



Childhood Hunger
in

Florida

2024 - 2025



The last several years have been difficult for our country, with 1 in 5 kids facing hunger in Florida, but they have also proven that policy matters. When our nation invests in nutrition programs like SNAP, school and summer meals, and programs that help get grocery and tax benefits into the hands of families, hunger and hardship give way to security and opportunity, especially for those in historically marginalized communities.

That was never truer than last year, when 38 states, the District of Columbia, all five U.S. territories and four tribes will implement Summer EBT, a game changing program that was expected to help the families of nearly 21 million kids nationwide stretch their grocery budget and provide nutrition meals at home while kids are out of school.

Yet, we know that it takes more than food to fight hunger. In the years ahead, our organization has committed to transforming systems and creating a more equitable world where all children, families and communities have what they need to thrive.

With your leadership, we can:

- ☐ develop, share and implement a replicable “blueprint” for ending childhood hunger;
- ☐ enact bold strategies that provide better access to meal programs;
- ☐ promote innovative solutions to remove barriers so that children in families with low-income can access nutrition programs, and;
- ☐ advocate for critical policy changes to ensure that children in need are receiving healthy meals every day.

You and your team are on the front lines of driving change and have the power to transform an issue into a movement. You are uniquely positioned to raise awareness about childhood hunger, advance proven solutions to reduce food insecurity and institute policies that bring about lasting change.

We look forward to being your partner throughout this journey,



Jason Gromley
Senior Director, Government Relations and Advocacy
Share Our Strength

In Their Own Words



Together, we can reach more kids with the food they need to grow up healthy, educated and strong. No Kid Hungry is proud of the work we have done with **elected officials, educators, chefs and community leaders** to build public support and provide leadership around policies to end childhood hunger in the United States.



"It is unthinkable that any child in America goes to bed hungry – but the fact is, they do. Addressing hunger in our state has been a priority of this administration from day one, and while we've seen meaningful progress, there is more work to do. **New Mexico – and every other state in the nation – needs to fundamentally change the way our food system works to get more food to the people that need it the most, lifting children and families out of poverty in the process.**"

MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM
GOVERNOR OF NEW MEXICO



"Hunger is often an invisible problem that requires partnerships to cast a spotlight that brings all of the right people to the table. Wyoming is committed to preventing food insecurity by increasing awareness and support for the work of local anti-hunger organizations statewide and by advocating for a future where no child faces the school day on an empty stomach. **If you want to eliminate hunger, everyone has to be involved.**"

JENNIE GORDON
FIRST LADY OF WYOMING



"No child should have to go to school hungry, let alone be expected to learn, participate in class and earn good marks on an empty stomach. Yet this has been the reality for many kids across the country. That's why I was proud to work with my colleagues in the Maine Legislature to make school meals available to all students, free of charge. Now, Maine kids can focus on learning to read, playing with their friends, and just being a kid – not where their next meal will come from. I hope other states will follow our lead."

TROY JACKSON
MAINE SENATE PRESIDENT (ALLAGASH)



"There's no excuse for even one child going hungry – in San Antonio, or anywhere else for that matter. This is a solvable issue. This is a bi-partisan issue. **This is an investment in our next generation. Let us act now to prioritize the solutions we know work.**"

RON NIRENBERG
MAYOR OF SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS
MEMBER OF MAYORS ALLIANCE TO END CHILDHOOD HUNGER

The Problem: Childhood Hunger in Florida



Food insecurity looks different in every household. For some families, the pantry is completely empty. In others, parents skip dinner a few nights a week so their kids can have something to eat in the evening. No matter how food insecurity manifests, a lot is at stake for these children, families and the communities where they live. When kids don't get the consistent nutrition they need each day throughout the year, it's harder for them to grow up healthy, educated and strong. Consistent access to nutrition is linked to cognitive and physical development, better long-term health, higher test scores and better education outcomes.

Unfortunately, because policies and practices entrenched in our laws and society leave millions of children behind, especially in rural areas, tribal lands and among communities of color, the promise of opportunity remains unfairly out of reach for far too many children. The pandemic, the economic fallout and inflation have exacerbated these existing deep-rooted disparities, increasing the severity of a myriad health and economic crises, pushing millions more families into poverty and hunger throughout the country. **Keep in mind, 1 in 5 kids in Florida faces hunger.**¹

Impact on Child Food Insecurity



19%
of children face hunger in
Florida¹

The Solution: Addressing Summer Hunger



Summer is the hungriest time of year for many kids from families facing economic hardship because school breakfast and lunch are unavailable. Summer meal programs—which are operated by schools and community organizations and have traditionally provided free meals at congregate sites to children 18 and under—can help kids get the nutrition they need during these difficult months. But, transportation challenges, bureaucratic hurdles, area eligibility rules, the congregate requirement, and even extreme weather can become barriers to participation.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 is a recent step to address these challenges for rural areas, where these difficulties are often more acute. It authorizes a permanent non-congregate option for rural communities without congregate sites, including for eligible children in areas that do not meet usual area eligibility rules. It also authorized a permanent, nationwide Summer EBT program to start in 2024, which will provide all kids eligible for free or reduced-price school meals with a grocery benefit over the summer break.

Non-congregate Meals

At congregate meal sites, children and young people must eat their meal at the site location. If more than one meal service is offered, that means they would need to be present at the site for both breakfast and lunch. This model works great for summer camps and programs offering enrichment and childcare. However, it can be a great burden for children of working families, those without access to reliable transportation, and families who live a significant distance from the nearest meal site.

The non-congregate meal option now available in rural areas allows for meals to be taken to-go. Depending on what is allowable in their state, operators can provide individual or multiple days worth of meals for families. Meals can be either delivered directly to families' doors or picked up at a central location. By offering delivered and to-go style meals, we can overcome transportation, safety, and accessibility barriers and meet the nutritional needs of children and young people during the summer – setting them up for school year success!

SUN Bucks (Summer EBT)

SUN Bucks, also known as Summer EBT, is a new, permanent, nationwide program that provides children eligible for free or reduced-price school meals with grocery benefits over the summer break. The benefits are \$40 per child per summer month, \$120 per child for the full summer and will remain available and accessible for 122 days after the date they were issued. After 122 days, all unused benefits are removed from the card. The permanent program is based on the Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children initiative, which demonstrated positive impacts for children, including increasing consumption of whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and dairy and reducing very low food security by a third. USDA pays for 100% of the benefits, while the administrative costs are shared between USDA and the state. SUN Bucks is estimated to bring in over \$258,960,000 dollars to the state.² It's imperative that Florida secures the funds for the administrative operations and collaborate with the relevant state agencies to launch the program smoothly.

2,158,000

The number of
Florida students
eligible for Summer
EBT²

The Solution: Strengthening School and Community Meal Programs



School Meals

School meals play a critical role in ensuring kids get three meals a day and the nutrition they need to thrive in and out of the classroom. For day-to-day school breakfast and lunch operations, this school year is largely a return to pre-pandemic operations since nationwide waivers have now expired. Students are back in classrooms and most meal service has returned to the cafeteria. One of the most notable changes is that school meals are no longer free for all students; that means families must again apply for free or reduced-price school meals eligibility. Meals do continue to be free for all students at schools participating in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), Provision 2 or in states that have passed healthy school meals for all legislation.

While the Keep Kids Fed Act authorized a temporary additional per meal reimbursement, many school nutrition programs are facing many challenges including staffing shortages, turnover among critical leaders, supply chain challenges, school morale and strained budgets. It continues to be critical to promote and educate communities about the availability of school meals and the critical role of school nutrition personnel. School nutrition programs are reimbursed for each meal that they serve, so when more students participate, it helps strengthen the program for all students.

2,244,639

**The number of
Florida students
eligible for free and
reduced-price school
meals in SY23-24³**

Afterschool Meals

Too many kids don't get enough to eat between lunch and breakfast the next morning. Afterschool meals help kids get the nutrition they need once the school day ends. Having these meals reimbursed by the USDA also helps schools and community organizations save money and redirect funds into additional programming or staffing.

The Solution: Strengthening School and Community Meal Programs



SNAP

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a powerful tool for ending childhood hunger in the United States. SNAP provides eligible households with a grocery store benefit, that allows families to purchase healthy food and ingredients. It helps decrease food insecurity, lifts kids out of poverty and is linked to better physical health and stronger academic success in children.

Now, as many families struggle with inflation, the program is more important than ever. In FY19, 1,268,472 kids in Florida were eligible for SNAP.⁴ Over the last couple of years, program flexibilities have been allowed to ensure those most in need have better access to needed food and nutrition through SNAP, but many of these flexibilities have or are going away, which means families may have more difficulties accessing or maintaining their SNAP benefits. SNAP is also one of the most effective ways to boost the local economy, money spent at grocery stores and markets leads to more jobs, wages and local economic activity in the community.

In FY19,
84%
of SNAP eligible
children were
participating in the
program⁴

WIC

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) assists low-income pregnant and postpartum women, infants and children up to age five with food, nutrition education, breastfeeding support and health care referrals. Evidence suggests that women who participate in WIC have improved pregnancy outcomes, resulting in healthier babies and reduced medical costs.

Over the last couple of years, USDA has taken the steps necessary to modernize the WIC program. Taking lessons learned from the pandemic, the use of waivers enhanced remote services meaning WIC online ordered improved. However, despite these benefits, many women, infants, and children are not participating in the program due to the administrative burden and barriers to access & eligibility. In addition, WIC retention has become a challenge as many women leave the program after their child turns one.

In 2021,
75.4%
of eligible infants
and
40.7%
of eligible children
(ages 1-4) were
participating in
WIC in Florida⁵

End Childhood Hunger: An Action List



Your leadership is crucial to a successfully ending hunger in your state. With the engagement of state and local leaders, the federal nutrition programs can run more effectively and efficiently, reaching more kids with the food they need to grow up healthy and strong in Florida. You can help set policy priorities, activate resources, champion legislation, and use your office to bring together the right stakeholders to advance proven solutions.

Across all programs

- ☐ Support efforts to pass equitable and inclusive state policies that will improve access to school breakfast, lunch, after-school meals, summer meals programs, and SNAP
- ☐ Ensure state agencies have the resources to efficiently administer each program and hold them accountable for reaching quantitative goals to increase program participation
- ☐ Use your platform to celebrate the champions who are feeding kids through the child nutrition programs
- ☐ Make hunger a priority for the Children's Cabinet or convene a Task Force on Childhood Hunger with state agencies and nonprofit organizations to establish a plan of action with public goals
- ☐ Raise awareness by speaking publicly about the issue of childhood hunger, using social media to promote programs and program sites to constituents, and talk to school administrators and staff about how child hunger impacts their students

School meals

- ☐ Provide financial support for school meal programs in the state budget, that will cover additional costs associated with inflation (meal delivery and transportation)
- ☐ Encourage eligible schools to implement the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) to support school meals

WIC

- ☐ Support efforts to ensure that mothers and young children have access to WIC and childcare

SUN Bucks (Summer EBT)

- ☐ Appropriate the necessary administrative match funds to successfully launch Summer EBT in 2025
- ☐ Collaborate with state agency leadership to ensure smooth, successful program operation
- ☐ Ensure that all families who qualify can access the program quickly and efficiently
- ☐ Actively promote and provide clear participation guidance to eligible families
- ☐ Establish a statewide or centralized database system and processes for rapid eligibility determination to distribute benefits more quickly

Out of school meals

- ☐ Increase participation in the summer and afterschool meal programs by promoting PSAs and hotlines to help families find sites

SNAP

- ☐ Maximize all the available federal SNAP flexibilities available to states to expand program access, reduce administrative and application burden to state agencies and eligible families.
- ☐ Expand outreach and application assistance services in various areas of the state where eligibility is high, and participation is low by proving funding and other resources.

Visit <https://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/index.php/policy-and-advocacy/state-policy-advocacy> and <https://state.nokidhungry.org/Florida/> for more information

The No Kid Hungry Strategy



Share Our Strength created the No Kid Hungry campaign to make sure every child in the United States gets three meals a day. As part of this mission, No Kid Hungry is focused on making sure more children have access to essential nutrition programs like school meals, summer meals, SNAP, and WIC.

Through a combination of emergency grants, strategic assistance, advocacy, and awareness, No Kid Hungry is helping kids, families, and communities get the resources they need.

BUILD CAPACITY THROUGH TARGETED INVESTMENTS



Since 2010, the No Kid Hungry campaign **has invested millions of dollars in schools, nonprofits, and community organizations in all 50 states** - including over \$100 million in grants to 2,300+ local organizations during the worst of the pandemic. These organizations have used these investments on the essential kitchen equipment, transportation, staffing, food and materials that allowed them to serve billions of meals to children who needed them. **Most importantly since March 2020, No Kid Hungry has invested over \$12,250,000 dollars for solutions that work in Florida.**



CREATE EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

No Kid Hungry works with corporate and philanthropic supporters like **Citi, Arby's Foundation, Walmart Foundation, Warner Bros. Discovery, and Williams Sonoma** and strong local partners to build relationships with schools and community leaders to provide better access to the programs that feed kids.



DEVELOP NONPARTISAN PARTNERSHIPS

No Kid Hungry builds **strong, bipartisan support** among elected leaders around streamlined data collection, pragmatic policy actions and collaboration to strengthen child nutrition programs.



BRING RESOURCES AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

No Kid Hungry provides **expertise, best practices, collaborative planning and bold strategies** to maximize meal accessibility.



MAXIMIZE PUBLIC AWARENESS AND SUPPORT FOR STRATEGIES

No Kid Hungry ensures families facing economic hardship have information about the programs that can help them have better food access through our meal finder map, texting line and outreach campaigns. Lastly, No Kid Hungry enhances public awareness of childhood hunger, creating new momentum by celebrating champions, building support for solutions and celebrating successes.

Deep Dive: Children facing hunger in Florida by County¹



County	Child food insecurity rate - %
Alachua	19%
Baker	17%
Bay	20%
Bradford	25%
Brevard	17%
Broward	20%
Calhoun	24%
Charlotte	20%
Citrus	22%
Clay	15%
Collier	16%
Columbia	22%
DeSoto	26%
Dixie	24%
Duval	23%
Escambia	24%
Flagler	17%

County	Child food insecurity rate - %
Franklin	30%
Gadsden	35%
Gilchrist	18%
Glades	26%
Gulf	22%
Hamilton	30%
Hardee	25%
Hendry	22%
Hernando	19%
Highlands	23%
Hillsborough	18%
Holmes	21%
Indian River	19%
Jackson	27%
Jefferson	27%
Lafayette	22%
Lake	18%

Deep Dive: Children facing hunger in Florida by County¹



County	Child food insecurity rate - %
Lee	18%
Leon	22%
Levy	23%
Liberty	24%
Madison	28%
Manatee	17%
Marion	22%
Martin	16%
Miami-Dade	18%
Monroe	16%
Nassau	15%
Okaloosa	17%
Okeechobee	24%
Orange	19%
Osceola	18%
Palm Beach	18%
Pasco	17%

County	Child food insecurity rate - %
Pinellas	18%
Polk	21%
Putnam	28%
St. Johns	9%
St. Lucie	21%
Santa Rosa	13%
Sarasota	16%
Seminole	14%
Sumter	27%
Suwannee	21%
Taylor	26%
Union	21%
Volusia	19%
Wakulla	14%
Walton	16%
Washington	25%
State Total	19%

About No Kid Hungry Florida

For nearly 40 years, Share Our Strength has been a nonprofit leader, creating innovative, sustainable ways to help people out of poverty. In 2010, we launched No Kid Hungry, a national campaign to end childhood hunger in America by changing the way that schools, communities and entire cities ensure hungry children have the food they need.

As many as 819,940 kids face hunger in Florida.¹ But this is a solvable problem. Investments in nutrition programs protect many families from hunger and helped stave off greater rates of child food insecurity. This is complicated work, but we know what strategies have been successful and today, we have the momentum and opportunity to make real progress. No Kid Hungry is working to ensure that policies and nutrition programs are adapting to meet the needs of families and that schools and communities have the funding, flexibility, guidance and strategies to support children's access to three healthy meals a day—now and in the future.



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¹ Dewey, A., Harris, V., Hake, M., & Engelhard, E. (2024). [Map the Meal Gap 2024](https://map.feedingamerica.org/): An Analysis of County and Congressional District Food Insecurity and County Food Cost in the United States in 2022. Feeding America. <https://map.feedingamerica.org/>

² Estimated Number of Summer EBT Eligible Children and Total Benefit Amounts, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Services, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/sebt/estimated-children-eligible>

³ Number of Students Eligible for Free and Reduced-Price School Meals: State Data for SY23-24. U.S. Department of Agriculture. Data Report is provided directly to Share Our Strength.

⁴ SNAP Participation Rates. Analysis conducted by Mathematica Policy Research on behalf of Share Our Strength. Published data report will be released in early 2025.

⁵ Kessler, C., Bryant, A., Munkacsy, K., & Farson Gray, K. (2023). National- and State- level estimates of WIC eligibility and WIC program reach in 2021. U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service. <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/wic-eligibility-report-vol2-appendices-2021.pdf>