

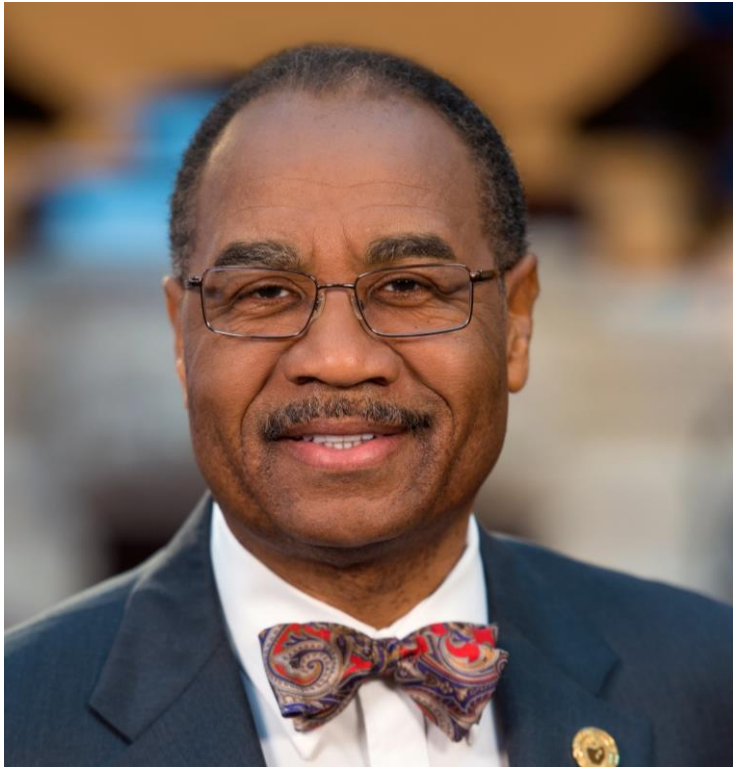


Ohio Legislative Children's Caucus

*Learning, connecting, and problem-solving
together. Our children are counting on us.*

Hunger-Free Schools are Essential for Ohio's Recovery
September 26, 2022

Opening Remarks: Sen. Vernon Sykes



*Ohio Legislative
Children's Caucus
Vice Co-Chair*



Presentation to Ohio Legislative Children's Caucus

Alexis Bylander | Senior Child Nutrition Policy Analyst | abylander@frac.org

9.26.22

Food Research & Action Center (FRAC)

The leading national nonprofit organization working to eradicate poverty-related hunger and undernutrition in the United States

Advocate for federal, state and local public policies that protect and strengthen the federal nutrition programs

Provide coordination, training, technical assistance, and support on hunger-related issues

Support free healthy school meals for all legislation across the country



Crystal FitzSimons

Director of School and Out-of-School Time Programs

Food Insecurity Rates

Definitions

- **Food secure**—Households have access, at all times, to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members.
- **Food insecure**—Households, at times during the year, were uncertain of having or unable to acquire enough food to meet the needs of all their members because they had insufficient money or other resources for food.



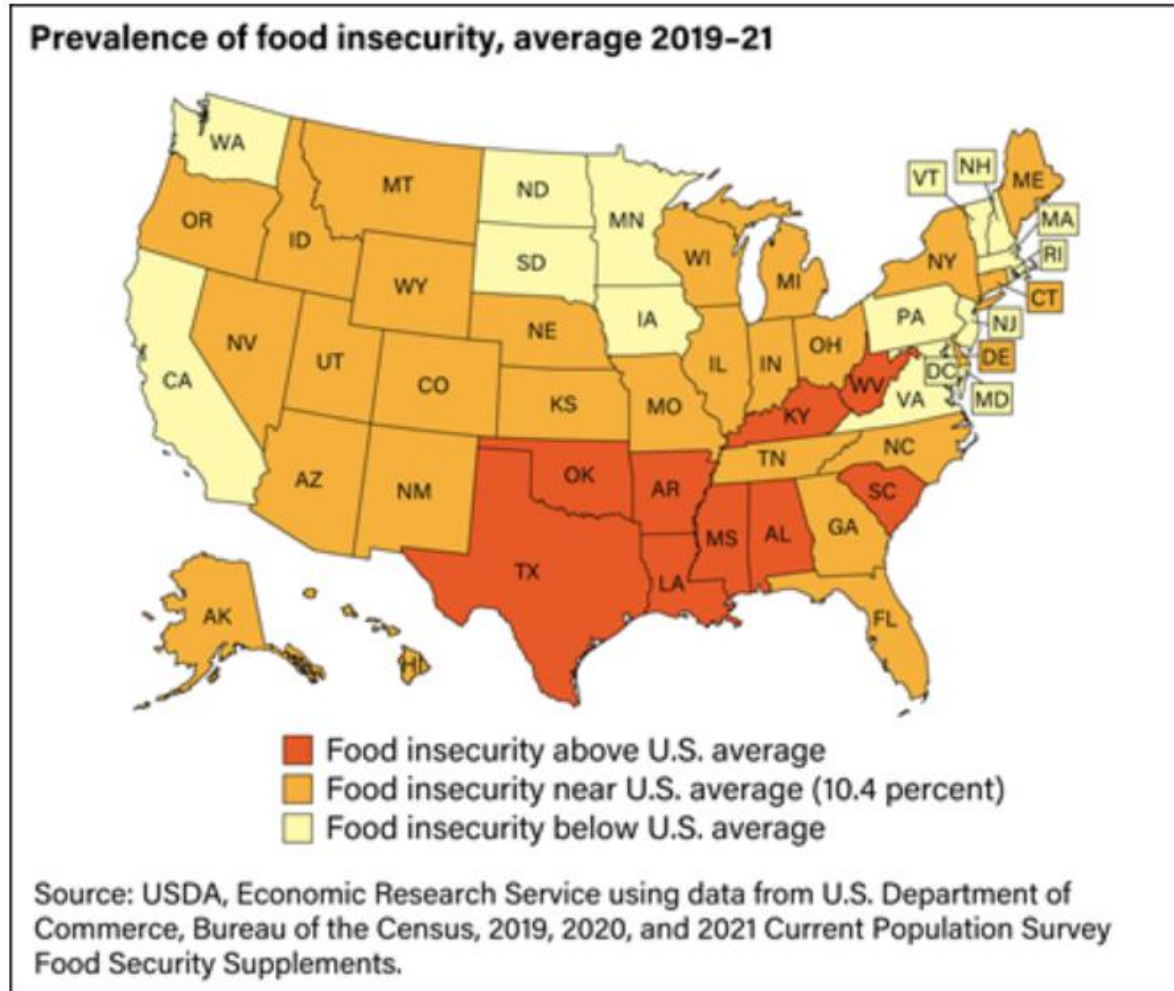
Source: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/key-statistics-graphics>

U.S. Food Insecurity Data

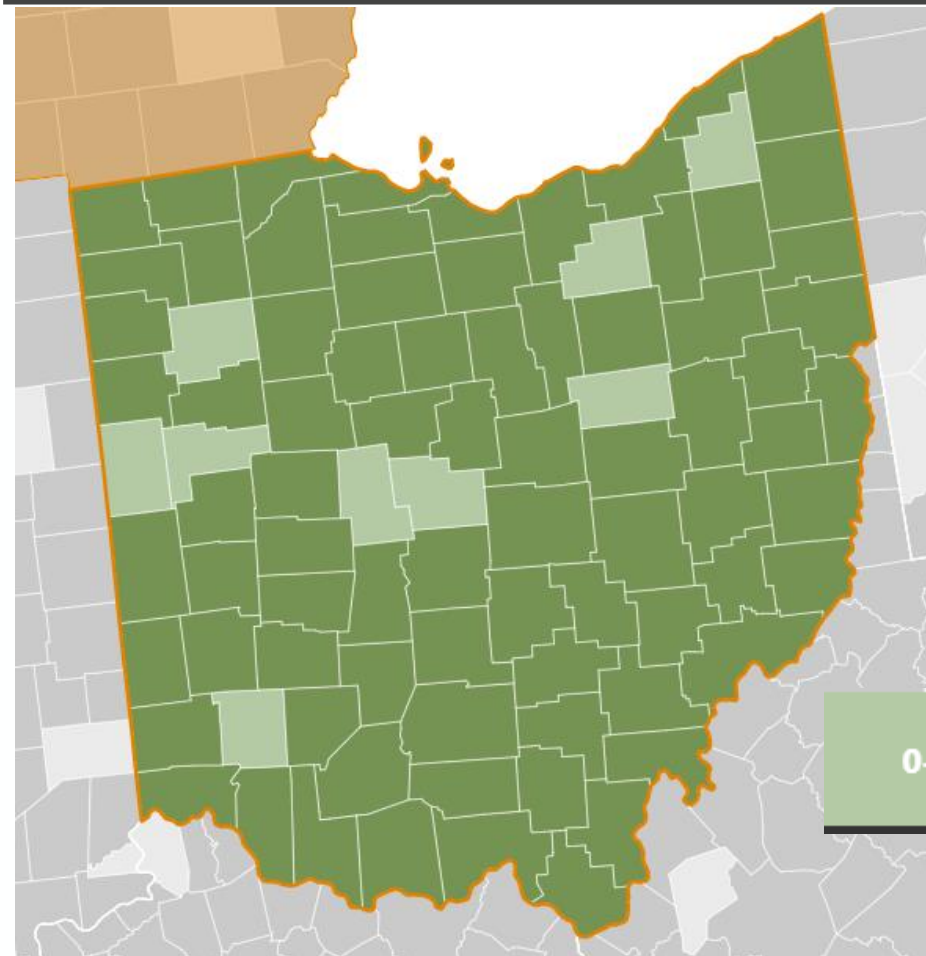


- In 2021, 13.5 million U.S. households (13.5 percent) were food insecure at some time during the year
- Food insecurity was higher for households with children
- Rural households and Black, Latinx, and Native American households experience disproportionately high rates of food insecurity.

Food Insecurity Data



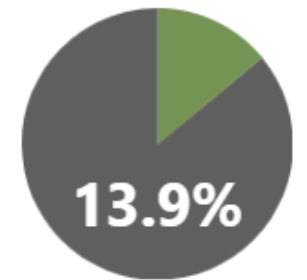
Food Insecurity Rates in Ohio



FOOD INSECURE POPULATION IN OHIO

1,624,180

FOOD INSECURITY RATE IN OHIO



0-10.8%

10.9-21.7%

21.8-32.6%

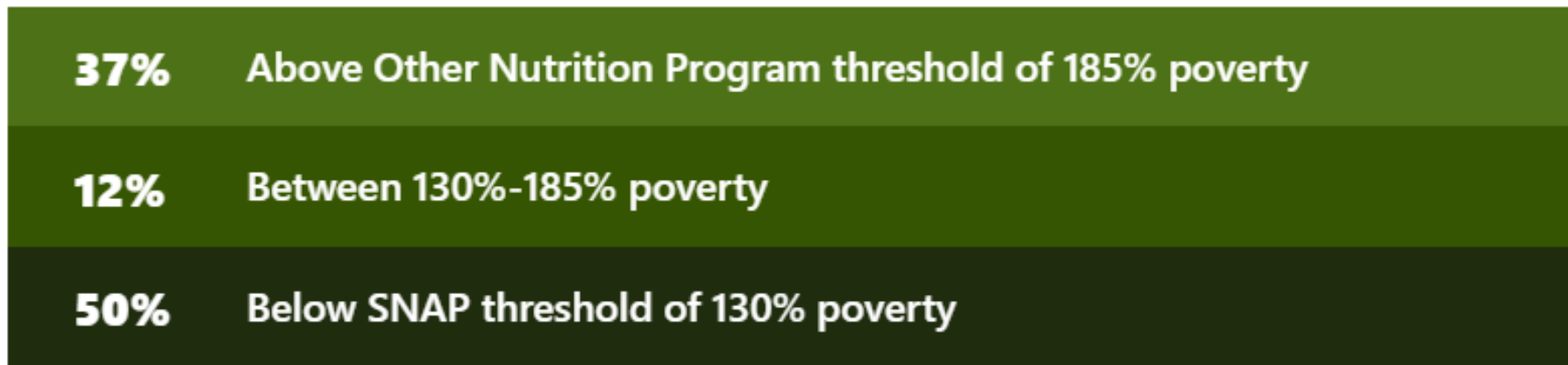
32.7-43.5%

43.6% +

Source: <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2018/overall/Ohio>

* Data from 2019 and 2020

Estimated Program Eligibility Among People Experiencing Food Insecurity in Ohio



- Households are eligible for free school meals at 130% of the federal poverty level (for a family of 4 = \$36,075 or less)
- Households are eligible for reduced-price meals at 185% of federal poverty level (for a family of 4 = \$36,076 - \$51,338)

Source: <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2018/overall/Ohio>

Source: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/fr-021622>

Federal Anti-Hunger Initiatives During Pandemic

- Allowing schools to serve free meals to all students (Spring 2020 - 2021-2022 school year)
- Waivers from USDA to support access to school meals and support program operations for schools and community sites
- Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT)
 - P-EBT provides nutritional resources to families who have lost access to free or reduced-price school meals and/or child care meals due to school and child care closures
 - Families receive money on a new or existing EBT card to help fill the meals gap

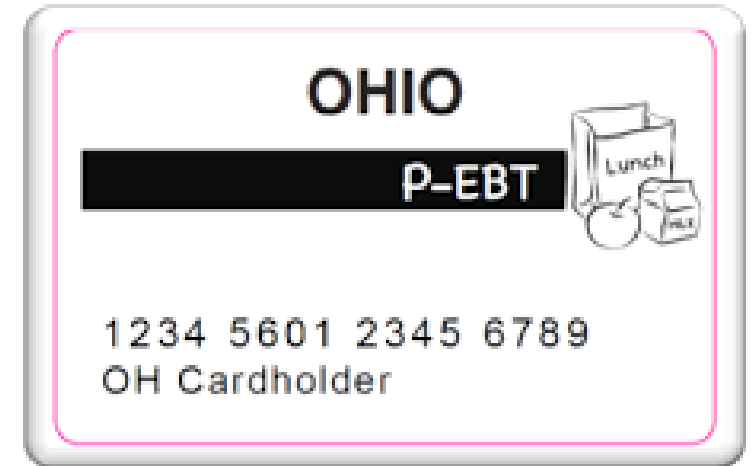


Image: <https://ohiopebt.org/>

Impact of Hunger on Health and Learning

Hunger Harms Health and Learning

- Children and adolescents experiencing hunger have lower math scores and poorer grades and are more likely to be hyperactive, absent and tardy
- Teens experiencing hunger are more likely to have been suspended
- Children with hunger are more likely to have repeated a grade, received special education services, or received mental health counseling, than children from low-income households that do not experience hunger



School Meals Support Learning

- School breakfast has been linked with fewer visits to the school nurse and positive impacts on mental health, including reductions in behavioral problems, anxiety, and depression.
- Students who participate in school breakfast programs have improved attendance, behavior, academic performance, and academic achievement as well as decreased tardiness
- At Community Eligibility Provision schools where all students have access to free meals, multiple out-of-school suspension rates decreased

Source: https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/School-Meals-are-Essential-Health-and-Learning_FNL.pdf

Federal Child Nutrition Programs

School Breakfast and Lunch

- Millions of children from low-income households benefit from federally funded breakfasts and lunches provided through the School Breakfast Program and the National School Lunch Program
- School meals support academic achievement, reduce food insecurity, and improve health, making them as critical for students' academic success as textbooks.



Photo Credit: Duval County Public School District

School Breakfast and Lunch Participation

- According to FRAC's annual report, 14 million children received breakfast and 19.8 million children received lunch on an average day during the 2020-2021 school year
- During the 2020-2021 and the 2021-2022 school year, schools could offer free meals to all students



Participation in Ohio

- In **Ohio**, on an average day 447,201 students participated in School Breakfast and 727,251 students participated in School Lunch during the 2020-2021 school year
- Prior to the pandemic, 1 in 4 children eligible for free or reduced-price meals did not participate in school lunch and 1 in 2 children did not participate in school breakfast
- **Take-away: When all students had access to free meals, more students participated in school meals**

Source: https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/FRAC_BreakfastScorecard_2021.pdf

Free Healthy School Meals for All

Free Healthy School Meals for All

- Providing free breakfast and lunch to all students, regardless of household income

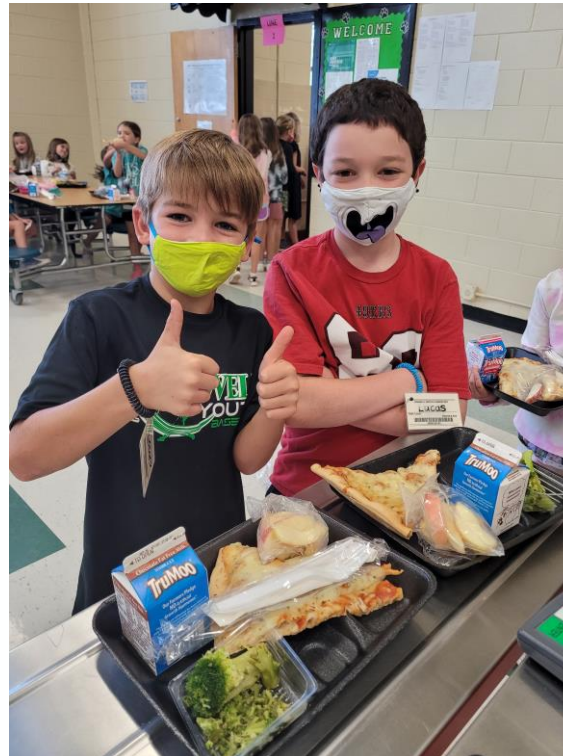


Photo Credit: Fulton County Schools

The Pandemic Changed the Landscape

- COVID-19 highlighted the critical role that school meals play for children
- Free school meals for all students during the pandemic served as a trial run for a free school meals for all policy



Benefits of Free Meals for All Students



- Ensure all students are hunger-free and ready to learn
- Reduce stigma
- End unpaid school meal debt
- Ease administrative burdens for schools

School Nutrition Association Survey Results

Survey results from SNA found that school meal program directors across the country reported that serving free meals to all students during the pandemic

- increased access
- improved equity
- fueled a large decrease in unpaid meal debt



Steady Stream of Supportive Earned Media

Free School Meals: When the Feds Step Back, States Step Up

 Medium

School meals should remain free for all children — today and always

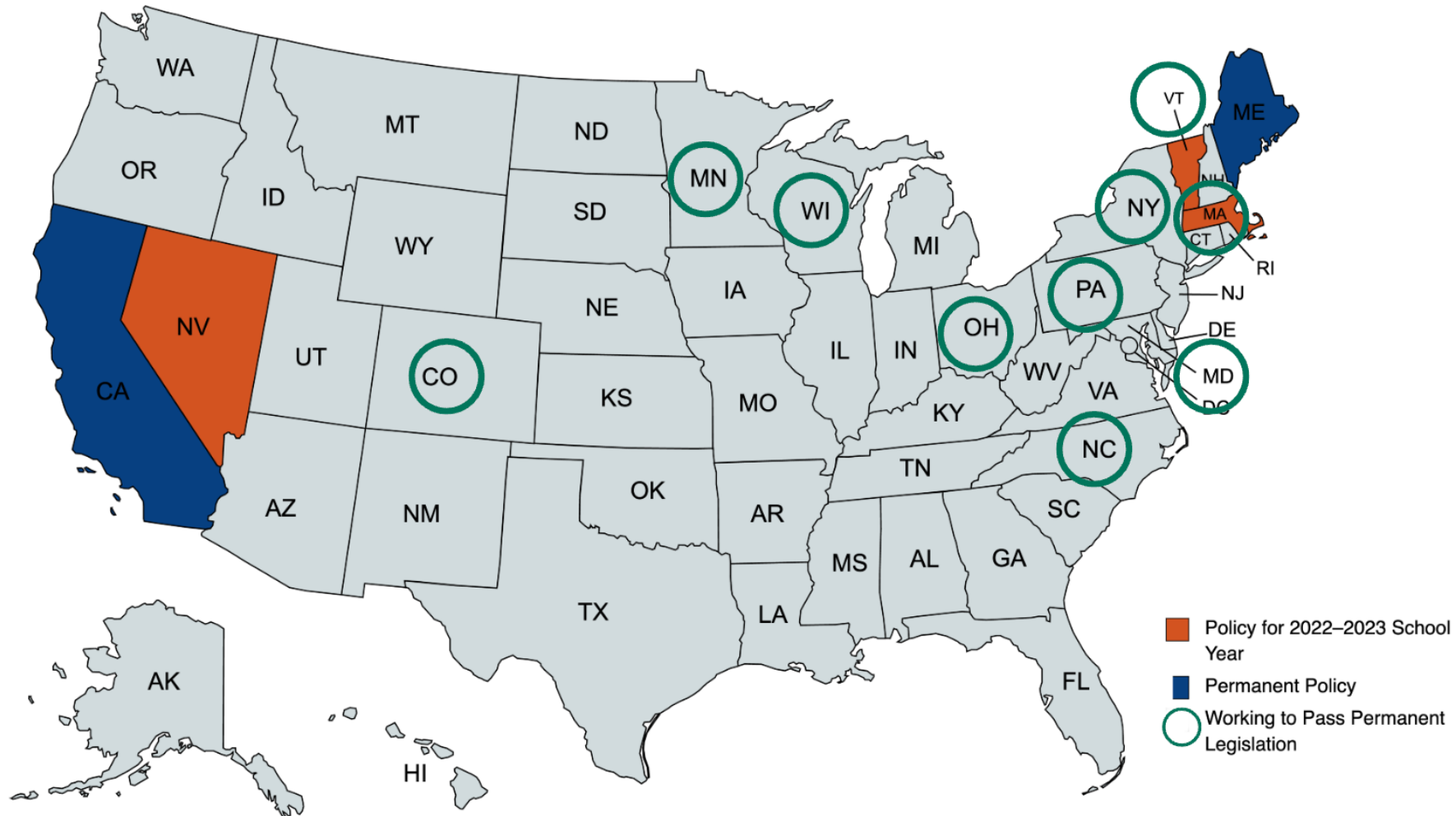


WA Superintendent calls on legislature to provide free school meals to all students



Posted: September 8, 2022 7:11 PM

Momentum Building for Healthy School Meals for All



freeschoolmealsforall.org

FRAC
Food Research
& Action Center

State Efforts to Address Child Hunger

- Free school meals for all legislation (5 states and counting)
- Pennsylvania offering free breakfast to all students during the 2022-2023 school year
- Some states have eliminated the co-pay for reduced-price meals
- Some states have passed legislation to ban lunch shaming practices

Gov. Wolf announces universal free breakfast program for 1.7 million Pennsylvania school children

RecordStaff · 2 weeks ago

2 minutes read



<https://therecord-online.com/site/archives/86463>

Summary

- There are approximately 1.6 million people in Ohio living with food insecurity
- Hunger harms health and learning for children and teens
- The School Nutrition Programs provide healthy meals, particularly to students from food insecure households
- Momentum is building across the country to provide free healthy school meals to all students as a permanent part of the school day



Thank you

Food Research & Action Center

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202.986.2200 | www.frac.org



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linkedin.com/company/food-research-and-action-center



Andrea Helton MS, RDN LD



School and Community

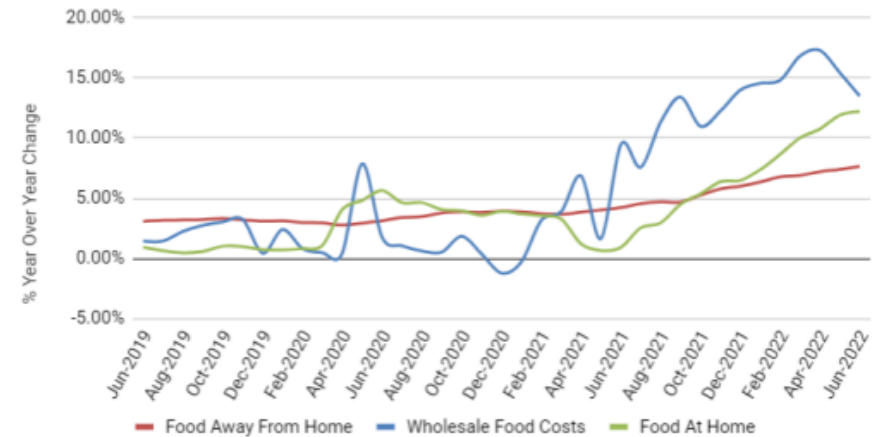
- ❑ Wellington Exempted Village School District
 - ❑ Lorain County
- ❑ Enrollment: 1060 Students
 - ❑ Pre-school through 12th grade
- ❑ Total Students considered economically disadvantaged: 38.5%
 - ❑ Free: 29.9%
 - ❑ Reduced: 8.58%
- ❑ Parental Concerns about income cutoff levels



Expiration of Waivers

- Cost of goods
 - GFS whole-sale prices up 13.4%
- Access and exposure to fresh fruits and vegetables
 - Packed lunches vs. lunches offered in school

Year over Year Growth – Prices and Costs:
Consumer Food Price Inflation vs. Wholesale Food Costs (PPI)



Expiration of Waivers

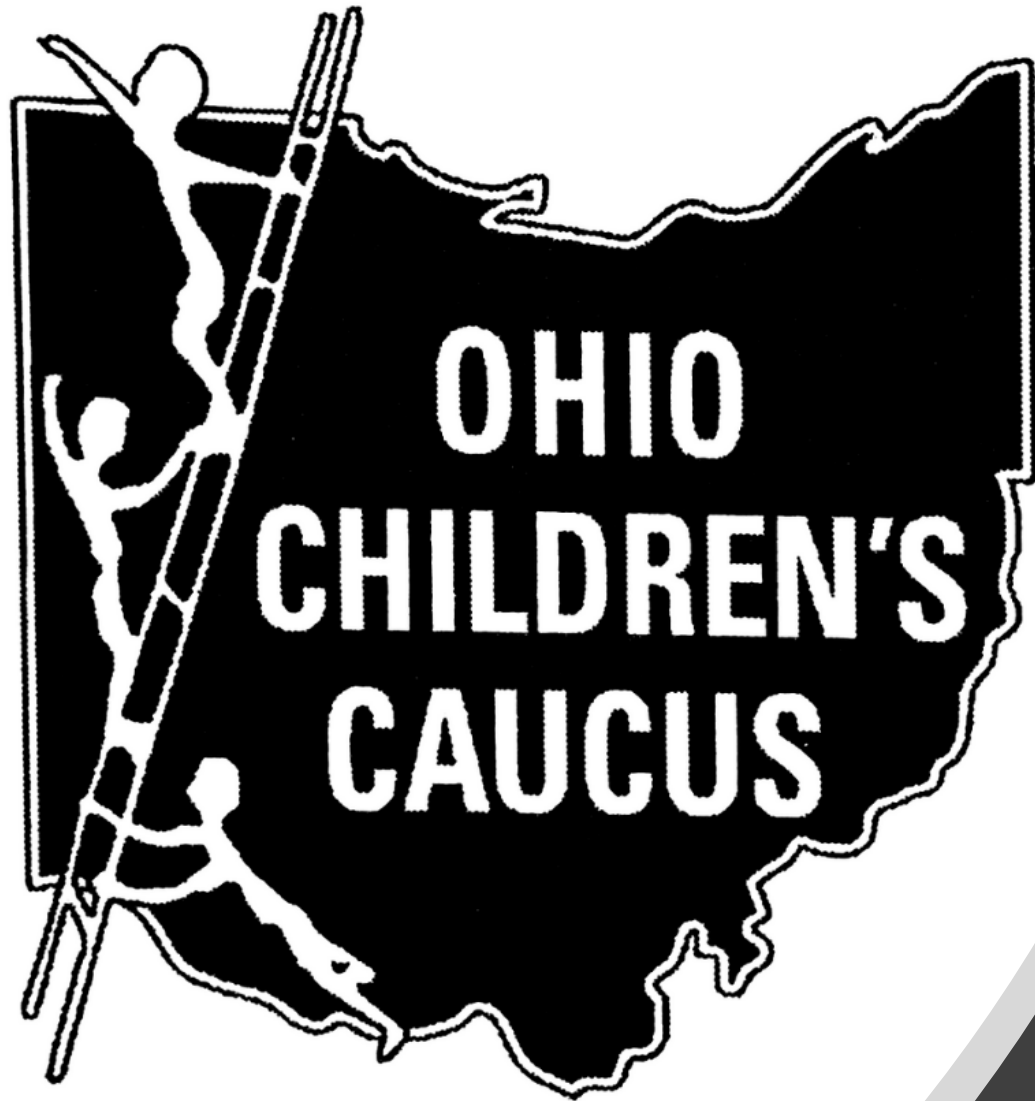
- Students without food
 - Parental charge limits
 - Complaints of hunger
- Confusion
 - Calls with Parents
 - Outreach





Universal Free Meals

- Increased Participation
 - Total lunches SY 2018-2019: 18,308
 - Total lunches SY 2021-2022: 21,930
 - We fed students 3,622 more times!
- Reduced stigma associated with Free/Reduced-Price qualifications
- Increased accessibility to well-balanced meals



Katherine Ungar, JD

Senior Policy Associate,

Children's Defense Fund-Ohio



HUNGER-FREE SCHOOLS



- Passionate collective working to take hunger off the table
- Committed to ensuring that every student in Ohio has access to healthy school meals.



**HUNGER-FREE
SCHOOLS OH**

Ohio Chapter
INCORPORATED IN OHIO
American Academy
of Pediatrics



**children's
defense fund
ohio**



Local Matters



The Problem

Nutrition Facts:

1:5

TOO MANY HUNGRY KIDS
1 in 5 Ohio children is food-insecure — an unacceptably high rate of hunger

88/88

EVERY CORNER OF THE STATE
Urban, suburban, and rural — food-insecure children live in every county in Ohio

2+2=?

FUZZY MATH
Hungry children have lower math scores and are more likely to repeat a grade

Why school meals make a difference

WHY SCHOOL MEALS MAKE A DIFFERENCE



Better Educational Outcomes

When students get consistent, nutritious meals, they have more energy, more focus, and more curiosity in the classroom. You can't learn when you are hungry.



Less Food Stigma

No one – especially kids! – wants to walk around with a flashing “poor” sign. When all students have equal access to the same meal, students won't have to choose between sitting lunch out or standing out for their meal choice.



A Level Playing Field

When food access varies across families, students don't start from the same line. Free school meals give students the nourishment they need to give school their best shot.

Ohio Parents Support School Meals for all Students

A recent survey from CDF-Ohio and Baldwin Wallace University shows **82% of Ohio Parents agree that school meals are helpful for their families.**

Families across all demographics relied on free school meals throughout the pandemic

Free School Meals are Helpful to Ohio Families

64%

of Ohio parents said their child ate a school-provided lunch at no cost at least once in the past week.

46%

of Ohio parents said their child ate a school-provided lunch at no cost all five days.

Source: "Finding Unity & Common Ground: What Ohio Parents want for their Children's Education" (2022 Survey conducted by CDF-Ohio & Baldwin Wallace Community Research Institute)



Ohio Parents Want Hunger-Free Schools for All



87%

of Ohio parents with school-aged children agree that school meals should be provided at no cost to all students, regardless of the student's ability to pay.

Source: "Finding Unity & Common Ground: What Ohio Parents want for their Children's Education"
(2022 Survey conducted by CDF-Ohio & Baldwin Wallace Community Research Institute)



Recommendations

- Use state funding (ARPA or GRF) to supplement federal meal reimbursement to ensure all students in Ohio have access to school meals
 - 5 states (Maine, California, Vermont, Massachusetts, Nevada) have passed legislation to ensure all of their students have continued access to free school meals this school year
 - PA just passed legislation to provide free school breakfast to all children



Who Gets Left Behind under the Current Structure

While many Ohio schools – predominantly our larger, urban school districts – offer meals at no cost for all through CEP, over 280,000 students in Ohio attend schools in our state that are eligible for CEP but not participating, often because they are unable to make it work financially. School meals for all students are a critical investment in improving the health and well-being of Ohio's students, ending child hunger in schools, and strengthening our education and health system.



July 6, 2022

The Honorable Governor Mike DeWine

Riffe Center, 30th Floor
77 South High Street
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Dear Governor DeWine,

We are the [Hunger-Free Schools Ohio coalition](#), a growing group of anti-hunger, education, food, and nutrition organizations and associations. In recognition of your commitment to child well-being in Ohio, we are requesting that you take action to continue to provide healthy school meals for all Ohio children and make all of our schools hunger-free.

The federal school meal programs have played a central role in reducing hardship during the pandemic. Since March 2020, USDA has provided waivers to schools, allowing them to serve meals at no cost to all students. These meals have been a lifeline for struggling families, but the waivers are set to expire at the end of this school year, leaving schools and students in Ohio without access to free school meals. Healthy School Meals for all Ohio students would ensure that every K-12 student in Ohio has equal access to a nutritious breakfast and lunch at school to support their health and academic success. Providing healthy school meals at no cost for every student in Ohio – regardless of income – is a critical investment in improving the health and well-being of Ohio's students, ending child hunger in schools, and strengthening our education and health system.

Hunger-Free Schools are Essential for Recovery in Ohio

The health and economic crises brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic have made school meal programs more important than ever. A record number of Ohio children do not have enough to eat, and the economic recovery for families who struggle to put food on the table will take years. The ability to serve all students a nutritious meal, regardless of income, should continue as we recover.

State Board of Education Passed Resolution Recommending GA use ARPA Funds to Provide 100% Free Meals to Ohio Students

RESOLUTION TO RECOMMEND TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY THE USE OF ARPA FUNDS TO PROVIDE 100% FREE BREAKFAST AND LUNCH TO ALL OHIO STUDENTS

The State Board of Education ("Board") **APPROVES** a recommendation to the General Assembly for the use of American Rescue Plan State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds to provide free breakfast and lunch to all Ohio students as follows:

In school years 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 the United States Department of Agriculture authorized nutrition program regulations waivers allowing schools and districts to offer no-cost meals to all students and claim the meals at the federal free meal rate.

In school year 2021-2022, 90,443,684 breakfasts and 171,246,917 lunches were served under the no-cost meals waivers, meal counts substantially higher than pre-pandemic program meal counts demonstrating the model promotes student meal participation.

The United States Department of Agriculture waivers which authorized no-cost meals for all students in the school lunch and school breakfast programs expired June 30, 2022.

Offering no-cost meals to all students eliminates the stigma of program participation, promotes consumption of healthy breakfasts and lunches to support a ready learning environment, in studies is found to improve dietary intake and provides additional funding to school food service programs to offset elevated food and supply costs related to inflation.

California, Maine, Massachusetts, Nevada and Vermont passed legislation supporting no-cost meals for all students for school breakfast and school lunch programs in school year 2022-2023. Pennsylvania passed legislation approving no-cost school breakfast for all students in school year 2022-2023.

In July, the Hunger-Free Schools Ohio coalition sent Governor DeWine a letter requesting action to continue to provide healthy school meals for all Ohio children. The coalition has over 35 community stakeholder member organizations such as the Ohio Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Ohio Association of Foodbanks.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board recommends to the General Assembly the use of a portion of the remaining State and Local Fiscal Recovery funds allocated by the federal government through the American Rescue Plan to provide 100% free breakfast and lunch to all Ohio students.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Board hereby directs the Interim Superintendent of Public Instruction to prepare correspondence, subject to the approval of the President of the Board, to the Primary and Secondary Education Committee of the Ohio House of Representatives and the Primary and Secondary Education Committee of the Ohio Senate containing the recommendation approved herein.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Interim Superintendent submit the recommendation to the aforementioned committees of the General Assembly and take any appropriate action to advocate for its adoption.

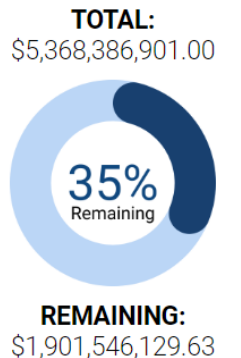
“NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board recommends to the General Assembly the use of a portion of the remaining State and Local Fiscal Recovery funds allocated by the federal government through the American Rescue Plan to provide 100% free breakfast and lunch to all Ohio students.”



State Fiscal Recovery Fund:

Ohio has spent nearly 65% of the \$5.4 billion allocated by the U.S. Department of the Treasury under ARPA.

[Click here](#) for a breakdown of all appropriations and detailed expenditures through 08/10/2022.



Recommendations

- Pass Anti-Lunch Shaming Legislation
 - Students as young as Kindergarten may be denied a hot lunch after accrued school meal debt
 - States have enacted legislation to prevent identification and stigmatization of students with school meal debt and regulate debt collection practices



Thank you!!

Contact Info:

Katherine Ungar, JD
CDF-Ohio, Senior Policy Associate
Kungar@childrensdefense.org

WHY SCHOOL MEALS FOR ALL



It's an investment in public education of children. Children need healthy food to learn in school and School Meals for All would ensure our investment is paying off.



Removes stigma. When schools can serve every child the same food there are fewer divisions between students based on income. The stigma low-income students face is something they carry with them in many ways, and it should not start in the school lunch line.



More students will get the food they need. School districts who have implemented School Meals for All in the past, and districts in Ohio who have implemented it this year, have seen a 20 percent increase in participation when school meals are available to all students.



Creates community. When children eat together, they learn together. School Meals for All can mean less time in the lunch line and more time for children to eat together, socializing and creating community.



Less administrative costs. When all children can get school meals, school nutrition departments can spend more time developing delicious meals, and less time collecting school meal applications, taking money in the lunch line, and tracking down school meal debts from families.



No lunch debt. As families struggle to cover the costs of living in our state, School Meals for All would eliminate their lunch debts so they can focus on their families' other needs like housing, utilities, and more.



More resources for schools & staff. When schools have adequate reimbursements for all meals served, they can spend less money on administrative costs and spend funds on staffing, healthy meals, and scratch cooking.



Healthier, thriving students. According to studies, when children are given healthy food they do better in school and stay healthier overall. Healthy food is as important as any other tool for children to learn, grow and thrive.



Keeps children from falling through the cracks. Today's free and reduced-price meals program income threshold is too low to truly account for children and families facing food insecurity. (see chart below)

HEALTHY
SCHOOL
MEALS
HELP OHIO
FAMILIES
FACING
FOOD
INSECURITY



\$23,803: Maximum income for a family of 2 to qualify for free school meals (FNS-USDA)



\$33,874: Maximum income for a family of 2 to qualify for reduced priced school meals (FNS-USDA)



\$65,728: Income needed for a family of 2 to live in Ohio (MIT)

Questions & Answers

*Moderated by Traevon Leak,
Legislative Aide for Sen. Sykes*

*For legislators and legislative staff,
please feel free to unmute
yourselves to ask questions or
share feedback.*

*For all other participants, please
use the chat or Q&A feature, and
we will do our best to answer in
the time allotted.*



*Thank you for joining
today's webinar!*

For more information on upcoming
Ohio Legislative Children's Caucus
webinars and meetings, please
contact:

Alison Paxson,
apaxson@childrensdefense.org

