

Keeping Food on the Table

Presented by
HUNGER
SOLUTIONS^{MN}
A Statewide Partnership of Organizations Fighting Hunger



**“Hunger is a problem that
must be addressed if
closing the achievement
gap is a real goal.”**

- Minnesota Education Commissioner

Brenda Cassellius

A Quarterly Review of the State of Hunger in Minnesota

Released March 2011

**First
Quarter
2011**

Hunger in the Classroom



Minnesota Department of Education data show a 3% increase in the number of children receiving free and reduced lunch over last year.

In the past decade in Minnesota, the number of children living in poverty has increased by 53%.

That means one in five families with children are now at risk for hunger in Minnesota.

We see the impact of this in the number of children in Minnesota receiving free and reduced lunch at school.

In 2000, there were 218,205 students enrolled in free/reduced lunch. Jump forward to 2010 and the number is 301,974. Currently in Minnesota, 37% of all K-12 public school students are eating subsidized meals.

But, does that really translate to hunger in the classroom?

Yes. Teachers see it, test scores show it, parents worry about it, and fellow students deal with the consequences of being in class with hungry friends.

What does hunger in the classroom look like? Read what teachers have to say from a recent Share Our Strength national survey of K-8 teachers:

- Hunger in the classroom is frequent/on-going. Two-thirds of the surveyed teachers witness hunger.
- Hungry students exhibit behavior problems, low performance. Especially if they skip breakfast.

- Teachers buy food to distribute in their classroom. They take class time to make referrals so families can seek assistance.
- School meals are the primary source of nutrition for students living in poverty.

Local School District is National Model

[Minneapolis Public Schools Address Hunger](#)

Rosemary Dederichs, who oversees the district's nutrition services, is recognized nationally for implementing anti-hunger programs to support academic success. She was a leader on the committee that developed the new nutrition standards for school meals.

"There are just study after study after study, and so much data that tells us that children who are not hungry learn better. Their tummies aren't empty and rumbling, and they're better able to concentrate."

Dederichs says one possibility might be eliminating the "reduced-price" category and allowing those children to eat free. Minneapolis made this change to its lunch program last year and saw a 13 percent increase in the number of low-income children eating lunch.

At the Capitol

In Minnesota the monthly cost of school lunch is about \$80. For thousands of Minnesota families, school lunch is unaffordable. If families do not qualify for free lunch, low-income families are obligated to pay. Even at a reduced rate, this monthly bill is proving to be too much.



Anti-hunger advocates are currently working on a bill that will reduce the stigma and feed more students.

What happens when you cannot afford to pay?

- Some children are turned away at the lunch counter while others are given a cheese or peanut butter sandwich.
- Middle schools and high schools report that children are skipping lunch, fearing there is no money in their accounts. Some school districts can no longer "forgive" school lunch debt and the outstanding debts are pursued by collection agencies.

The Bill (SF511) will prohibit schools from withholding grades or diplomas for nonpayment of student fees.

No pupil's rights or privileges, including the receipt of grades or diplomas may be denied or abridged for nonpayment of fees, including reduced price lunch fees. More importantly, no reduced-eligible child will have their food taken away or be turned away from the lunch counter without food or with a non reimbursed "replacement" meal.

What is happening at Minnesota food shelves?



In 2010, we surpassed 2.8 million visits to food shelves—another record year that included:

- An increase of 62% in visits since 2008—before the bottom fell out of the economy.
- 39% of the total visits to food shelves were for children under 18, and another 9% of visitors were elderly.
- 36% of visitors to metro-area food shelves reported having at least one working adult in the household.

The Good News of Food Support in Minnesota

Minnesota now has 485,509 people enrolled in Food Support. This reflects a 17% jump in one year. We have gone from 54% of eligible people enrolled to 66%. This is good news, the program works. Unemployed Minnesotans do not have to go with out eating well just because their income is diminished during this recession.

Last November a simple policy change was implemented that has made a big difference for low income people and for Minnesota's County Social Service offices. The change eliminated the asset limit (you now do not have to spend down all of your savings) and increased the income eligibility level to 165% of poverty. That means a family of 3 earning \$2,518 a month is eligible for benefits.

Following the November 1, 2010 changes to Food Support, caseloads in Minnesota are double the average monthly caseload increase in the first ten months of 2010. From January 2010 to October 2010, the Food Support caseload increased by an average of 2,187 cases each month. In November 2010 – Food Support caseloads increased by 5,355 cases.



Food Support benefits buffer low income families from increased food insecurity and have a positive benefit for our local economy during the recession.

To accommodate the increase, some counties have developed new work plans that more efficiently handle the caseloads. Some counties have been able to reduce pending applications down to 6 working days, reduce daily phone call volume by one-half, and cut wait time for appointment booking in half.

All of this leads to more Federal dollars being spent in our local economy. Eighty percent of Food Support benefits are used within two weeks at local grocers.

Source:<http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/>

HUNGER SNAPSHOTS:



In 2010, people in the U.S. applied for Food Support/SNAP benefits at an average rate of 22,000 a day.



Food prices jumped 3.9% in February 2011, the biggest increase in nearly 37 years.



In 2010, an unprecedented number (29,586) of Minnesota seniors enrolled in Food Support. That reflects an 18% increase over 2009.



We help put healthy food within reach.

The Minnesota Food HelpLine by the Numbers

Between December 2010 and February 2011, the helpline had:

- ⇒ **932 calls from 73 of the 87 counties in Minnesota**
- ⇒ **60% of those callers were screened for Food Support benefits**
- ⇒ **91% of callers screened were eligible for Food Support and were supplied with materials and assistance so they may enroll for benefits**
- ⇒ **34% of all callers were seniors and 21% of all callers had children in the home, many of the other callers are working-age adults that are underemployed or disabled**

We hear from people like the caller below every day:

Anna didn't know where to turn for help. Her husband had just left her and she was faced with the reality of not being able to afford groceries after paying that month's bills. She had a 10 month old baby to take care of on her own now and wasn't sure where she could find the food help she needed.

The helpline staff person told Anna about a food shelf that was located in her town and encouraged her to call them right away to set up an appointment. Anna also learned that she likely qualified for Food Support and WIC.

In the ten minutes it took her to make a call to the Minnesota Food HelpLine, she was able to find somewhere she could get food help that day, learn about government food assistance, and have an application mailed directly to her.



Americorps volunteers answer the Minnesota Food Helpline. Minnesotans can call with questions about food shelves, Food Support and other local food resources. (MPR Photo/ Julie Siple)



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hungersolutions.org

Hunger Solutions Minnesota is a comprehensive hunger relief organization that works to end hunger in Minnesota. We take action to assure food security for all Minnesotans by supporting agencies that provide food to those in need, advancing sound public policy, and guiding grassroots advocacy. HSM advocates for the maximum use of all federal public nutrition dollars available and works to improve low income Minnesotans' access to all nutrition programs.

