the weekend, and then are able to perform much better in school as a result.

More than 300 JLA member volunteers are committed to cleaning, packing, and delivering over 12,000 pieces of food each week. The backpacks contain breakfast, snack, and dinner foods that include healthy fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low fat milk. Recipe cards, written in both English and Spanish, are also included in the bags, highlighting nutrition tips to share with the family.

“I like receiving the FIT bag because when my mom is working, and I’m hungry, I can get good food to eat,” said one fourth grade student at Baty Elementary.

“For the past eight years, the students and Hillcrest and Baty Elementary have benefited tremendously by all that the FIT program provides,” said Del Valle ISD Director of Communications and Community Relations Jason Zielinski. “FIT combats weekend hunger as it also supports District health initiatives that have been put into place to help our students learn about health conscious foods and activities.
that can be enjoyed by the students and their families. Students and parents tell us how much the foods help their families over the weekend. We are truly grateful for this amazing partnership.”

The pep rallies are designed to get the students excited about FIT and teach them the importance of good nutrition and fitness. Students, school administrators, and program sponsors helped cheer on FIT at both schools.


Ninety-eight percent of the FIT program costs go directly toward the food and backpacks. The cost to feed one student for one weekend is about $5. For more information about FIT, visit https://www.jlaustin.org/?nd=fit.

**The Junior League of Austin**
The Junior League of Austin is an organization of more than 2,500 women committed to promoting voluntarism, developing the potential of women, and improving the community through the effective action and leadership of trained volunteers. Its purpose is exclusively educational and charitable. On an annual basis, The Junior League of Austin contributes over $800,000 to the Austin community and its members spend approximately 150,000 hours volunteering. For more information about The Junior League of Austin, call 512-467-8982 or visit www.jlaustin.org.

**FIT – Food In Tummies – Feeding Minds...Growing Bodies**
The Food In Tummies (FIT) Program is a unique project of The Junior League of Austin (JLA) designed to provide weekend nourishment to children in economically disadvantaged situations. FIT benefits the entire student populations of two schools in the Del Valle Independent School District, which currently reports that more than 88 percent of students are considered economically disadvantaged. Every week for 34 weeks of the school year, the FIT program provides more than 1,400 students with backpacks full of healthy food along with bilingual recipe cards and nutrition tips. By feeding an entire student population that is currently experiencing food insecurity, school administrators have seen improved school attendance, improved student health, and other benefits.

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