

Food insecurity: A barrier to student success

Food insecurity is a substantial problem

- **One in five** children live in families that struggle to put food on the table.¹



- That's **16,000,000** children nationwide.¹
- Among teachers in K-8 public schools, **Seven in ten** say they teach students who regularly come to school hungry.²

Food insecurity has negative impacts

- **Eight in ten** K-8 public school teachers agree that hungry children “can’t concentrate, lack energy, and show poor academic performance.”²
- From kindergarten to grade 3, students who became food insecure lose **roughly 70 days of reading gains**.³
- Food insecure children are more likely to get **headaches, stomachaches, and colds**, and to have chronic illnesses.⁴

Food insecurity varies by location

- Nationally, children’s household food insecurity at the **county** level ranges from **4 to 41 percent**.⁵
- A study of **schools** serving kindergarteners found school-level food insecurity rates ranged from **0 to 48 percent**.³
- Find estimates of food insecurity in **your county and state**:
<http://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/our-research/map-the-meal-gap>.

For more information

- No Kid Hungry campaign: <http://www.nokidhungry.org>
- United States Department of Agriculture: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us.aspx>
- Feeding America: <http://www.feedingamerica.org>
- Food Research Action Center (FRAC): <http://frac.org>

“One of my students this year came up to me during a test and said she was having trouble. When I asked her which question she needed help with, she answered, ‘I don’t need help with the questions. I need help because I’m hungry and I can’t think.’”

– Maryland teacher⁶

Definitions

Food insecurity: Limited or uncertain access to adequate food.¹

Hunger: Craving or urgent need for food or specific nutrients



SOURCE: Feeding America.

“The saddest are the children who cry when we get out early for a snow day because they won’t get lunch.”

– Midwestern teacher⁶

¹ Coleman-Jensen, A., Gregory, C. & Singh, A. (2014a). *Household food security in the United States in 2013*. Economic Research Report No. (ERR-173). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service.

² Share Our Strength. (2013). *Hunger in Our Schools: Share Our Strength’s Teachers Report 2013*. Washington, DC: Author.

³ Princiotta, D., & Lofton, R. (2014, December). *Unpacking Poverty: Food Insecurity*. Presentation at the December 2014 meeting of the Center for the Social Organization of Schools’ Consortia on Unpacking Poverty and its Impact on Student Success, Baltimore, MD.

⁴ Coleman-Jensen, A., McFall, W., & Nord, M. (2013). *Food insecurity in households with children: Prevalence, severity, and household characteristics, 2010-11*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service.

⁵ Feeding America (2014). *Map the meal gap*. Retrieved from: <http://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/our-research>

⁶ Share Our Strength. (2012). *Hunger in Our Schools: Share Our Strength’s Teachers Report 2012*. Washington, DC: Author.

Schools can help solve child food insecurity

Tap existing federal funds

There is unmet need

- **Only half** of food insecure households with children eligible for **SNAP** (food stamps) were actually enrolled in the last 30 days.⁴
- On an average day, **10.6 million students** eligible for free- or reduced-price **breakfast** go without it.¹
- Just **1 in 9 students** who receive free- or reduced-price meals during the school year receive them in **summer**.⁷

These programs work

- **Participating in SNAP** for 6 months was linked to a reduction in food insecurity of **5 to 11 percentage points**.⁸
- Students who attend school breakfast programs **score higher on math** tests and **miss less school**.⁹

Partner with community organizations

- Schools can leverage existing community resources.
- Food banks and others have collaborated with schools on:
 - **Backpack programs**, which help children get enough to eat on the weekends.
 - **Kids programs**, where low-income students can get free meals and snacks at public schools in the afternoon.
 - **School pantries**, where low-income students and their families can access foodstuffs.
- Find contact information by searching for “food bank” on <http://www.google.com/maps>

Collect data to shape or target efforts

- Survey teachers on hunger in the classroom using selected questions from: <http://join.nokidhungry.org/site/DocServer/2012-teacher-report-full-final.pdf?docID=8902>
- Survey parents: Add a question or two to an existing survey.
 - FRAC measures food hardship with a single item.¹⁰
 - Just two items provide a good measure for food insecurity.¹¹
- Compare your results to relevant national benchmarks.

School breakfast:

Starting the day off right

To boost participation:

- Pursue innovative models like breakfast in the classroom or grab n’ go breakfast
- Eliminate reduced-price category
- Provide universal free breakfast
- See: <http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/school-breakfast/nea-hin-school-breakfast-toolkit>

Find information on your state’s school breakfast policy, see:

http://frac.org/pdf/School_Breakfast_Scorecard_SY_2012_2013.pdf

*“Since we started our breakfast in the classroom program, being hungry at school has not been an issue for our students. Before the program, I had students who would come in hungry and not be able to concentrate on classwork. Students would fall asleep in class or be very irritable. After the program started, we saw improvements in attitude and classroom performance.
– Maryland teacher²*

⁷ Feeding America (2014). Summer Feeding Program. Retrieved from: <http://www.feedingamerica.org/our-response/we-feed-children/summer-feeding-program>

⁸ Mabli, J., Ohls, J., Dragoset, L., Castner, L., & Santos, B. (2013) Measuring the Effect of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Participation on Food Security. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

⁹ Murphy JM. “Breakfast and Learning: An Updated Review.” Journal of Current Nutrition and Food Science 3.1 (2007): 3-36. Murphy, J. Michael, et al. “The Relationship of School Breakfast to Psychosocial and Academic Functioning.” Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med 152 (2008): 899-907.

¹⁰ Food Research and Action Center (2013). *Food hardship in America 2012: Data for the nation, states, 100 MSAs, and every congressional district*. Washington, DC: Author.

¹¹ Hager et al. (2010) found that this two-item scale identified 97 percent of children classified as living in food insecure families by the USDA’s 18-item US Household Food Security Scale (USHFSS). The scale was more apt than the USHFSS to classify food secure families as food insecure; Eighty-three percent of food insecure families were classified as food insecure by the two-item scale. Hager, E. R., Quigg, A. M., Black, M. M., Coleman, S. M., Heeren, T., Rose-Jacobs, R., ... Frank, D. A. (2010). Development and Validity of a 2-Item Screen to Identify Families at Risk for Food Insecurity. *Pediatrics*, 126(1), e26–e32. doi:10.1542/peds.2009-3146