



CHILD WELL-BEING SERIES PART 2 OF 3

Food for Thought

Food insecurity undermines learning outcomes and academic success

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) plays a critical role in lifting children and families out of poverty, ameliorating the harmful effects of food insecurity.¹ SNAP is the most effective government-run program to address hunger in the United States. It has been shown to improve child health, mental health, development, and growth, and to promote better academic outcomes and long-term economic self-sufficiency. Despite its well-documented success, SNAP is once again on the chopping block. On October 5, 2017, shortly after the 40th anniversary of the implementation of SNAP, the House passed a budget resolution that would cut \$150 billion from anti-poverty programs including SNAP.² Furthermore, a significant shift to state authority over the program – in the form of block grants – has the potential to further reduce access to proper food and nutrition for poverty-impacted children and families. Among children in the United States already living in low-income households, these budget cuts place nearly half at risk of malnutrition and food insecurity.³

Food Insecurity and Education

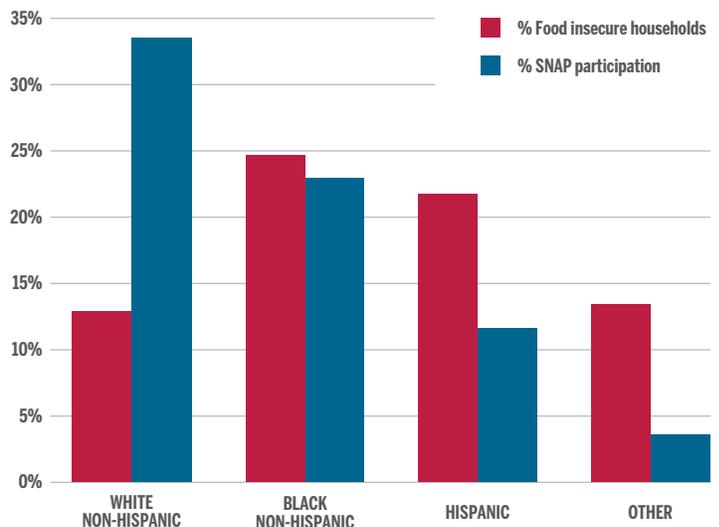
Children who are hungry do not perform as well in school as children who are well-nourished. Being hungry makes it difficult to concentrate, to absorb information and to engage with teachers and other students. In the United States, one in five children experiences food insecurity. This is one of the highest rates of hunger among all developed countries.⁴ Food insecurity has detrimental effects on all domains of children’s health, development, and well-being. The effects of food insecurity on academic outcomes are particularly acute. Children who do not have access to

sufficient, regular sources of nutrition are more likely to miss school, have lower scores in core subjects such as reading and math, and are less engaged in school.

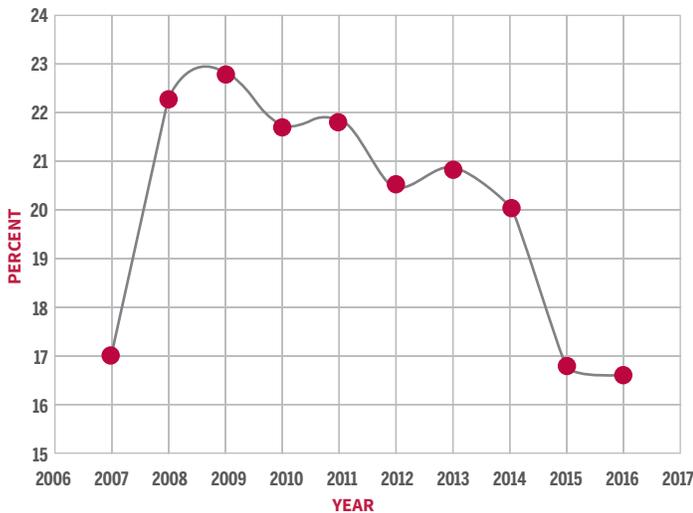
The average SNAP participant receives only \$125, disbursed once a month. These limited benefits often do not provide enough resources to feed children for an entire month. As a result, as the month progresses, children are more likely to experience hunger and get lower test scores.⁵ Research has demonstrated that children who receive consistent nutrition perform better on school tests. A recent study by Mary McKay, dean of the Brown School at Washington University in St. Louis, found that SNAP participation played a significant role in promoting better academic outcomes for children experiencing nutritional deprivation, particularly in lowering the risk of repeating a grade.

Black and Hispanic families proportionately experience the greatest amount of food insecurity. However, in terms of absolute numbers, white families are the largest recipients of SNAP benefits.

Percent of food insecure households vs. SNAP participation in 2015



Food insecure households with children < 6 yrs, pre- and post-recession and the Recovery Act of 2009



SNAP was expanded as part of the Recovery Act of 2009 in response to the Great Recession. As a result, food insecurity dropped dramatically between 2008 – 2015. Despite consistent funding cuts since the Act expired in 2013, SNAP continues to serve a critical and far-reaching role in promoting child nutrition and well-being. Any additional cuts will have dire consequences on children’s long term ability to succeed academically and achieve economic self-sufficiency.

1. Markovitz, L., Thurman, A., & Parker, G. (2018). *Food for Thought: Food insecurity undermines learning outcomes and academic success*. St. Louis, MO: The Clark-Fox Policy Institute, Brown School at Washington University in St. Louis.

Endnotes

1. Child Trends DATA BANK. (2016). Food Insecurity: Indicators of Child and Youth Wellbeing. Retrieved from: <https://www.childtrends.org/indicators/food-insecurity/>.
2. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/posteverything/wp/2017/09/29/oh-snap-its-been-40-years-since-the-food-stamps-act/>
3. Beharie, N., Mercado, M., & McKay, M. (2016). A Protective Association between SNAP Participation and Educational Outcomes Among Children of Economically Strained Households, *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition*, 12(2), 181-192. DOI: 10.1080/19320248.2016.1227754
4. <http://www.newsweek.com/under-trumps-new-budget-if-you-dont-work-you-dont-eat-republicans-are-kicking-679749>
5. Beharie, N., Mercado, M., & McKay, M. (2016). A Protective Association between SNAP Participation and Educational Outcomes Among Children of Economically Strained Households, *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition*, 12(2), 181-192. DOI: 10.1080/19320248.2016.1227754

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SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SNAP)^{1,2}

2 out of every 3 recipients are children

70% of eligible families with children participate

In 2013, **2.1 million** children rose above the poverty level due to SNAP

83% of the working poor in Missouri participate



FOOD INSECURITY AFFECTS CHILDREN’S SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS.^{3,4}

Food insecure children are **more likely** to:

Miss school

Get lower scores in reading and math

Repeat a grade in school

Food insecure children are **less likely** to:

Be engaged in school

Graduate from high school



CHILD HUNGER⁵

1 in 5 children in the United States experience food insecurity

Racial disparities:

1 out of every 3 Black and Hispanic children

1 out of every 6 white children

1. Child Trends DATA BANK. (2016). Food Insecurity: Indicators of Child and Youth Wellbeing. Retrieved from: <https://www.childtrends.org/indicators/food-insecurity/>.
2. Missouri Foundation for Health. (2015). Health Equity Series: Food Insecurity. Retrieved from: <https://mffh.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Health-Equity-Series-Food-Insecurity.pdf>
3. Ralston, K., Treen, K., Coleman-Jensen, A., & Guthrie, J. (2017). Children’s Food Security and USDA Child Nutrition Programs. United States Department of Agriculture. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/key-statistics-graphics.aspx>
4. Beharie, N., Mercado, M., & McKay, M. (2016). A Protective Association between SNAP Participation and Educational Outcomes Among Children of Economically Strained Households, *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition*, 12(2), 181-192.
5. Missouri Foundation for Health. (2015). Health Equity Series: Food Insecurity. Retrieved from: <https://mffh.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Health-Equity-Series-Food-Insecurity.pdf>