



# Backpack Buddy

2023 - 2024



houston**food**bank   
Filling pantries. Filling lives.

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## **SECTION 1:** **What is the Backpack Buddy Program?**

One in five southeast Texas children is considered food insecure, which means they don't have consistent access to enough nutritious food. Many of these children rely on school meals to provide breakfast and lunch during the school year. During breaks, such as weekends and holidays, many of these children go home to little or no meals. The Houston Food Bank's Backpack Buddy program works to fill that gap by providing nutritious, child-friendly food for school children to take home over the weekend.

Through Backpack Buddy program, the Houston Food Bank, works in partnership with participating schools, schools district delivery sites, and other community partners, to ensure that the food sacks are distributed to children on every Friday during the school year.

### **Backpack Buddy Food Examples:**

#### Protein (2):

Meat Stews with Vegetables  
Canned Chicken or Tuna  
Vienna Sausages  
Canned Beans  
Canned Ravioli  
Canned Spaghetti with Meat Sauce

#### Fruits (2):

Canned Fruit packed in 100% Juice or light syrup (i.e., Mandarin Oranges or Peaches)  
Canned Applesauce

#### Vegetables (2):

Canned Green Beans, Peas,  
Carrots, Spinach, or Corn

#### Grains (1):

Cereal  
Oatmeal

#### Healthy Snacks (2):

Yogurt Cereal Bars  
Fruit filled Cereal Bars  
Pretzels  
Graham Crackers  
Granola  
Dried Fruits  
Fruit Snacks  
\*Trail Mix  
\*Peanut Butter

#### Dairy (2):

Milk- 1% Shelf Stable

\*Possible allergen-containing ingredients

\*\* Please be advised- Nutritional Flyers/Child Friendly Toiletry may be found within the food sacks. Please alert your students of the importance of nutrition to reinforce the value of this information.

\*\*\*TEFAP products comprise a large percentage of the food sacks that are distributed to the Backpack Buddy participants

#### TEFAP Declaration:

*Standards for participation in the Program are the same for everyone regardless of race, color, national origin, age, sex, or disability. You may appeal any decision made by the local agency regarding your denial or termination from the Program. If your application is approved, the local agency will make nutrition education available to you and you are encouraged to participate.*

## **Backpack Buddy Program Documentation and Compliance**

The **School Programs Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), National Background Check, and TEFAP Agreement Between CE & SA** forms must be completed and turned in before you are officially enrolled in the Backpack Buddy program. All required trainings need to be completed to start the program at the school site.

### 1. Program Documentation:

It is imperative that the participating school site provides the necessary documentation required from the Houston Food Bank. These records will be used for distribution, food inventory, reporting, and auditing purposes. These records include, but not limited to:

- School Programs Memorandum of Understanding
- National Background Check form
- TEFAP Agreement Between CE & SA form
- Completion of Food Safety and Civil Rights quizzes
- Quarterly Reports

These forms must be maintained and kept updated throughout the school year. The Backpack Buddy specialist must be notified with any changes to contact information at the participating school site immediately so the program can continuously operate throughout the school year. The quarterly reports must be submitted to the Houston Food Bank by the **first** of each new quarter. For example, the quarterly report for July-September is due by October 1<sup>st</sup>, the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter. The quarterly Report scheduled is page on 15 for assistance.

### 2. Noncompliance Procedure

The site coordinator and the Backpack Buddy staff will work together to identify, discuss, and solve problems. If you are unsure about the procedures, such as food storage, quarterly reports, or distribution issues, please contact your Backpack Buddy specialist immediately. Follow the two common noncompliance procedures to resolve school site issues:

#### Improper food storage and/or bag distribution procedure:

- Identify the noncompliance issue.
- Contact your Backpack Buddy specialist.
- Evaluate the issue together.
- Devise a detailed intervention plan including a time frame for completion.
- Conduct a follow-up visit to observe if the noncompliance issue is now in compliance by the designated date.

Delinquent quarterly reports procedure:

- The quarterly reports must be submitted on PMA by the **first** of each new quarter.
- If quarterly reports are missing by the 5<sup>th</sup> day of the new quarter, the school site will be placed on hold for further deliveries and notified by email.
- Deliveries will not resume until school site has turned in all delinquent paperwork

Backpack Buddy Team Compliance Warning System: This system will be followed by the Backpack Buddy team if a school fails to submit their quarterly report by the 5<sup>th</sup> day of the new quarter.

- Email primary coordinator, secondary coordinator, and school principal about compliance hold by the 6<sup>th</sup> day of the month. The team will ask if the primary coordinator needs any assistance to complete and submit the quarterly distribution report.
- If the quarterly report is still not completed after the compliance hold email, the Backpack Buddy team will contact the primary coordinator via a phone call to ask if any assistance is needed.
- Another compliance hold email will be sent to the primary coordinator, secondary coordinator, and school principal to remind them of the compliance hold and explain why the reports must be submitted to restart the deliveries.
- If the Backpack Buddy team notices a pattern of missing reports, they will reach out to the school contacts to schedule an in-person site visit. This site visit will help the team gain information on why documentation is missing, and they can help establish schedule for the primary coordinator to submit reports.

Continuation of the noncompliance issue will be documented, and further action will be taken (e.g., probation or suspension of school site), depending on the severity of the issue.

## **SECTION 2:**

### **Getting Started: Site Coordinator Responsibilities and Tasks**

The following are a list of responsibilities and tasks for the school site coordinators operating the Backpack Buddy program. Section 3 will provide more detail on the logistics of the program.

1. Attend the Site Coordinator training sessions provided by the Houston Food Bank via in-person.
2. Apply for the program on our PMA portal (<https://programs.houstonfoodbank.org/>)
3. Comply with guidelines and requirements established by Feeding America, the Houston Food Bank, and any other governmental agency regarding the Backpack Buddy food.
4. Develop a site distribution plan including:
  - Who will receive the delivery of food orders?
  - Where will the food be stored at the school site?
  - How, where, and when will the bags be distributed to the students?
  - Who will distribute the bags to the students?
  - Who will be the alternate contact for the program at the school site for any unforeseen absences?
  - If using reusable backpacks, where will the students return the backpacks?
  - Who will be responsible for completing the quarterly report and submitting it on a timely manner?
5. Train school site faculty and staff on the essentials of the program. The better informed the staff is at the site is with the following topics, the more successful the program operates.
  - How to identify students with chronic hunger.
  - How to refer students for the Backpack Buddy Program.
6. Send home permission forms to parents of referred students.
  - Meet with referred students to explain the program.
  - Every child will need a signed permission form from a parent/guardian to participate in the Backpack Buddy program.
7. Quarterly reports must be completed by the first of the new quarter.
8. Assist the Houston Food Bank and other partners with ongoing evaluations of the program.



## **SECTION 3:**

### **Backpack Buddy Procedures: Identify Food Insecure Children**

Research shows that hungry children have poorer mental health, physical, and overall health, tend to miss more days of school, and suffer greater rates of behavioral disorders. Proper nutrition is vital to the growth and development of children. Elementary school aged students are at a critical stage of growth and development. Although, they are most at need of food and least able to secure it on their own, middle, and high school students present many challenges of their own.

One of the most difficult aspects of the Backpack Buddy program is selecting students to participant in the program. We strongly urge you to carefully think about which students should be on the program because of the limited amount of space for the program. Please select only the students most in need, at risk of being chronically hungry, and/or experience weekend hunger on a regular basis. A child that complains of being hungry is not necessarily a child who qualifies for the Backpack Buddy program. School site coordinators need to determine if a child just has a large appetite related to growing and development or if a child is truly chronically hungry. Asking a few questions to the child will help clear up the situation. For example, ask the child if they had breakfast, find out why if they did not. Also, ask if they had dinner and if it was enough for them to make them full.

To assist with identifying proper students for the program, a student referral form is included in the back of this manual. This referral form is to be used for every student on the program and kept with the permission slip. The referral form has a check list for identifying food insecure behaviors as well as contributing factors including physical appearance, school performance, and home environments.

School coordinators are not allowed to send mass emails to staff or parents informing them of a program that is giving out free food. The Backpack Buddy program is **ONLY** for students facing food insecurity. It is not open to signing up just anyone. Please carefully think about which students would benefit from the program.

#### **1. School Site Allotment:**

Upon submission of the School Programs MOU, you will be informed of your weekly allotment. This allotment is based on the number of students who receive free and reduced lunch. This allotment will define the maximum number of weekly children that you may select to participate in the Backpack Buddy program. The same children should receive a bag every week unless taken off the program. Always get parent approval before taking the children off the program.

- **Examples of taking a child off the program:**
  - Parents no longer want to be on the program, verbal consent is acceptable. Please note it on the student's permission slip.



- Student misuse of food bags, such as leaving food at the school, giving the food to friends, or picking through bags for certain foods. Parents need to be notified of the situation before being removed from program.

## 2. Free and Reduced Lunch Participation:

To be compliant with the Texas Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), participating students **must** be receiving free or reduced lunch (FRL). If a student is not a recipient of (FRL), the student must have a letter on file from the parent or guardian stating extreme circumstances or economic hardship(s).

- **Examples of extreme circumstances:**
  - Large homeless student population at the school. Documentation of homeless classification needs to be supplied for student(s).
  - A letter from school coordinator or parents stating why there is an extreme circumstance at home (i.e., illness or loss of job).

## 3. Student Documentation:

### **Backpack Buddy Student Referral Form:**

- **This form is helpful to identify students for the program.** It can be filled out by a teacher, counselor, or nurse that notices any of the signs listed. The site coordinator needs to sign for approval to add the student.
- Homeless children should be considered first when identifying recipients of the food sacks. \*Please note, if the homeless children are living in a shelter, they may not be the best recipients of the food sacks due to the fact that most shelters do not allow food to come in from outside of the facility.
- There is a notable difference between a child that is hungry and a child that is chronically hungry. When uncertain, look into the situation and talk with the student and parents. Using the behaviors mentioned in the Student Referral Form and “Helpful Tips” would be good tools to start with.
- This form is submitted online via Claromentis that is provided when you start the program. If a staff member fills out a hard copy of the referral form, the school coordinator is responsible for entering it via Claromentis. We do not accept scan ins.

**Parent Permission Slip: \*Required. No food is to be given without a signed permission slip.**

- Every student needs a parent permission slip signed. If there are siblings in the same household, one permission slip with all the names is allowed.
- These permission slips are to be submitted online via Claromentis. If a parent signs a hard copy of the permission slip, the school coordinator is responsible for entering it via Claromentis. We do not accept scan ins.

## **Backpack Buddy Procedures: Program Logistics**

### **1. Backpack Buddy Food Sack Transportation:**

The Houston Food Bank works with many partners in the community to provide the best option for the school sites to receive the food sacks on a regular basis. Each school will be notified about their specific transportation parameters by the Houston Food Bank when the program starts at their site.

#### **Delivery Procedures:**

Most deliveries are made to the school ISD distribution centers or agency partners that have confirmed to help a district. This consists of the Houston Food Bank delivering orders for a group of schools on a scheduled day to them. The agency or school ISD will then deliver the food cases to the individual schools or have the schools pick them up from them that week. The Backpack Buddy team is not aware of the school ISD or partner agency delivery schedule.

### **2. Requesting Food Bags/Ordering:**

Weekly ordering is not necessary; the shipments are made on a regular and consistent schedule unless otherwise specified. Please be advised: During times, before and after holidays or extensive breaks from school (i.e., Christmas, Thanksgiving, and Spring Break) deliveries of extra food sacks may be made.

Backpack Buddy staff members need to place orders internally five business days before the scheduled delivery to a site. For any allotment decreases, the school site coordinator will need to contact the Backpack Buddy staff a week before their next scheduled delivery to ensure enough time to process the change. Please note that some changes can take up to two weeks to take effect.

Backpack Buddy coordinators are only allowed to increase their allotment numbers every quarter. This is to ensure that the program has enough inventory to make changes accordingly.

- July – September: 1<sup>st</sup> quarter
- October – December: 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter
- January – March: 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter
- April – June: 4<sup>th</sup> quarter

To increase your allotment number, you will confirm the new allotment number to your Backpack Buddy specialist the last week of the 3<sup>rd</sup> month in a quarter.

**For example:** If you have an allotment of 10 bags a week during the first quarter (July-September), and you need to increase to 15 bags a week for the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter. You will need to inform your Backpack Buddy specialist the last week of September.

**\*Please report any excess of bags to the Backpack Buddy staff immediately to reduce orders. The Backpack Buddy staff will not pause any deliveries unless informed by the school coordinator.**

### 3. Food Safety Guidelines:

Every year, at least one person from a school site, preferable the person administrating the program, will be required to take a food safety training and pass the food safety quiz before starting the Backpack Buddy program at their school. If that person leaves the school, another person will need to complete the training as soon as possible to continue the program. The following is a list of some important aspects of food safety:

- All food, whether in a box or just in the sack, must be stored at least six (6) inches off the ground (e.g., on a pallet, shelf, and/or desk), six (6) inches away from the wall, and six (6) inches below the ceiling.
- The storage area should be climate and temperature controlled, clean, dry, and free of pests. The area should be secured from the public when not in use, such as an office, closet, or lockable cabinets in a classroom.
- Store non-food items separate from food. Never store non-food items (e.g., cleaning products), with food items.
- It is pertinent to utilize the First In, First Out (FIFO) method when distributing the food. Make sure that the date in which the food is received is clearly marked in/on the storage area. Organize the food stock so that the first received is the first given out during distributions. This is to ensure that the older food is distributed prior to the newer shipment of food.

### 4. Site Visits/Monitoring:

Per Feeding America's mandates annual site visits to the Houston Food Bank's program sites are required. The Houston Food Bank staff and volunteers will be conducting in-person or virtual site visits/audits yearly. This will ensure that the program regulations are accurately being adhered to. In-person site visits can be announced or unannounced, depending on the situation.

The permission slip forms will be audited during the site visit to ensure that all students getting a bag have one on file. In addition, the FRL status of the students in the Backpack Buddy program will also need to be verified at the site visit. Qualification for the FRL program is required for the student to receive Texas Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) product, which is contained in the backpack food bag. If the student needs the assistance but isn't on the FRL program, please ensure that the family has a hardship letter attached to the permission slip. Quarterly distribution reports will also be verified. The school must be up to date on quarterly reports at the visit.

## 5. Distribution Method:

The Backpack Buddy program is here to help children over the weekend with food, but we also want to preserve the dignity of the students on the program. There are many ways to distribute the bags to the children per the school structure and age of child. For example, some schools will call the students to the nurse's room to very discretely give them the bags, while other students look forward to the bags and carry them with pride. Please be thoughtful of how the bags will be given out to maintain dignity of the students always.

**Child Distribution:** Explain that they will receive a sack of food each week on Fridays.

- Tell the child that the food is for them to eat throughout the weekend. Although it is okay for them to share, try and stress that the food is for them. If you hear a child, say that another family member is taking all their food and they are left with nothing to eat, please contact the parent to resolve the situation.
- Caution the child not to share the food with their friends or open the food sack until they get home. Repeated actions such as these will result in the student being removed from program.
- If you have any issues of children selling the food, giving it all away to friends, or taking advantage of the program, you do have the authority to discontinue services to that child.
- Each participating child should receive one food sack every week. Families with multiple children at the **same school** should receive one bag per student.
- School coordinators are not allowed to give food sacks to students that do not attend their school.

**Child Confidentiality:** Please distribute the food in a way that the children will not be embarrassed. Even if children are not embarrassed to receive the food, please maintain a level of confidentiality to prevent potential problems (e.g., other children seeing the food sack and asking for it).

- Avoid making obvious public announcements that refer to children receiving the food. For example, instead of announcing, “Backpack Buddy program, come to the office,” try saying, “Health Club Members please come to the office.”
- Do not hand food to children amid their peers who are not receiving food. For example, going into a classroom with food sacks and calling referred students to receive food in front of the class.
- Hall passes can be used to gather the students at the time of distribution. On Friday mornings, the hall passes can be placed in the boxes of the teachers that have students that are participating in the Backpack Buddy program. The hall passes can be found on the last page of this packet.

## 6. Backpack Buddy Quarterly Reports:

Keeping accurate records of children receiving food on a weekly basis is essential to the success of the program. To be in compliant with The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), it is required to inform the Houston Food Bank of the names of the children who are receiving the food sacks. If confidentiality is a concern, the first initial and last name (or vice versa) of the student will be accepted.

**The due date for the quarterly report is the first day of the next quarter.**

Schools will be placed on a compliance hold for any reports that are not received by the 5<sup>th</sup> of the month due. For example, the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter reports are late if not received by October 5<sup>th</sup>. Schools will not be able to accept further deliveries until the report(s) are submitted. Below are the due dates for the 2023-2024 school year.

Months in a Quarter	Quarter	Report Due Dates:
July - September	1st	October 1st
October - December	2nd	January 1st
January - March	3rd	April 1st
April - June	4th	July 1st or end of the school year

**\*\*IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT:**

All reports are submitted by the online reporting system at <https://programs.houstonfoodbank.org> and can only be submitted once there is an approved application on file.

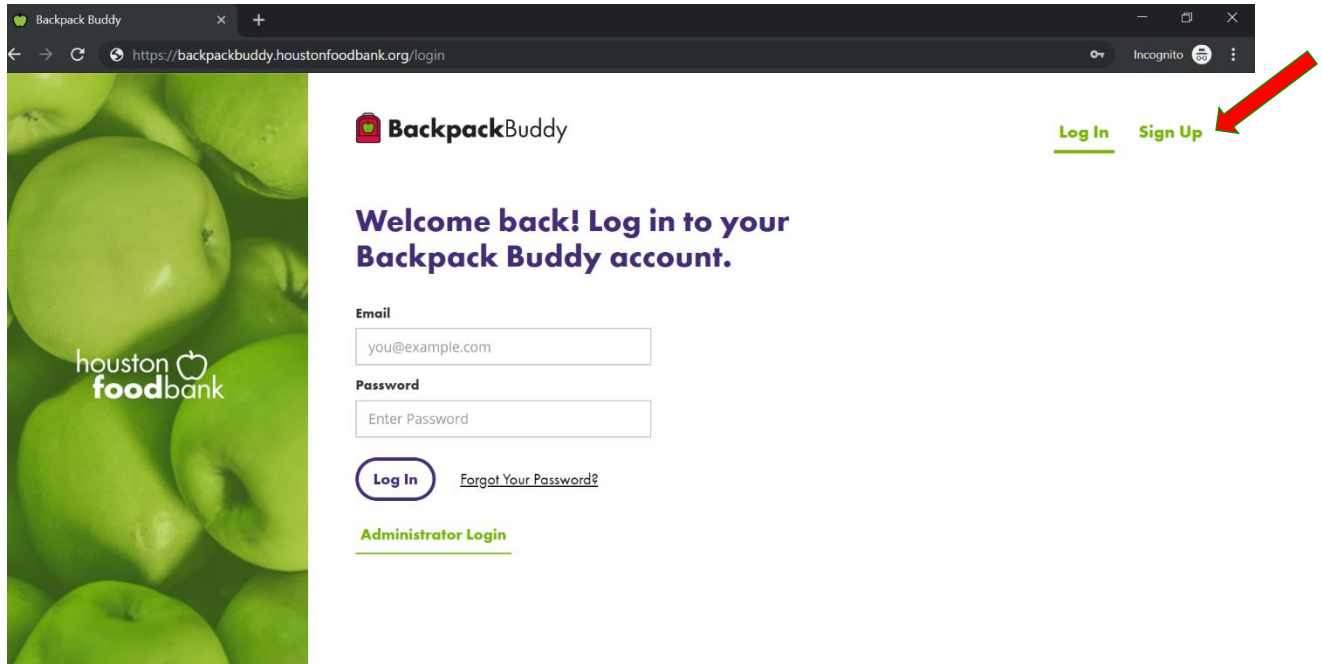


## Program Management Application (PMA) Website Instructions:

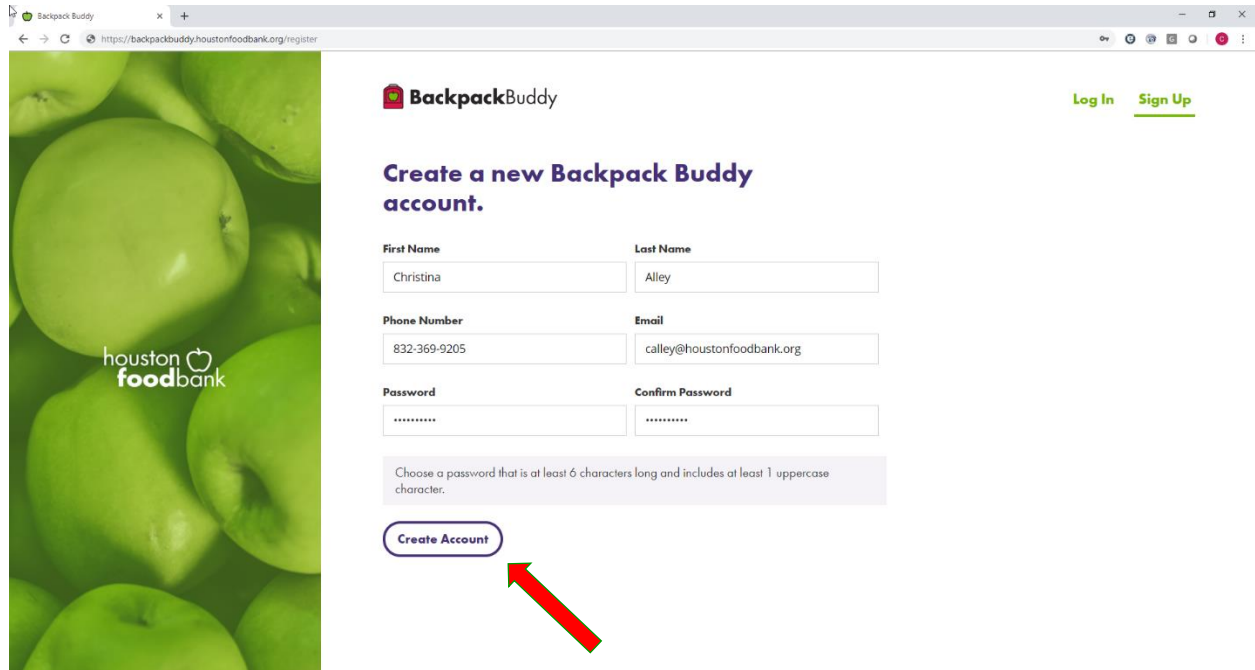
<https://programs.houstonfoodbank.org/>

### New Users:

- Click “Sign Up” for new users at the top of the screen.



- Enter your first name, last name, phone number, school email address.
- Enter a password of your choice.
  - At least six (6) characters long.
  - At least one uppercase letter.
- Click “Create Account”



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL <https://backpackbuddy.houstonfoodbank.org/register>. The page features a green sidebar with a background image of apples and the Houston Food Bank logo. The main content area is titled "Create a new Backpack Buddy account." and contains a registration form. The form has fields for First Name (Christina), Last Name (Alley), Phone Number (832-369-9205), Email (calley@houstonfoodbank.org), Password, and Confirm Password. A red arrow points to the "Create Account" button at the bottom of the form. A password hint box states: "Choose a password that is at least 6 characters long and includes at least 1 uppercase character."

BackpackBuddy

[Log In](#) [Sign Up](#)

### Create a new Backpack Buddy account.

**First Name**  
Christina

**Last Name**  
Alley

**Phone Number**  
832-369-9205

**Email**  
calley@houstonfoodbank.org

**Password**  
\*\*\*\*\*

**Confirm Password**  
\*\*\*\*\*

Choose a password that is at least 6 characters long and includes at least 1 uppercase character.

[Create Account](#)

## Application Page 1:

- Once you have logged in you will be directed to the Program Management page. Please go to Backpack Buddy and select Visit.
- The Backpack Distribution Report dashboard will now pop up. Please go to your name at the top right-hand corner. My Account will populate under your name.
- Once you are in your “My Account” please scroll down and select “Apply” under “Apply Again”. Select the application that applies to you.
- Fill out required fields of the school application as seen below. School Name will auto populate if your school participated in Backpack Buddy in the 2023-2024 school year. If you are a new school, please continue to type your school’s name and below it will give you the option to create your school’s name.
- Please confirm that the right school district is populated. In some cases, we have schools that are named the same but in different districts. If you see that your district is not correct, please delete the school’s name and select the other option.

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the Backpack Buddy logo and a progress indicator showing two steps, with the first step being active. The main heading is "Backpack Buddy Program Agreement 2019-2020". Below this is a paragraph: "Please complete this agreement to be considered for the Backpack Buddy program. After your agreement has been submitted, check your approval status by logging in to your Backpack Buddy account." The form is divided into two main sections: "Application Type" and "School Information".

**Application Type**

- ☐ Summer Summer Months Only (June 1, 2019 - August 25, 2019)
- ☒ School Year Full Calendar Year (August 15, 2019 - June 15, 2020)

**School Information**

**School Type**

- ☐ Elementary
- ☐ Middle
- ☐ High

**School Name**

Enter School Name

**School District**

Enter School District

**Address Line 1**

Enter Address Line 1

**Address Line 2 (Optional)**

Enter Address Line 2 (Optional)

**City**

Enter City

**County**

Enter County

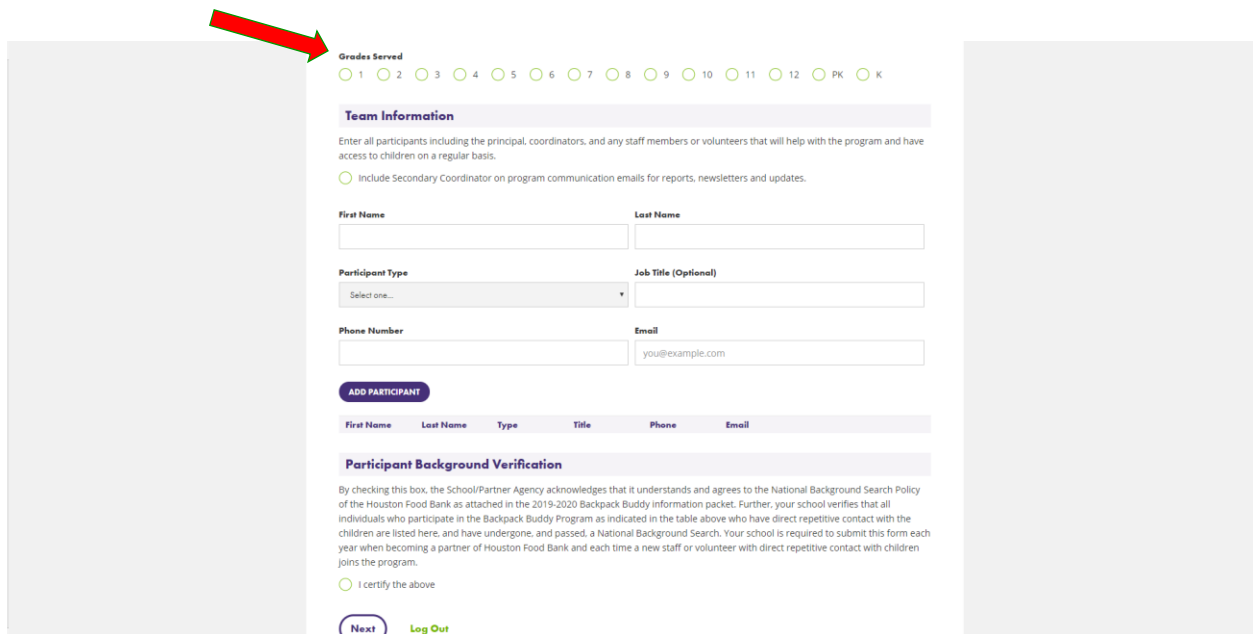
**State**

Enter State

**Zip**

Enter Zip

- Please modify the coordinators and principal as needed by selecting the delete button in appropriate contact line and adding new participant with “Add Participant” button.
- If there is already a principal, primary coordinator, and/or a secondary coordinator listed, the application will not allow you to add another one unless you delete the previous contact. You can delete the contact by scrolling under the “Add Participant” button and hovering over the light grey trash bin towards the very far right of the contact’s name.
- If you do not need to make any changes from the previous year, please leave the fields under “Team Information” blank and click next. The application will not let you proceed if you typed anything in that area.



**Grades Served**

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10 ☐ 11 ☐ 12 ☐ PK ☐ K

**Team Information**

Enter all participants including the principal, coordinators, and any staff members or volunteers that will help with the program and have access to children on a regular basis.

☐ Include Secondary Coordinator on program communication emails for reports, newsletters and updates.

**First Name**

**Last Name**

**Participant Type**

**Job Title (Optional)**

**Phone Number**

**Email**

**ADD PARTICIPANT**

First Name	Last Name	Type	Title	Phone	Email
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**Participant Background Verification**

By checking this box, the School/Partner Agency acknowledges that it understands and agrees to the National Background Search Policy of the Houston Food Bank as attached in the 2019-2020 Backpack Buddy information packet. Further, your school verifies that all individuals who participate in the Backpack Buddy Program as indicated in the table above who have direct repetitive contact with the children are listed here, and have undergone, and passed, a National Background Search. Your school is required to submit this form each year when becoming a partner of Houston Food Bank and each time a new staff or volunteer with direct repetitive contact with children joins the program.


☐ I certify the above

[Next](#) [Log Out](#)

Click “Next”

**Application Page 2:** Fill out required fields of the school application as seen below, read the School Programs MOU and then click “Submit Agreement.”

\* The program's rules and regulations are on the agreement, and they must be followed. Failure to comply will result in the issue being investigated by the Backpack Buddy staff and a proper course of action being taken after the investigation.

Your Progress 1 2

### Backpack Buddy Program Agreement 2019-2020

Please complete this agreement to be considered for the Backpack Buddy program. After your agreement has been submitted, check your approval status by logging in to your Backpack Buddy account.

#### Allotment Information

Number of students receiving FREE lunch

Required

Number of Students Receiving REDUCED lunch

Required

Total Enrollment of your school

Would you be willing to help Houston Food Bank with media events?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Would you be willing to pass out info about other Houston Food Bank's programs if provided?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Please check the programs that you are interested in receiving more information about (Optional)

☐ Nutrition Education

☐ SNAP

☐ Kids Cafe

☐ Partner Services

☐ Teachers Aid

#### The Agreement

This document is an agreement made between the Houston Food Bank (hereinafter referred to as "HFB") located at 535 Portwall St. Houston, TX 77029 and your school (hereinafter referred to as "School Partner").

**The School Partner agrees to:**

1. Ensures the School Partner staff complies with all applicable local, state, and federal statutes, ordinances and regulations including, but not limited to, the safe and proper handling of food and distribution of food.
2. Willingness to abide by the policies, procedures, and record keeping requirements of HFB.
3. School Partner staff and volunteers will not engage in discrimination, in the provision of services, against any person because of race, color, citizenship, religion, gender, national origin, ancestry, age, marital status, disability, sexual orientation including gender identity or expression, unfavorable discharge from the military, or status as a protected veteran.
4. Ensure that all student participants have a signed permission slip. Supply HFB with copies of permission slips as students are added to the program. All Backpack Buddy records should be stored for a minimum of three years at the School Partner location.
5. Distribute healthy, nutritious food to children free of charge.
6. Identify children that are chronically hungry in your school(s) using the guidelines specified in the Student Referral Form, as indicated in the Backpack Buddy Informational Packet.

I understand that the School Partner will receive food from the HFB to help provide food to chronically hungry children over the weekend. I understand that the food we receive for the Backpack Buddy program can only be used for that purpose. I understand that the food and backpacks cannot be sold, used for other school programs, used for fundraisers, given to staff, or used for any other purpose other than to provide food to chronically hungry children. Food sack items may not be removed, replaced or added unless approved by the HFB. Failure to comply with the program requirements will result in the loss of the Backpack Buddy program at School Partner.

☐ I understand the above

I certify that I have read the Backpack Buddy Information Packet in its entirety. By signing this agreement, I, the School Partner Site Coordinator and/or the affiliates at the campus level, acknowledge the respective duties and responsibilities related to the administration of the Backpack Buddy Program.

☐ I understand the above

### Principal Signature

Your Principal is required to provide an e-signature for this application to be considered. An email message will be sent to the Principal email that you provided. Your Principal must click the link and follow the instructions to provide their signature.

**Verify Principal Email**  
keimigh@pearlandisd.org

[Back](#) [Log Out](#) [Submit Agreement](#)

- You can click “Back” to modify page 1 of the application before submission. The application autosaves if you “Log Out.” Page will open where your previous session ended when logging back into website.
- Please make sure all contact emails for coordinators and principals are correct before submitting.
- An email for the principal, to click the agreement link, will be sent after submission.
- Coordinators will not have access to the website reporting function unless principal approves the agreement through the emailed link. Coordinators will get the following message until the application is approved by principal.

**BackpackBuddy**

### Your Backpack Buddy Program Agreement is under review

**Application Status:**  
**Pending Principal**

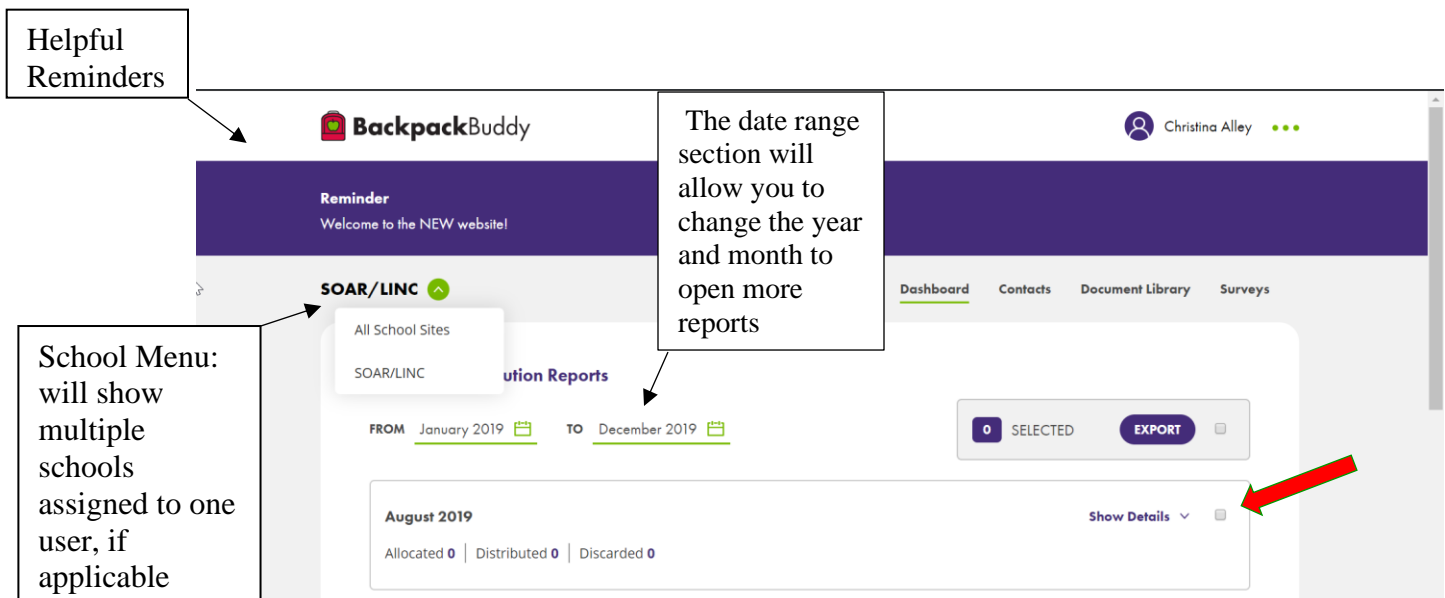
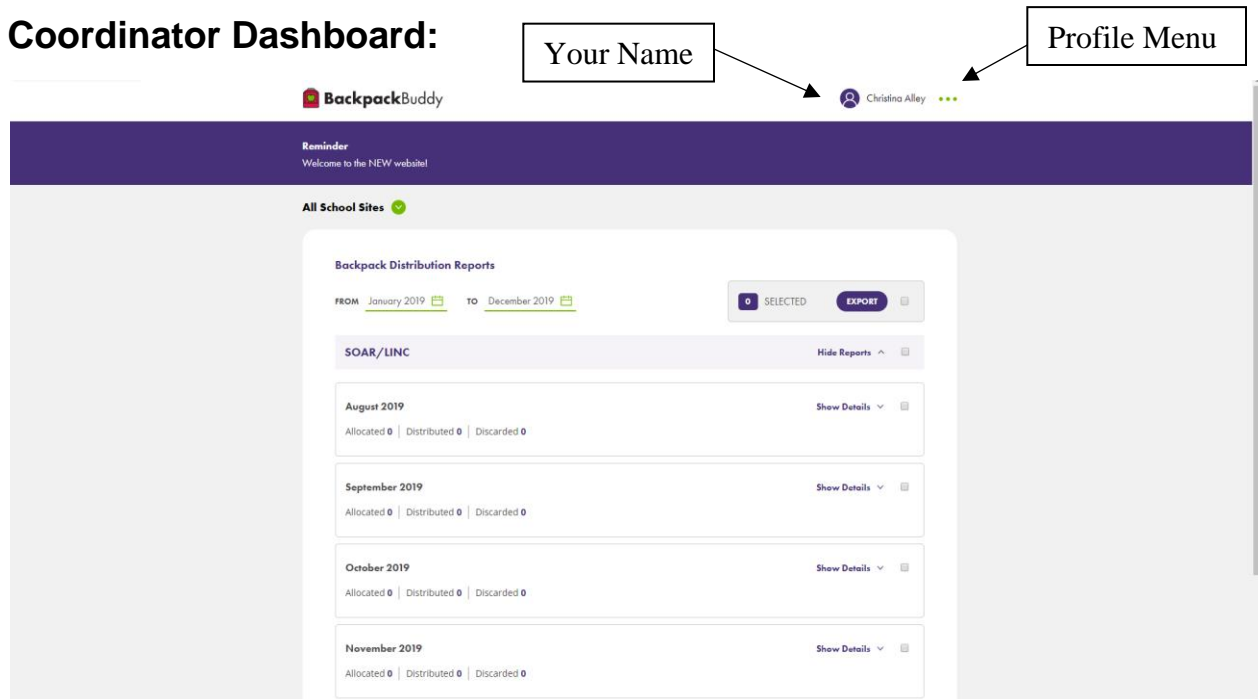
Your Principal is required to provide an e-signature for this application to be considered. An email message will be sent to the Principal email that you provided. Your Principal must click the link and follow the instructions to provide their signature.

For questions, please contact the Backpack Buddy Coordinator 832-369-9314.

[Log Out](#)

Once approved, log in using your email username and password that you created during sign up at <https://programs.houstonfoodbank.org>. Passwords are case sensitive.

## PMA Coordinator Dashboard:



- Select your school to see dashboard menus and reports.
  - Contact Menu: Change contacts for school
- Dashboard will show all available reports for the application in the year search window.
- Click “Show Details” to enter and look at reports.



May 2021 Hide Details ^ □

Allocated 0 | Distributed 0 | Discarded 0

---

**Student Distribution Report**

To start a report copy students from the previous month, upload the excel template, or add a student to start fresh.

Copy Students
Add a Student
Upload Template
Download Template

To enter students:

- **Copy Students**: Copy all student names and numbers from previous month report. Edits of the number of bags per Friday will need to be completed before submission. \*Can only be used when your previous month has been completed.
- **Add a Student**: button will pop up a screen to enter number of bags into active Friday dates for service month. Student name and ID number are required.
- **Download Template**: will be an excel spreadsheet. You will input the students Names and ID numbers and save the spreadsheet. Use **Upload Template** to upload the saved spreadsheet and the information will carry over. You will select each student individual and enter the number of bags into active Friday dates for service month.
- Click “Save” to go back to report dashboard and see student information.

**Add a Student** ✕

Name

ID Number

Aug 16

Aug 23

Aug 30

Testimonial

Add comments about this student.




---

Cancel
Save

- Once student name and ID number are entered, edits can be made throughout the month by clicking the edit button.
- The form auto saves after entering information. **Do not click submit until completion of report.**
- Once all student and bag information are entered and finalized, click Submit.
  - This is a final submission, and no more edits will be allowed after submission.
  - Please email your Backpack Buddy Specialist if you have submitted your report early for reinstatement.

Allocated 0 | Distributed 0 | Discarded 0

### Student Distribution Report

Name	ID	Sep 06	Sep 13	Sep 20	Sep 27	Testimonial
Christina Alley	HFb1234	0	0	0	0	 
<b>Weekly Totals</b>		0	0	0	0	 <b>Add a Student</b>

Add comments about this report.

**Submit**

- Submission information will be recorded under report information indicating successful report submission.

August 2019

Hide Details ^

Allocated 0

Distributed 3

Discarded -3

Student Distribution Report

Name	ID	Aug 16	Aug 23	Aug 30	Testimonial
Christina Alley	HFb1234	1	1	1	
Weekly Totals		1	1	1	

No comments.

Submitted by Christina Alley  
July 16th, 2019 1:37 pm

- Allocated number: your weekly allotment number times the number of weeks in the month.
- Distributed number: the number of bags you distributed to each child for that month.
- Discarded: will be a negative number if you distributed the allotted number of bags you received for that month. If you did not distribute all of the bags you received it will reflect on this field.

## Profile menu:

- Allows you to change contact information for your profile.

The screenshot shows the BackpackBuddy website interface. At the top, there is a purple header bar. On the left, it says "Reminder" and "Welcome to the NEW website!". On the right, there is a user profile icon for "Christina Alley" with a dropdown menu containing "Account" and "Log Out". Below the header, the main content area is titled "My Account". It features a sidebar with "Profile" (selected) and "Applications". The "Profile Information" section contains input fields for "First Name" (Christina), "Last Name" (Alley), "Email" (calley@hotmail.com), and "Phone" (832-369-9205). A green "Save" button is at the bottom of the form.

- Current application for submitted school can be viewed and printed under Applications.
- Allows you to apply for other schools in current year and next available years.

### Apply Again

Are you affiliated with another school or need to apply again? Complete another application for Summer 2022 or School Year 2022-2023.

Apply

### Apply for Next Year

Applications for next year are not available. Please check back at a later time.

Apply

### **\*Helpful Tips**

- Staff awareness is helpful. Please explain the Backpack Buddy program to all your school staff and ask for their help in identifying children that would benefit from the program.
- Please stress that teachers should only refer students who are chronically hungry using the Backpack Buddy Student Referral Form.
- Discuss your plans for how food will be distributed and get input from staff so that everyone will be accommodating to your plan of the food distribution.
- Use the Student Referral Form to identify children for the program. You may also see the following changes in children that are chronically hungry :
  - Behavior changes
  - Mental changes
  - Detrimental performance in math and reading
  - Decline in responsiveness and attention span
  - Depression
  - Extreme sleepiness
  - Mood Swings
  - Changes in physical appearance
  - Excessive absences
- If you need more assistance or have any more questions in reference to this packet, feel free to contact Backpack Buddy staff at [backpackbuddy@houstonfoodbank.org](mailto:backpackbuddy@houstonfoodbank.org).
- Additional Resources:
  - To access Agency Partners in your area, please visit the Houston Food Bank's website, <http://www.houstonfoodbank.org/agency-locator/> or call the Call Center at 832-369-9390 for Social Services.
  - Teachers Aid: A school supply program offered to schools in which 60% or more of school enrollment are receiving free and reduced lunch. Please contact the School Programs manager at [teachersaid@houstonfoodbank.org](mailto:teachersaid@houstonfoodbank.org) to obtain enrollment information and procedures.



## Onboarding Checklist

Starting the Program	
	<p>Register for School Program Training</p> <p><b>[Insert first training date and time]</b> [Insert first training link]</p> <p><b>[Insert second training date and time]</b> [Insert second training link]</p> <p><b>[Insert third training date and time]</b> [Insert third training link]</p> <p><b>[Insert fourth training date and time]</b> [Insert fourth training link]</p>
	Attend School Program Training.
	<p>Apply for the Backpack Buddy program.</p> <p><a href="https://programs.houstonfoodbank.org/login">https://programs.houstonfoodbank.org/login</a></p>
	Confirm Principal has approved the Backpack Buddy Application on PMA once the application is open.
	<p>Receive Claromentis Login once application is <b>Approved</b> and Training is complete.</p> <p><a href="https://portal.myintranet.com/login?no_auto=1&amp;no_autologin=1&amp;page=%2F">https://portal.myintranet.com/login?no_auto=1&amp;no_autologin=1&amp;page=%2F</a></p>
	Complete Food Safety quiz on Claromentis
	<p>Complete Civil Rights quiz on Square Meals</p> <p><a href="https://squaremeals.org/FandNResources/Training/CivilRights.aspx">https://squaremeals.org/FandNResources/Training/CivilRights.aspx</a></p>
	<p>Begin Permission slips and Referral form distribution to students. Submit on Claromentis:</p> <p><a href="https://portal.myintranet.com/intranet/infocapture/add_issue.php?project_id=82">https://portal.myintranet.com/intranet/infocapture/add_issue.php?project_id=82</a></p>
	Backpack Buddy Specialist will <b>email the allotment number and start date.</b>



## Program Checklist

<b>Official Start of the Program on Campus</b>	
	1. Check permission slips on Claromentis or add hard copies of the permission slips on Claromentis
	2. Confirm allotment number and start date with Backpack Buddy Specialist
	3. Create distribution method of bags
	4. Your Backpack Buddy Specialist will inform you of your delivery frequency and when your school district is routed for delivery
	5. Receive shipment of food cases (5 bags per case) to your school district warehouse or primary distribution center
	6. Receive shipment of food cases to your individual school campus
	7. Count and confirm that all food cases and bags are correct
	8. Store food cases or bags in the appropriate storage space as mentioned in the food safety training
	9. Execute distribution method on Friday
	10. Record which students received a bag and how many on the PMA portal of the appropriate month (helps if you record weekly)
	11. Repeat steps 8-10 for the 2 <sup>nd</sup> week
	12. Repeat steps 5-10 for 3 <sup>rd</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup> week
	13. Submit quarterly distribution report on PMA portal once all Friday dates have been filled out



## National Background Check Policy and Procedure

### PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to ensure the safety of all children that participate in programs offered by the Outreach Services Department at the Houston Food Bank. Further, careful screening of staff and volunteers who work with children is an important risk management precaution.

### POLICY

Site management must ensure that all staff and volunteers at all outreach services sites who have “direct repetitive contact with children” undergo a *National Background Check*.

Some examples of **who is required to have** a background search performed:

- ✓ Staff who work directly with the kids in the program daily
- ✓ Volunteers who work directly with the kids in the program daily
- ✓ Anyone who has ongoing, frequent or recurring interactions with or around the kids who participate in the program (e.g. once each week or several times over the course of a summer)

Participants must limit the volunteer involvement of any one-time or non-regular volunteer who has not been subject to a national background check strictly to open and supervised activities. A child should never be alone with a single staff member or volunteer.

### PROCEDURE

**It is the responsibility of the Program Site to perform and verify** the following background checks as a minimum:

- ☞ Social Security History to assure proper identification
- ☞ National Sexual Offender search
- ☞ Criminal History record search

The Houston Food Bank reserves the right to see proof of the completed background searches on all staff and volunteers during routine site inspections. Houston Food Bank will perform all necessary background checks on HFB staff and volunteers sent to program sites.

*This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer. Please retain a copy of this document at the school site and email to [backpackbuddy@houstonfoodbank.org](mailto:backpackbuddy@houstonfoodbank.org)*

The Emergency Food Assistance Program  
**Agreement Between Contracting Entity and Subdistributing Agency**

A **contracting entity** (CE) is an organization that contracts with the Texas Department of Agriculture to receive, store, handle, and deliver United States Department of Agriculture(USDA) Foods. A **subdistributing agency**, usually a food bank, contracts with a CE to receive, store, handle, and deliver USDA Foods.

**Agreement**

This Agreement specifies the rights and responsibilities of the above-named Contracting Entity (CE) and Subdistributing Agency as participants in The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). By signing this Agreement, both parties are bound by its terms and conditions, unless terminated with 30 days' written notice by either party. This Agreement may be terminated for cause by either party, by mutual consent of both parties, or solely by the Subdistributing Agency without cause or mutual consent.

**2023-2024 Backpack Buddy Program – Student Referral Form**

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_

**Food Insecurity Behavior (at least 1 needs to be checked):**

- ☐ Rushing food lines
- ☐ Extreme hunger on Monday morning
- ☐ Quickly eating all the food served and asking for more
- ☐ Asking when the next meal/snack will be served
- ☐ Saving/hoarding/stealing food to take home for themselves and/or siblings
- ☐ Linger around for or asking for seconds
- ☐ Comments about not having enough food at home
- ☐ Asking classmates for food they don't want
- ☐ Chronic stomach aches

**Physical Appearance (Check all that apply):**

- ☐ Extreme thinness
- ☐ Puffy, swollen skin
- ☐ Chronically dry, cracked lips
- ☐ Chronically dry, itchy eyes
- ☐ Brittle, spoon-shaped nails

**School Performance (Check all that apply):**

- ☐ Excessive absences and/or tardiness
- ☐ Repetition of a grade
- ☐ Chronic sickness
- ☐ Short attention span/inability to concentrate
- ☐ Chronic behavior that leads to disciplinary action  
(Hyperactive, aggressive, irritable, anxious, withdrawn, distressed, passive/aggressive)
- ☐ Parents scheduling medical appointments until after lunch

**Home Environment (Check all that apply):**

- ☐ Often cooks own meal, or has another sibling who does ☐
- ☐ Moves frequently
- ☐ Often spends the night away from home (primary residence)
- ☐ ☐ Loss of income
- ☐ ☐ Family crisis

**Are there other school aged children in this household?**

Yes ☐ No ☐ If so, how many? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name/title of person referring the student

\_\_\_\_\_  
Referral Date

*Completed by School Coordinator:*

*Date Approved:* \_\_\_\_\_ *Approved by:* \_\_\_\_\_

School Name/District: \_\_\_\_\_

**Is the student (or student family) any of the following programs?**

- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- School Free & Reduced Lunch Program? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- Medicaid / Childrens Health Insurance Program (CHIP)? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- Social Security Income (SSI)? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)? ☐ Yes ☐ No

**Has this family ever used any of Houston Food Bank's other programs that you are aware of, including:**

- Visited a pantry that is an HFB Partner? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- Community Assistance Program? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- Community Kitchen (Culinary training program)? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- Nutrition Education classes? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- Community Resource Center (HFB Pantry)? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- School Market (Pantries/Markets located at schools)? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- Kids Café (Free after-school and summer meals)? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- They have never used any other service ☐ Yes ☐ No
- I'm not sure ☐ Yes ☐ No

**If eligible, would you be willing to share about your experience participating in this program with a Houston Food Bank representative?** *(Please note that this is completely optional and will not affect your eligibility for this program)* ☐ Yes ☐ No

## 2022-2023 Backpack Buddy Program Parent Permission Slip / Hoja de Permiso

Dear Parent/Guardian:

We would like to offer your student an opportunity to participate in the Houston Food Bank's Backpack Buddy program. Here is how it works:

- There is no charge for the food sacks to you or to the student.
- Every Friday at the school your child attends, your child will receive a sack full of nutritious food for the weekend. The food sacks are distributed as discreetly as possible and contains enough food to serve one child per weekend.
- Texas Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) products comprise a significant percentage of the food sacks that are distributed to the Backpack Buddy participants. \*
- Houston Food Bank staff will verify free and reduced lunch status of your student on Backpack Buddy Program during school visits.

The Houston Food Bank respects your information and wants to make sure it remains private. This survey will only be used to enroll children in the Backpack Buddy Program. Any data collected will not report individual-level information.

Estimado Padre / Tutor:

Nos gustaría ofrecerle a su estudiante la oportunidad de participar en el programa Backpack Buddy del Houston Food Bank. Así es como funciona:

- No hay ningún cargo por las bolsas de alimentos para usted o para el estudiante.
- Todos los viernes en la escuela a la que asiste su hijo, su hijo recibirá un saco lleno de alimentos nutritivos para el fin de semana. Los sacos de comida se distribuyen de la manera más discreta posible y contienen suficiente comida para servir a un niño por fin de semana.
- Los productos del Programa de Asistencia Alimentaria de Emergencia de Texas (TEFAP) comprenden un gran porcentaje de las bolsas de alimentos que se distribuyen a los participantes de Backpack Buddy.
- El personal del Banco de Alimentos de Houston verificará el estado de almuerzo gratis o a precio reducido de su estudiante en el Programa Backpack Buddy durante las visitas escolares.

El Houston Food Bank respeta su información y quiere asegurar que se quedara privado. Esta encuesta solamente se usará para inscribir a sus hijos o hijas en el programa de Backpack Buddy. Cualquier informe producido con la recopilación de datos no identificará la información individual.

**Parent/Guardian First and Last Name // Nombre y apellido del Padre/Guardián:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Email / Correo electrónico:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone Number / Numero Celular:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Yearly Income / Ingresos Anuales:**    ☐ Less than/menos que \$26,973    ☐ \$26,973-\$36,482

- ☐ \$36,483-\$45,991   ☐ \$45,992-\$55,500   ☐ \$55,501-\$65,009   ☐ \$65,010-\$74,518  
☐ \$74,519-\$84,027   ☐ \$84,028-\$93,536   ☐ \$93,537+   ☐ I do not wish to share / No deseo compartir

**Household Size / Numero de Miembros del Hojar:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Number of Children/ Minors Under Your Custody (Ages 0-18) // Numero de Niños/ Menores Bajo su Custodia (0-18 años):** \_\_\_\_\_

Your Student's Name / Nombre de su estudiante	School Name / Nombre de la Escuela	School District/ Distrito Escolar	Grade / Nivel de grado	Student's Race/Ethnicity // Estudiantes Raza/Origen Etnico	Student Gender / Alumno Género

**1. Is anyone in your household currently receiving any of the following programs? / Participa en alguno de los siguientes programas?**

- ☐ SNAP (Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program) / Programa de Asistencia Nutricional Suplementaria (SNAP)?  
☐ School Lunch - Free and Reduced Lunch / Programa de almuerzo gratis o reducido en la escuela?  
☐ Medicaid or CHIP (Children's Health Insurance Program) / Medicaid / Programa de Seguro Médico para Niños (CHIP)?  
☐ SSI (Social Security Income) / Ingresos del Seguro Social (SSI)?  
☐ TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) / Asistencia temporal para familias necesitadas (TANF)?

**2. Are you interested in learning more about the following Houston Food Bank programs? / Está interesado en obtener más información sobre los siguientes programas del Banco de Alimentos de Houston?**

- ☐ Houston Food Bank Pantry Partners / Socios de la despensa del banco de alimentos de Houston

- ☐ Community Assistance Program (SNAP Application Assistance) / Programa de asistencia comunitaria? (SNAP asistencia con la aplicación)
- ☐ Community Kitchen (culinary training program) / Cocina comunitaria (programa de entrenamiento culinario)
- ☐ Nutrition Education classes (teaching about healthy eating) / Clases de educación nutricional (enseñando sobre alimentación saludable)
- ☐ Community Resource Center (pantry located on-site at Houston Food Bank's main warehouse) / Centro de recursos comunitarios (despensa ubicada en el almacén principal del Banco de Alimentos de Houston)
- ☐ School Market (pantries or markets located at middle and high school campuses) / Mercado Escolar (Despensas/Mercados ubicados en las escuelas)
- ☐ Kids Cafe (free afterschool and summer meals for children) / Kids Café (comidas gratuitas después de la escuela y durante el Verano)
- ☐ I'm not sure / No estoy seguro

**3. If eligible, would you be willing to share about your experience participating in this program with a Houston Food Bank representative? Please note that this is completely optional and will not affect your eligibility for this program**

☐ Yes / Si ☐ No

**\*TEFAP rights and responsibilities are as follows:**

Standards for participation in the Program are the same for everyone regardless of race, color, national origin, age, sex, or disability. You may appeal any decision made by the local agency regarding your denial or termination from the Program. If your application is approved, the local agency will make nutrition education available to you.

- By signing below, I certify that: 1) I am a member or a proxy of the household living at the address provided and that, on behalf of the household, I apply for USDA Foods that are distributed through The Emergency Food Assistance Program; 2) all information provided to the agency determining my household's eligibility is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, true and correct. I acknowledge that I may be prosecuted for making false statements related to the information I have provided for this application.
- By signing my name below, I, as the student(s)' parent/guardian, grant the Houston Food Bank staff and/or certified volunteers permission to verify my student's school enrollment status from supporting documents. I grant permission for the school personnel to verify my student(s)' Free and Reduced Lunch status to the Houston Food Bank staff and/or certified volunteers. I certify that I have read the permission slip in its entirety for the Backpack Buddy Program and would like my student(s) to participate unless I provide verbal or written consent to the school staff to discontinue. I understand that the food and backpacks cannot be sold or used for other purposes. I understand that providing my contact information below is optional to participate in community research and story collection conducted by Houston Food Bank. Any reports produced with the data collected will not identify individual information. I understand that I will not be denied for services if I wish to not provide contact information. I understand my rights and responsibilities as stated above



\* Los derechos y responsabilidades de TEFAP son los siguientes:

Los estándares de participación en el Programa son los mismos para todos, independientemente de su raza, color, nacionalidad, edad, sexo o discapacidad. Puede apelar cualquier decisión tomada por la agencia local con respecto a su denegación o terminación del Programa. Si se aprueba su solicitud, la agencia local pondrá a su disposición educación nutricional.

- Al firmar a continuación, certifico que: 1) soy miembro o representante del hogar que vive en la dirección proporcionada y que, en nombre del hogar, solicito los alimentos del USDA que se distribuyen a través del Programa de Asistencia Alimentaria de Emergencia; 2) toda la información proporcionada a la agencia que determina la elegibilidad de mi hogar es, a mi leal saber y entender, verdadera y correcta. Reconozco que puedo ser procesado por hacer declaraciones falsas relacionadas con la información que he proporcionado para esta solicitud.
- Al escribir mi nombre a continuación, yo, como padre / tutor de estudiante (s), otorgo al personal del Houston Food Bank y / o voluntarios certificados permiso para verificar el estado de inscripción escolar de mi estudiante a partir de los documentos de respaldo. Doy permiso para que el personal de la escuela verifique el estado de almuerzo gratuito o reducido de mi estudiante al personal del Houston Food Bank y / o voluntarios certificados. Certifico que he leído la hoja de permiso en su totalidad para el programa Backpack Buddy y me gustaría que mi (s) estudiante (s) participaran a menos que me proporcione consentimiento verbal o escrito al personal de la escuela para discontinuarlo. Entiendo que la comida y las mochilas no se pueden vender ni utilizar para otros fines. Entiendo que proporcionar mi información de contacto a continuación es opcional para participar en la investigación comunitaria y la recopilación de historias realizada por Houston Food Bank. Cualquier informe elaborado con los datos recopilados no identificará información individual. Entiendo que no se me negarán los servicios si no deseo proporcionar información de contacto. Entiendo mis derechos y responsabilidades como se indica arriba.

X

Parent/Guardian Signature // Firma del Padre/Guardián

Date / Fecha

# Hall Pass

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Grade/Teacher

\_\_\_\_\_  
School Year

\_\_\_\_\_  
Today's Date

**Backpack**  
Buddy 

# Hall Pass

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Grade/Teacher

\_\_\_\_\_  
School Year

\_\_\_\_\_  
Today's Date

**Backpack**  
Buddy 

# Hall Pass

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Grade/Teacher

\_\_\_\_\_  
School Year

\_\_\_\_\_  
Today's Date

**Backpack**  
Buddy 

# Hall Pass

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Grade/Teacher

\_\_\_\_\_  
School Year

\_\_\_\_\_  
Today's Date

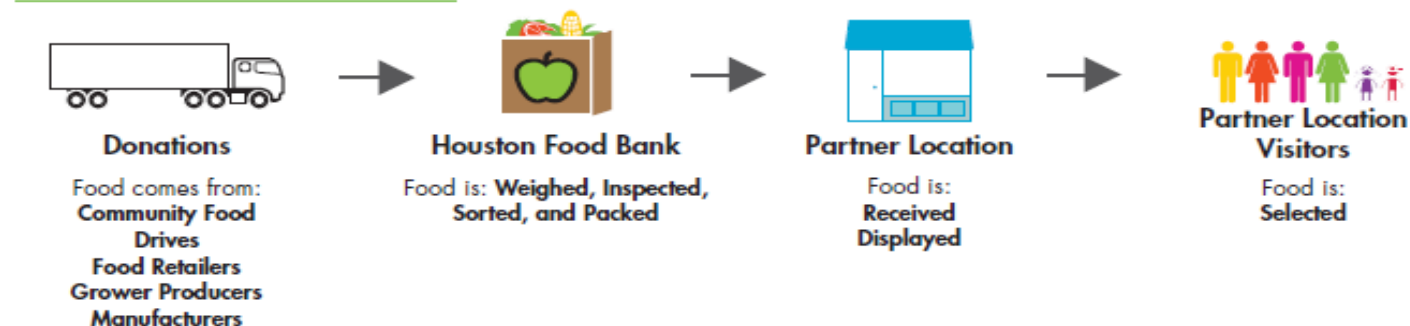
**Backpack**  
Buddy 

## FOOD QUALITY

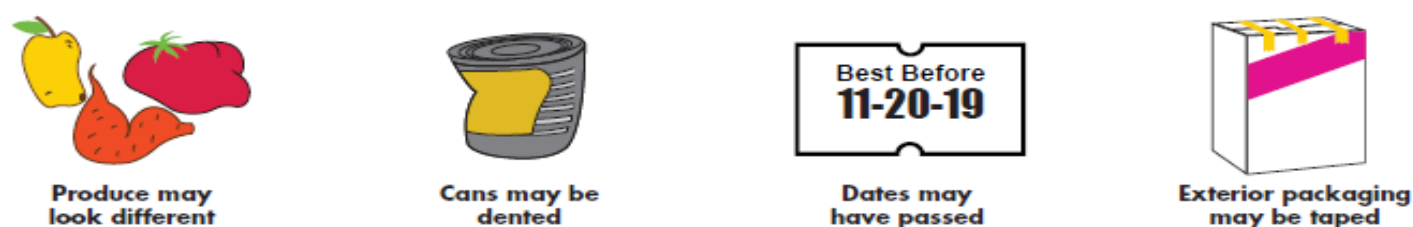


The Houston Food Bank strives to distribute the best quality of food we can. The Food Bank receives food from various sources; including growers and producers, grocery stores, USDA, and the public. Just like a grocery store, the Food Bank has to sort, inspect and process all product. Some of our product may look a little different – produce may be in weird shapes, cans may have slight dents, exterior packaging may be taped, and dates may have passed.

### How a food bank works



### Partner Food



According to the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service, only infant formula requires expiration dating. All other foods are dated voluntarily by the manufacturer and the dates do not indicate if food is safe to eat or not, they simply indicate best quality of the item. There are three ways products are dated:

- **"Sell by"** tells the store how long to display the product for sale. You should buy the product before the date expires.
- **"Best if used by (or before)"** is a manufacturer's recommendation for best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.
- **"Use by"** is the last date recommended for use of the product while at peak quality. The manufacturer of the product has determined the date.

In general, most canned foods have a long shelf life, and when properly stored, can be eaten for several years. Cereal can be good for up to six months past "Best if Used By" date. Dry pasta and rice can be eaten for a year or two after their sell-by dates. Juice has a shelf-life of up to 12 months when stored unopened. According to the USDA, packaged and fresh meats can be safely eaten for up to a year after being frozen. The Houston Food Bank receives and freezes retail meat before expiration. It is then stored and transported to partners while maintaining proper temperature for safe consumption.

**Please use your best judgment as well. If something seems questionable, don't consume.**

**Questions? Call 832-369-9390 or for more information: [houstonfoodbank.org/foodquality](https://houstonfoodbank.org/foodquality)**

# Healthy Eating Research (HER) Guidelines

## Healthy Eating Research (HER) Guidelines

### What are they?

- **Nutrition guidelines** tailored to the unique needs and capacity of the **charitable food system (food banks, pantries, meal programs)**
- Will help **improve the quality of foods** in food banks
- Will **increase access to and promote healthier food choices** in food banks and with our partners

Table 1: Nutrition Guidelines for Ranking Charitable Food

Food Category*	Example Products	Choose Often			Choose Sometimes			Choose Rarely					
		Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugar**	Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugar**	Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugar**			
Fruits and Vegetables	Fresh, canned, frozen, and dried fruits and vegetables; frozen broccoli with cheese sauce; 100% juice; tomato sauce; 100% juice; 100% fruit popsicle	< 2 g	<230 mg	0 g	All 100% juice and plain dried fruit			< 2.5 g***	<231-479 mg	5-11 g	< 12.5 g***	<480 mg	<12 g
Grains	Bread, rice, pasta, grains with seasoning mixes	First ingredient must be whole grain AND must follow thresholds:			< 2.5 g***	231-479 mg	7-11 g	< 12.5 g***	<480 mg	<12 g			
Protein	Animal (beef, pork, poultry, sausage, deli meats, hot dogs, eggs) and plant proteins (tofu, seeds, veggie burgers, soy beans, peanut butter)	< 2 g	< 230 mg	< 6 g	2.5-4.5 g	231-479 mg	7-11 g	> 4.5 g	> 480 mg	> 12 g			

### Why HER?

- **Food insecurity** is a complex problem, with many families also experiencing other challenges, such as lack of affordable housing, low income, lack of transportation, and fewer social supports.
- People living in low-income neighborhoods lack access to healthy food, which has led to **inequalities in diet quality and higher prevalence of chronic disease**.

### HER Ranking System

- Three- tiered system based on amount of **saturated fat, sodium, and added sugar** in foods.

Color	Criteria	Examples
Green: "choose often"	Foods are lower in saturated fat, sodium, and added sugar	All produce automatically ranks as green
Yellow: "choose sometimes"	Foods can vary in one or all nutrients	Canned vegetables, refined grains
Red: "choose rarely"	Foods are high in either saturated fat, sodium, added sugar, or a combination of all three.	All desserts and most processed and packaged snacks rank as red

**Note: Items such as condiments, cooking staples, and miscellaneous products (protein powders, nutritional supplements, baby food) remain unranked.**

Click [here](#) to learn more about the HER Ranking System!