



# **Pancakes with Partners: Eunice Smith has breakfast for first responders**

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer  
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**ALTON** - Students of **Eunice Smith Elementary School** are receiving a hands-on lesson in community helpers through the **Pancakes with Partners** event.

The event was created by **Eunice Smith Elementary Title I teacher Natalie Gordon** to help the kindergarten and first grade curriculum come to life. Part of the students' curriculum is to learn about "community helpers," such as firefighters and police officers. To better illustrate the lessons, Gordon said students take a field trip to the fire department. This year, however, she said they are taking it a step further.

"We talked to the fire department and the police department, and the field trip will now spend half the day at the fire station, and the other half at the police station," Gordon said. "As a thank you for showing us their places, we thought we would invite them into our place."



Gordon invited area first responders for two days of pancake breakfasts at the elementary school. She said more than 60 accepted the invitations, with more coming on Wednesday morning.

"Since we can't empty out the fire station and police station, we wanted to make sure everyone had a chance to come," she said. "It went over very well. Firefighters and police officers loved it."

Teachers at Eunice Smith have told Gordon their students are asking more questions and becoming more active in their studies since the breakfasts.

Another reason for the Pancakes with Partners initiative was to replace former "**Muffins with Mom**" and "**Donuts with Dad**" days, which Gordon believes singles out students who may not have moms or dads. Community volunteers and parents were also invited to the Pancakes with Partners breakfast. Gordon said that spirit will continue into the spring with a **Kids' Picnic**.

"We're doing the same thing, only instead of being limited to mom or dad, kids can choose someone special to bring," Gordon said.





The Pancakes with Partners day was funded by a federal Title I grant, which has the purpose of getting parents more involved with students. The cost was roughly \$1.55 a plate, with the additional cost of coffee, which Gordon got for the adults. She hopes this will become an annual event.

"As long as the funding is there, we'll be doing it again."

Gordon said community partnerships are essential to student learning at Eunice Smith. She said many community volunteers come to the school before classes start every day from Tuesday through Thursday as part of the **Reach Out and Read** program. She said the **Alton Fire Department** even sends a fire engine each Thursday with three or four firefighters.

The Reach Out and Read program is open to the community. Interested volunteers can come to the school's office between 7:45-8:15 a.m. on those four days, get a pass, and read to first grade students.

"We have had over 200 reading experiences before school in September," Gordon said. "Those are 200 books that would not have been read without volunteers coming in."

She said that initiative has boosted the reading scores of the first grade students at Eunice Smith.