

Kim Stefansson
Escambia County School District
Public Relations Coordinator
kstefansson@escambia.k12.fl.us
850 469-6219 (Office)
850-393-0539 (Cell)

ECSD NEWS RELEASE

Jan. 18, 2017

Escambia Backpack Project *Hooks* a New Benefactor

PBGFC Donation to benefit Escambia County students

Pensacola, FL: Members of the Pensacola Big Game Fishing Club (PBGFC) made a visit to the J.E. Hall Center, on Wednesday, Jan. 18 to meet with representatives from the Escambia County School District's Maintenance Department and students from the International Baccalaureate Program at Pensacola High School. The mission of this "fishing trip" didn't include water, or rods, or bait because the Clubs members are already *hooked* on supporting this worthy cause.

The cause is the Escambia County Backpack Project USA. The program was started a few years ago as a way to help students who are identified by their schools as being at risk of not getting enough to eat over the weekend.

Principal Linda Bonifay, from Oakcrest Elementary School where 50 students go home every Friday with food from the project, spoke to the gathering about the importance of the backpack project. "Our students' parents work hard to supply resources for their families, but this program bridges a gap. We can see a big difference and want you to know that what you are doing is amazing."

Through donations and fund raising at their annual Family Fishing Rodeo, held on Labor Day Weekend, the Maintenance Department has grown the program each year.

"The first year we took over after a group had to cancel their support at O.J. Semmes Elementary School. We fed 20 students," said Scott Stillman a member of the ECSD Maintenance Department. "This year we are able to take care of 376 children from 14 schools."

But, he also explained that they spend 100% of the money they raise, which means they have to start over every year. Having new supporters, such as the Big Game Fishing Club, allows them to continue and to add more students.

Greg Whibbs, Jr., President of the PBGFC Board, said that they select a charity each year and collect donations from their members for that charity at their Christmas party. This year they learned about backpackprojectusa and thought it was a great fit for three reasons, "The project helps children, even better it helps children in Escambia County, and when we heard their main fund raising event is a fishing tournament, it was a great choice. And, the idea of kids going hungry is criminal."

Each Friday's portion of food costs about \$2.25. So this donation of over \$6000 is enough to take care of 70 students for 40 weekends, explained Stillman.

Students from the IB Program at PHS joined the effort a few years ago. A group of four members of the Class of 2016 helped at the Family Fishing Rodeo (held on Labor Day Weekend), created the web site (backpackprojectusa.com) and planned various ways to raise funds. The founders have all moved on to college, but not before they recruited younger students from the IB program to keep the partnership going.

Stillman explained to the group that a few years ago Superintendent Malcolm Thomas challenged them to find ways to impact learning. They heard about children coming to school on Monday mornings so hungry they would act out. "We decided to focus on doing what we could to help kids not come to school hungry on Monday mornings," Stillman said. "We are happy to have the IB students help us and we love the idea of kids helping to feed other kids."

After the presentation of the check, discussion quickly moved on to ways the PBGFC can help the backpackproject team promote the 2017 Family Fishing Rodeo in September and even plans to enter and compete. It was obvious that their members are totally *hooked*.

For more information about the Escambia County Backpack Project, and how you can help, go to:
Backpackproject.usa

For more information about the Pensacola Big Game Fishing Club go to: pbgfc.com.

Media queries about Escambia County School District topics should be directed to Kim Stefansson, at 850-469-6219 or kstefansson@escambia.k12.fl.us. Like ECSD on Facebook at www.facebook.com/ecsdfl
Go to the Escambia Schools Public Relations page on www.facebook.com/ecsd.public to see pictures of recent events.
Visit ECSD's web page at www.escambiaschools.org

ECSD prc ### /2017