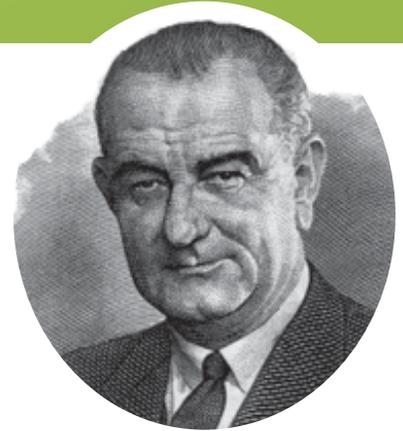


Policy Points

FOOD STAMP CUTS: EFFECTS ON EDUCATION

“The program I shall propose will emphasize this cooperative approach to help that one-fifth of all American families with incomes too small to even meet their basic needs... We must distribute more food to the needy through a broader food stamp program.”

—President Lyndon B. Johnson’s 1964 State of the Union Address, the “War on Poverty”



The War on Poverty is now 50 years old and is arguably more important than ever as the percent of people living in poverty is virtually unchanged since Johnson’s speech, despite the many government programs implemented over the last five decades to address it. The federal government spent more than \$80 billion on food stamps in 2013, providing aid to 14 percent of U.S. households. Yet, significant cuts to the program threaten the access to food and nutrition of each family, and student, living in these households.

THE SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SNAP)

The federal food stamp program first entered U.S. policy in 1939 and was made permanent when Congress passed the Food Stamp Act of 1964. Administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the act was intended to provide meals to and improve nutrition for low-income households, while strengthening the agricultural economy. In 1965, the program reached half a million participants and received \$75 million in funding—in FY13, 47 million people participated in the program, which was funded at

\$82.5 billion, according to the USDA. Despite the great need for program funding, Congress recently approved and President Obama signed a reauthorization of a farm bill that cuts SNAP funding, through changes in eligibility, by more than \$8 billion over 10 years.



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Due to the economic recession of 2008 and slow recovery; increasing fuel, food, and healthcare costs; and stagnant low wages, more families struggle to put food on the table now than in the past. The number of families relying on SNAP has increased by 77 percent in the last 5 years. Yet, according to the Food Research and Action Center, even with the significant increase in participation, 3 in 10 people eligible for SNAP benefits remain unserved because they do not know they are eligible, the application process is too difficult, or they are deterred by the negative stigma associated with accepting food stamps.



Notably, children are not spared from the brunt of poverty. The USDA reports that 21.9 percent of children in the United States live in food-insecure households, meaning their normal eating pattern is disrupted and meals are skipped because the household lacks money and other resources to obtain food.

EFFECT OF NUTRITION ON STUDENT ACADEMICS

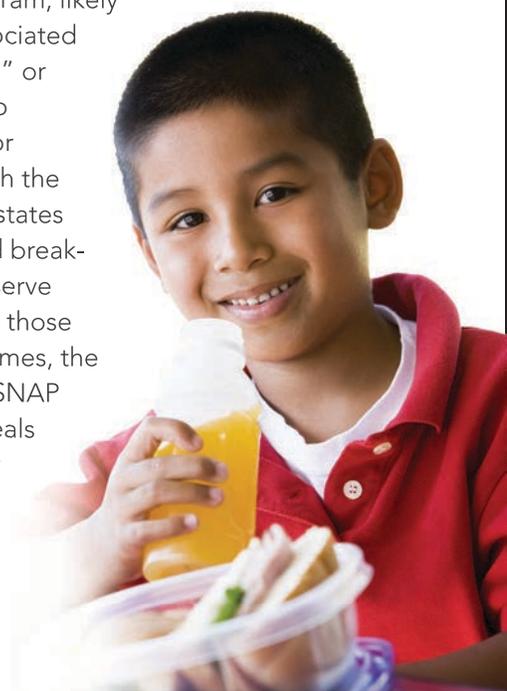
Poverty at home has a very real and visible effect on students in the classroom. Students with access to good nutrition have higher school attendance records, are better able to focus, and are consistently more engaged than students with poor nutrition (FRAC, *Child Nutrition Fact Sheet*).

Children who live in poor families also consume food with lower nutritional value than their peers due to limited access and ability to afford food with higher nutritional value. Although SNAP is able to fill some of that void, monthly benefits often run out before

the next round is set to kick in. And because low-nutrition food costs less, many families forgo the higher-cost, higher-nutrition options to make their SNAP benefits last longer. But the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) reports that prolonged poor nutrition has daily consequences. Students with poor nutritional habits and weak health practices struggle with listening, concentrating, and learning. Hungry students also have more stomachaches, headaches, depression, anxiety, and slower memory recall; are more likely to make errors; and are more likely to repeat a grade (FRAC, *Breakfast for Health*).

Because families depending on food stamps still struggle to put food on the table for three meals a day throughout the month, students in these families rely on school meal programs to eat when they would otherwise go hungry. Fortunately, the National School Lunch Program was expanded in 1975 as a permanent program offering nutritious breakfasts to needy students. According to Windsor and Chandran of the No Kid Hungry Campaign, students who consume breakfast demonstrate increased concentration, better academic performance, and improved classroom behavior. Indeed, students who eat a free breakfast at school average 17.5 percent higher scores on standardized math tests and attend 1.5 more days of school per year.

Despite the benefits, only half of the students eligible for free or reduced breakfast at school take advantage of the program, likely due to the stigma associated with being a “poor kid” or the inability to arrive to school early enough for the meal. And although the USDA is working with states and schools to expand breakfast models to better serve all students, especially those from food-insecure homes, the importance of robust SNAP benefits to provide meals for students in poverty both for educational achievement and social equality is clear.





CURRENT STATUS OF FEDERAL NUTRITION PROGRAMS

After three years of arduous debate in Congress, President Obama signed a new farm bill reauthorizing and setting funding for SNAP benefits.

The bill covers several school nutrition programs, including the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP), which allows schools to use federal funds to purchase and serve fresh produce. Under FFVP, two pilot programs were launched by the USDA. The first, a \$5 million program, was authorized this year to test the efficiency of serving frozen, canned, and dried fruit and vegetables in schools. The second expands funding opportunities for the Farm to School program, which allows participating schools in eight states to serve locally sourced foods instead of relying solely on USDA foods.

Although the reauthorized bill supports efforts to bring more nutrition to students while they are at school, it cuts funding for food aid in the home. The legislation aims to cut \$8.6 billion from the food stamp program over 10 years – potentially affecting nearly 2 million people by tightening eligibility requirements. Due to these changes,

up to 850,000 households could each lose about \$90 in monthly benefits, which anti-hunger groups equate to a loss of 34 meals per month per household (*The New York Times*). Though the \$8 billion in cuts are less severe than what was previously proposed, that fact brings little comfort to the families on the front lines of the war against poverty.

There is still much work to be done to mitigate the negative effect of poverty on education. In particular, the federal government must recognize the clear relationship between income inequality and academic achievement, and consider how nutrition aid programs can be used to improve outcomes for low-income students.



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SNAP



BY THE NUMBERS

16 Million

The number of U.S. children living in poverty.

77%

The percent increase in SNAP participants between 2007 and 2012.

10%

The percent of SNAP benefits remaining for the last week of the month.

47.3 Million

The number of Americans who participate in SNAP.

10 Million

The number of students who eat free or reduced-price breakfast in school, out of the 20 million who are eligible for the service.

\$133

The monthly dollar allotment for the average SNAP recipient, which equals less than \$1.50 per meal (provided that recipient eats three meals per day).

1 in 3

The number of those eligible who do not receive SNAP benefits.