



Achievement Gap Task Force

Testimony of Lucy Nolan, Executive Director
End Hunger Connecticut!
April 17, 2014

I would like to thank the members of the Achievement Gap Task Force the opportunity to speak before you today on the impact of hunger and food insecurity on the educational achievement of our children. My name is Lucy Nolan and I am the executive director of End Hunger Connecticut!. End Hunger Connecticut! is a statewide anti-hunger advocacy, education and outreach organizations whose mission is to end hunger in Connecticut. We strive to make the connection between hunger, lack of academic achievement, poor health outcomes, and low economic security.

We're grateful when children have hungry minds, but guilty of educational malpractice when children have hungry bodies.

Poverty's most immediate consequence is food insecurity. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines food insecurity as "...the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or the limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways." According to the USDA, in 2011, 17.9 million U.S. households were food insecure—14.9% of all households in the country. In Connecticut, 11.9 % of households are food insecure representing more than 415,000 individuals.

Low income families can experience food insecurity due to several factors: strained budgets, volatile income and expenses, and, often, because family food needs are typically only covered in part by federal food assistance. Children do not only feel the impact of hunger at the dinner table; food insecurity manifests itself in many other social outcomes, including health, education, and economic prosperity.

Food insecurity in early childhood (ages 0-3) is associated with impaired cognitive development which can negatively impact a child's future potential academic and economic success. Solid support of the WIC program is essential, and the research reinforcing their lactation initiatives demonstrates how significant this nutritional delivery is for children in the early years. Research done by Children's HealthWatch shows food insecure children have greater difficulty acquiring social and academic skills necessary to successfully transition to pre-school or kindergarten. Across children of all ages, food insecurity is linked with lower academic achievement.

Hungry children are sick more often and are 31% more likely to be hospitalized, their school attendance is poorer, and their ability to focus on learning is hampered. According to a study done by Feeding America in 2009, these children are also 3.4 times more likely to be overweight or obese.

The USDA administers the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the School Breakfast Program (SBP). Both programs offer free and reduced-price meals to low-income students. Historically, more low-income children eat school lunch than school breakfast with NSLP reaching over 153,000 Connecticut low-income students and the SBP's 72,000 in 2012-2013. Increasing the SBP participation rate could produce profound results.

A recent social impact analysis conducted by Share Our Strength and Deloitte indicates that students who eat school breakfast on average attend 1.5 more days per year, score 17.5% higher on standardized math tests, and have a 20% higher high school graduation rate. Compiled in 2008 by J. Michael Murphy for the Journal of Current Nutrition and Food Science and entitled "The Relationship of School Breakfast to Psychosocial and Academic Functioning", these numbers demonstrate what growth can be measured when breakfast programs are delivered to students in the most efficient manner.

50% of teachers, in a 2013 study done by APCO Insight for the Share Our Strength/No Kid Hungry campaign, reported that hunger is a serious issue in their classrooms. 67% see hunger as a cause of disciplinary problems, while 88 % state that concentration is severely compromised.

Conversely, decreases in trips to the nurse and significant improvement in student focus during the critical learning hours of the morning are hallmarks in classrooms where the SBP is implemented.

Connecticut ranks 51st (including the District of Columbia) in the nation when measuring the percentage of schools that participate in the NSLP and also have SBP in place. Currently, 68.3% of our 1,089 individual schools offer some type of SBP. Nationally, the average percentage is 89.8% of schools providing both programs. Only 49.7 % of our low-income students who eat school lunch are also eating school breakfast.

Clearly, this situation needs to change. The overwhelming research associated with the benefits of SBP demands that our schools act. The most effective results are seen in classrooms where school breakfast becomes part of the school day. Children eat in their classrooms either upon arrival or during a after the bell snack time in the mid-morning. The academic, social, and behavioral positives are formidable tools in the struggle to conquer the achievement gap. The Connecticut Education Association and American Federation of Teachers have both endorsed the "Breakfast in the Classroom" model. It is the gold standard when schools seek higher student participation in the SBP.

Additional tools to fight food insecurity and help children learn are extended day programs. Typically, these are enrichment or reinforcement opportunities offered to students after the conclusion of the regular school day. (Role of Time and School Climate later in this report speak to these efforts). Federal reimbursements are also available for these programs in the form of after school snacks and/or suppers provided to participants. The food often serves as an added incentive for students to become involved in these extra lessons.

Extended Day programs are increasingly popular as research highlights their effectiveness in bridging the achievement gap. Again, nutritious offerings play a significant role in ensuring that students function at their optimum levels.

Federally funded Summer Meals Programs are key ingredients in the battle against the "Summer Slide". As documented in another section of this report, current research strongly indicates that low-income students are the victims of significant knowledge and skill loss over the summer months. This is also a time when students who have free or reduced-price meal plans during the school year are at risk for food insecurity.

Activities sponsored in identified Census areas that have 50% or more children on free or reduced-price plans are eligible for free summer meals. School related activities, Park and Recreation offerings and events, YMCA camps, and outings are a sampling of the programs that can fall under the reimbursable Summer Meals Programs. All children 18 years old and younger can eat free. Coupled with the enhanced learning and exposure to healthy activities, this nutritional program is critical in filling the void created when schools are not in session. Hard won academic gains need not be sacrificed to inactivity and hunger during July and August. Schools can facilitate a family's use of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formally Food Stamps). The Department of Social Services and the State Department of Education "directly certify" a student for free meals if his or her family are accessing SNAP benefits. It would be helpful to the social, emotional and health wellbeing of the family unit if those students receiving free or reduced meals were helped to apply for SNAP benefits. The stress of not having enough to eat for a family can be apparent in a student's academic performance.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

---Schools will ensure that all students receive the nutrition required to be active learners from the opening bell of the day.

---Schools will incorporate the most appropriate school breakfast delivery options given their unique characteristics for optimizing student participation levels.

---Extended Day programs will employ the federally reimbursable snacks/meal programs needed to make the extra time on task productive.

---Schools will actively assist in the marketing of the Summer Meals Programs in their communities. This effort will receive support and outreach by local and state officials promoting the benefits for children.

---Schools will assist families of students participating in free or reduced price meals to apply for SNAP benefits through the Department of Social Services.

Experimental design and analysis - Learning objectives are to understand the design of experiments and the analysis of experimental data. This includes the design of experiments and the analysis of experimental data.

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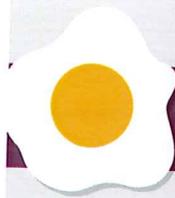
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BREAKFAST CHANGES LIVES

..... HOW?



KIDS WHO EAT SCHOOL BREAKFAST...

MISS LESS SCHOOL



They attend an average of
1.5 more days
per year

DO BETTER IN MATH:



They average
17.5% higher
math test scores

MORE ATTENDANCE



HIGHER MATH SCORES =

20% more likely to
graduate high school



AND KIDS WHO EAT BREAKFAST
REAP THE BENEFITS AS ADULTS, TOO:



High school graduates on average earn

\$10,000
more annually



Less likely to experience

HUNGER

as adults



BUT HERE'S THE PROBLEM

NOT ENOUGH KIDS ARE EATING SCHOOL BREAKFAST.

21 MILLION

U.S. kids get free or reduced-price
school lunch



Only 1/2 of those kids
get breakfast, even though they're eligible



Too many kids are showing up to school
hungry. And hungry kids can't learn.

BREAKFAST CAN CHANGE THEIR LIVES

No Kid Hungry starts with breakfast

Learn how you can help at NoKidHungry.org/Breakfast



Deloitte.

Supported by



Data via Share Our Strength's No Kid Hungry campaign, available at NoKidHungry.org/Breakfast.

