

Hunger Impact Partners – 2020 Annual Report



A Time of Unprecedented Challenge

Dear Friends,



It comes as no surprise that the number of food insecure Minnesota children spanning birth to 18 years of age skyrocketed in 2020. Across the state, 572,544 students from low-income households – some very new to such circumstances – qualified for free or reduced-price school meals through long-standing federal programs. Since the COVID pandemic began, that is a 14.5 percent increase over the baseline of 500,000 food insecure kids, which

is where Hunger Impact Partners (HIP) started our work to close the missing meal gap.

For Minnesotans, the pandemic exposed the fragility of some of their most relied upon hunger relief programs, such as federally funded school breakfasts and lunches, plus after-school and summer meals. For many children, meals eaten at school are the only substantial meals they receive during the day.

The ongoing global pandemic further illuminated the critical role school nutrition programs play in the lives of our students and communities. For decades, many of our children depended on these programs as their only source of balanced nutrition. Nearly overnight, the places that provided them were closed.

In the face of unprecedented crisis, our schools and communities remained undeterred and pivoted to overcome daunting barriers. Rather than a focus on distinct meal programs provided in school buildings, “meal-bundling” and innovative new delivery services at new sites became the food access mechanisms of the moment.

Hunger Impact Partners, a nimble, responsive backbone organization, was right there with our valued partners in education, government, business and social services. We acted in ways I believe to be more relevant than ever.

With the goal of significantly reducing child hunger in Minnesota, we:

- Collected, shared and leveraged key data
- Provided funding to support stop-gap solutions
- Shared newly minted best practices
- Re-deployed our trusted meal locator app
- Advocated for public policies

The COVID-19 pandemic taught us many practical lessons about how to better support children. Now, as our communities seek justice and meaningful change following the death of George Floyd and too many others, HIP’s work with schools continues with renewed vigor.

We are grateful to the superintendents, administrators, principals, teachers, student support professionals, data liaisons and other school and district staff members who have demonstrated resilience, creativity and ceaseless dedication, as they transitioned school-based practices into a system of

supports and services delivered exclusively outside of their school buildings.

We also thank our funders and community partners, who are tireless in finding ways to reach out, collaborate and deliver services to children and families in need of food and support. Their commitment allowed us to continue our work during a time that fundamentally challenged our society’s health and well-being. With their inspiration, we have a renewed commitment to supporting children and families who have suffered disproportionately from food insecurity during the pandemic.

The circumstances of 2020 were exceptionally difficult and the paths forward daunting and unfamiliar. All the more reason we are proud of Minnesota’s collective response to fighting child hunger, in the most unimaginable of years, through the schools and communities we call home. We so appreciate having a role to play and valued contributions to make.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ellie Lucas".

Ellie Lucas
Chief Executive Office

Our Work

Since 2015, Hunger Impact Partners has been changing the trajectory of child hunger in Minnesota. We have done this by improving access to healthy food for at-risk Minnesota kids.

Originally, our programs were designed to broaden use of under-utilized federal child nutrition programs. In response to the world-altering global pandemic, our lean backbone structure has allowed us to evolve successfully while adhering to our vision, mission and guiding principle.

Armed with in-depth knowledge of child hunger, we collaborate with strong cross-sector partners and use our proprietary data analyses to keep improving our track record of closing the meal gap for hungry kids.

VISION

Food for Every Child

MISSION

Change the trajectory of hunger-relief for Minnesota’s children so they can realize their full potential for social engagement, academic achievement and a healthy lifestyle.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

Kids should only be hungry to learn.

TAKING DATA TO NEW LEVELS OF INFLUENCE

HIP'S Child Nutrition Index

For six years, our powerful, proprietary data analytics tool—the Child Nutrition Index (CNI)—has enabled us to focus on addressing hunger among the 572,544 Minnesota children identified at the end of 2020 as at-risk of going hungry, 303,312 living in the 7-county metro. We use this data to customize strategies and increase participation in federally funded food and nutrition programs across the state.

CNI's master database combines data from the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), Department of Health (MDH) and Department of Human Services (DHS) in an unprecedented undertaking. From this expansive database, we can pinpoint low-income kids by race, meals missing and the corresponding federal reimbursement revenue available for meal supports.

We know that one in three kids are food insecure and 48% are infants, 54% are children ages one to four and 35% are students ages five to 18.

Our youngest Minnesotans are the poorest. Nearly one in five under the age of six lives in poverty. Of those, more than 60% are children of color/Native American. They face disruption in their housing, education and family support systems, circumstances exacerbated during the pandemic.

Our CNI methodology consists of measuring the participation rate of School Nutrition Programs (SNP) across districts. We work with these districts and the MDE using participation rates for each program to help identify funding opportunities to increase meal access and food varieties. This year, school nutrition departments went the extra mile to address food insecurity needs in their community at the onset of COVID-19 and found ways to make those efforts sustainable as the pandemic continued.

For example, prior to the pandemic, 40% of children in Minnesota lived in food insecure households. Roughly 35% of school districts—176 in all—were eligible to participate in after-school meal programs. Still, only 30 districts participated, with the average student participation rate at 11%. The average participation rate for school breakfast was 37% and lunch was 65%.

As the pandemic continued, meal participation increased due to alternative meal distribution methods, more flexibility in administration due to waivers and meal bundling of multi-day meal boxes.

Child Nutrition Index STATEWIDE OVERVIEW Total Population vs. Food Insecure Population

Statewide			
Children Ages	Population		Medicaid Financed
Infants	68,603		29,599
Ages 1 to 4	278,680		133,202
Subtotal Birth to 4		347,283	162,801
Ages 5 to 18		1,003,635	409,743
Grand Total Birth to 18		1,350,918	572,544

2020 FUNDING PRIORITY: PANDEMIC MEALS MADE POSSIBLE

Within months of the COVID-19 outbreak, school meal programs across the country, Minnesota included, totally re-engineered food distribution methods to ensure students remained well-fed and healthy minimizing contact and exposure to the virus. HIP and its funding partners provided 42 grants to support school nutrition departments and community partners in providing meals to children and their families. These direct and timely awards to trusted partners allowed them to respond quickly on a rapidly shifting playing field. HIP enabled the expansion of meal programs in racially diverse communities in both the 7-county metro area and greater Minnesota.

Child Nutrition Index Dashboard

Meal Type	Calendar Year	
	2019	2020
Child Care Center Meals	20,417,988	8,297,462
Breakfast and Lunch School Meals	78,328,807	107,407,863
Summer Meals (June, July, August)	3,739,374	22,450,159*
Supper Meals	2,526,514	4,014,582
Meal Total	105,012,683	142,170,066

* Meal increases could be due to meal bundling and weekly distribution schedules but reconciliation of the number of children receiving meals is problematic.

With our help, the easing of federal restrictions and school and community's own swift ingenuity, nutrition programs across the state dramatically changed food delivery models. Schools became efficient feeding distribution hubs in their communities, substantially increasing meals provided by branching out to other school sites, libraries, churches and fire departments. Twenty-four percent of Minnesota schools delivered food directly to students' homes, while nearly one-third activated their school bus routes for food distribution. Other successful options included: drive-through meal pick-up, walk-up family feeding stations or combinations of multiple means. Distribution of single, daily meals was replaced with "meal-bundling"—the flexibility to provide meal packs of up to two meals per day, per child for an entire week—which also dramatically increased utilization.

Community non-profits experienced similar issues when moving quickly to respond to the pandemic impact, with many expanding services to include food distribution and child care. Many also setup meal box delivery services to multi-family affordable housing apartment complexes.

HIP funding was used to fill such basic needs as the purchase of meal-bundle packing equipment, transportation costs, personal protection gear, culturally-specific menu plans and staffing.

Federal meal program compliance became less burdensome, which also contributed to the cause. Through it all, meal reimbursement rates were adequate and meal quality improved.

FREE MEALS FOR KIDS: OUR RE-INVIGORATED MOBILE APP

Total downloads: **15,660**
Total visits: **28,255**
Total page-views: **50,633**



HIP re-deployed the Summer Eats Minnesota mobile app to be COVID-relevant, re-casting it as “Free Meals for Kids.” It served as the central statewide communication resource for families to source meals and meal packs during school closures, during the summer months and in hybrid learning situations. We continued to host and update the app through the summer of 2020

and beyond thanks to USDA waiver extensions.

As of May 2020, we had more than 1,300 sites listed on Free Meals for Kids. We coordinated with county health departments, the MDE and a network of partners to support promotion and outreach so more families could access meals at locations throughout the state.

Administering the app is time-intensive due to the need for daily updates and detailed information regarding bus routes, home delivery schedules and site pick-up logistics. We sent push notifications to every user with news on additional community resources, and we dedicated graphic space for targeted promotions and messaging, such as the Pandemic EBT (P-EBT).

New downloads increased daily through 2020, as did page views and site visits—further evidence that this resource was and is a vital tool for families and communities.

We remain committed to maintaining the Free Meals for Kids app through September 2021, when the current USDA waiver extension expires.

Child Nutrition Index

Meals Served June, July & August Pre-COVID and During-COVID

GEOGRAPHY	MEALS SERVED		MEAL PROVIDERS	
	2019	2020	2019	2020
7-County Metro	2,128,101	16,585,226	62	108
Greater Minnesota	1,611,273	5,864,933	155	183
State of Minnesota	3,739,374	22,450,159*	217	291

* Meal increases could be due to meal bundling and weekly distribution schedules but reconciliation of the number of children receiving meals is problematic.

SCHOOL DISTRICT OVERVIEW

Innovative Meal Bundling While Operating Multiple Learning Models

As schools transitioned from full distance learning to a combination of learning models (in-person, hybrid and distance), providing multiple-day meal boxes was the best method for families to provide meals to their children.

Schools distributed different multi-day meal boxes depending on the student’s learning model. All students were offered equal access to meals, no matter the learning model they were utilizing. For example, if the school offered a seven-day meal box to students opting to continue distance learning, then in-person learners would be offered a two-day meal box for the weekend, in addition to the meals they received at school.

Resources made a difference. There was a wide variation in resources for students and teachers in public and charter schools. Teachers working in high-poverty schools found virtual classes to be especially ineffective bolstering concerns that the pandemic exacerbated educational inequalities.

To serve Minnesota students well this year demanded a great deal of innovation and ingenuity. In addition to dealing with the pandemic, many school nutrition departments made efforts to add new programs, expand menu choices and pursue more sustainable practices. Below are a few of the Independent School Districts (ISDs) we wanted to spotlight for their innovative efforts in 2020.

MEAL INNOVATIONS

Minneapolis and St. Paul ISDs: Comprehensive Transformation

These Twin City districts excelled in delivering school breakfast and lunch, then shifted to new COVID-19 meal sites and models during the summer of 2020. They changed their menus to better suit pick-ups, redesigned their logistics with suppliers and optimized delivery, all of which made meals more accessible and convenient for families.

Minneapolis Public School district operated 50 sites, including schools, parks and community centers throughout Minneapolis. Boxes come packed with fresh produce, like strawberries and sugar snap peas, as well as kid favorites like pizza and French toast bread. The program was open to anyone with a child age 18 and under in Minneapolis—whether or not they attend Minneapolis Public Schools. St. Paul had 117 pick-up sites and delivered meals to all children in St. Paul who registered to receive seven-day, home-delivery meal packs. The district doubled its number of distributed meals when the home delivery program started reaching families who did not have reliable transportation. Public schools in Minneapolis and St. Paul distributed nearly 21 million meals in 2020.

St. Cloud ISD: Menu Innovator

St. Cloud supported healthy eating patterns with cheese, fruit and vegetables, while also offering cultural options for breakfast and lunch. St. Cloud has a 25% population of

black students, many of whom are immigrants or children of immigrants from East Africa, so cultural food options were included two to three times a week in response to their ethnic preferences.

Bloomington IDS: Bundled Meal Packs

The suburban district of Bloomington operated bundled meal packs at neighborhood school sites serving populations with more than 50% students of color.

Pelican Rapids IDS: Multicultural ingredients

Small, rural school districts bridged the cultural divide with multicultural meal components in multi-day meal boxes that were relevant to specific Hispanic or immigrant student populations.

While innovation and dedication shown by school meal programs has been remarkable, the additional preparation, staffing, personal protection equipment, and transportation costs caused financial concerns for many school districts. These financial constraints made it even harder to serve their kids throughout this crisis, as well as when schools eventually reopen.

TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE: ADVOCATING IN A PANDEMIC FOR THE FUTURE

We continued our policy advocacy work at the state and federal levels, with shifted emphasis on pandemic relief benefits.

We supported extending (P-EBT) through the public health emergency to include summers. P-EBT may be needed for the 2021-22 school year, should schedules continue to be disrupted.

We supported two provisions in the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) to strengthen nutrition services and address health inequities—the cash value increase for fruit and vegetable purchases and special funding for targeted outreach and redemption for online foods.

What's next for child nutrition advocacy:

- Combine the Summer Food Service Program, which provides summer meals, and the Child and Adult Care Food Program, which provides after-school meals, so meal providers operate one program year-round. This would streamline paperwork and administration.
- Provide funding for transportation grants to support innovative approaches and mobile food trucks.
- Lower area eligibility threshold to allow communities to participate if 40 percent of the children are eligible for free/reduced-priced meals. The current threshold is 50 percent. This was particularly helpful for rural communities.
- Allow all sites to serve a third meal. Currently sites can only serve a maximum of two meals a day.
- Allow USDA to waive the congregate feeding requirement when a disaster situation is declared by a governor.

Currently, USDA only has this authority if the president declares a disaster situation.

- Support MDH proposal for USDA grant to pilot online purchases of WIC foods.

We know access to federally funded balanced and nutritious meals is one of the best tools we have available to fight childhood food insecurity.

LESSONS WE ARE LEARNING DURING COVID-19

- COVID-19's impact on the kids and communities HIP serves will be complicated and uncertain. Its economic, social and emotional fallout is not now fully comprehensible.
- Food accessibility needs and challenges will remain intense for the foreseeable future. The issue of childhood hunger as a root of numerous social problems must stay high on the state's radar.
- Improvements to federal child nutrition program access and implementation was overdue. Systemic changes need to be ongoing.
- Meal delivery systems and channels must continue to be agile. Engagement and coordination with strong networks of partners willing to share new ways of distributing healthy, culturally respectful food is essential.
- Education communities will continue to have a primary role to play as feeding centers for food insecure children and their families.
- Data is now more than ever key to directing and coordinating strategies and resources for vulnerable families with rapidly changing needs for food access.
- Funders will need to be open-minded, responsive and flexible.



Child Nutrition Index Data Comparison

The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us many practical lessons about how to better support children. It also has put into stark focus not only the unbelievable power of schools to support students and their families, but also the significant power of communities. All across our network of statewide schools and community organizations, many have stepped up to help distribute food to families in need. This comparison data will inform our work in 2021, shaping strategies to do more for our population of food insecure children.

Child Nutrition Index STATEWIDE OVERVIEW

Meal Participation for Low Income Infants on WIC

Birth to Age 1 Population: 68,603				Meal Participation Percentage	Meals Served & Reimbursement Revenue	Reimbursement EBT Value	WIC Food Dollars	WIC Clinics	
	Month & Year	Medicaid Financed	Number Kids Served		Breakfast, Lunch & Supper	Cost of Food	Spent in Local Grocery Stores	Clinics	Agencies
Pre-Covid	May 2019	29,459	22,502	76%	1,870,102 \$866 K	\$38.52	\$1.4 M	266	88
	Oct. 2019	29,459	22,693	77%	1,887,072 \$738 K	\$32.51	\$1.4 M	266	88
During Covid	May 2020	29,599	22,561	76%	1,877,975 \$850 K	\$37.68	\$1.4 M	197	85
	Oct. 2020	29,599	21,803	74%	1,813,891 \$786 K	\$36.05	\$1.3 M	197	85

Child Nutrition Index STATEWIDE OVERVIEW

Meal Participation for Low Income Children on WIC

Children Ages 1, 2, 3, 4 Population: 278,680				Meal Participation Percentage	Meals Served & Reimbursement Revenue	Reimbursement EBT Value	WIC Food Dollars	WIC	
	Month & Year	Medicaid Financed	Number Kids Served		Breakfast, Lunch & Supper	Cost of Food	Spent in Local Grocery Stores	Clinics	Agencies
Pre-Covid	May 2019	133,146	55,132	41%	2,921,996 \$2.1 M	\$38.52	\$3.5 M	266	88
	Oct. 2019	133,146	56,635	43%	3,001,655 \$1.8 M	\$32.51	\$3.5 M	266	88
During Covid	May 2020	133,202	58,498	44%	3,100,394 \$2.2 M	\$37.68	\$3.5 M	197	85
	Oct. 2020	133,202	59,142	44%	3,134,526 \$2.1 M	\$36.05	\$3.6 M	197	85

Child Nutrition Index STATEWIDE OVERVIEW

Meal Participation for Low Income Children in School

Children Ages 5 to 18 Population 1,003,635					Meal Participation Percentage			Meals Served & Reimbursement Revenue	FREE Reimbursement meal value	Sites	Sponsors
	Learning Model	Month & Year	Medicaid Financed	Number Kids Served	Breakfast	Lunch	Supper	Breakfast, Lunch & Supper	Maximum	Number	Number
Pre-Covid	On Site	May 2019	409,599	257,478	37%	65%	2%	9,039,315 \$23.6 M	\$5.14	2,284	694
	On Site	Oct. 2019	409,599	254,071	55%	62%	3%	10,329,612 \$23.6 M	\$6.52	2,004	634
During Covid	Remote	May 2020	409,743	327,961	76%	80%	4%	13,700,751 \$40.7 M	\$6.52	1,117	522
	Remote	Oct. 2020	409,743	443,613	76%	108%*	4%	16,241,541 \$48.4 M	\$6.78	2,046	684

* Meal increases could be due to meal bundling and weekly distribution schedules but reconciliation of the number of children receiving meals is problematic.

Child Nutrition Index 7-COUNTY OVERVIEW

Meal Participation for Low Income Children in School

Children Ages 5 to 18 Population: 580,015					Meal Participation Percentage			Meals Served & Reimbursement Revenue	FREE Reimbursement meal value	Sites	Sponsors
	Learning Model	Month & Year	Medicaid Financed	Number Kids Served	Breakfast	Lunch	Supper	Breakfast, Lunch & Supper	Maximum	Number	Number
Pre-Covid	On Site	May 2019	193,328	152,070	46%	80%	33%	5,258,812 \$13.8 M	\$5.14	982	222
	On Site	Oct. 2019	193,328	137,725	62%	72%	5%	5,686,600 \$13.4 M	\$6.52	982	222
During Covid	Remote	May 2020	216,717	173,977	78%	83%	5%	7,589,248 \$22.6 M	\$6.52	818	205
	Remote	Oct. 2020	216,717	246,247	93%	115%*	7%	9,791,252 \$29.2 M	\$6.78	818	205

* Meal increases could be due to meal bundling and weekly distribution schedules but reconciliation of the number of children receiving meals is problematic.

Hunger Impact Partners

DEMOGRAPHIC SUMMARY:

We are committed to working with people that reflect our communities of race, religion and gender. We actively engage and hire people with diverse backgrounds who understand cultures and local communities. We have an expansive team of advisors that we collaborate with who assist us in navigating federal meal programs, food sourcing and local neighborhood needs. We intentionally bring people together to listen and learn about what efforts will be most effective in the communities we serve.

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HUNGER IMPACT PARTNERS DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STATEMENT

Hunger Impact Partners does not discriminate on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, gender expression, age, national origin, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, or military status, in any of its activities or operations. We are committed to working with people that reflect our communities and actively engage and hire people with backgrounds who understand diverse cultures.

We embrace diversity, equity and inclusion as organizational values to encourage positive outcomes to flourish in communities. We apply racial equity by partnering with organizations that reflect the populations we serve who are most impacted by structural racial inequality. We recognize that those most affected are the most effective in advocating for their communities. These organizations are meaningfully involved in the creation and implementation of our programs, policies and practices.

COLLECTIVE IMPACT PARTNERS



HUNGER IMPACT PARTNERS
Food for Every Child