

Local food service worker named Florida School Lunch Hero at surprise celebration

“They’re all my babies!”

That’s how food service assistant Angela Kelly describes the students she serves at Chiles Elementary School. It’s a philosophy that has earned her recognition as a 2024 School Lunch Hero.

In a cafeteria full of enthusiastic Prekindergarten, second- and fourth-grade students, Kelly was surprised with the announcement that she was one of just five Heroes selected statewide. The announcement was made by representatives from the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, No Kid Hungry of Florida and the Dairy Council of Florida. They presented Kelly with a \$2000 check, a superhero cape and other gifts.



“You are so worthy of this celebration,” said Sky Beard, Florida Director for No Kid Hungry. “You and your team care so deeply for the students that you serve, and we know that’s why you get up every day.”

“She knows every kid by name and they know her,” said principal Corey Tomlinson. “For her to be recognized shows her dedication and we’re so happy for her to get that recognition.”

Kelly was nominated for the recognition by Minh Do, a parent of two daughters who have been at the school since they were 5 years old. Both have severe food allergies that have sent them to the hospital. During her remarks at the presentation, Do praised Kelly for making sure her children have access to allergy-safe foods that are similar to the meals and snacks other students receive, both during lunch and after school. She said Kelly even sends information to the family about any allergy-safe foods that the girls have particularly enjoyed.

Do also said she’s had the opportunity to send her daughters to other schools through scholarships, but has chosen not to because of that care.

“We have respectfully declined due to the thoughtfulness of Ms. Angela as well as the exceptional teachers and staff here at Lawton Chiles Elementary School,” she said. “I trust her more than I trust some family members.”

“It’s an honor. I know there were many, many deserving people,” said Kelly. “Just knowing that a parent thought enough to do that means a lot.”

Kelly knows firsthand what it’s like to have a child with a severe food allergy. Her own son suffered his first serious allergic reaction when he was just 3 months old. When she went back into the workforce, she chose school food service so she could help children with food allergies.

“I want them to feel safe to eat lunch with their friends and have food that’s like what their friends are eating so they don’t have to feel different,” said Kelley.

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