Feeding children nutritious food gives them the fuel they need to grow, learn and just be kids. School meals play a major role in providing children food during the school day. But what happens when the bell rings for dismissal?

For the nearly 300,000 New Jersey kids at risk of hunger, the bell signals that they might not have something healthy to eat that evening or over the weekend.

The Community FoodBank of New Jersey fills the gap by serving nourishing meals at Kids Cafe sites across the state, as well as by distributing Family Packs to supplement food insecure households over the weekend.

We visited one of our Kids Cafes in Dover to find out what the after-school meals we serve mean to children in the community.

When 8-year-old David is hungry, he feels “sad” and it’s “all I can think about,” he said.

He enjoys coming to Project Safe for many reasons, a major one being the food. “I like to come here for the food and how good the food is,” David added. “I feel kind of hungry on my way here and I know when I come here there will be good food and I will have the energy to do my homework.”

Ten-year-old Emily shares a similar experience when she is hungry. “It distracts me from everything,” she said. Then she comes to the Kids Cafe and gets a healthy meal, which “gives me the energy to finish my homework and play with my friends.”

Having the right food is especially important for growing children and our Kids Cafe meals impact thousands of children across the state. Children are essential members of their communities and, with the right tools (including nutritious food), they can bring positive change and break the cycle of hunger and poverty.