



**Raymond James**

Ronald Diner

Director, Strategic Community Partnerships

Across the nation, school districts and school leaders are experiencing overwhelming challenges to educate students and increase high school graduation rates. These challenges are staggering as it relates to students in poverty, particularly African American and Hispanic students.

We, the business community, can play a major role to help overcome these challenges, and we can do so at no cost. The result will also be a more vibrant community with increased opportunities for profits for all of our businesses. According to the Alliance for Education, if just half of Florida's dropouts from the class of 2010 had stayed in school and earned diplomas, there would be \$322 million in increased earnings, \$254 million in increased spending, and 2,750 new jobs created over their lifetimes.

In addition, if a greater percentage of our students graduated from high school and went on to post-secondary education or career training, there would be:

1. More opportunities to sell our products locally.
2. Increased local sources of qualified employees.
3. A more vibrant community, making it easier to attract employees from outside the area.
4. Lower taxes as a result of less community funds spent on law enforcement, courts and incarceration.

Schools cannot solve these issues alone. Many children face daily challenges in their personal lives, resulting in students who arrive each day with the burdens of low economic levels and self-esteem, making it difficult for them to succeed. These students will especially benefit from an additional caring adult in their lives whose encouragement can help them better manage the trials facing them.

What can businesses do to significantly help address these barriers to learning? What can we do that will be very impactful, that cannot be accomplished without us, but which has virtually no cost?

Pinellas County School district has reached out to our community stakeholders to ask our staff, and ourselves, to get involved as mentors to students who need us most – to become a Lunch Pal. In only 30 minutes at lunch time once a week, we can make a difference at a nearby elementary or middle school. The total time commitment is one hour, including the travel time to and from the school.

Preliminary outcomes from students currently involved are already showing positive impacts on academic achievement, behavior, and attendance. The impact to business is very positive as well. Studies show that:

- Companies who practice corporate social responsibility significantly outperform their counterparts.

- Americans are more likely to support products that support a cause they care about.
- Employees that rate their organization's corporate citizenship higher are more committed to and trusting of their employer, resulting in a willingness to recommend their employer as a good place to work.

You would be joining with Raymond James and our current Lunch Pals partners – USFSP, Eckerd College, Stetson University College of Law, St. Petersburg College, Tech Data, Juvenile Welfare Board, Pinellas County Government, Bayfront Health St. Petersburg and others – all of whom are providing Lunch Pals mentors to a partner school near their workplace. At Raymond James alone, there are more than 100 employees making a difference as Lunch Pals mentors to students at Mt. Vernon Elementary School, including myself.

On behalf of Raymond James and Tom James, and with the full endorsement of Superintendent Dr. Michael Grego, we hope you will join with us so that together we can make a difference. You can become an important partner.

Learn more about Lunch Pals by clicking on the following links:

Website: <http://www.pcsb.org/lunchpals>

Videos:

- <https://vimeo.com/130334630>
- <https://vimeo.com/99252984>

For additional information, please contact me or Susan Schneck, Lunch Pals Coordinator, 727-588-6000 Ext. 1369, [schnecks@pcsb.org](mailto:schnecks@pcsb.org).

Thank you for considering becoming involved in enriching the lives of students in our community.

**RAYMOND JAMES**



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727-510-8750 – Email: [Ron.diner@raymondJames.com](mailto:Ron.diner@raymondJames.com)

**Pinellas County Schools**

301 Fourth Street S.W., Largo FL 33779 – Susan Schneck, Lunch Pals Coordinator  
727-588-6000 x1369 – Email: [schnecks@pcsb.org](mailto:schnecks@pcsb.org)