



MEDIA RELEASE

Feb. 14 , 2023

919 N Broad Street • Brooksville, FL 34601

## Delegates convene - and nosh - in person for first time since the pandemic

**Brooksville** - It has been nearly three years since the Hernando County School District's Student Delegation has convened in person. Since the pandemic hit, meetings have been held virtually. That all happily came to an end last week when the delegation met on Feb. 8 at Nature Coast Technical High School. The program is headed by Weeki Wachee teachers Tori Hunt and Ashley Buckey.

Hunt - who is also Hernando School District's 2023-24 Teacher of the Year - emphasized her happiness with the in-person meeting, as well as the significance of the delegates. "You are the voice of your school," Hunt said to the delegates. "You can meet with a teacher or advisor to find out what's going on that needs to be addressed. ...Your voice means so much."

Gina Doherty, a senior at Nature Coast and the school's delegate, is this year's Student Representative to the Hernando County School Board, elected by the other student delegates. "It was amazing to have a delegate meeting in person, finally," Doherty said. "It has been a challenge with communication, so to see them in person was refreshing. I was super happy with the turnout. We had 14 different schools there, so that means 14 different perspectives from throughout the county!"

Last week's meeting was two-fold. The first half was to discuss issues and concerns at each of the schools. The delegates discussed three main issues: safety, bullying, and lack of drive to participate in school. Students then presented their ideas for solutions to these problems, as well as presenting any problems specific to their schools. Many students mentioned having issues with communication in their schools as well as ways to increase kindness on campus. Students also shared what they thought was going right within their schools, to allow other schools to implement those ideas. "I believe it went well for all the students to finally be able to express their point of view of how their schools are doing," said Doherty. "Students were happy to be a part of sharing their perspective and to pioneer change within their schools."

The second half of the meeting was a taste-testing event hosted by HCSD Food & Nutrition Services. Dougherty learned that the taste-testing was happening the same day as Food & Nutrition's event at NCTHS, and arranged to allow the delegates to be a part of it. The event included a number of vendors offering a variety of breakfast, lunch and snack items to be tasted and rated. The room was filled with an impressive selection of foods, such as chicken empanadas, breakfast egg and cheese wraps, Mediterranean bento box, assorted coffees and syrups, stromboli, pizza, French toast bites, chicken and vegetable dumplings, Mexican churros, pollock nuggets, honey siracha chicken wings, and so much more.



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Each table had a QR code that the student delegates scanned with either a smart phone. Those who didn't have phones used iPads provided by Food & Nutrition, or had the option to fill reviews out on paper. Lori Drenth, Director of Food & Nutrition, encouraged the students to "try things you may not otherwise want to try." The students were instructed to give specific details as to what they liked or didn't like.

Incidentally, this was the first student taste-testing event Food & Nutrition has had since before the pandemic, Drenth said. The reviews from the delegates, as well as from students from Nature Coast Tech who also tasted throughout the day, will help determine what meals will be offered - or removed - from the menu during the 2023-24 school year. "This is the first time that we have had the student delegates from all schools attend and I couldn't be more pleased that it worked out to be able to do that," said Drenth. "It is my hope that the delegates go back to their schools and share with others the great options that School Food Service has for the coming school year. We also got great feedback from our high school students at Nature Coast."

More than 100 surveys were returned, with mostly positive feedback. Drenth said the Asian dumplings and fried rice were a hit, as well as the Confetti Rice Krispy treats. For high school students, another hit was the sampling of Poppi, a prebiotic soda. "Many of the items sampled rated a 5 out of 5, which shows how great a job our vendors do at offering menu items that students love! We couldn't do this without the support of the school food service vendors."

Participating food vendors included Affinity Sales, Core Food Service, Markon, Coastal Foods, Java House, Kellogg, Prime Foods, Tyson, and Schwans. Gordon FS gave out thank you bags.

