



Children’s Hunger Alliance defining and filling the need

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For nearly a quarter century, the Children’s Hunger Alliance has provided healthy meals to children in need. In Ohio, more than 20% of children — or 1 in 5 — do not know where they will get their next meal.

However, its most recent report, *The State of Childhood Hunger: Creating a Full Future for Ohio’s Children*, shows that progress has been made in the effort to ensure no child goes to bed hungry, according to **Judy L. Mobley**, the alliance’s president and CEO.

“We are helping more schools and communities than ever before to make lasting changes that alleviate childhood hunger,” Mobley said in the report. “As we reflect on the last three years, the impact made possible by the Walmart Foundation grants is significant.”

The alliance applied for its first Walmart Foundation grant in 2015. Since then, it has received \$3.5 million from the foundation, which has “served as a catalyst for innovative hunger solutions across the state,” Mobley said. After

collecting data to identify areas of the state where child nutrition programs were most needed, new programs were launched to feed more children. The impact included:

- More than 2.7 million additional school breakfasts served through proven programs, such as Partners for Breakfast in the Classroom.
- Many school districts began summer meal programs while others supported by the alliance reached thousands of children through mobile meals.
- After-school programs provided shelf-stable meals, in addition to hot meals, to ensure every child was fed on days with unexpectedly high attendance or disruptions in meal delivery. Shelf-stable meals also provided immediate hunger relief to after-school programs in mostly rural areas of our state where food vendors weren’t available.
- Preschool-aged children from low-income households were provided nutritious meals through child care centers sponsored by the alliance.

Defining the need

The more than half-million children who live in food-insecure households do not know if they’ll begin their day with breakfast or have dinner available at home. That uncertainty is even greater during weekends and summer breaks when school meals aren’t available.

“Poor nutrition at an early age is linked to lasting health problems, learning challenges, delayed cognitive development and an increased risk of obesity,” the report said. “The experiences and habits we build in childhood set the foundation for our future.”

The alliance conducted a Statewide Child Nutrition Programs Needs Assessment, which provided data for the agency’s program expansion. One of the key findings of the assessment was the limited number of after-school and summer meal programs in southeast Ohio. The region has the highest rates of childhood food insecurity in the state.

Food deserts also limit residents’ access to healthy food.



RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

An in-depth look at what works in public education

This article is part of an OSBA initiative designed to share the latest education-related research with school board members and administrators. The association is working with Ohio colleges, universities and education organizations to disseminate studies about what works in K-12 public education. In addition to the Research Spotlight section appearing in the Journal, OSBA has dedicated a page on its website to serve as a research repository for members at <http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/66017>. For more information about this initiative, contact **Gary Motz**, OSBA senior editorial manager, at (614) 540-4000 or gmotz@ohioschoolboards.org.

For example, Vinton County, which has a population of approximately 13,200, did not have a grocery store from 2013 to 2017, limiting residents' access to healthy food.

“The vast geography of the largely rural area ... presents obstacles for children and their families who may not have access to transportation or live within safe walking distance of a meal program site,” the report said.

Partners for Breakfast in the Classroom

Research shows that students who eat breakfast see benefits, such as decreased school absence and tardiness, fewer behavioral problems and less depression and anxiety. While many schools offer school breakfast to students, only 56% of Ohio children who receive free or reduced-price lunches are participating in school breakfast programs each day, the alliance said.

One program, Partners for Breakfast in the Classroom, has been expanded to target schools with a high number of children who qualify for free or reduced-price school meals but have low participation rates. The alliance used a twofold approach to help Ohio schools increase breakfast participation by:

- providing minigrants to qualifying schools to help offset some of the initial Partners for Breakfast in the Classroom startup costs;
- helping high-need districts apply for and receive grants via the Partners for Breakfast in the Classroom program.

Once schools brought breakfast into the classroom, participation on average increased 20%.

Logan-Hocking Local (Logan) struggled to increase breakfast participation despite offering it free to all students. After the alliance awarded the district \$4,000 to pilot Breakfast in the Classroom at Chieftain Elementary School in May 2017, the program's success led to its expansion at five additional elementary schools during the 2017-18 school year. Breakfast participation then skyrocketed from 33% to 73%. The school was awarded a \$90,000 grant from Partners for Breakfast in the Classroom in 2017.

“School staff and administrators have reported an increase in attendance, fewer visits to the nurse's office and improved social interaction and test scores,” the report said.

Funding boosts breakfasts and summer meals

The alliance awarded more than \$400,000 in minigrants to more than 80 individual schools, districts and community organizations. The funds allowed recipients to provide meals to their most vulnerable children, with profound results:

- A 151% increase in summer meals served to children in **Meigs Local (Meigs)**.
- Six districts — **Garfield Heights City, Indian Creek Local (Jefferson), Logan-Hocking Local, Newark City,**

Southern Local (Meigs) and Wellston City — started breakfast pilot programs funded through minigrants and later received additional grants totaling \$336,000 from the Partners for Breakfast in the Classroom program.

- Indian Creek Local received a \$2,000 minigrant that led to an increase in average daily breakfast participation from 48% to 83%.
- Nine districts — **Chillicothe City, Edison Local (Jefferson), Garfield Heights City, Hillsboro City, Indian Creek Local, Meigs Local, Newark City, Richmond Heights Local (Cuyahoga) and Switzerland of Ohio Local (Monroe)** — launched summer feeding programs for the first time in 2017 and 2018.

Stable solutions

One of the alliance's fastest-growing programs is after-school meals, which increased from providing meals and snacks at 90 sites in 2011 to 280 sites by 2017. Despite the success, the program continues to struggle balancing food orders with attendance.

Determining how many children will participate in a meal program on any given day is a challenge. While the sites need enough food to ensure no child goes without a meal, ordering too much food can lead to a strain on financial resources. In 2016, the alliance began a pilot program using shelf-stable meals and snacks as a safety net.

“If a site ordered 20 meals and 23 children showed up, they could pull three shelf-stable meals from their supply and still feed every child,” the report said.

Over the program's first year, the alliance provided more than 34,000 shelf-stable meals and snacks to at-risk children across 61 sites. The benefits are significant. Shelf-stable food ensures that children still receive a healthy meal when delivery is delayed or unavailable.

The ripple effect

Sustainable programs, rather than temporary fixes, are the weapons to fight hunger, according to the alliance. Everything from nutrition education to shelf-stable meals and Partners for Breakfast in the Classroom are sustainable programs that not only create long-term change but also a ripple effect of benefits for communities.

The Walmart Foundation's support has provided millions of meals to hungry children in Ohio, but more must be done to ensure no child goes to bed hungry, Mobley said.

“If we don't provide children with one of their most basic necessities — healthy food — how can we expect them to succeed in school and become a productive adult?” ■

Editor's note: View the full report at <http://links.ohio.schoolboards.org/84291>.