



Childhood Hunger
in

Arkansas



Millions of children in the United States are growing up facing hunger, a number that has grown due to the coronavirus pandemic, especially within Black, Latino, and rural communities. Hunger takes a profound toll on children's health, happiness, and their ability to build successful futures and break the cycle of poverty.

Childhood hunger is, however, a solvable problem. As an elected leader, you have the power to help and, together, we can ensure that all children get the nutrition they need to grow up healthy, educated and strong.

With your leadership, we can:

- develop, share and implement a replicable “blueprint” for ending childhood hunger;
- enact bold strategies that provide better access to meal programs;
- promote innovative solutions to remove barriers so that children in low-income families can access nutrition programs, and;
- advocate for critical policy changes to ensure thousands more children in need are receiving healthy meals every day.

As a state elected official, you are on the front lines of this crisis. You can transform an issue into a movement. With collaborative guidance, you can use your role to raise awareness about childhood hunger, advance proven solutions and institute policies that bring about lasting changes to increase access to child nutrition programs and end childhood hunger.

No Kid Hungry is focused on relief and recovering as a nation from this crisis. This year, 1 in 4 kids may face hunger in Arkansas. We are working to end childhood hunger by helping launch and improve programs that give all the kids the healthy food they need to thrive.

We look forward to being your partner throughout this journey,



Lisa Davis
Senior Vice President, No Kid Hungry Campaign
Share Our Strength

In Their Own Words



Together, we can reach more kids with the food they need to grow up healthy, educated and strong. No Kid Hungry is proud of the work we have done with **elected officials, educators, chefs and community leaders** to build public support and provide leadership around policies to end childhood hunger in the United States.



“We want to fight hunger, particularly among our children. There are kids, regrettably, who go to school that are hungry and if they don’t have something there in that environment, they’re going to be hungry all day. **It’s hard to learn when you’re thinking about an empty stomach.**”

ASA HUTCHINSON
GOVERNOR OF ARKANSAS



“As a former teacher, I have seen first-hand what can happen when children attend school without having enough to eat. It impacts them in many ways. **When kids get regular healthy meals they do better on tests, have fewer discipline and health problems and are more likely to graduate from high school.**”

DONNA EDWARDS
FIRST LADY OF LOUISIANA



“Hunger is not a Democratic problem or a Republican problem: it’s an American problem. **While the face of hunger looks different in every community, one thing is true across the nation: America’s farmers stand ready to help fulfill their mission of providing food to those who need it most.**”

RYAN QUARLES
KENTUCKY COMMISSIONER OF AGRICULTURE



“As a former school teacher for over 16 years, I know from experience the enormous impact that nutritious school meals can have on a child’s success. **With over a million children in California facing food insecurity during this pandemic, there is no more important fight than the fight against hunger.**”

BLANCA E. RUBIO
CALIFORNIA ASSEMBLYWOMAN (D-BALDWIN PARK)



“No child in Richmond or any city around the country deserves to spend one day hungry. **In the face of a global pandemic, this country will be defined by whether it chooses to stand behind hardworking families or decides to abandon them in a time of unprecedented need.**”

LEVAR STONEY
MAYOR OF RICHMOND, VIRGINIA
CHAIR OF MAYORS ALLIANCE TO END CHILDHOOD HUNGER

The Problem: Childhood Hunger in Arkansas



Food insecurity looks different in every household. For some families, the pantry is completely empty. In others, parents skip dinner a few nights a week so their kids can have something to eat in the evening. No matter how food insecurity manifests, a lot is at stake for these children, families and the communities where they live. When kids don't get the consistent nutrition they need each day throughout the year, it's harder for them to grow up healthy, educated and strong. Consistent access to nutrition is linked to cognitive and physical development, better long-term health, higher test scores and better education outcomes.

Unfortunately, because policies and practices entrenched in our laws and society leave millions of children behind, especially in rural, tribal and communities of color, the promise of opportunity remains unfairly out of reach for far too many children. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these existing deep-rooted disparities, increasing the severity of a myriad health and economic crises, pushing millions more families into poverty and hunger throughout the country. In Arkansas, the new reality created by the pandemic has made it harder for children to access no-cost meals provided by schools and community organizations. **As a result, 1 in 4 kids may face hunger in Arkansas.¹**

COVID-19: Impact on Child Food Insecurity



23%

of children may face hunger in Arkansas¹



21%

of children were in food insecure households in Arkansas in 2019¹

The Solution: Strengthening Nutrition Programs



Our nation's federal nutrition programs work together to connect children to the food they need. Many of these programs, however, are underutilized or can be difficult to access, especially during the pandemic. Eliminating barriers and maximizing participation in these programs will help combat rising child food insecurity in Arkansas. While strengthening these programs often requires federal action, state level policy changes and innovations can play a major role. This section describes the various nutrition programs followed by an action list on how Arkansas can help these programs operate more effectively and reach more children facing economic insecurity.

School Meals

For many children, school meals are their only source of consistent nutrition. Prior to the pandemic, children had access to school breakfast and lunch in a more predictable manner which lead to calmer, more focused classrooms where students are better able to learn. The importance of school meals has never been more apparent than when schools closed classroom learning due to the pandemic. While learning models vary, with some schools operating only virtually or with hybrid models, school cafeterias have been operating continuously since March 2020, providing critical nutrition to students across Arkansas.

Meals look different now, and school nutrition staff are coming up with innovative ways to keep kids fed through delivery, pick up, and in person models. This has put considerable strain on school nutrition budgets, threatening to cause layoffs and cuts across these important departments.

290,788

The number of Arkansas students eligible for free and reduced-price school meals in 2019²

Summer Meals

Summer is the hungriest time of year for many kids from families facing economic hardship because school breakfast and lunch are unavailable. Summer meal programs—which are operated by schools and community organizations and provide free meals at congregate sites to children 18 and under—can help kids get the nutrition they need during these difficult months. But, transportation challenges, bureaucratic hurdles and even extreme weather can become barriers to participation. As a result, summer meals only reached 11.1% of eligible children in Arkansas in 2019.³

In 2019, summer meals reached

11.1%

of eligible children³

Afterschool Meals

Too many kids don't get enough to eat between lunch and breakfast the next morning. Afterschool meals help kids get the nutrition they need once the school day ends. Having these meals reimbursed by the USDA also helps schools and community organizations save money and redirect funds into additional programming or staffing.

In FY 2019, the number of afterschool meals and snacks served in Arkansas was just

12.26%

of free or reduced-price school lunches⁷

In Times of Crisis: Addressing Hunger

SNAP

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a powerful tool for ending childhood hunger in the United States. SNAP provides eligible households with a grocery store benefit, that allows families to purchase healthy food and ingredients. It helps decrease food insecurity, lifts kids out of poverty and is linked to better physical health and stronger academic success in children.

In Arkansas, almost
74%
of SNAP participants
are in families with
children⁵

Now, as many families struggle with economic impacts of COVID-19, the program is more important than ever. In FY 2019, SNAP reached 355,000 Arkansas residents.⁵ During the pandemic, program flexibilities have been allowed to ensure those hardest hit by the pandemic have better access to needed food and nutrition through SNAP. These include flexibilities related to benefit application, processing and recertification, and the availability of the maximum benefit level for current program participants. SNAP is also one of the most effective ways to boost the local economy, money spent at grocery stores and markets leads to more jobs, wages and local economic activity in the community. In fact, every SNAP dollar that households spend expands the local economy by about \$1.50 to \$1.80.

WIC

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) assists low-income pregnant and post-partum women, infants and children up to age five with food, nutrition education, breastfeeding support and health care referrals.

During the pandemic, USDA is maximizing the use of existing program flexibilities and the waiver authority provided by Congress to ensure children and families who need it can participate in WIC. Despite the benefits, many women, infants, and children are not participating in the program due to the administrative burden. In addition, many women leave the program after their child turns one as infant formula benefits end. State officials can eliminate red tape to ensure that eligible women, infants, and children can continue to participate in the program.

In 2018, only
98.2%
of eligible infants
and
36.4%
of eligible children
(ages 1-4) were
participating in WIC
in Arkansas⁶

Pandemic EBT

Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) was initially authorized by Congress in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act in March 2020. P-EBT provides grocery assistance directly to households with K-12 students eligible for free and reduced-price school meals when schools are closed or when schools have a hybrid attendance schedule. The amount of assistance a family receives is equal to the value of school breakfasts, lunches and snacks that are missed. In January 2021, children under the age of 6 who are in households that receive SNAP and live in or attend child care in an area where one or more schools or child care facilities are closed or operate with reduced attendance became eligible to receive P-EBT. P-EBT was extended for the 2021-2022 school year for eligible K-12 students and children under the age of 6.

365,000
children were
eligible for P-EBT in
summer 2021⁴

The No Kid Hungry Strategy



As the pandemic continues, millions of children in the U.S. continue to face poverty and hunger. Many kids count on the meals they get at school each day. But even as school staff and community leaders work to feed students, children are missing important meals.

No Kid Hungry has a plan to make sure those children are fed, both during this crisis and in the recovery to follow. Through a combination of emergency grants, strategic assistance, advocacy, and awareness, No Kid Hungry is helping kids, families, and communities get the resources they need.



BUILD CAPACITY THROUGH TARGETED INVESTMENTS

Since March 2020, No Kid Hungry has granted over \$100 million to 2,377 organizations. No Kid Hungry school and community grantees have reported serving nearly 1.5 billion meals to children and families across the country. Granting will also continue in the new year. **As of November 2021, No Kid Hungry has invested \$2,274,086 in grants for solutions that work in Arkansas.**



CREATE EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

No Kid Hungry works with corporate and philanthropic supporters like **Citi, Arby's Foundation, Discovery, Inc., and Walmart Foundation** and strong local partners to build relationships with schools and community leaders to provide better access to the programs that feed kids.



DEVELOP NONPARTISAN PARTNERSHIPS

No Kid Hungry builds **strong, bipartisan support** among elected leaders around streamlined data collection, pragmatic policy actions and collaboration to strengthen child nutrition programs.



BRING RESOURCES AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

No Kid Hungry provides **expertise, best practices, collaborative planning** and **bold strategies** to maximize meal accessibility.



MAXIMIZE PUBLIC AWARENESS AND SUPPORT FOR STRATEGIES

No Kid Hungry ensures families facing economic hardship have information about the programs that can help them have better food access through our meal finder map, texting line and outreach campaigns. Lastly, No Kid Hungry enhances public awareness of childhood hunger, creating new momentum by celebrating champions, building support for solutions and celebrating successes.

Deep Dive: Children facing hunger projections in Arkansas by County¹



County	Child food insecurity rate - %
Arkansas	24%
Ashley	26%
Baxter	22%
Benton	15%
Boone	22%
Bradley	27%
Calhoun	25%
Carroll	19%
Chicot	41%
Clark	26%
Clay	26%
Cleburne	24%
Cleveland	27%
Columbia	30%
Conway	26%
Craighead	23%
Crawford	24%
Crittenden	31%

County	Child food insecurity rate - %
Cross	22%
Dallas	25%
Desha	35%
Drew	24%
Faulkner	19%
Franklin	27%
Fulton	26%
Garland	28%
Grant	20%
Greene	25%
Hempstead	26%
Hot Spring	25%
Howard	26%
Independence	23%
Izard	29%
Jackson	32%
Jefferson	32%
Johnson	25%

County	Child food insecurity rate - %
Lafayette	35%
Lawrence	24%
Lee	31%
Lincoln	26%
Little River	26%
Logan	27%
Lonoke	19%
Madison	20%
Marion	26%
Miller	28%
Mississippi	33%
Monroe	39%
Montgomery	30%
Nevada	30%
Newton	22%
Ouachita	30%
Perry	24%
Phillips	42%

Deep Dive: Children facing hunger projections in Arkansas by County¹



County	Child food insecurity rate - %
Pike	24%
Poinsett	28%
Polk	27%
Pope	21%
Prairie	24%
Pulaski	26%
Randolph	25%
St. Francis	32%
Saline	18%
Scott	24%
Searcy	26%

County	Child food insecurity rate - %
Sebastian	24%
Sevier	23%
Sharp	32%
Stone	27%
Union	27%
Van Buren	28%
Washington	17%
White	22%
Woodruff	33%
Yell	21%
Total State	23%

About No Kid Hungry Arkansas

For nearly 40 years, Share Our Strength has been a nonprofit leader, creating innovative, sustainable ways to help people out of poverty. In 2010, we launched No Kid Hungry, a national campaign to end childhood hunger in America by changing the way that schools, communities and entire cities ensure hungry children have the food they need.

This year, as many as 160,020 kids may face hunger in Arkansas.¹ But this is a solvable problem. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, investments in nutrition programs helped protect many families from hunger and helped stave off greater rates of child food insecurity despite the severe economic hardships brought on by the pandemic. This is complicated work, but we know what strategies have been successful and today, we have the momentum and opportunity to make real progress. Throughout this crisis and its aftermath, No Kid Hungry is working to ensure that policies and nutrition programs are adapting to meet the needs of families and that schools and communities have the funding, flexibility, guidance and strategies to support children's access to three healthy meals a day—now and in the future.



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¹ Map the Meal Gap 2020, Feeding America, <https://map.feedingamerica.org/> & The Impact of the Coronavirus on Food Insecurity, Feeding America, March 2021, <https://www.feedingamerica.org/research/coronavirus-hunger-research/>

² Child Nutrition Tables, Data & Research, U.S. Department of Agriculture, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/child-nutrition-tables>

³ Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation: Summer Nutrition Status Report, FRAC, <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/FRAC-Summer-Nutrition-Report-2020.pdf>

⁴ Pandemic EBT – Summer 2021 – Projected Beneficiaries and Value of Benefits, United State Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/resource/pandemic-ebt-summer-2021-projected-beneficiaries-and-value-benefits>

⁵ A Closer Look at Who Benefits from SNAP: State-by-State Fact Sheets, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/a-closer-look-at-who-benefits-from-snap-state-by-state-fact-sheets#Alabama>

⁶ WIC Coverage Rates by State 2018, United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service, <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/WICEligibles2018-Volume2.pdf>

⁷ Celebrating Ten Years Of Afterschool Meals: Looking Back And Looking Ahead, No Kid Hungry, <http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/Celebrating%2010%20Years%20of%20Afterschool%20Meals%20Full%20Report.pdf>