



Resources To End America's Child Hunger

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FOUNDATION**

This paper was produced by the Public Health Policy and Strategies Center at Health Resources in Action, Boston [www.hria.org](http://www.hria.org), and funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation [www.wkkgf.org](http://www.wkkgf.org).

Policy Briefings developed for the City of Boston Mayor's Office, Northeast Summit on Children, Health and Food Systems



CITY OF BOSTON  
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# Investing in Children's Cognitive Development Through Sound Nutrition Policies

## THE FACTS ABOUT POVERTY AND FOOD INSECURITY

In 2007, 18% of all children lived in poverty and 17.2% children lived in households where families are constantly struggling with hunger. In recent years, rising food prices in the United States have compounded this problem, with the current recession compounding the problem. In 2006, food prices increased by just 1.7%, but then grew by 4.2% in 2007 and are projected to increase by double that, to more than 9% a year through the beginning of 2012. Food costs are now affecting a wider range of families from a variety of racial, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, including many middle class families, meaning that dependence on federal nutrition programs is rapidly increasing. The lack of food security can result in myriad challenges, including poor educational attainment.



## NATIONAL NUTRITION PROGRAM PARTICIPATION RATES (2006-2007)

8.1 million low-income children received free or reduced-price breakfast

17.9 million low-income children received free or reduced-price lunches

8.3 million women, infants and children participated in WIC. Of that, 2 million were women, 2.1 million were infants, and 4 million were children under five.

2.8 million low-income children received summer meals.

45.9 low-income children ate breakfast for every 100 children who ate lunch in school year (2007-2008)

## THE PROBLEM

Despite a rise in obesity rates, food insecurity continues to be prevalent amongst low-income populations both in the Northeast and nationwide. Hunger can impair children's development, and contributes to an immediate loss in educational attainment and increased educational costs:

- It can impair school achievement and thus long-term productivity and economic potential.
- It increases the likelihood that a child will suffer from hyperactivity, absenteeism, tardiness, generally poor behavioral, and poor academic functioning.
- It increases the chance that a child will need special education services.

### Differentiating between Food Insecurity and Hunger Status

Status	Definition
Food Security Level*	Households are classified as food secure if they report no food insecure conditions or if they report only one or two food-insecure conditions. They are classified as food insecure if they report three or more food-insecure conditions. Food-insecure households are further classified as having either low food security or very low food security. Households classified as having low food security have reported multiple indications of food access problems, but typically have reported few, if any, indications of reduced food intake. Very low food security applies in households in which food intake of one or more members was reduced and eating patterns disrupted because of insufficient money and other resources for food. Households without children are classified as having very low food security if they report 6 or more food-insecure conditions. Households with children are classified as having very low food security if they report 8 or more food-insecure conditions, including conditions among both adults and children. Households with children are further classified as having very low food security among children if they report 5 or more food-insecure conditions among the children. In most but not all households with very low food security, the survey respondent reported that he or she was hungry at some time during the year but did not eat because there was not enough money for food.
Hunger	An individual-level physiological condition that may result from food insecurity. Hunger also occurs among people who are food secure and is not considered a precise metric for tracking sustained difficulty with having enough food to eat.

\* Food security is defined by household survey responses to the Current Population Survey food security module

Source: VCU Center on Human Needs, Project on Societal Stress [www.societaldistress.org](http://www.societaldistress.org)

**FACT:** Did you know that over 20% of Latino and 25% of Black households with children are food insecure, compared to 15% of all households in the U.S?

Source: [www.partnershipforsuccess.org/docs/researchproject\\_foodinsecurity\\_200811\\_brief.pdf](http://www.partnershipforsuccess.org/docs/researchproject_foodinsecurity_200811_brief.pdf)

### Hunger can result in lower educational attainment –

- By the third grade, children who had been food insecure in kindergarten saw a 13% drop in their reading and math test scores compared to their food-secure peers.
- Children who skip breakfast are less able to distinguish among similar images, show increased errors, and have slower memory recall.
- Only one-sixth of low-income children who ate a school lunch during the regular 2007-2008 school year were reached by the Summer Nutrition Programs.
- Children classified as hungry are twice as likely as their non-hungry peers to be receiving special education services and to have repeated a grade.

Source:

[www.partnershipforsuccess.org/docs/researchproject\\_currie\\_200903\\_paper.pdf](http://www.partnershipforsuccess.org/docs/researchproject_currie_200903_paper.pdf)



## THE OPPORTUNITY:

There are a number of public policy avenues that can have a significant impact on reducing food insecurity in this country. The primary levers are increasing access to nutritious foods before, during and after school, as well as greater access to WIC programs.

### School Meals:

- Students who eat school breakfast at the start of the school day show a general increase in math and reading scores.
- Schools that serve breakfast to all students in the classroom show increases in standardized test scores.
- Providing breakfast to mildly undernourished students at school improves their speed and memory in cognitive tests.
- Nationally, if the school breakfast to lunch ratio had reached the goal of 60:100, 2.5 million more children would have been eating a healthy school breakfast every day, and states would have received an additional \$561 million in federal child nutrition funding in school year 2007-2008.

### Women, Infant and Children Supplemental Food Program (WIC):

- Children under the age of three who receive WIC are more likely to be in excellent or good health than WIC-eligible children who do not receive WIC because of access barriers.
- WIC enrollment from birth increases iron levels among preschoolers and lowers their incidence of iron-deficiency anemia.
- WIC saves between \$1.77 and \$3.13 in Medicaid costs for each dollar spent.

**FACT:** With the average annual cost of educating a child around \$6,800 in 2001, and special education services an additional \$6,000, a food insecure child who needs special education services costs the educational system nearly double that of one who does not. And a child who must repeat a grade can cost the school system nearly four times as much as a student who neither needs special education nor repeats a grade.



## SOURCES and RESOURCES

Northeast Region Anti-Hunger Network – [www.nerahn.org/](http://www.nerahn.org/)

Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) – [www.frac.org](http://www.frac.org)

Children’s Health Watch – [www.childrenshealthwatch.org/](http://www.childrenshealthwatch.org/)

Partnership for America’s Economic Success – [www.partnershipforsuccess.org](http://www.partnershipforsuccess.org)

United States Department of Agriculture – [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov)

School Nutrition Association – [www.schoolnutrition.org](http://www.schoolnutrition.org)

Project Bread – [www.projectbread.org](http://www.projectbread.org)

School Focus – [www.SchoolFoodFOCUS.org](http://www.SchoolFoodFOCUS.org)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) – [www.cdc.gov/obesity/causes/economics.html](http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/causes/economics.html)

C.Murphy, et al. (2008). Reading, Writing and Hungry: The consequences of food insecurity on children, and on our nation’s economic success.

Source: [www.partnershipforsuccess.org/docs/researchproject\\_foodinsecurity\\_200811\\_brief.pdf](http://www.partnershipforsuccess.org/docs/researchproject_foodinsecurity_200811_brief.pdf)

## KEY FEDERAL POLICIES AND INTERVENTIONS TO IMPROVE CHILD NUTRITION

By investing in food assistance programs, policy leaders can improve the cognitive and economic impacts associated with childhood food insecurity. Below are a list of policy targets that many anti-hunger groups believe will make a difference:

Improve the area eligibility test.	The current definition for low income requires that 50 percent of the children in the area be eligible for free or reduced-price school meals, a test which excludes many communities with significant numbers of low-income children from participating. Lower the threshold to 40 percent to bring hundreds of thousands of low-income children back into the program.
Restore the reimbursement rates.	Restore the reimbursement rates to their pre-1996 levels, indexed to inflation.
Provide start-up and expansion grants.	Provide funding to establish and sustain universal classroom breakfast programs (free for all students), especially in schools that qualify for “severe need” breakfast reimbursement.
Restore nutrition education and training for staff and teachers of all child nutrition programs.	Training on supporting healthy eating habits.
Increase funding for outreach and transportation to Summer Nutrition programs.	Do a better job of feeding children in summer, when they are most likely to be hungry, by increasing reimbursement rates to get more summer sites to participate and by providing funding for outreach and transportation.
Fund and design WIC and SNAP (Food Stamps) programs to meet the needs of hungry families for nutritious food.	Fund programs adequately to serve all American families in need. Federal programs should facilitate and support good nutritional choices.
Increase access to, and affordability of free school breakfast program.	Raise the income eligibility cut-off for free school breakfast to 185 percent of poverty and eliminate the reduced-price co-payment.
Expand the After-school Meal Program to all states and the District of Columbia.	Currently, only ten states are included in this crucial program, which provides funding for a meal in after-school programs located in low-income areas.
Provide funding to improve the quality of all school meals.	Develop dietary quality standards that align with the overall dietary quality standards established in Healthy People 2010 (USDHHS), with particular emphasis on the problematic intake of sugar, salt, and fats. These standards should establish specifications for food purchasing and preparation that complement federal meal planning guidelines.
Provide the full complement of foods recommended by the Institute of Medicine for the new WIC food packages.	USDA’s WIC food packages give children only three quarters and women only four-fifths of the amount of fruit and vegetables the Institute of Medicine (IOM) determined was necessary for a nutritionally sound WIC food package.
Increase WIC program participation rates.	Make WIC an entitlement program, similar to food stamps.