



Case Study:

Bridging Nutrition Gaps: Hillsborough County Schools' Path to Holistic Student Well-being

Introduction

In the heart of Florida, [Hillsborough County Public Schools](#) and [Feeding Tampa Bay](#) partnered to lead a successful, transformative effort to ensure that students could access healthy, nourishing meals. The district worked toward expanding no-cost school meals to all students through boosting Identified Student Percentage (ISP) to achieve Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) status. Achieving district-wide CEP required enrolling approximately 21,000 likely eligible students in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), an ambitious but achievable goal that represented the district's deep commitment to student well-being and equity.

Identified Student Percentage are identified students that are certified for free meals without a household application by using programs like SNAP. This percentage is what determines a school's eligibility for and benefits under the CEP program. The CEP program is a federally funded program that allows schools with high percentages of students on SNAP or other programs to provide breakfast and lunch to all students regardless of income.

CEP eliminates unpaid meal charges, minimizes stigma, reduces paperwork for school nutrition staff and families, and streamlines meal service operations. Learn more about CEP [here](#).

Identifying and Closing Gaps

When this work began in summer 2022, there were no schools in Hillsborough County participating in CEP. Recognizing both the challenge and opportunity, the Student Nutrition Services team collaborated with No Kid Hungry and Feeding Tampa Bay to identify students who were likely eligible for SNAP and other federal nutrition programs. The connection between SNAP and CEP is critical: the more students enrolled in SNAP, the higher a district's ISP, which determines eligibility for CEP and directly impacts a school's ability to offer universal free meals. Ensuring [SNAP access for eligible families helps schools become eligible for CEP](#).

Feeding Tampa Bay identified a significant gap in SNAP participation among families within the district. This data-driven insight catalyzed a partnership between the district and the food bank to launch a focused SNAP outreach campaign designed to increase enrollment and unlock additional meal access for students.

Collaboration for Greater Reach

With Funding from No Kid Hungry, Feeding Tampa Bay hired staff to provide hands-on SNAP outreach and enrollment support, working directly with families at school events, during back to school nights, and through district communication channels. While the district did not receive funding for this work, school staff were fully engaged to help share SNAP information with families.

To complement these efforts, they also partnered with [mRelief](#), an organization that leverages technology to develop and promote online or text-based screener and application tools for families to access benefits more easily, to deploy a text-based SNAP screener tool tailored for this project. The tool allowed families to quickly determine eligibility and begin applications online, making the process simpler and more accessible. The screener was promoted in both English and Spanish and was shared through the district's online meal menus and communication platforms. Additionally, the district partnered with the Hispanic Services Council to expand outreach and build deeper trust within Hispanic and Latinx communities. Together, these efforts combined technology, cultural responsiveness, and personalized support to help families access benefits more easily.

mRelief **Como aplicar para SNAP (beneficios de comida)**

1 Envíe "HCPSComida" por texto al 74544*
Conteste unas cuantas preguntas sobre ti y mRelief le dirá si calificas para recibir SNAP para sus compras del mercado.

También puedes visitar apply.mrelief.com

2 Aplica con Asistencia
Te enviaremos un enlace para programar una llamada para que alguien le ayude a aplicar por el teléfono.

mRelief **How to Apply for SNAP (food stamps)**

1 Text "HCPSFood" to 74544*
Answer a few questions about yourself and mRelief will let you know if you likely qualify for SNAP.

You can also visit apply.mrelief.com

2 Apply with Assistance
We'll send you a link to schedule a call for someone to assist you with applying over the phone.

*Se pueden aplicar tarifas de datos y mensajes de texto. No se necesita un teléfono inteligente para ver su elegibilidad o aplicar.

*Data and text messaging rates may apply. You don't need a smartphone to screen or apply.

Progress Through Data and Innovation

The results of this initiative have been striking. In 2022, no schools in the district participated in CEP. Within a year, 176 of the district's 233 schools adopted the provision, expanding free meal access to more than 127,000 students. By April 2023,

over 78,000 students were identified as SNAP participants, contributing to a total of nearly 160,000 students receiving free meals through CEP.

The district also became a leader in self-service SNAP applications within Feeding Tampa Bay's service area. Self-service application rates increased from 26 percent to 33 percent, with an average of 200 completed applications each month. These metrics demonstrate how effective targeted outreach and accessible tools can be in driving meaningful systems change.



Graphic by Arianne Corbett

Empowering and Strengthening Communities

Hillsborough County's initiative demonstrates how aligning SNAP outreach with school nutrition goals can produce measurable results and strengthen student well-being. The collaboration across education, technology, and community-based organizations created a model for success rooted in trust, accessibility, and innovation.



The partnership with the Hispanic Services Council helped break language and cultural barriers, while mRelief's technology made it possible for families to screen quickly and confidently. By integrating outreach efforts into trusted school environments, the district transformed how families connect to essential supports.

Conclusion

Hillsborough County Public Schools' pursuit of district-wide CEP status through targeted SNAP enrollment illustrates how complementary programs can work together to fight hunger and promote holistic well-being. This initiative shows that when schools, community partners, and technology providers join forces, they can expand access to nutritious meals, reduce administrative burdens, and ensure that every child is nourished and ready to learn.

The Hillsborough experience serves as an inspiring example of how going deeper into SNAP in schools work can unlock new opportunities for districts nationwide, proving that coordinated systems of care can help every student thrive.

