

Modesto students get final Food 4 Thought of school year

HIGHLIGHTS

100-plus at Eisenhut take home nearly 20 pounds each through incentive program

Children earn food by participating in after-school academics and enrichment

Second Harvest partners with Foster Farms, Wells Fargo and others for program



BY DEKE FARROW

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There were lots of smiles and zero complaints as 109 students at Eisenhut Elementary carried nearly 20-pound loads Wednesday afternoon.

That's because they'd filled bags of food to take home to their families. The children earned the groceries by participating in Food 4 Thought, an after-school incentive program that includes eight hours of academic and enrichment activities each week.

In exchange, the program – through the Second Harvest Food Bank in partnership with major sponsor Foster Farms, Wells Fargo and others – provides groceries twice a month.

Stanislaus Union School District employee Sargina Yonan, the Eisenhut site leader for Food 4 Thought, said the children enjoy the after-school program and the tangible rewards it brings their families.

“We do STEM, art, physical activities. Everything is about learning,” she said of the program. “When we do art, the kids learn about artists like Jackson Pollock and Van Gogh. When planting in the garden, they learn about nutrition. When doing physical activities, they learn about things like heart rate.”

When a school year starts, the first thing many students ask about is when the Food 4 Thought program will begin, she said. “They enjoy helping out their households, helping provide for their families. Most kids can't say they do that.”

Fifth-grader Tatiana Moreno has participated in Food 4 Thought two years and said, “It means a lot to take it home to my family.” Her mother regularly uses the groceries to prepare family meals, she said, and “we give some to my grandma and aunt because they don't always have enough money to buy food.”

She said the program has introduced her to new and healthier foods, and she especially enjoys getting granola bars.

Of the after-school program, Tatiana said, “I enjoy finishing my homework, reading, playing outside with my friends and talking to the teachers.”

Wednesday, the Eisenhut students were packing bags with instant potatoes, spaghetti sauce, white rice, macaroni, canned tomatoes, soup, and fresh apples and carrots.

The Del Monte spaghetti sauce was “Filipino-style” – something you don't see every day. “We gets all sorts of food many families have never heard of, but really like it and ask where they can find it in stores,” Yonan said.

Food 4 Thought is closing out its seventh year. This week, as the school year ends, nearly 800 kids at seven Modesto-area schools are taking home more more than 14,000 pounds of groceries. During the academic year, the students have provided their families with more than 250,000 pounds of food.

In addition to Eisenhut, participating schools are Agnes Baptist, Chrysler, Empire, Orville Wright, Franklin and Capistrano.

Since 2009, Food 4 Thought has provided more than 5,300 Stanislaus county elementary students with more than 1.75 million pounds of food.