

# Hunger Impact Partners – 2023 Annual Report

## Say Yes! to School Meals



Dear Friends,



In 2023, 17.3% of households with children in the United States experienced food insecurity, which is an increase of 40% from 2021. This means that food insecurity is more prevalent among children than the total population in every state.

We continue to work to reduce poverty, strengthened early childhood and student nutrition, and boost children's health and

development in everything we do for the nearly 600,000 struggling kids.

Fortunately, 2023 marked the State's commitment to make Minnesota better at addressing childhood food insecurity. On March 17th, the Governor signed into law the Universal Meals for ALL bill. Seen as a long-term fix and motivated by the consequences of the pandemic and the budget surplus, Minnesota joined seven other states offering universal meals which means all students can eat free breakfast and lunch school meals. Realistically, this legislation is not going to be transformative enough to completely eliminate childhood food insecurity, but it does help reverse the concerning upward spike we were seeing.

As we know, all children need to be hunger-free to have the energy and focus they need to get the most out of their school day. To improve participation rates by students, we partnered with the Minnesota Department of Education Nutrition Task Force and a team of community organizations to create a marketing campaign called 'Say Yes to School Meals.' The campaign launched statewide in school districts at the start of the 2023-24 school year. The campaign developed posters and flyers, parent engagement collateral, and videos designed to entice students to eat meals at school. We have displayed the campaign on the cover of this annual report, on our website and on the Free Meals for Kids mobile app.

Early childhood advocacy efforts resulted in several new legislative investments to lead sustainable change for our estimated 83,000 children birth to five and their families:

- Creating a nation-leading Child Tax Credit predicted to cut child poverty by one-third.
- Increasing the Childcare Assistance Program.
- Continuing State funding support of Early Learning Scholarships for struggling families.

Additionally, the State Legislature passed a drastically needed one-time \$4 million investment for innovative cross-agency IT projects and \$20 million in one-time funding to improve IT systems and processes for programs impacting low-income children and families, including youth, childcare and early learning programs. The Hunger Impact Partners Child Nutrition Index was the key data source used to drive this investment.

In closing, COVID exposed lots of issues within the family of federal child nutrition meal programs. We continue to try to refine what could be the best strategy for the big idea addressing food insecurity. We find ourselves examining local food systems and school district delivery methods. All the USDA child nutrition programs are siloed with different meal patterns, eligibility, and reimbursement requirements. They all have the same mission but separate funding streams. We are reimagining a more equitable and resilient child nutrition program platform that makes feeding kids less cumbersome, creates efficient delivery methods and is more cost-effective. Less money to implement and more dollars to provide better meal nutrition reaching more hungry children—more to come on this initiative.

It was a positive and productive year. Your interest in Hunger Impact Partners extends to the lives of many Minnesota children experiencing food hardship and your continued support is invaluable to us.

With tremendous gratitude,

*Ellie Lucas*

Ellie Lucas  
Chief Executive Office

Total population vs. Food Insecure Population 2023

| Children Ages           | Population | Medicaid Financed | Enrolled in WIC or Free & Reduced-Price Meals | Children Missing from WIC and State Educational Benefits |
|-------------------------|------------|-------------------|---|--|
| Infants                 | 63,071     | 28,133            | 21,846  | 6,287  |
| Ages 1 to 4             | 269,728    | 127,415           | 61,316  | 66,099   |
| Subtotal Birth to 4     | 332,799    | 155,548           | 83,162  | 72,386   |
| Ages 5 to 18            | 1,037,313  | 440,386           | 377,649                                       | 62,737   |
| Grand Total Birth to 18 | 1,370,112  | 595,934           | 460,811                                       | 135,123  |

2023 HIGHLIGHTS – INVESTING IN OUR CHILDREN

Our four initiatives expand and increase access and utilization of existing meal programs designed to close the meal gap among WIC families, at licensed childcare centers, in schools with after-school enrichment activities, and at summer feeding sites in low-income neighborhoods. Below is a summary of our community investments.

- We funded nutrition infrastructure projects in five school districts and nine community-based non-profits in low-income neighborhoods with large BIPOC populations in the 7-county metro and awarded grants to six public school districts in greater Minnesota. Grants enabled facility upgrades, staffing and tech support.
- We supported 15 childcare centers with tech support, record-keeping resources and staffing to increase the number of meals served and improve financial accountability.
- We supported outreach efforts to promote after-school meal program participation and developed a compliance curriculum for new sponsors adding 18 new after-school sites, where 21,500 additional meals were served to school age children.
- We provided funding to support four multi-family affordable housing sites, five community libraries, and four faith-based sites offering free summer feeding locations.
- We awarded a grant in central Minnesota to upgrade a community kitchen facility serving 1,700 low-income families.

CHILD NUTRITION INDEX

All our efforts are grounded in our proprietary Child Nutrition Index, a data tool that helps us isolate populations according to meal program, percentage of free/reduced-price eligibility and meal participation levels.

**MISSION STATEMENT**

At Hunger Impact Partners, our sole mission is to enable children to grow, develop and focus on learning rather than hunger, and reach their full potential and long-term self-sufficiency. We bring a laser focus to leading initiatives that support high impact child nutrition programs available to food insecure children from early childhood to age 18 living in or below poverty. We prioritize our efforts to reach those most at-risk using data and leveraging community resources to support disadvantaged children in low-income communities suffering from racial inequities. Our guiding principle is children should only be hungry to learn.


We calculate missing meals and work with communities to customize programs that will close the missing meal gap. We measure new meals added, increases in numbers of children fed and additional markets reached through improved federal meal program access. The chart below shows we are starting to return to 2019 pre-pandemic levels with a gain in school breakfast and lunch meals served. Unfortunately, summer meals, childcare center meals and after school meals are lagging and collectively there were 1 million less meals served in 2023.

Child Nutrition Index Dashboard

| Meal Type                         | Calendar Year |             |             |             |             |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
|                                   | 2019          | 2020        | 2021        | 2022        | 2023        |
| Childcare Center Meals            | 11,099,012    | 8,321,235   | 8,363,661   | 7,666,112   | 8,549,833   |
| Breakfast and Lunch School Meals  | 79,578,777    | 106,698,343 | 193,326,537 | 166,832,774 | 85,706,096  |
| Summer Meals: June, July & August | 3,739,374     | 22,450,159  | 36,176,904  | 7,539,352   | 2,844,103   |
| At-Risk After School Meals        | 2,568,407     | 4,014,582   | 62,097,687  | 2,386,805   | 1,701,980   |
| Meal Total                        | 96,985,570    | 141,484,319 | 299,964,789 | 184,425,043 | 98,802,012  |
| Snack                             | 11,638,470    | 10,125,851  | 70,208,686  | 8,509,161   | 8,309,531   |
| Meal & Snack Total                | 108,624,040   | 151,610,170 | 370,173,475 | 192,934,204 | 107,111,543 |

FREE MEALS FOR KIDS MOBILE APP

The **Free Meals for Kids** mobile app continues to be the central statewide communication resource for families to source meals during the summer months in communities, at after-school programs offering meals during the school year, and at licensed childcare centers operating year-round meal service.



| 2023 Data         |        |
|-------------------|--------|
| Total users:      | 35,949 |
| Total visits:     | 48,079 |
| Total page-views: | 58,532 |

The **Free Meals for Kids** mobile app now has approximately 36,000 active users and includes information on food help and support resources for struggling families. We added “push” notification features to reach users directly with alerts for community events for food distributions, informational messages on safety net programs and opportunities for users to participate in community research projects. This year we worked with the University of Minnesota School of Nursing on a Child Health and Food Study, CHeFS, to look at the quality of summer meal sites and how to make them the most helpful for children’s nutritional and health needs over the summer.

There were more than 1,300 sites listed on the mobile app in May 2023. We coordinated with county health departments, MDE, and our established network of partners to support promotion and outreach so more



families could access meals at locations throughout the state via the app. We continue to maintain an ongoing partnership with Second Harvest Heartland to promote the app on billboards, truck wraps and websites to build users year over year.

In 2023, 54% of the summer sites were in the 7-county metro serving 29,073 children and 46% percent were in greater Minnesota serving 27,809 children. We continue to focus on increasing serving sites that are sponsored by credible community-based organizations to build back to 2019 levels.

The chart *below* shows the breakdown of locations that provided free summer meals.

| Summer Meal Sites             | 2019 | 2023 |
|-------------------------------|------|------|
| Community Based Organizations | 107  | 55   |
| Park & Rec Centers            | 183  | 130  |
| Boys & Girls Clubs & YMCAs    | 54   | 39   |
| Libraries                     | 25   | 14   |
| Headstart Sites               | 18   | 9    |

In 2019 there were 107 Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) providing summer meals and in 2023 there were only 55 CBOs participating. Public, private and charter school sites filled the gap during the pandemic years. We still need to build back meal sites at libraries, parks, rec centers and HeadStart locations.

The Summer Child Nutrition Index *below* reflects the implications of the COVID federal food program fraud scheme in the years 2020, 2021 and 2022. Opportunistic operators, sponsors and food vendors used fictitious names and inflated the tens of thousands of kids they claimed they were serving. Abuse of the USDA child nutrition programs that reimburse schools, daycares and non-profits for feeding low-income children during the summer was rampant across the state and we are still in recovery.

Comparing data from 2019 and 2023 accurately reflects the meal gap. Our ongoing work to build back capacity begins with increasing the number of credible community non-profit sponsors and operators, expanding school district sponsorships and implementing a record-keeping platform for meal counts and compliance. In order for Minnesota to close the summer meal gap, we need to supply over 10 million additional meals to reach the 266,000 children living in identified high-need areas across the state.

Summer Child Nutrition Index June, July & August

| Geography          | Meals Served |            |            |           |           | Geography          | Meal Providers |      |      |      |      |
|--------------------|--------------|------------|------------|-----------|-----------|--------------------|----------------|------|------|------|------|
|                    | 2019         | 2020       | 2021       | 2022      | 2023      |                    | 2019           | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
| 7-County Metro     | 2,128,101    | 16,585,226 | 26,685,995 | 5,009,491 | 1,453,647 | 7-County Metro     | 2,128,101      | 108  | 173  | 167  | 59   |
| Greater Minnesota  | 1,611,273    | 5,864,933  | 9,490,909  | 2,529,861 | 1,390,456 | Greater Minnesota  | 1,611,273      | 183  | 310  | 229  | 161  |
| State of Minnesota | 3,739,374    | 22,450,159 | 36,176,904 | 7,539,352 | 2,844,103 | State of Minnesota | 3,739,374      | 291  | 471  | 390  | 220  |

SCHOOL SYSTEM CHALLENGES CONTINUE

We continued to focused on addressing the most challenging time schools and nutrition professionals have faced in the past three years. There were staffing challenges, inflation, decreased participation rates, unpaid meal debt, changing regulations and ongoing supply chain issues.

Looking ahead we see ongoing system challenges that school districts will need to proactively manage. We will be monitoring these issues to be ready to support solutions to improve operational efficiencies and financial stability during the 2024-25 academic year.

**Supply chain:** Ongoing disruptions in the supply chain coupled with rising costs, labor shortages, and insufficient regulatory relief will continue to create significant challenges for school nutrition programs.

**Building partnerships:** Educating the community about school nutrition programs and deepening relationships with community-based organizations requires a partnership mentality.

**Lease freezers or warehouse space:** As districts continue to struggle with supply chain challenges, the feasibility of leasing storage space and challenges associated with the option, include transportation issues moving product to schools.

**Co-op purchasing:** Cooperative purchasing should be used more as a way to increase a district's buying power and better pricing on products.

**USDA regulations:** Operators face challenges with the current meal pattern regulations while the food industry is concerned that proposed regulations will result in manufacturers stepping away from school district business.

## CHILD NUTRITION INDEX DATA COMPARISON

Below is the meal participation for low-income children in schools in the 7-county and the State. Comparing October 2019 and October 2023, data reflects the number of children served before and after the pandemic. The primary need is to increase the number of sites serving

meals and the number of kids participating. The Universal Meals for ALL legislation should show improvement in breakfast and lunch participation during the 2024-25 academic year. Unfortunately, only 4% of the eligible students are participating in after-school meals.

### Child Nutrition Index 7-COUNTY COMPARISON Meal Participation for Low Income Children in School



| Children Ages 5 to 18<br>Population: 568,255 |                |              |                   |                    | 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      |
|  | Hybrid         | May 2021     | 215,074           | 176,410            | 80%                           | 82%   | 155%*  | 14,326,393 \$46.3 M                  | \$6.78                        | 719    | 188      |
|  | On Site        | Oct. 2021    | 215,074           | 267,633            | 56%                           | 124%* | 120%*  | 16,136,357 \$47.8 M                  | \$6.85                        | 1,205  | 208      |
|  | On Site        | May 2022     | 222,665           | 194,160            | 44%                           | 87%   | <1%    | 9,137,387 \$21.9 M                   | \$6.85                        | 1,000  | 232      |
| Post-Covid                                   | On Site        | Oct. 2022    | 222,665           | 134,103            | 50%                           | 60%   | <1%    | 4,969,381 \$13.4 M                   | \$7.225                       | 985    | 226      |
|  | On Site        | May 2023     | 229,785           | 138,989            | 32%                           | 60%   | 4%     | 5,008,388 \$16.0 M                   | \$7.225                       | 926    | 242      |
|  | On Site        | Oct. 2023    | 229,785           | 157,853            | 38%                           | 69%   | 4%     | 4,667,768 \$15.8 M                   | \$6.58                        | 861    | 228      |

### Child Nutrition Index STATEWIDE COMPARISON Meal Participation for Low Income Children in School



| Children Ages 5 to 18<br>Population 1,037,313 |                |              |                   |                    | 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      |
|   | Hybrid         | May 2021     | 406,045           | 324,650            | 78%                           | 80%   | 93%    | 21,321,624 \$67.5 M                  | \$6.78                        | 1,842  | 606      |
|   | On Site        | Oct. 2021    | 406,045           | 506,919            | 58%                           | 125%* | 107%*  | 24,728,490 \$68.9 M                  | \$6.85                        | 2,301  | 631      |
|   | On Site        | May 2022     | 418,143           | 413,106            | 50%                           | 99%   | 1%     | 19,441,250 \$46.8 M                  | \$6.85                        | 2,080  | 640      |
| Post-Covid                                    | On Site        | Oct. 2022    | 418,143           | 239,469            | 47%                           | 57%   | 2%     | 8,873,895 \$24.1 M                   | \$7.225                       | 2,294  | 643      |
|   | On Site        | May 2023     | 440,386           | 251,919            | 31%                           | 57%   | 3%     | 9,042,993 \$28.7 M                   | \$7.225                       | 1,983  | 717      |
|   | On Site        | Oct. 2023    | 440,386           | 248,819            | 31%                           | 57%   | 4%     | 8,511,808 \$28.7 M                   | \$6.58                        | 1,796  | 630      |

# Hunger Impact Partners

## DEMOGRAPHIC SUMMARY

We are committed to working with people that reflect our communities by 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.

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

### Dr. Diana Cutts

Chief of Pediatrics, Hennepin Healthcare  
Principal Investigator, Minneapolis Medical Research Foundation

### Daniel Gott

Managing Director  
Boston Consulting Group

### Robbin Johnson

Retired President  
Cargill Foundation  
Senior Advisor  
Humphrey School of Public Affairs

### Albert Nolen

Academy of Excellence  
University of Minnesota

### Michael Wagner

CEO  
Active Capital Funding

## ADVISORS

### Kate Abernathy

CEO  
Providers Choice

### Laurie Acker

Program Manager  
CityConnects

### Kiley Benson

Associate Executive Director  
Loaves & Fishes

### Joel Berg

CEO  
Hunger Free America

### Minerva Delgado

Director of Coalitions and Advocacy  
Alliance to End Hunger

### Tim English

Deputy Under Secretary  
USDA-Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services

### Stephanie Ettinger de Cuba

Executive Director  
Children's HealthWatch

### Sue Gillman

Member at Large  
Foundation for Essential Needs

### Glen Gunderson

CEO  
YMCA of the North

### Monica Herrera

Director  
Nutrition, Health and Youth Development Division  
Minnesota Department of Education

### Michelle Horovitz

Vice President  
Appetite for Change

### Jeanette Johnson-Reed

Supervisor  
CACFP Compliance & Assistance  
Minnesota Department of Education

### Cisa Keller

President and CEO  
Think Small

### Daron Korte

Assistant Commissioner  
Minnesota Department of Education

### Sophia Lenarz-Coy

Executive Director  
Twin Cities Mobile Market & The Food Group

### Cindy Long

Administrator  
USDA-Food and Nutrition Services

### Adair Mosley

CEO  
African American Leadership Forum

### Allison O'Toole

CEO  
Second Harvest Heartland

### Cinnamon Pelly

CEO  
Pillsbury United Communities

### Marcus Pope

President  
Youthprise

### Art Rolnick

Senior Fellow  
Humphrey School of Public Affairs

### Courtney Smith

SVP  
No Kid Hungry

### Jerry Sparby

Executive Director  
YES Network

### Libby Stegger

Executive Director  
Move for America

### Rob Williams

Executive Director  
Every Meal

### Nicoshia Wynn

Executive Director  
Relentless Academy

### Sheila Zephier,

Director of Community Engagement  
MN Indian Women's Resource Center

## SENIOR TEAM

### Ellie Lucas

CEO

### Wendy Tai

Early Childhood Nutrition

### Trent Tucker

Student Nutrition

### Jim Thielman

Web Strategy and Content

### Stacey Hueftle Stockdill, Ph.D.

Independent Director of Evaluation and Data Analysis for the Child Nutrition Index

## 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. 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*