

NO CHILD SHOULD GROW UP HUNGRY.

BRIEFING BOOK 2016
Childhood Hunger in America





This is an extraordinary time. For the first time in history we've had 45 million Americans living below the poverty line for four years in a row.¹ We've crossed a threshold where a majority - 51% - of public school students, now live in low-income families.² One in 5 of American children struggle with hunger.³

Poverty is complicated. Feeding a child is not. This is a solvable problem.

Share Our Strength has been on the front lines of the war against poverty and hunger for thirty years, and, since 2010, working to end childhood hunger in the U.S. through our No Kid Hungry campaign by connecting children in need to programs like school breakfast and summer meals.

Hand in hand with our partners across the country, we've built the foundation necessary to create lasting, transformational change.

Political leadership is critical. Ending childhood hunger will take commitment from Republicans and Democrats, national leaders as well as local. We must continue to build support with the business community and nonprofits, with parents, teachers, reporters, legislative staffers, chefs and everyone with a strength to share.

This briefing is a look at childhood hunger in America through the lens of the 2016 elections. It includes:

- P3: Why hunger should be part of the 2016 conversation
- P4: Hunger is an Education Issue
- P5: Hunger is a Health Issue
- P6: Hunger is an Economic Issue
- P7: Hunger is a Constituent Issue
- P8: General childhood hunger facts
- P9: State-by-state childhood hunger data
- P10: Methodology and Research
- p11: About No Kid Hungry

We can't have a strong America with weak kids. To build a nation that is healthier, stronger, smarter and more economically competitive, we must work together.

Sincerely,
Billy Shore



“Why Hunger Should Be Part of the 2016 National Conversation

At a time of extreme partisanship, both political parties agree that too many Americans are struggling economically and living in poverty; that the middle class is eroding; and that our children face an uncertain future. While poverty is complicated – and the parties’ proposed solutions differ widely – feeding a child is not. In fact, addressing childhood hunger is a popular concept that can help candidates move from a topic that can seem pessimistic and intractable into territory that offers achievable solutions that enjoy strong, bipartisan support.

A focus on hunger provides an opportunity, during these partisan times, for candidates and public figures to highlight their bipartisan, non-political approach to problem solving – even strongly identified partisan voters want people to come together to feed hungry kids.

One recent example includes strong bipartisan support for such policy solutions as the “Hunger Free Summer for Kids Act,”³ which is designed to reform the summer meals program through Child Nutrition Reauthorization. Few other pieces of legislation in Washington enjoy support from such a broad ideological group as Mitch McConnell and Roy Blunt on the one hand and Barbara Mikulski and Sherrod Brown on the other.

Below, we present some key summary points about why the fight against childhood hunger is important and solvable, followed by state-specific and national facts about childhood hunger.

- **Childhood Hunger in America is Widespread** – One in five American children don’t get the food they need every day. This takes a toll on their health and development, threatening their future and their potential.
- **We Can’t Have a Strong America with Hungry Kids** – When children are hungry, they don’t fulfill their academic potential. When children are hungry, they are more likely to develop avoidable illnesses. When children are hungry, they struggle to grow up into strong, healthy, and productive members of our society. This comes at a massive cost to the American economy and its potential.
- **Addressing Childhood Hunger is a Solvable Problem** – Poverty is a complicated issue; feeding a child is not. When kids get the food they need, they do better in and out of the classroom. We know how to connect children in need to programs like school breakfast and summer meals. We know how to empower families with the tools they need to cook healthy meals and stretch their food budgets. We know that we can end childhood hunger and change lives and futures in the process.
- **Addressing Childhood Hunger Enjoys Bipartisan Support** – Even the strongest partisans want people to come together to feed hungry kids. To build a nation that is healthier, stronger, smarter, and more economically competitive, we must work together.”

Child Hunger Is An Education Issue



“The first year we served free breakfast in our classroom was remarkable. Not only are we feeding their physical needs, we’re feeding their emotional needs. The light turns on; they’re able to function in the classroom.”

-- Margot Shaver, first-grade teacher

“Teachers cannot teach when kids cannot concentrate. Think about yourself; when you’re hungry, you can’t focus, you can’t think straight. I want my kids to be able to eat, because then I know they’re going to concentrate. I know their teachers are going to be able to teach them what they need.

-- Amanda Rice, elementary school principal.

An estimated 15 million children in America live in families struggling to put enough food on the table.⁵ This has a profound effect on our education system. If our children are too hungry to learn, their academic success is doomed before classes even begin.

Teachers Worry About Hungry Students

In a survey of American public school teachers, **3 out of 4** say they taught students who regularly came to school hungry. Nine out of 10 say they are concerned about the **long-term effects** hunger has on children’s education.⁶ [[NoKidHungry 2015](#)]

Hunger Damages The Brain

According to a research review from RTI International, hunger alters the way a child’s brain develops. “Food insecurity can be part of several forms of toxic stress that literally damage the architecture of a child’s developing brain. That damage can handicap the child for life, reducing its learning capacity, hampering its school readiness, reducing academic achievement and lowering educational attainment.”⁷ [[RTI](#)]

Hunger Affects Test Scores

Recent studies show that, by the third grade, “children who had been food insecure in kindergarten had a 13% drop in their reading and math test scores compared to their food-secure peers.”⁸ [[Partnership for America’s Success](#)]

Breakfast Has An Impact On Learning

On average, students in schools that serve breakfast each morning in the classroom score 17.5% higher on standardized math scores.⁹ [[Deloitte](#)]

Hunger Is Linked To School Discipline

Researchers studied student behavior and discovered discipline problems in school are “nearly 50 percent higher at the end of the month, when benefits have typically run out, than at the beginning of the month among students in families on food stamps.”¹⁰ [[Bloomberg](#)]

Child Hunger Is A Health Issue



"We see a whole host of health problems from kids who don't consistently get the healthy food they need, from increased hospitalizations and developmental problems all the way down to more frequent colds, headaches and stomach aches. Food for kids acts as a vaccine."

- Lee Hammerling, MD,
Chief Medical Officer,
ProMedica

"As a physician, it's troublesome knowing kids aren't getting enough to eat. And as a mom, in my family food equals love. When you love someone, you cook for them, and make sure they have enough to eat. So the thought of all these kids just haunts me."

-- Dr. Ximena Garcia,
Topeka, KS

An estimated 15 million children in America live in families struggling to put enough food on the table. This has a profound effect on our nation's health. When children are hungry, they are more likely to develop avoidable illnesses, and the nation is burdened with the expense of avoidable health care costs.

Hungry Children Are Hospitalized More Frequently

Children struggling with hunger are 31% more likely to be hospitalized at some point during their childhood. The average cost of a pediatric hospitalization is \$12,000.^{11, 12} [[Journal of Nutrition](#)], [[Child Food Insecurity: The Economic Impact on our Nation](#)]

Hunger Leads To Worse Overall Health

Food-insecure kids are 90% more likely to have their overall health reported as "fair/poor" rather than "excellent/good" for kids from food secure homes.¹² [[Child Food Insecurity: The Economic Impact on Our Nation](#)]

Hunger Leads To More Frequent Colds

Preschool children without enough to eat tend to have more frequent colds.¹³ [[National Institutes of Health \(NIH\)](#)]

Hunger Leads To Asthma, Depression, Diabetes

A recent study by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Pew Charitable Trusts showed potential cuts to SNAP (food stamps) would increase heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure among adults, and higher rates of asthma and depression in children.¹⁴ [[NYT](#)]

Families Make Tradeoffs

In a survey from Feeding America, "66 percent reported choosing between buying food and paying for medicine and health care in the past year."¹⁵ [[Feeding America](#)]

Child Hunger Is An Economic Issue



“When kids get the food they need, it does more than simply nourish them for the day; it builds a smarter, stronger, healthier generation. We’re unlocking their potential to become the next CEO, engineer, professor, innovator, athlete or small business owner.”

-- Paul Brown, CEO,
Arby's

“The healthy development of all children benefits all of society by providing a solid foundation for economic productivity, responsible citizenship, and strong communities.”
-- Jack P. Shonkoff, MD,
Center on the Developing
Child Harvard University

An estimated 15 million children in America live in families struggling to put enough food on the table. This has a profound effect on our nation’s economy. When children are hungry, they struggle to grow up into strong, healthy, productive members of society. This has a massive cost to the American economy.

The Cost Of Hunger

Hunger costs America in direct and indirect ways, including lost productivity, more expensive public education, higher health care costs and the cost of charities to keep families fed. A study from Brandeis University put hunger’s cost to the U.S. economy per year at \$167.5 billion.¹⁶ [[Brandeis](#)]

Hunger And Salary

Children struggling with hunger also struggle academically, and are more likely to drop out before getting a high school degree. High-school dropouts make significantly less than their peers who graduate.¹⁷ [[Child Food Insecurity](#)]

- How much more a high school graduate makes, over the course of a career, than a high school dropout: **\$500,000**
- How much more a college graduate makes, over the course of a career, than a high school dropout: **\$2,000,000**

Hunger And Avoidable Health Costs

Kids who struggle with hunger are also at an increased risk of obesity. In fact, research shows that children from low-income families are twice as likely to be obese than kids from higher-income households.¹⁷ [[Child Food Insecurity](#)]

- Direct health-care costs for childhood obesity in the United States, per year: **\$14.1 billion**

Hunger and Avoidable Education Costs

Summer hunger is linked to cognitive decline and summer learning loss for children from low-income families.

- Studies show low-income students return to school in September an average of two months behind in reading.
- Re-teaching costs average **\$1,540 per student** per year.¹⁸ [[Deloitte](#)]

Hunger Is A Constituent Issue



“Not being able to provide enough food is the worst feeling that you can imagine. That you have children at home that are waiting to be fed, and you don't have the money or the means to get them the food.” – Judy, mom from New York

“If we didn't have these programs my kids would starve. We would starve. My kids aren't going to starve. I will do what it takes for my kids to eat. But I will go hungry. My husband will go hungry. But what does that do to our health?” – Brandy, mom in Colorado

“Budgeting for food is very strategic. So, like I said, I'm trying to make as many moves as I can, because it's like a chess game, trying to just pick and choose what step I take now—try to make sure we got all our bases covered.” –Nadir, Dad in Baltimore

An estimated 15 million children in America live in families struggling to put enough food on the table. This hunger affects all races, genders and ages. It affects Republicans and Democrats alike, from the South to the North, from the Coasts to the Middle Plains.

Child Hunger and Women

Child hunger has an enormous impact on women. Female-headed households are much **more likely to be food insecure (35.3%)** than other households (19.2%). And according to research, moms are prone to skipping meals to ensure children have enough to eat. This leads to illness, workplace absences and decreased productivity.¹⁹ [[RTI](#)]

Child Hunger and Seniors

Today, more grandparents are raising their grandchildren – according to the most recent research, about **one in 14 kids** in the U.S. lives in a household headed by a grandparent. Of the grandparents meeting the daily needs of their grandchildren, **21%** live under the poverty line.²⁰ [[Generations United](#)]

Child Hunger and Race/Ethnicity

According to the USDA, food insecurity among families with children varies widely among different demographics.²¹ [[USDA](#)]

- 14% - White, non-Hispanic
- 32.4% - Black, non-Hispanic
- 26.9% - Hispanic
- 14.2% - Other, non-Hispanic

Child Hunger and Geography

While Food insecurity among families with kids varies considerably on the state level, it is spread fairly evenly across general geographic regions.²¹ [[USDA](#)]

- 18.3% - Northeast
- 18.4% - Midwest
- 20.9% - South
- 17.7% - West



Childhood Hunger In America: Basic Fact Sheet

Poverty in America

- **\$20,090:** The federal poverty level for a family of three.²² [[Federal Register](#)]
- **46.7 million:** The number of people living in poverty in America, or 14.8%.²³ [[Census](#)]
- **15.5 million:** The number of children living in poverty in America, or 21.1%.²³ [[Census](#)]
- **2 in 5:** The number of children in America who will spend at least one year of their childhoods in poverty.²⁴ [[Urban Institute](#)]
- **51%:** Percent of U.S. public school kids who live in low-income homes.²⁵ [[Southern Education Foundation](#)]

Hunger In America

- **15.3 million:** The number of children in America who live in “food insecure” homes, or 20.9%.²⁶ [[USDA](#)]
- **23.6%:** Percent of kids struggling with hunger who live in rural America vs. inside metropolitan areas (18.4%).²⁶ [[USDA](#)]
- **22%:** Percent of households in Mississippi that are food insecure, giving it the highest rate in the nation. Mississippi is followed by Arkansas (19.9%), Louisiana (17.6%), Kentucky (17.5%) and Texas (17.2%).²⁶ [[USDA](#)]

Impact

- **43%:** How much less likely it is that a persistently poor child gets a college education.²⁷ [[Urban Institute](#)]
- **17.5%:** Average difference in standardized math scores in schools serving breakfast in the classroom vs. traditional breakfast in the cafeteria.²⁸ [[Deloitte](#)]
- **31%:** How much more likely it is that a food-insecure child in America will be hospitalized at some point during their childhood.²⁹ [[Journal of Nutrition](#)]

Program Participation

- **44.7%:** Percent of SNAP (food stamp) recipients who are under the age of 18.³⁰ [[USDA](#)]
- **96.34%:** SNAP’s accuracy rate in providing correct benefits to low-income people. Of the 3.6% error rate, 0.7% is underpayment and only 2.96% is overpayment. This error rate has been falling for more than a decade; in 2002, the SNAP error rate was more than 8%.³¹ [[USDA](#)]
- **22 million:** The number of children from low-income families in America who rely on free or reduced-price lunch at school.³² [[FRAC](#)]
- **12 million:** The number of children from low-income families who get a free school breakfast.³² [[FRAC](#)]
- **4 million:** The number of children from low income families who have access to meals during the summer months through the federal summer meals programs.³³ [[FRAC](#)]

Childhood Hunger: State Breakouts



The food insecurity rate for kids varies considerably state-by-state, as does a child’s access to critical federal nutrition programs like SNAP, free/reduced school breakfast or summer meals.

State	# of kids in food-insecure homes	% of people using SNAP who are under 18*	School Breakfast **	Summer Meals Programs ***
US	15,772,000 (21.4%)	44.4%	53.2	16.2%
AK	37,590 (20.0%)	43.1	45.6	13.7
AL	294,060 (26.2%)	42.4	53.0	10.3
AR	201,820 (28.4%)	45.2	59.5	23.3
AZ	454,460 (28.0%)	49.5	50.9	12.0
CA	22,316,570 (25.1%)	55.6	52.7	19.7
CO	253,000 (20.6%)	50.0	54.2	9.3
CT	152,990 (19.1%)	37.0	47.4	27.0
DC	32,100 (30.5%)	37.7	70.0	59.0
DE	39,780 (19.4%)	46.0	53.5	18.6
FL	1,071,760 (26.7%)	37.7	49.1	15.1
GA	700,870 (28.2%)	45.2	57.7	15.3
HI	68,450 (22.4%)	39.4	41.5	9.1
IA	139,850 (19.3%)	43.6	40.1	11.8
ID	90,240 (21.1%)	47.4	55.7	22.6
IL	643,040 (20.8%)	44.4	45.4	14.8
IN	348,570 (21.8%)	47.2	47.0	20.0
KS	161,740 (22.3%)	45.7	47.3	7.0
KY	221,780 (21.7%)	39.9	62.7	7.5
LA	271,500 (24.3%)	45.3	56.5	12.1
MA	232,150 (16.5%)	37.0	44.1	19.4
MD	258,110 (19.1%)	42.1	59.9	21.6
ME	61,080 (22.7%)	34.7	56.7	21.8
MI	480,490 (20.9%)	37.5	54.6	13.4
MN	205,050 (16.0%)	43.9	48.2	16.0
MO	304,810 (21.6%)	44.4	56.9	10.6

State	# of kids in food-insecure homes	% of people using SNAP who are under 18*	School Breakfast **	Summer Meals Programs ***
MS	217,220 (29.0%)	44.2	59.1	8.4
MT	49,300 (22.1%)	41.3	45.9	18.6
NC	595,240 (26.1%)	44.0	54.5	16.8
ND	16,780 (10.9%)	43.0	46.2	7.2
NE	97,080 (21.1%)	47.4	39.9	9.5
NH	42,170 (15.0%)	41.5	39.7	13.1
NJ	374,350 (18.3%)	46.7	50.8	19.4
NM	145,280 (28.3%)	46.6	71.5	37.0
NV	176,810 (26.7%)	45.9	46.7	8.4
NY	938,610 (21.9%)	39.1	45.4	31.2
OH	653,410 (24.2%)	41.8	51.7	10.8
OK	242,990 (26.0%)	44.1	58.9	6.7
OR	223,480 (25.9%)	36.2	52.9	18.1
PA	564,440 (20.4%)	39.0	45.2	19.9
RI	47,740 (21.7%)	35.3	50.4	16.7
SC	271,560 (25.2%)	44.3	64.1	20.1
SD	40,040 (19.6%)	46.2	43.1	17.9
TN	379,780 (25.4%)	41.1	62.1	14.4
TX	1,899,310 (27.4%)	55.4	62.0	11.6
UT	179,130 (20.4%)	51.7	34.7	10.7
VA	311,410 (16.8%)	43.4	51.6	16.1
VT	24,330 (19.2%)	34.4	61.3	29.4
WA	366,450 (23.1%)	38.8	44.2	11.3
WI	270,460 (20.4%)	42.4	45.7	15.6
WV	89,880 (23.3%)	37.6	73.8	10.3
WY	25,420 (18.6%)	48.4	40.7	19.2

* Percent of SNAP participants in the state who are children.³⁴ [USDA]

** Number of low-income kids participating in free/reduced school breakfast per 100 who participate in the school lunch program.³² [FRAC]

*** Number of low-income kids participating in the national summer meals program per 100 who participate in the school lunch program.³³ [FRAC]

Methodology and Research

- 1) United States Census Bureau, "[Current Population Survey \(CPS\), 2015 Annual Social and Economic Supplement \(ASEC\)](#)," September 2015.
- 2) Southern Education Foundation, "[A New Majority Research Bulletin: Low Income Students Now a Majority in the Nation's Public Schools](#)," January 2015.
- 3) United States Department of Agriculture, "[Household Food Security in the United States in 2014](#)," September 2015.
- 4) United States Congress, "[S.1966 - Hunger Free Summer for Kids Act of 2015](#)," introduced 08/05/2015.
- 5) United States Department of Agriculture, "[Household Food Security in the United States in 2014](#)," September 2015.
- 6) Share Our Strength, "[Hunger In Our Schools](#)," March 2015.
- 7) RTI International, "[Current and Prospective Scope of Hunger and Food Security in America: A Review of Current Research](#)," July 2014.
- 8) Partnership for America's Economic Success, "[Reading, Writing and Hungry](#)," November 2008.
- 9) Deloitte Consulting, "[Ending Childhood Hunger: A Social Impact Analysis](#)," February 2013.
- 10) Bloomberg View, "[End-of-Month Hunger Hurts Students on Food Stamps](#)," April 2012.
- 11) Journal of Nutrition, "[Food Insecurity Is Associated with Adverse Health Outcomes among Human Infants and Toddlers](#)," March 2004.
- 12) Feeding America, "[Child Food Insecurity: The Economic Impact on our Nation](#)," July 2009.
- 13) National Institutes of Health, "[Food insufficiency, family income, and health in US preschool and school-aged children](#)," May 2001.
- 14) New York Times, "[House Plan on Food Stamps Would Cut 5 Million From Program](#)," July 2013.
- 15) Feeding America, "[8 Impossible Choices](#)," November 2014.
- 16) Brandeis and the Center for American Progress, "[Hunger in America, Suffering We All Pay For](#)," October 2011.
- 17) Feeding America, "[Child Food Insecurity: The Economic Impact on our Nation](#)," July 2009.
- 18) Deloitte Consulting, "[Summer Nutrition Program Social Impact Analysis](#)," July 2015.
- 19) RTI International, "[Current and Prospective Scope of Hunger and Food Security in America: A Review of Current Research](#)," July 2014.
- 20) Generations United, "[Grandfamilies Statistics](#)," 2013.
- 21) United States Department of Agriculture, "[Household Food Security in the United States in 2014](#)," September 2015.
- 22) Office of the Federal Register, "[2015 Poverty Guidelines](#)," January 2015.
- 23) United States Census Bureau, "[Income, Poverty and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2014](#)," September 2015.
- 24) Urban Institute, "[Child Poverty and Adult Success](#)," September 2015.
- 25) Southern Education Foundation, "[A New Majority Research Bulletin: Low Income Students Now a Majority in the Nation's Public Schools](#)," January 2015.
- 26) United States Department of Agriculture, "[Household Food Security in the United States in 2014](#)," September 2015.
- 27) Urban Institute, "[Child Poverty and Adult Success](#)," September 2015.
- 28) Deloitte Consulting, "[Ending Childhood Hunger: A Social Impact Analysis](#)," February 2013.
- 29) Journal of Nutrition, "[Food Insecurity Is Associated with Adverse Health Outcomes among Human Infants and Toddlers](#)," March 2004.
- 30) United States Department of Agriculture, "[Household Food Security in the United States in 2014](#)," September 2015.
- 31) United States Department of Agriculture, "[Supplemental Assistance Nutrition Program: Quality Control](#)," FY2014.
- 32) FRAC, "[School Breakfast Scorecard](#)," 2015.
- 33) FRAC, "[Hunger Doesn't Take A Vacation](#)," 2015.
- 34) United States Department of Agriculture, "[Characteristics of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Households: Fiscal Year 2013](#)," December 2014.

About No Kid Hungry



No child should grow up hungry in America, but 1 in 5 kids will face hunger this year. When kids get the food they need, they do better in and out of the classroom. No Kid Hungry uses practical solutions to end hunger everywhere it affects kids – at home, at school, and where they play.

Since its launch in 2010, No Kid Hungry has changed lives in communities across the country. We are working to unify the anti-hunger community while breaking down the barriers between critical nutrition programs and the kids they serve.

Everyone has a strength to share. Together, we can create a No Kid Hungry nation. Join us at www.NoKidHungry.org.

For more information, contact Christy Felling, Director of Strategic Communications, at cfelling@strength.org or 202.320.4483.

Every kid. Healthy food. Every day.

That's our promise. And that's how we'll end childhood hunger, by ensuring that no matter the time of day or time of year, we'll be there for kids. No Kid Hungry connects children in need to programs like school breakfast and summer meals, and teaches low-income families to cook healthy, affordable foods. Working together with local organizations around the nation, we generate the will and skill to help communities feed children in need, every day of the year.

The Result: Transformative Change.

Our policy objectives were turned into the Hunger-free Summer for Kids act, which has the support of 17 bipartisan Senators, including Sens. Mitch McConnell, Roy Blunt and John Boozman as well as Sens. Barbara Mikulski, Sherrod Brown and Ed Markey.

The No Kid Hungry campaign has bipartisan support at the state and local levels as well, working with with (among others) Democrats including Govs. Terry McAuliffe (VA) and Martin O'Malley (MD) as well as Mayor Bill deBlasio (NY). The campaign has also worked with Republicans including Govs. Brian Sandoval (NV), Nathan Deal (GA) and John Kasich (OH).

Two million fewer kids are food insecure than 7 years ago.

10,000 additional summer meal sites are now serving children, serving 23 million more summer meals.

2 million more kids are now starting the school day with breakfast.

Major cities like Los Angeles, Dallas, New York and New Orleans have made breakfast a part of the school day for every student, with our help.

Our Cooking Matters courses, grocery store tours and curriculum are reaching more than 100,000 families each year.

The No Kid Hungry network of supporters is more than 700,000 strong and took over 1,4 million actions to end hunger in one year.