

Senior adults serve school across the street from church

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ABILENE—Senior adults at Pioneer Drive Baptist Church in Abilene have provided more than \$70,000 in the past 13 years to help students at neighboring Bonham Elementary School.

More significantly, Pioneer Drive's [Primetimers](#) have established deep relationships with the administration, faculty and students at the school, located across the street from the church facility.

"It's important to have a strong church and a strong school in the area, here in this part of the community," Associate Pastor Jeff Reid said. "It's been a wonderful ministry relationship."

Natural fit for retired educator

Malcolm Brown vividly remembers when his late wife of 62 years, JoAnn, launched the partnership between the church and the school.

"She had worked with children all her life in school," he said. "She felt like the Primetimers organization needed a good missions outreach, and she suggested we adopt Bonham Elementary."

As a retired schoolteacher and administrator, she developed an immediate rapport with the principal, who welcomed the senior adults' involvement.

'Needed a little extra attention'

One of the first initiatives Brown helped his wife organize was the "lunch

buddy” program. About a dozen senior adults spent one lunch hour a week in the school cafeteria with a specific student.

“The principal would let us know about particular students the teachers identified who needed a little extra attention and love,” Brown said.

“The first little boy I sat with was from a broken home. It was an opportunity for me to be a real witness and encouragement to him.”

‘No strings attached’

The Primetimers also began collecting an annual offering for Bonham Elementary to provide a gift “with no strings attached,” Reid said. The first year, the senior adults donated about \$1,000, and it has continued to grow significantly each year.



Jeff Reid, associate pastor at Pioneer Drive Baptist Church in Abilene, presents a sign representing the \$6,000 the Primertimers gave to Bonham Elementary School last December. (Photo courtesy of Pioneer Drive Baptist Church)

Cumulatively, the Primetimers have donated \$70,000, which the school has used both to provide students a fun annual outing and to meet the needs of children from low-income families. About 68 percent of the students at Bonham qualify for free or reduced lunches, based on family income.

Every year before Christmas, students are invited to wear their pajamas to school one day. They board a school bus, drink hot chocolate and travel to downtown Abilene for a screening of *The Polar Express* at the historic Paramount Theater.

The offering also helps families from the school who are struggling financially to pay for their children's dentist appointments, pediatrician visits, eyeglasses and prescription medicine.

'A heart for the students'

The Primetimers also help keep the school supply closet at Bonham Elementary School stocked, and they volunteer in after-school tutoring and reading programs.



Primetimers from Pioneer Drive Baptist Church serve back-to-school snow cones to children at Bonham Elementary School. (Photo courtesy of Pioneer Drive Baptist Church)

“We have a lot of retired educators in our church, and they still have a heart for the students,” Reid said.

Bonham students look forward to the day at the beginning of each school year when they can enjoy the free snow cones the Primetimers serve.

“It’s just a matter of being good neighbors,” Reid said. “It’s a way for our folks and the children to love on each other.”

Once a year, the students, faculty and staff show their appreciation to the Pioneer Drive senior adults by serving them a meal.

“It’s a happy experience for us, as well as for the children,” Brown said.

This is part of an ongoing series about how churches can support public education and the common good. Substantive coverage of significant issues facing Texas Baptists is made possible in part by a grant from the Prichard Family Foundation.