Flagship Case Study

Phoenix P-12 Community College

Why Phoenix matters.

Across Australia, many schools are increasingly responding to the impacts of hunger and poor diet quality on learning and wellbeing. Phoenix P-12 (Primary to Year 12) Community College is the flagship site for the Healthy Lunch Kitchen (HLK) model, providing a clear example of how a school-based nutrition partnership can respond to this challenge in practice.

As a large, complex community school, Phoenix offers credible proof that HLK can work in real world conditions, not just ideal settings. The partnership demonstrates how nutritious school meals can improve learning readiness, wellbeing, and community connection when delivered in a respectful, collaborative way.

Phoenix is not presented as a one-off success, but as a reference that helps other schools, funders, and government understand what is possible.

School context:

- Community focused P-12 school in Victorian regional city, Ballarat.
- Serves a diverse student population
- Longstanding commitment to wellbeing, inclusion, and whole child development
- Actively engages families and community partners.

The school already recognised food security and nutrition as critical to learning, but faced the same challenges as many schools:

- Children arriving at school hungry or with not enough food to abate hunger throughout the day
- Lunchboxes dominated by ultra processed foods
- Limited capacity for schools or families to solve this alone

Why Phoenix said yes.

Phoenix partnered with HLK because the program aligned strongly with the school's values and priorities.

Key drivers included:

- Well nourished children learn better – socially, emotionally, physically, and academically
- Nutrition is part of a holistic education, not separate from it
- HLK offered partnership, not prescription
- The model respected families while supporting children

The Principal described the partnership as "*an absolute no brainer.*"

What was implemented.

HLK worked with Phoenix to co-design a model that fit the school context.

Key elements included:

- Regular provision of fresh, nutritious lunches eaten at school
- Meals based on wholefoods, rich in vegetables and balanced nutrition
- Shared, screen-free, mealtimes that encouraged connection
- Flexible delivery that complemented existing school programs

The program began with younger year levels, allowing habits and expectations to form early, with the intention to expand over time.

What changed (observed outcomes).

For students:
- Arrived at afternoon classes more settled and ready to learn
- Improved concentration and learning stamina
- Greater willingness to try new foods
- Reduced reliance on ultra processed snacks
- Stronger sense of belonging through shared meals

For teachers:
- Fewer disruptions caused by hunger or sugar crashes
- Less need to compensate for unmet nutritional needs
- Greater confidence that students were ready to learn

For the school community:
- Meals became a point of connection rather than stigma
- Strong alignment between learning, wellbeing and nutrition
- Increased parent and community engagement

Teachers observed that initial resistance gave way to curiosity, then acceptance, as children tried and enjoyed their food.

Phoenix shows that when nutritious food is embedded into the school day as a core learning infrastructure, children are better nourished, better connected, and better able to learn. It also shows that this can be achieved through partnership, dignity, and a model designed to scale.