



STRATEGIC PLAN TO

End Childhood Hunger

2023



Letter from County Executive Elrich and Councilmember Albornoz

Childhood hunger touches all corners of our County. According to the latest research and available data, at least 14% of children in Montgomery County, approximately 34,000, are food insecure, and thousands more are living in households without sufficient income to meet their basic needs. Our County's food security response during the pandemic has been nationally recognized as collaborative, strategic and innovative, and we must now build on those successes in transitioning to a long-term sustainable approach to fighting hunger in our community. All families should have sufficient access to the necessary nutritional resources that meet the cultural preferences and dietary needs of their children. Montgomery County is fortunate to have tremendous strengths - a robust food assistance network, a strong nonprofit sector, and government leaders dedicated to ensuring that every child never has to worry about their next meal. We have arrived at a point where we can boldly state that it is possible to end childhood hunger in our community. The Montgomery County Strategic Plan to End Childhood Hunger is the first step in this process.

This plan harnessed the expertise of local residents and organizations to identify food access barriers and strategies that will reduce food insecurity across all childhood age groups. Its recommendations are based on the feedback and insight of stakeholders, subject matter experts, and local residents, ensuring that lived experience of food insecurity and service delivery are embedded throughout the plan's analysis and strategies. Serving as a roadmap for both short and long term County planning, the plan highlights opportunities to better connect families to existing federal, state, and local programs while also identifying new and novel approaches to meet the unique needs of our incredibly diverse population.

We are keenly aware that there is a hunger cliff looming for food insecure residents of Montgomery County. As pandemic-enacted food security measures, such as universal school meals and SNAP emergency allotments, come to an end at the same time that the cost of food is skyrocketing due to inflation, more Montgomery County residents—and more children—will experience food insecurity. There are already too many county residents who are forced to make impossible choices between paying rent, paying bills, and buying enough food to feed their families. That is why this initiative to prioritize ending childhood hunger is essential to ensure there are policies, programs and funding in place so that children in Montgomery County have the food they need to thrive.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marc Elrich".

Marc Elrich
County Executive



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gabe Albornoz".

Gabe Albornoz
Councilmember, At-Large
Chair, Health and Human Services Committee

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Executive Summary

Montgomery County's Strategic Plan to End Childhood Hunger is organized around three major objectives:

1. Determine the scope and scale of food insecurity among children in the County.
2. Identify the barriers food insecure children in the County face in accessing safe, sufficient, culturally familiar nutritious food.
3. Formulate potential strategies to address childhood hunger that overcome those barriers and challenges.

Childhood Food Insecurity in Montgomery County

Measuring childhood hunger at the local level is difficult, as there is not a direct measurement or survey of childhood food insecurity, which is defined as a “household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food.”¹ For this reason, a collection of indirect measures is used in this plan to paint a picture of the scale of need. Feeding America estimates that 13.9% of all children in Montgomery County face food insecurity and over the past five years, that rate has ranged between 10-14%.² Other critical measures, however, indicate food insecurity among children could be far higher. In 2021, there were approximately 52,000 children living in Montgomery County in households with incomes below 185% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), which is an important eligibility cut-off for federal support.³ Measures that take into consideration the relatively high cost of living in Montgomery County paint an even bleaker picture. In 2021, roughly 45% of children are estimated to have lived in households with incomes below the University of Washington's Self Sufficiency Standard for this area.^{4,5} These measures vary significantly; but, taken in their totality, they give policy leaders and community members a sense of the need to be addressed.

At least 14% of children in Montgomery County are food insecure, and far more live in households without sufficient income to meet their basic needs.

The data also reveals significant racial disparity in childhood food insecurity. While 4.5% of white children in Montgomery County are estimated to live in households with incomes below the FPL, that same measure for Hispanic or Latino and Black children is over 14%.⁶ Solutions must also acknowledge that roughly half of children living in households below the FPL speak languages other than English at home, with 35% living in Spanish speaking households.⁷

Strategies to Address Childhood Food Insecurity

The Montgomery County Food Council interviewed over a hundred subject matter experts to develop a collection of proposed strategies to end childhood hunger in Montgomery County. This plan organizes these proposed recommendations into three groups based on how they address childhood food insecurity:

1. Direct Financial Benefits

- a. Expansion of SNAP Enrollment Programs: SNAP is our nation's first line of defense against hunger, but many eligible residents are not receiving the benefits to which they are entitled. Community based organizations could be expanded to add SNAP outreach and enrollment expertise to meet the overwhelming demand for their services.
- b. Address Benefit Inadequacy, Especially During the Summer: Benefit inadequacy is greatest during the summer when children are not receiving meals at school. Providing a food benefit that would allow families to shop at their preferred grocer can effectively combat food insecurity experienced while children are not in school.
- c. Provide Direct Benefits to SNAP Ineligible Households: Some households with children in Montgomery County do not qualify for SNAP but still struggle with food insecurity. Providing these households with direct benefits will ensure children in these households are food secure without federal assistance.

2. School and Childcare Adjacent Food Assistance

- a. Expansion of Free School Meals: Free school meals are a good way to link food insecure children with reliable, nutritious meals, but not all food insecure children benefit from these programs due to barriers like eligibility criteria and stigma. By expanding the reach of the school lunch program, either to all students or to those living below the Self-Sufficiency Standard, would ensure that all those children who could benefit from free school meals receive them.
- b. Expansion of Child and Adult Care Food Program: Over the past 5 years, there has been a dramatic decrease in the number of home daycares providing free meals and snacks to food insecure children under the federal Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). Providing access to computers to complete the newly required CACFP paperwork and increasing outreach to potentially eligible daycare providers, would benefit more young children countywide and leverage more federal dollars in the County to fight early childhood hunger.

- c. Expand Early Head Start, Head Start, and Pre-K: Head Start programs provide free meals to those enrolled, directly addressing childhood food insecurity. More classrooms would address the demand for these programs, which greatly outpaces the supply of enrollment openings, and close gaps that exist in program coverage for three-year-olds.
- d. Community Schools are a critical pathway to providing wraparound services to children in areas of concentrated poverty. Ensuring that all new MCPS Community Schools have an in-school pantry or at-school distribution would help address food insecurity as part of those wraparound services.
- e. Weekend Bags: Weekend bags provide a weekend's worth of food for school-age children who rely on free school meals during the school week. Program expansions could include a larger number of schools in the MCPS system.

3. Novel Approaches and New Pathways

- a. Direct-to-Household Food Assistance Program: Many families with children lack transportation and have busy schedules, making it hard for them to access and receive food from food distributions. A new program model would create a platform to link food insecure families with free food delivery.
- b. Food is Medicine: Clinicians and pediatricians are in a unique position to screen children for food insecurity, and “prescribe” free food to children as treatment. Expanded food is medicine programs would allow health professionals to refer families with children for benefits, resources, and support.
- c. Caretaker Nutritional Training: Stakeholders highlighted the importance of adequate nutritional education for caretakers preparing meals for food insecure children. Working in collaboration with universities and nutritional experts, a nutritional program specifically for caretakers of young children could be developed and delivered to fill this gap.
- d. Financial Literacy Training and Education: Food insecurity stems from a lack of buying power. Budgeting, financial planning, and spending habits can significantly increase a family's buying power. Financial literacy and budgeting training could be offered to families experiencing food insecurity.
- e. Gardening Grant Program: Existing county gardening grant programs could be increased to fund the expansion of existing, and establishment of new, community gardens and/or indoor gardens to provide educational opportunities and make fresh produce more accessible to food insecure children.

- f. **Improved Data-driven Decision Making:** Collecting data on food insecurity is notoriously difficult, but without reliable data, it can be difficult to evaluate the impact of current and new interventions and inform future policy and investment decision making. The County's forthcoming Office of Food System Resilience, with its dedicated Food System Research Analyst, should undertake updating FoodStat and expanding the data sources analyzed to include grant and programmatic data from County-funded childhood hunger interventions.

For each of these strategies, a dedicated section details the specific **proposal**, the **background** that led to the recommendation, the rough **cost** of implementation of the recommendation, an indication of the potential **impact**, and a set of logical **champions** to lead strategy rollout.

Advocacy, Leadership, and Change

This plan focuses on actionable items that the Montgomery County government can do to address childhood food insecurity within its borders, but it also identifies **areas for advocacy** at the state and federal level that would have a huge impact locally, including policy changes to SNAP, school-based feeding programs, and other key nutrition programs.

In Montgomery County, childhood food insecurity is a symptom of deeper systemic inequities. The primary root cause being that many children in our community live in households with insufficient income to purchase adequate healthy food. While this crisis is fundamentally economic in nature, this plan focuses only on solutions related directly to food access. Though it is beyond the scope of this plan to propose non-food centered economic and equity building interventions, it is critically important to note that **any intervention that increases the buying power of food insecure families will directly reduce childhood hunger**, even if its aim is not directly to provide food (such as efforts aimed at providing childcare and housing assistance, additional income supplements, tax credits, etc.).

This plan represents the first step in the process of ending childhood hunger in Montgomery County, providing a variety of strategies for County leaders to consider. The next step is for County leaders to identify which recommendations they would like to explore further in partnership with the identified champions, and commit to long-term action in partnership with residents, community partners, and the private sector to use all available tools and resources to end childhood hunger in Montgomery County.

Childhood Food Insecurity in Montgomery County

Why is Ending Childhood Food Insecurity so Important?

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Food Research & Action Center, “Food insecurity — even marginal food insecurity — is detrimental to children’s health, development, and well-be-

ing.”⁸ It is associated with poor health status,⁹ developmental risk, mental health problems,¹⁰ and poor educational outcomes¹¹ that could have a negative impact over a child’s entire life.¹²

How Many Children Are There in Montgomery County, Maryland?

The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that there are 1,047,661 people living in Montgomery County, with **243,489** of those being under the age of 18.¹³ Of the children in

the County, approximately 31.5% are below school-aged (6 years old or younger), 33.5% are between 6 and 11 years old, and the final 35% being between 11 and 17 years old.¹⁴

How Many Children Are Food Insecure?

Before addressing specific strategies to eliminate food insecurity among children in Montgomery County, it is important to clarify the meaning of food insecurity, especially as distinct from the colloquial term “hunger.” Hunger is defined as “an individual-level physiological condition

that may result from food insecurity,” while **food insecurity** is the more technical term for “household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food.”¹⁵ This strategy is aimed at ending childhood food insecurity.



Measuring food insecurity is a notoriously difficult task; “[while] its most extreme manifestations are often obvious, many other households facing constraints in their access to food are less identifiable.”¹⁶ There is not a direct measurement or poll of children in Montgomery County aimed at determining their level of food security.

That said, a collection of indirect measures can paint a relatively clear picture of the scale of the need. The following sections will walk through some of those indicators, and examine what each can tell us about childhood hunger in Montgomery County.

Feeding America’s Data

Feeding America estimates that **33,840** children (**13.9%** of all children) in Montgomery County face food insecurity.¹⁷ According to Feeding America, over the past five years, the food insecurity rate among children in Montgomery County has ranged between **10-14%**.¹⁸ Figure 1 shows how the population of adults compares to the population of children in the County, and highlights the portion of food insecure children and adults. This measurement is based on a model that considers a variety of sources, including the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Current Population Survey and “along with income ... unemployment rates, median incomes, and other factors that have been shown to be associated with food insecurity ... disability prevalence, another key risk factor for food insecurity.”¹⁹ As can be seen in Figure 2 - Feeding America’s data shows that the rate of **food insecurity among children is consistently near double that of overall food insecurity.**

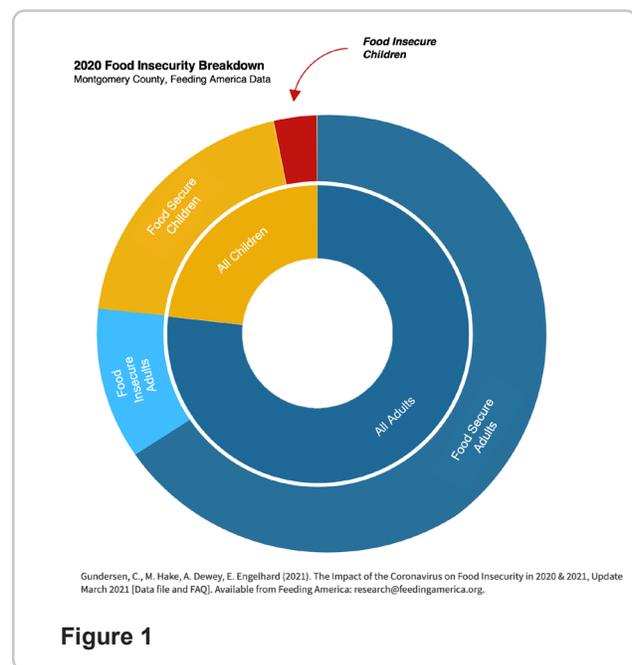
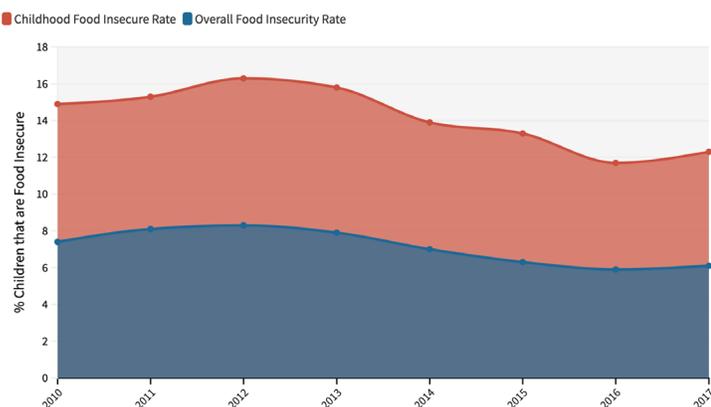


Figure 1

Historic Food Insecurity Rate Among Children

Montgomery County, Feeding America Data



Source: Gundersen, C., A. Dewey, M. Kato, A. Crumbaugh & M. Strayer. Map the Meal Gap 2019: A Report on County and Congressional District Food Insecurity and County Food Cost in the United States in 2017. Feeding America, 2019.

Figure 2

Children Living in Households Below Poverty or Self-Sufficiency

Another important indicator of childhood food insecurity is the number of children living in households without enough income to afford sufficient nutritious food. While not all children living in poverty are food insecure, the relatively high cost of living in Montgomery County makes low household income a reliable indicator of potential food insecurity. When considering household income, there are two particularly important measures - the Federal Poverty Level which is calculated as a national standard and the Self-Sufficiency Standard which is calculated to consider Montgomery County's relatively high cost of living.

The Federal Poverty Level (FPL) is a measure used to determine eligibility for certain federal programs and benefits; the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) uses **130% of the FPL** as a cutoff for program eligibility, while The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women,

Infants, and Children (WIC) use **185% of the FPL** as their cutoff. For 2022, the FPL for a family of four in the lower 48 states is \$27,750, making 130% of FPL \$36,075 and 185% of FPL **\$51,337.50**.²⁰ In 2021, there were approximately **36,000 children living in households with income below 130%** of the FPL, and **52,000 in households below 185%** of the FPL.²¹

The Self-Sufficiency Standard (SSS) defines "the amount of income required for working families to meet basic needs at a minimally adequate level, taking into account family composition, ages of children, and geographic differences in costs."²² The SSS varies by family composition and local cost of living. For the most common family compositions, the SSS is around **400% of the FPL or \$111,000**.²³ It is important to consider the SSS because, while not a strict measure of food insecurity, it does give an indication of how many children live in households that do not have enough money to purchase

basic needs, including food. In 2021, there were roughly **110,000 children living in households with income below 400%** of the FPL, with more than **57,000** of those children living in households making too much money²⁴ to receive assistance from the NSLP (yellow band in Figure 3) and **77,000 in households making too much to receive SNAP** (yellow and orange bands in Figure 3).²⁵

Children by Ratio of Household Income to Poverty Level Over Time

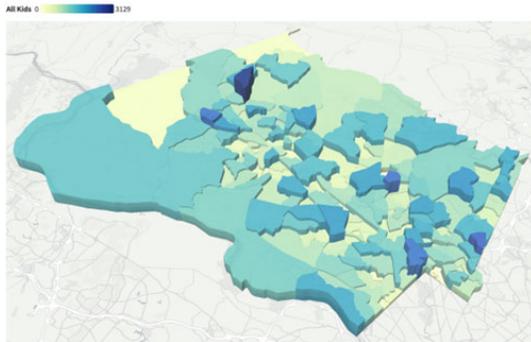


Source: US Census, American Community Survey, Table B17024. (2021) • *Census does not report specifically on 130% of poverty level so this is calculated as those below 125% plus 20% of those below 150%.

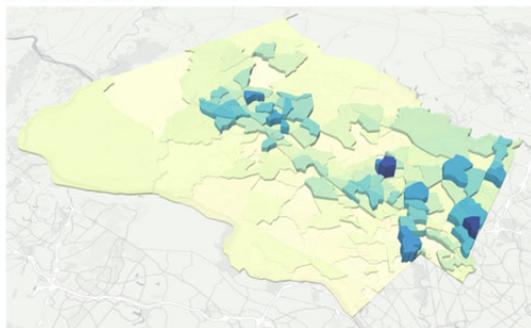
Figure 3

Where Children Live
Household Income Relative to Poverty Level

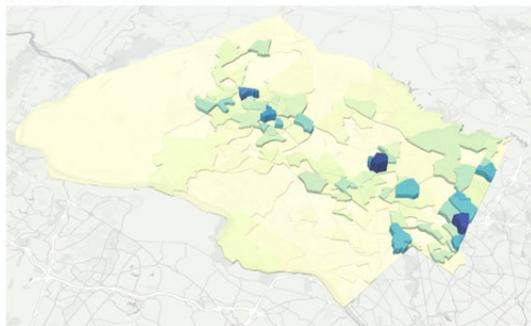
All Children



< 400% Poverty Level



< 185% Poverty level



< 130% Poverty Level

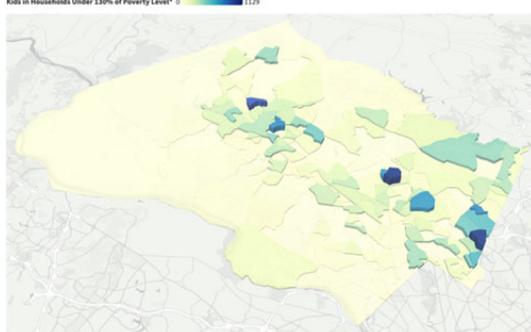


Figure 4

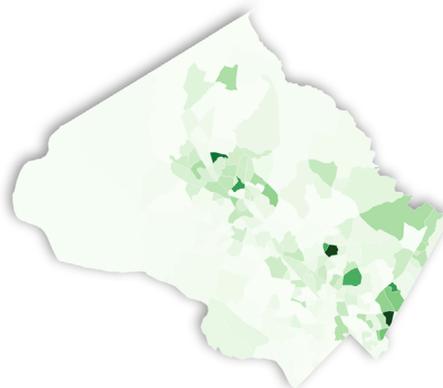
Considering Geography

It is also important to consider where children within each household income level live when considering strategic investment. Many parents report transportation as a critical roadblock to receiving assistance, so it is important to consider the location of support services and outreach efforts geographically. Figure 4 shows where children live by household income relative to the FPL.

Special attention should be paid to those children in households whose incomes are too high to qualify for most federal assistance (i.e. with household incomes greater than 130% of the FPL), but are below the SSS (i.e. with household incomes around 400% of FPL for Montgomery County). According to estimates by the U.S. Census Bureau, roughly **36,000 children** fall into this group.²⁶ The geographic distribution of those children is presented in Figure 5. This population of children live in households that may not have enough money to

Too much income for SNAP, but less than self sufficient
Children in Households with income between 130% and 400% of Poverty Level

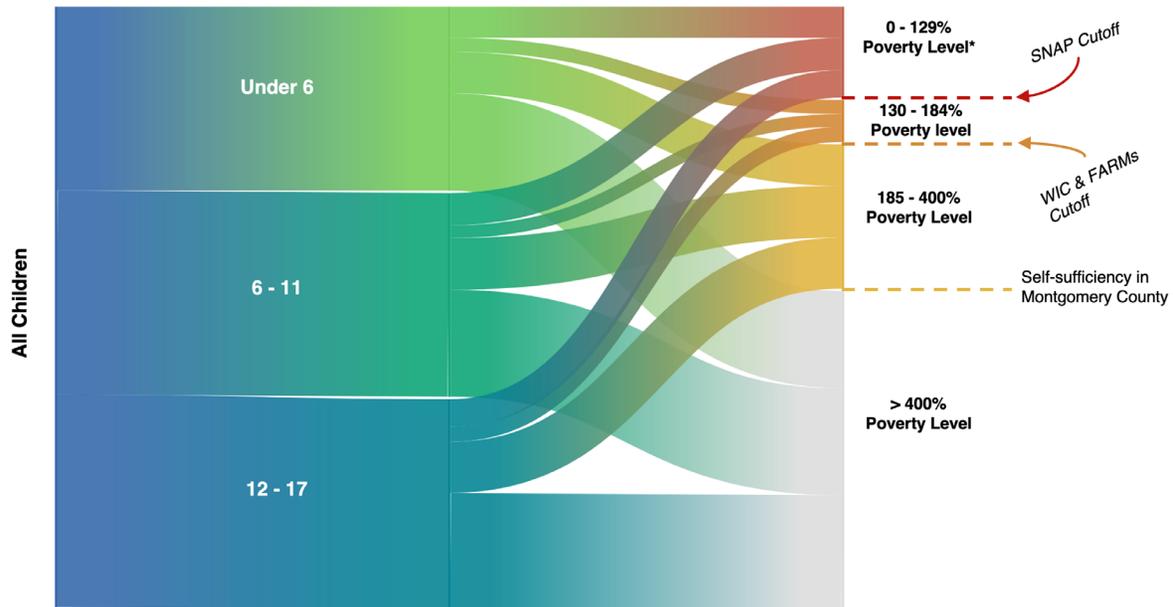
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Source: US Census Data. 2020 ACS 5-Year Estimate Detailed Table B17024. * Census does not report specifically on 130% of poverty level so this is calculated as those below 125% plus 20% of those below 150%.

Figure 5

Children by Age and Household Income Relative to Poverty Level
Montgomery County, US Census Data



Source: US Census Data, 2021: ACS 1-Year Estimates Detailed Tables.
* Census does not report specifically on 130% of poverty level so this is calculated as those below 125% plus 20% of those below 150%.

Figure 6

support healthy diets and meet their other needs - but are not eligible for programs like SNAP, WIC, and free school meals. The

distribution of the ages of these children is visualized in the yellow band on in Figure 6.

Considering Age

It is also important to consider the age of the children at each household income level when considering strategic investment. Within households below the SSS, school meals and other school-based interventions can be a good way to reach the more than 75,000 school-aged children. To reach the over 34,000 children below age 6 in this group, different approaches will be needed.²⁷

Figure 6 maps children by age to each of these categories to the relevant levels of income. The linear sections are drawn to the proportional scale to the amount of each group and their respective level of household income.

Considering Race

Along with age and location, it is crucial to consider the racial disparity in childhood food insecurity.

While 4.5% of white children in Montgomery County are estimated to live in households with incomes below the FPL, that same measure for Hispanic or Latino and Black children is over 14%.²⁸ Similar to geography, poverty (and food insecurity) is not equally distributed throughout the community, and strategies addressing childhood hunger should directly address these disparities.

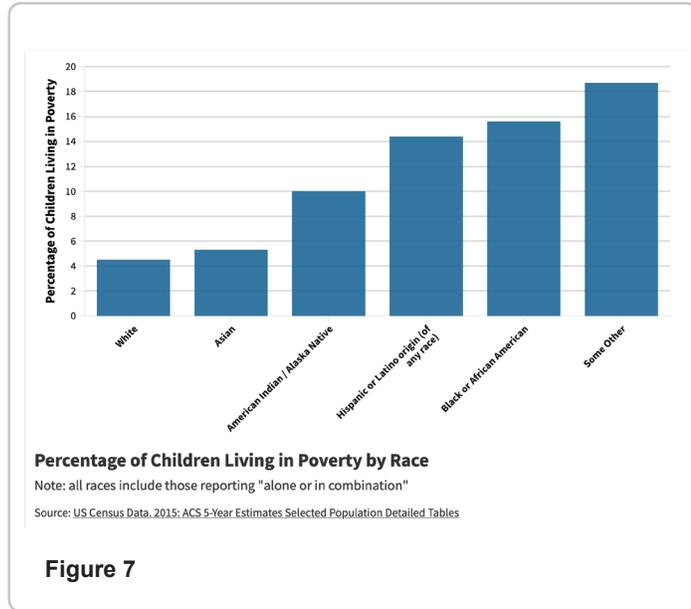


Figure 7

Considering Languages Spoken

For any strategy to end food insecurity to be effective, it must reach all residents experiencing it, and in Montgomery County that means ensuring that the strategies take into consideration the many languages spoken in our diverse County. Among children in poverty aged 5 - 17, **English and Spanish are the most common** languages spoken at home, as represented in Figure 8. It is important to note that a significant number of children in poverty speak other languages as well.²⁹

As one might expect, geographic analysis can also inform the language-focus of strategies based on their location. The maps in Figure 9 show where children live, sorted according to the language they speak at home. This data should be used to tailor interventions to meet both the geographic and language needs of families experiencing food insecurity. Participants in the Spanish-speaking listening sessions shared that they felt discriminated against based on their ethnicity, inability to speak English,

and lack of documents when applying for public food assistance programs like SNAP and WIC. They have found the lack of Spanish-speaking staff at government agencies and the disrespect they have experienced there to be a major barrier to accessing food assistance. Language access was a frequently cited barrier among participants in being able to fill out and ask questions about application forms.

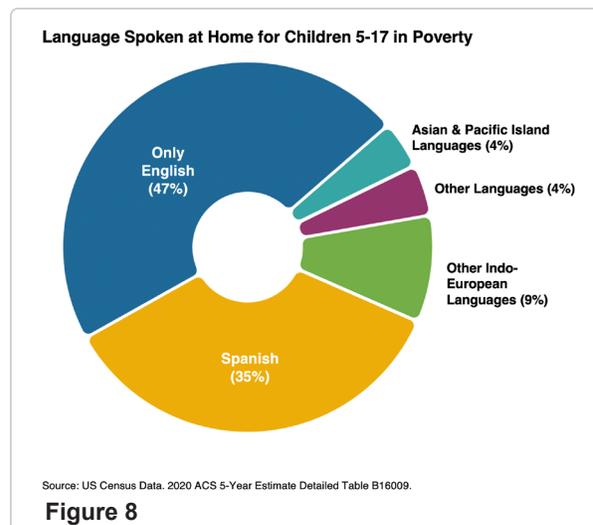


Figure 8

Language Spoken at Home by Children 5-17 in Poverty

English Only



Speak Spanish



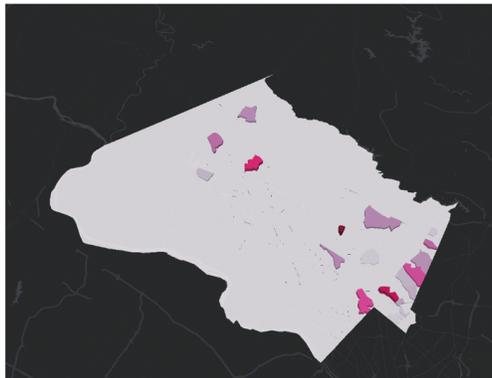
Speak other Indo-European Languages



Speak Asian and Pacific Island Languages



Speak Other Languages



Source: US Census Data. 2020: ACS 5-Year Estimates Detailed Table B16009.

Figure 9

Assistance Program Data

According to data collected from the 2020 US Census, an estimated **13% of children** in Montgomery County live in households that have received Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Cash Public Assistance Income, or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP) support in the past 12 months.³⁰ Figure 10 shows where these approximately 32,000 children live.

According to Maryland Department of

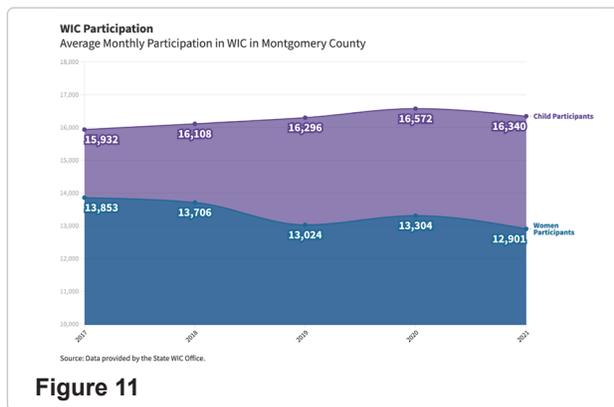


Figure 11

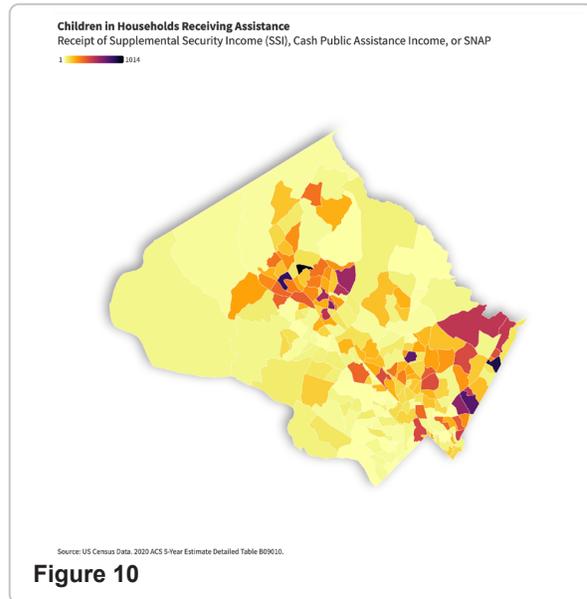


Figure 10

Health's WIC Office, 16,340 children and 12,901 women participated in WIC each month on average in 2021 in Montgomery County. US Census data estimates there are 65,340 children under 6, meaning that roughly **25% of children under 5 in the County are participating in WIC.**

National School Lunch Program

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is a federally funded assisted meal program that provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost, or free lunches to children each school day.³¹ In Montgomery County, Free and Reduced-price Meals (FARMs) are available to children in households whose income is below 185% of the FPL. In Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) in 2022, **70,348 children (43.56% of all enrolled) received FARMs.**³² The State of Maryland passed the Kids Cares Act in 2018, which supplements federal funding to cover the reduced category student's cost for breakfast and lunch.

Caretakers are required to register the children annually for the program, so not every eligible child participates. To close

this "FARMs gap," MCPS participates in a program that allows them to directly certify children who are participating in other assistance programs, including SNAP and Head Start, without requiring their caretakers to complete enrollment paperwork. In 2022, MCPS joined a pilot program to directly certify children on Medicaid to receive free or reduced meals. This new Medicaid direct certification process has made a striking difference - adding **nearly 28,000** children to the school meals program.³³ Direct certification, along with other MCPS FARMs enrollment efforts, are critical not only to serving eligible children in need, but also to take advantage of key federal program provisions. Most notably, this includes the USDA's Community Eligibility Provision (CEP).

CEP allows the nation’s highest poverty schools and districts to serve breakfast and lunch at no cost to all enrolled students without collecting household applications. Instead, schools that adopt CEP are reimbursed using a formula based on the percentage of students categorically eligible for free meals based on their participation in other specific means-tested programs, such as SNAP and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).³⁴

The increase in directly certified students will translate to additional schools that qualify for CEP. This increase in the number of participating schools will provide the opportunity for MCPS to provide meals to more students without the use of annual family applications. Looking forward,

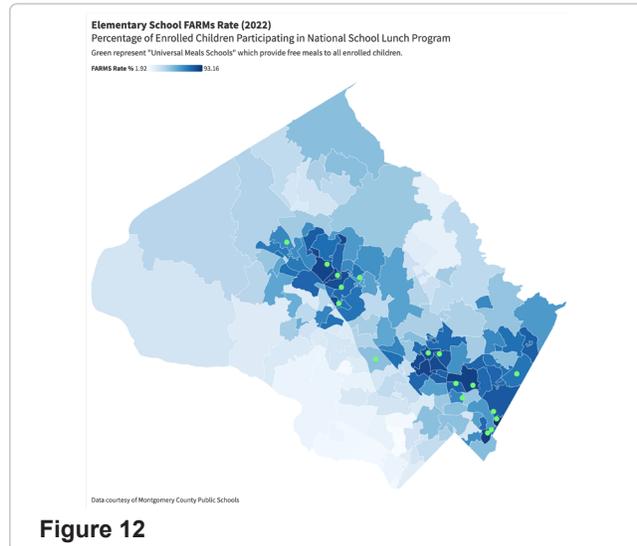


Figure 12

this should help MCPS use federal dollars to provide more FARMs, which will directly help address childhood hunger.

Maryland Meals for Achievement

The **Maryland Meals for Achievement (MMFA)** program “provides state funds to allow participating schools to implement free breakfast in the classroom.”³⁵ Currently 91 schools participate in the MMFA program in Montgomery County, with 58,838 students receiving free breakfasts every school day under this program.³⁶ Participation in MMFA is determined by the State, but generally “a school is eligible when at least 40 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price meals.”³⁷ Based on MCPS 2022 FARMs rate data, there are 26 schools that have a FARMs rate above 40 percent but are not currently MMFA schools. If these schools were added to MMFA, an additional 28,286 children would be eligible for free in-classroom breakfast.³⁸

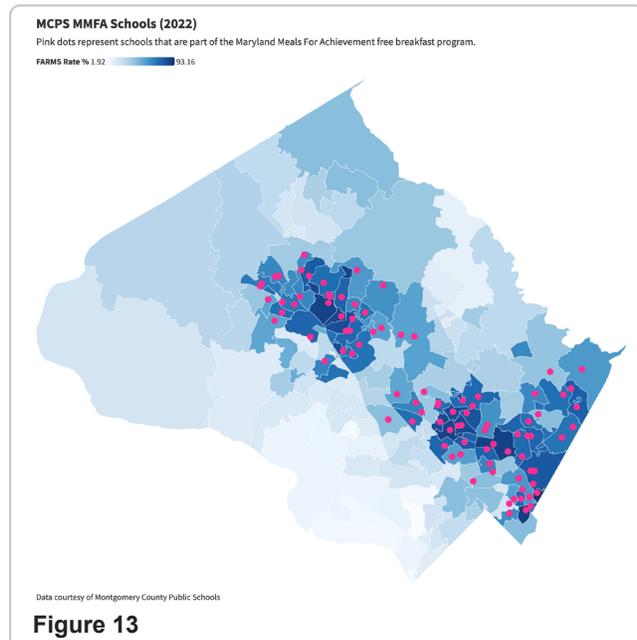


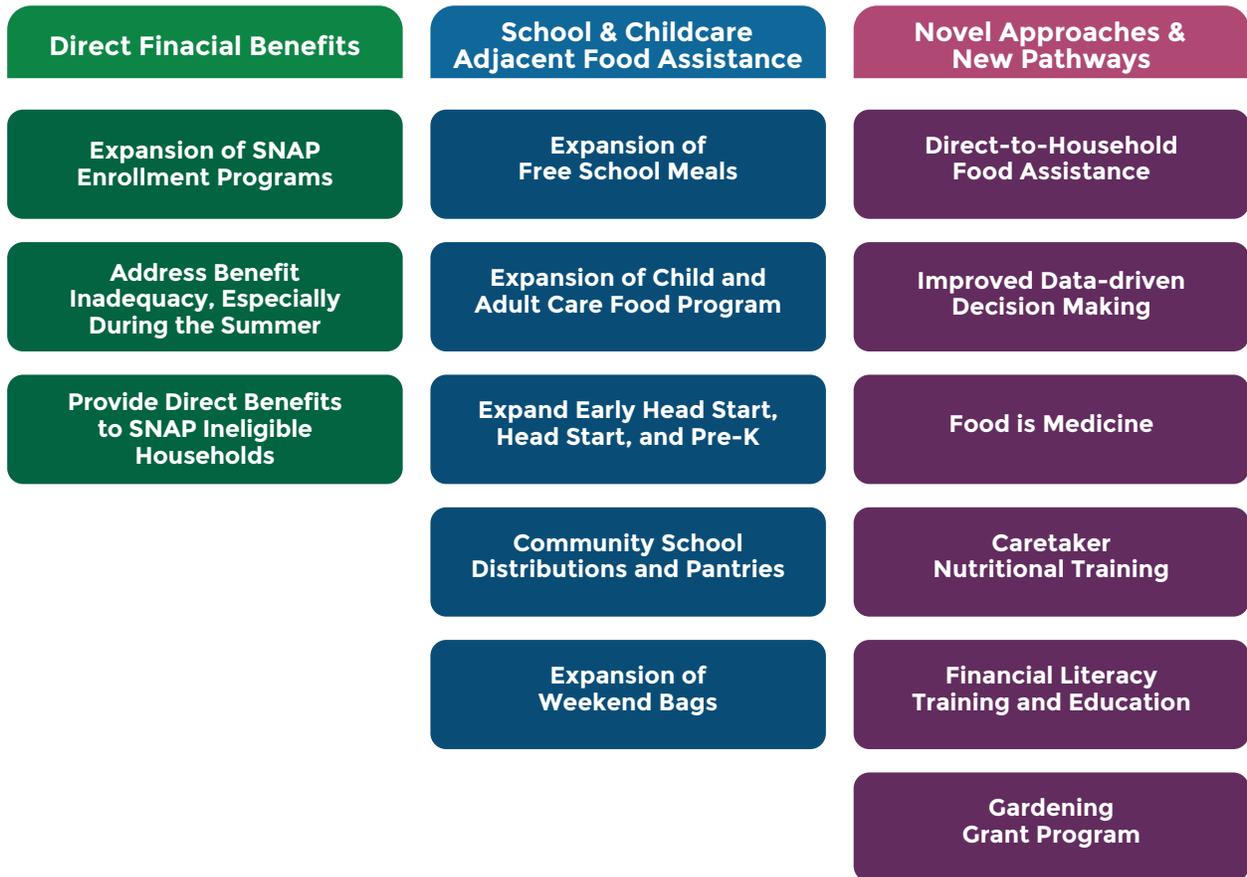
Figure 13

Strategies to End Childhood Hunger

The Montgomery County Food Council interviewed over a hundred local subject matter experts to develop a collection of proposed strategies to end childhood hunger in Montgomery County. Each of the sections below represents the fruits of that labor. They are organized into three groups based on how they address childhood food insecurity:

1. With **direct financial benefits** to purchase food;
2. With food provided at **school, pre-school, or daycare**; and
3. With **novel approaches**.

Each of these groups is detailed in a dedicated section that follows.



Areas for advocacy have also been identified, and are detailed in a section that follows the individual strategy descriptions.

Considering Scale, Complexity, and Impact

The strategies in this plan vary significantly in scale, complexity, and impact. In order to give the reader a sense of these differences, the chart below divides the strategies into two general categories - “Big Ideas” and “Quicker Changes”.

Big Ideas

- Promise large systemic change.
- Time and resource intensive.
- Reach thousands of families.
- Impact extends beyond just food needs.

Expansion of Free School Meals

Expansion of SNAP Enrollment Programs

Address Benefit Inadequacy, Especially During the Summer

Provide Direct Benefits to SNAP Ineligible Households

Direct-to-Household Food Assistance

Improved Data-driven Decision Making

Quicker Changes

- Promise rapid assistance.
- Help address immediate needs.
- Build on existing programs.
- Less time and resource intensive.

Expansion of Child and Adult Care Food Program

Community School Distributions and Pantries

Food is Medicine

Gardening Grant Program

Caretaker Nutritional Training

Financial Literacy Training and Education

Expand Early Head Start, Head Start, and Pre-K

Expansion of Weekend Bags

Direct Financial Benefits

In Montgomery County, hunger is a buying power problem. Residents appreciate the assistance offered through community and school-based food distribution programs, yet they also shared concerns about the quality and cultural appropriateness of the products offered. Their preference (according to resident survey data) is to have increased food benefit amounts. This request is consistent with academic research with the findings of the Montgomery Food Security Task Force that,

“Food distributions are often a “one-size-fits-none” approach, where the food access provider (who is packing the food in pre-set boxes) and the County (who is buying some or all of the food) are in the position of making the meal planning choices for those in need. The individuals served are subjected to the

trauma and indignity of waiting in a line (sometimes with their children, often outside, and almost always in front of neighbors and community members) only to be given a box of food that may not contain the things they can or want to eat, know how to cook, or want to serve to their family.”³⁹

Providing families with extra money to purchase the food they want, from their preferred local grocer or farmer’s market, is more dignified, convenient, and efficient. It also supports local businesses and contributes to a thriving local food economy. For these reasons, the subject matter experts and residents interviewed agreed that **efforts to combat childhood hunger should focus on increasing the buying power of food insecure families.**

The Unique Role of SNAP in Fighting Childhood Hunger

SNAP⁴⁰ is the Country’s first line of defense against hunger. “SNAP provides benefits to eligible low-income individuals and families via an Electronic Benefits Transfer card. This card can be used like a debit card to purchase eligible food in authorized retail food stores.”⁴¹ SNAP is critical to Montgomery County’s efforts because it is the primary pathway to significant federal funding aimed at addressing food insecurity. SNAP beneficiaries receive a reliable, steady, funding stream to purchase food at local commercial groceries. Unlike direct food assistance programs (like food provided from food pantries), families enrolled in SNAP can rely on the SNAP funding they will receive and have the increased dignity of choosing where, when, and what foods

they want to purchase. The impact on the local economy goes well beyond the families who receive help, as “each \$1.00 in federally funded SNAP benefits generates \$1.79 in economic activity.”⁴² Increasingly, the federal government looks to SNAP expansion as a pillar of disaster response and poverty reduction, as highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic response⁴³ and the recently released Biden-Harris Administration National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health⁴⁴.

While SNAP and other direct benefit programs provide both financial and personal empowerment, they have three major shortcomings:

- **Enrolling for benefits is an arduous and complicated** process that keeps many eligible families from ever getting enrolled;
- **Benefits provided are often insufficient** to meet the needs of food insecure families; and

- **Program restrictions** make many food insecure families ineligible to receive benefits.

The following sections will discuss these challenges as they relate to households with children, and consider potential solutions.

Expansion of SNAP Enrollment Programs

Proposal

Support the expansion of SNAP⁴⁵ Outreach through Community Based Organizations (CBOs) so that these organizations can perform more community outreach and training as well as add enrollment experts to meet the overwhelming demand for their services.

Additional benefits outreach and training on eligibility screening and referral pathways would be provided to the wide variety of existing frontline social workers, counselors, teachers, food access providers, and others who interact with food insecure children. These individuals are in a position to identify childhood food insecurity, but often do not know what benefit programs might be able to help or how and when to make SNAP or WIC enrollment referrals. Outreach and training would be offered to individuals working in trusted community spaces like MCPS Community Schools, Montgomery County Food Assistance Hubs, recreation centers, after-school child care programs, and other places where trusted individuals are likely to encounter food insecure children. The Montgomery County Food Council is well positioned to create a new “umbrella” program to engage non-CBO organizations with deep community ties.

Additional SNAP enrollment experts are needed to help cope with the overwhelming demand for SNAP enrollment assistance. CBOs are in a unique position to handle SNAP enrollment referrals, but currently lack the capacity to reach and assist all those who need help, let alone the additional demand for their services that new outreach efforts will create.

Expansion of SNAP Enrollment Programs

BACKGROUND

SNAP is the first line of defense against hunger, but many eligible residents are not receiving benefits to which they are entitled.

PROPOSAL

Expansion of community-based organizations to add SNAP enrollment experts to meet the overwhelming demand for their services.

IMPACT SNAP enrollment support for 2K children

MEDIUM COST \$300K per year

DIRECT FINANCIAL BENEFITS

Background

Importance of SNAP in Fighting Childhood Hunger

Many children in Montgomery County who are eligible for SNAP in Montgomery County are NOT enrolled in SNAP. Even more frustrating, many eligible families who were already enrolled in SNAP are being dropped from the program as a result of a complicated recertification process that was paused during the COVID-19 response, but is now back in full effect.⁴⁶ These families are missing out on critical, reliable federal funding, and in doing so are suffering needlessly, and placing additional stress on other (often less well-funded) food assistance programs and community organizations. According to Montgomery County’s Childhood Hunger Survey, uncertainty concerning

the application, personal eligibility, and child eligibility were 3 of the top 4 reasons participants were not enrolled in benefit programs.⁴⁷ Closing this “SNAP gap” among families should be a top priority in ending childhood hunger in Montgomery County.

Unique Role of CBOs

Applying for SNAP benefits is a confusing, time consuming process that (without assistance) requires English literacy, access to a computer, a working knowledge of the various state and local offices involved in the application process, an address to reliably receive U.S. mail, overcoming fear created by disinformation about “public charge,”⁴⁸ and persistent follow-up. Many residents are unsure who to turn to for help - with the most cited reason that kept them from asking for help from programs being, “I don’t know how to request help.”⁴⁹

Recognizing these significant barriers to SNAP enrollment, the State of Maryland Department of Human Services has trained and authorized special Community Based Organizations (CBOs) to assist people with applying for SNAP benefits.⁵⁰ CBOs are able to provide a greater level of service to clients because of their access to the application systems and the relationship they have cultivated locally with the Office of Eligibility and Support Service. There are only three Montgomery County based CBOs: Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington D.C. – Immigrant Support Services; Manna Food Center; and the Montgomery County Food Council.⁵¹ These CBOs are reimbursed 50% by the State, so County spending to expand local CBOs is effectively matched with State dollars.

CBOs do amazing work, but they face two major challenges: outreach and staffing. First, while CBOs have the technical exper-

tise to help clients successfully navigate the SNAP process, they are not often in the best position to identify the population of children who are eligible but not enrolled in SNAP. Rather, it is the trusted counselors, case workers, social workers, teachers, coaches, and others who work directly with the children and their families that can better assess food insecurity and other needed social services. Educating these trusted individuals on the basic eligibility requirements for nutrition benefit programs will help them to identify those families that may benefit from SNAP enrollment and create a referral pipeline to the CBOs. Equally important, therefore, is training frontline case workers on how to make a “warm hand-off” to the benefit experts at a SNAP CBO, WIC office, and/or other organization that is able to provide assistance.

Second, CBOs are currently understaffed and struggle to meet the demand of those already seeking their help. The Montgomery County Food Council reports that, without extensive outreach, they have received more than 400 referrals from MCPS alone in the past year, and have had to manage that workload with only two full time staff members working on SNAP enrollment support. A successful outreach and training effort should result in a significant increase in referrals, and additional enrollment staff will be needed to meet that demand.

To address both of these challenges, CBO work needs to be expanded. A reasonable expansion of CBO efforts would be the addition of one full time position dedicated to outreach and training, along with five full time positions dedicated to enrollment assistance. These new enrollment experts will need to add language capacity in Spanish and Amharic at a minimum.

Cost

An expansion of a local CBO's efforts to include the addition of one position dedicated to outreach and training, along with five full time positions dedicated to enrollment assistance is likely to cost approximately \$300,000 per year.⁵² Additional costs may be incurred to establish new (or to better leverage existing) referral mechanisms and develop training and outreach materials. CBOs are reimbursed 50% by the State, so County spending to expand local CBOs is effectively matched with State dollars.

Impact

SNAP is the Country's first line of defense against hunger, and the best way to link food-insecure families with reliable funding to buy healthy foods. SNAP enrollment also automatically qualifies children for free meals at school⁵³ or daycare.⁵⁴ Also worth noting is the positive local economic impact of bringing additional federal support dollars into the County; "each \$1.00 in feder-

ally funded SNAP benefits generates \$1.79 in economic activity."⁵⁵

The number of SNAP eligible children missing out on SNAP benefits is difficult to measure, but the current demand for SNAP enrollment assistance at CBOs indicates there are likely thousands of these children in Montgomery County.⁵⁶ SNAP enrollment may not fully address those children's food insecurity, but it is the most equitable and most cost effective place to start.

Champions

Montgomery County-based CBOs would be the main champions of this effort, which would be funded in part by the County and in part by the State. The Montgomery County Food Council is well-positioned to create a new "umbrella" program to engage organizations with deep community ties. All local SNAP-focused CBOs, however, would need to be involved for a program of this nature to be successful.

Address Benefit Inadequacy, Especially During the Summer

Proposal

Providing food insecure households with children with extra money to purchase the food they want from the local grocer they prefer is the most dignified, equitable, and efficient way to support them. While this additional support would be helpful year-round, the need is particularly acute for families when school is not in session, making the continued expansion of Maryland Summer SNAP program particularly important.

Background

Unfortunately, while many families receive direct benefits (like SNAP or WIC), these benefits are often insufficient to cover their actual needs.⁵⁷ According to the Food Research and Action Center,

“the greatest shortcoming of SNAP is that benefits for most households are not enough to get through the entire month without hunger or being forced to sacrifice nutrition quality. This limitation persists even in the face of overwhelming evidence on the gains from more adequate monthly SNAP benefits.”⁵⁸

This is confirmed by the Montgomery County Resident Survey; the Survey found that, among respondents (n=1,315), 63% used **both** food assistance programs (e.g., food distribution and food benefit). For many residents, food benefits alone do not meet their needs. **For families with children, this need is particularly acute during the summer and winter school breaks when school-aged children are not receiving free school meals.** Two recent programs have been created to fill this gap, one continuing program at the state level, and one tem-

Address Benefit Inadequacy, Especially During the Summer

BACKGROUND

Many households struggle with benefit inadequacy, which is greatest during the summer when children are not receiving free meals at school.

PROPOSAL

Providing a food benefit that would allow families to shop at their preferred grocer can effectively combat food insecurity experienced while children are not in school.

IMPACT \$100 - \$500 p/summer for 70K children

HIGH COST \$300K - \$30M per year

DIRECT FINANCIAL BENEFITS

porary COVID-19 response program at the federal level. Both are detailed below, and each can serve as a model for Montgomery County to close the benefits inadequacy gap for families with children.

Maryland Summer SNAP

The 2019 Summer SNAP for Children Act⁵⁹ aimed to close the inadequacy gap by ensuring children have access to the nutrition they need when school is out of session during the summer and winter breaks. Maryland Summer SNAP for Children provides a \$30 monthly cash benefit for food during the summer months and \$10 during winter break to reduce food insecurity and improve the diets of low-income children. The Maryland Department of Human Services’ Family Investment Administration ad-

ministers Summer SNAP. State law requires that local jurisdictions apply to participate in Summer SNAP and agree to contribute local funds. Presently, Montgomery County

has \$100,000 in the base budget and plans to continue to support the Summer SNAP Program and to increase the funding each year based on availability of funds.

Summer SNAP Participation for the Past 3 Years⁶⁰

Year	Total Amount	State Share	County Share	Number of Children & Target Group
20-21	\$228,300	\$46,410	\$181,890	1,818 TCA school-age
21-22	\$167,200	\$27,200	\$140,000	1,672 TCA school-age (4-17)
22-23	\$781,400	\$453,600	\$327,800	7,813 TCA school-age (5-15) & 7 highest SNAP zip codes (20874, 20877, 20878, 20886, 20904, 20906, and 20910)

Figure 14

Federal Pandemic EBT

During COVID, the federal government implemented the Pandemic EBT program, which provided funds to families with children that would have received free or reduced price school meals had schools not closed as part of the pandemic response.⁶¹ In Maryland, the total summer PEBT benefit was \$391 dollars per child.⁶² This extra funding has been cited as a possible reason why the “rate of food insecurity among households with children declined [nationally] in 2021 despite unemployment rates remaining above pre-pandemic levels and the rising cost of food and other basic necessities.”⁶³ Analysis has shown that Pandemic EBT had a major positive impact on families, lifting millions of children out of hunger.⁶⁴ Given the success of these programs, Congress is considering creating a permanent \$75 per month Summer EBT benefit.⁶⁵

The Role of Montgomery County

While State and Federal programs expanding food benefits are significantly impactful (and the County should continue to advocate for their continuation and expansion), these programs do not fully account for the relatively high cost of living in Montgomery County. Moreover, with the pandemic ending, critical federal support is disappearing. The County should consider providing direct financial support to families to purchase food. While this additional support would be helpful year-round, the need is most acute for families when school is not in session. Such a program could be modeled on Summer SNAP and Pandemic EBT, both of which provided benefits to all children receiving FARMs.

Cost

The County share of supporting Summer SNAP program for 22-23 will be \$327,800 - of which \$100,000 is in the base budget.

Funding an additional \$10 a week for the ten weeks of summer (\$100 total p/yr) for each of the 70,348 children receiving FARMs benefits would cost \$7,034,800 per year.

For many families, SNAP benefits are not just insufficient during summer. To fund an additional \$10 a week year round (\$520 total p/yr) for each of the 70,348 children receiving FARMs, the cost would be \$36,580,960 per year.

Impact

Maryland Summer SNAP is a partially State funded food support program that works

well, reaches a targeted audience, and will provide critically needed benefits to 7,813 children in 2023.

Pandemic EBT was transformative for those families that received it, and a similar Montgomery County funded initiative could be equally impactful. If this program was tailored to reach all children receiving FARMs during the regular school year, it would impact around 70,348 children.

Champions

The Department of Health and Human Services and the Office of Food Systems Resilience should work together to champion this work.

Provide Direct Benefits to SNAP Ineligible Households

Proposal

Provide SNAP-equivalent benefits to children in low-income families in Montgomery County who are not eligible for state or federal food benefits.

Background

Some residents who are not U.S. citizens are not eligible for SNAP.⁶⁶ Montgomery County has a history of providing support to families that are not eligible for state or federal benefit programs. For example, Montgomery County’s “Care for Kids [program] provides affordable primary, specialty, behavioral health, and dental care for nearly 6,000 children of low-income families in Montgomery County who are not eligible for other state or federal health insurance programs.”⁶⁷ It is likely that many of the nearly 6,000 children served by the Care for Kids program are food insecure but do not qualify for SNAP. Montgomery County should consider taking a similar approach to food insecurity, and choose to support those children with direct financial benefits as well.

The creation of a program designed to make all low-income families in Montgomery County eligible to receive some form of direct food benefit assistance could have positive network effects on overall SNAP enrollment. SNAP enrollment experts indicated one of the main things preventing eligible residents from enrolling in SNAP is concern and confusion about immigration status.⁶⁸ As proposed in another section, an expansion of SNAP enrollment CBOs can help close this gap. The creation of a program covering ineligible residents could help in this effort. Making it clear that **all** low-income food insecure families can

DIRECT FINANCIAL BENEFITS

Provide Direct Benefits to SNAP Ineligible Households

BACKGROUND
Some households with children in Montgomery County do not qualify for SNAP, but still struggle with food insecurity.

PROPOSAL
Provide SNAP-equivalent benefits to children in low-income families in Montgomery County who are not eligible for other state or federal food benefits

IMPACT

SNAP-equivalent benefits for 6K children

HIGH COST

\$10M per year

receive help from either SNAP, or a Montgomery County program will encourage more individuals to seek help. As a result of this outreach, some, if not many, of those individuals will turn out to be SNAP eligible.

Cost

To be eligible for the Care for Kids Program, a child must: not be eligible for any state or federal insurance programs; be below 250% of the FPL; and live in Montgomery County.⁶⁹ Similar eligibility requirements are appropriate for addressing food insecurity. If similar requirements were put in place, then a similar number of participants, about 6,000 children, could be expected.

The average monthly SNAP benefit per person is around \$145 per/mo⁷⁰ or \$1,740 per year. If those 6,000 children in Care for Kids

qualified for the benefit, that would be an annual cost of about \$10,440,000.⁷¹

Food, somewhat unlike individual medical coverage, is a shared family commodity, as families share meals in a way they do not share dental care or eye exams. For this reason, the County should consider expanding food insecurity support to all of the members of a food insecure child's household. This could more than double the cost of the program; it would ensure, however, that food benefits are properly scaled to a household's actual need.

Impact

If similar eligibility requirements from the Care for Kids Program were put in place, then a similar number of participants, roughly 6000 children, could be expected.

Champions

The County would need to carefully consider who should administer this program, and should consider a community based organization⁷² that is already assisting with SNAP enrollment. The primary reason for this is that one of the goals in creating the program is to draw applicants who are SNAP eligible but are reluctant to apply for SNAP due to disinformation or confusion. Administering this program through a CBO would help ensure that families in need of help were assisted in the application process for any and all help they might qualify for, be it SNAP or a Montgomery County program. MCPS would be a crucial partner in identifying children who might be facing food insecurity but are not SNAP eligible.

School and Childcare Adjacent Food Assistance

School, pre-school, childcare, and daycare facilities can play a unique role in reaching food insecure children with nutritious

food. Below are strategies that leverage the unique and special role these places have in children’s lives.

Expansion of Free School Meals

Proposal

Provide free school meals to more children than are currently covered by the National School Lunch Program (NSLP)⁷³, which provide Free and Reduced-Priced Meals (FARMs) to low-income students. Provide meals either to all students who live in households making incomes below the Self-Sufficiency Standard (SSS) or, alternatively, to all enrolled students.

Background

The Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) system is in a unique position to provide children with direct food support. Nutritious meals are served daily to children across the entire MCPS network. This tremendous feeding effort is backed by a large nutritional staff and significant physical infrastructure, including kitchens, warehouses, and lunchrooms designed to meet the needs of the 161,503 enrolled students.

This unique capacity of schools to feed children during every school day has led the federal government to make free school meals a cornerstone of the national effort to reduce childhood hunger. The NSLP is a federally assisted meal program that provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free lunches.⁷⁴ In Montgomery County, FARMs are available to children in households whose income is below 185% of the federal poverty level. In MCPS in 2022, **70,348 children (43.56% of all enrolled)**

Expansion of Free School Meals

BACKGROUND

Free school meals are a good way to link food insecure children with reliable, nutritious meals, but not all food insecure children are eligible for free meals or avoid free meals due to stigma.

PROPOSAL

Expanding the school lunch program to either all students, or to those living below the Self-Sufficiency Standard.

IMPACT Free school meals for 3K – 10K students

HIGH COST \$2M - \$12M per year

received FARMs.⁷⁵ The State of Maryland supplements federal funding to cover students’ reduced cost for breakfast and lunch.⁷⁶ Additionally, some “universal meals schools”, with particularly high FARMs rates, provide free meals to all children in school regardless of household income. Together, these programs provide free meals to **71,547 MCPS students** daily during the school year, making MCPS meals by far the largest direct food support hunger relief effort in the County. As part of the COVID-19 response, the federal government provided funding for school districts to make free meals available to all students.⁷⁷ While universally free school meals are no

SCHOOL & CHILDCARE ADJACENT FOOD ASSISTANCE

longer federally subsidized, COVID-19 showed that MCPS has the capacity to provide free school meals if sufficient funding is available.

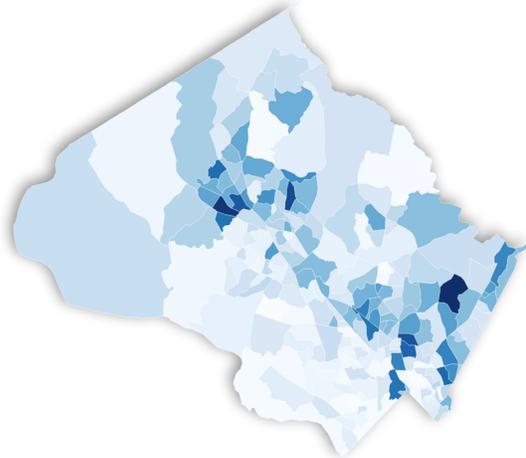
Researchers argue that universal meal programs help address major shortcomings in the current system that limits free or reduced cost meals to those children in households with incomes below 185% of the federal poverty level (FPL):

[T]his means-tested approach excludes many resource-constrained families at risk of food insecurity who are near eligible for free or reduced-price meals but do not qualify. Further, some students who are eligible for free or reduced-price meals do not participate due to stigma. Students may feel shame about receiving a free school meal or their parents/caregivers may be reluctant to complete the necessary paperwork because it denotes that they are from a low-income household. ... [Universal school meals] can reduce stigma; improve children's diet-quality; nourish students for the academic demands of the school day; and benefit schools by potentially lowering administrative costs and eliminating school meal debt from households with insufficient funds to pay for meals.⁷⁸

The failure of a needs-based test tied to the too-low 185% of FPL is particularly hard felt in Montgomery County, where the cost of living is much higher than the national average. U.S. Census data estimates that there are 40,777 school-aged children in Montgomery County that are between 185% and 400% of FPL (a reasonable estimate of the SSS).⁷⁹ This is a significant population of children that live in homes that make **too much income to qualify for FARMs, but not enough to be considered self-sufficient.**⁸⁰

Too much income for FARMs, but less than self sufficient
Children in Households with income between 185% and 400% of FPL

7 980



Source: US Census Data, 2020 ACS 5-Year Estimate Detailed Table B17024.

Figure 15

The County could help address this issue in one of two ways. First, it could offer free school meals to all students living in households below the self-sufficiency level. This would help address the concern that many food insecure children live in households with incomes above the 185% level. Alternatively, the County could make school meals free for all students. This would not only address the too-low 185% of FPL bar, but also address concerns about stigma and school debt.

Continued Advocacy

The County should also continue to advocate at the state and federal level for the expansion of school meal programs. Post-COVID, the expansion of school meals programs is getting renewed national interest, and is featured as a core part of the recently released White House National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health.⁸¹ In addition to advocating for more federal funding

for school meals, MCPS should take full advantage of existing programs like the **Community Eligibility Provision**⁸², which expands free lunch availability in schools that serve communities most in need.

The County should advocate at the state level for the expansion of the **Maryland Meals For Achievement (MMFA)** program. This Program “provides state funds to allow participating schools to implement free breakfast in the classroom.”⁸³ Currently, 91 schools participate in the MMFA program in Montgomery County, with 58,838 receiving free breakfasts every school day under this program.⁸⁴

Serving as examples, both Colorado and Maine have recently passed laws making free meals available to all students, regardless of their family’s income.⁸⁵ These could serve as a potential model to Maryland and other states. Montgomery County should advocate for similar support for universal school meals at the state and federal level.

Cost and Impact

Option A - All Children in households below the Self-Sufficiency Standard

School meals could be provided for free to all children living in households with income below the SSS. Due to the relatively high cost of living in Montgomery County, there are many students who face food insecurity but are ineligible for FARMs due to their household income being above 185% of the FPL. The SSS varies by family composition and local cost of living; for the most common family compositions, this is around 400% of the FPL or \$111,000 in Montgomery County.⁸⁶

According to 2021 Census estimates, approximately 75,532 children live in households that make less than 400% of the FPL

in Montgomery County.⁸⁷ Assuming that 97.77%⁸⁸ of these children are enrolled in MCPS, approximately 73,848 children attend MCPS and are living in households that make less than 400% of FPL.⁸⁹ According to 2022 MCPS data, 71,547 children already receive FARMs (either by being enrolled for FARMs, or attending a universal meals school). This would mean approximately 2,301⁹⁰ children are below estimates of self-sufficiency but not receiving free meals.

School lunches cost an estimated \$4.00 per meal. With 182 school days in the school year, the cost of providing free lunches to each additional student is around \$728.⁹¹ For the estimated **2,301 children** in households below 400% of the FPL that are not currently receiving FARMs, this would cost **\$1,675,178 per year**.⁹² This option could also encourage more families to complete FARMs application forms, which could help increase the number of children receiving federally-funded meals.

Option B - Universal meals

School meals could be provided for free to all enrolled MCPS students. Currently, there are 161,503 students enrolled, with 71,547 already receiving free meals.⁹³ The cost of providing meals to the other **89,956 children** could be as much as **\$65,487,968 per year**⁹⁴ if every student ate the provided meal everyday; experience indicates that not all students will take free meals even if offered. During the 2021-2022 school year, COVID-era waivers from the USDA made free meals available to every MCPS student, effectively operating a sort of one-year universal free meals program pilot. During this time, MCPS reports serving approximately **3,000,000 extra meals at a cost of \$12,000,000 per year**.⁹⁵ This is a far better estimate of the actual cost of implement-

ing universal free meals in Montgomery County.

If the County pursues universal school meals, efforts should be made to ensure that as many children as possible remain enrolled in the federally-funded school meals program. The County's goal should be to augment federal funding provided for meals with local funding, not to forgo federal funding altogether, which could happen if families stop completing federally-required FARMs applications. Moreover, the "FARMs Rate" (the percentage of the student body in a school receiving federally-funded school meals) is considered in a number of other social welfare and school

support program calculations. During COVID-19 (when universal school meals were offered) MCPS saw a significant drop in FARMs applications. If families no longer feel they need to apply for free school meals, it could lead to a significant drop in the "FARMs rate" at MCPS schools, which could in turn have a negative cascading impact by triggering a drop in many different forms of federal and state support offered only to high-FARMs rate schools.

Champions

The County would be the funder, with MCPS preparing and providing the meals.

Expansion of Child and Adult Care Food Program

Proposal

Reverse the decrease of home daycares (sometimes referred to as “family child care homes”) taking advantage of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). This is done by ensuring that (1) all child care providers have access to computers to complete required paperwork; (2) newly enrolled providers have sufficient support in menu planning and reporting; and (3) sufficient outreach is conducted to combat rumors and misconceptions about CACFP.

Background

CACFP “is a federal program that provides reimbursements for nutritious meals and snacks to eligible children and adults who are enrolled for care at participating child care centers, day care homes, and adult day care centers.”⁹⁶ In Montgomery County, CACFP for home daycares is administered by MCPS.⁹⁷ CACFP provides three levels of reimbursement based on a child’s household income level: “free” for those children in households below 130% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), “reduced” for those children in households below 185% of FPL, and “paid” for all others.⁹⁸ Home daycares receive \$5.37 per day per child. That is eligible for the “free” level if two meals are received (typically breakfast and lunch); a snack is also provided. That reimbursement amount is less for children at the “reduced” (\$2.58 p/day/child) and “paid” (24¢ p/day/child) levels.⁹⁹ Children in households participating in SNAP or the Temporary Cash Assistance Program are automatically (“categorically”) eligible for “free” status under CACFP.¹⁰⁰ To be eligible for reimbursement under CACFP, for-profit daycare centers must show more than 20% of enrolled children meet the criteria for “free” or “reduced”.¹⁰¹

SCHOOL & CHILDCARE ADJACENT FOOD ASSISTANCE

Expansion of Child and Adult Care Food Program

BACKGROUND

There has been a dramatic decrease in the number of home daycares providing free meals to food insecure children under the federal Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).

PROPOSAL

Providing access to computers to complete the newly required CACFP paperwork, helping the care staff create culturally-relevant menus, and increasing outreach to CACFP eligible childcare centers.

IMPACT

Free daycare meals for 1.5K children

MEDIUM COST

\$150K per year

In Montgomery County, roughly 200 home daycares participated in CACFP in 2022, of which approximately 25% were eligible for “free” reimbursement status and 75% were eligible for “reduced” reimbursement status.¹⁰² This is a substantial decline from the roughly 450 home daycares that participated in 2019.¹⁰³ There are many home daycares who would be eligible to get CACFP that are not participating. This is a major concern, given that the CACFP program is one of the primary pathways of federal funding to support childhood nutrition for children too young for school. Missing out on these federal dollars increases child care costs and reduces the capacity of providers to offer nutritious meals to food insecure children. According to MCPS administrative

staff and CACFP subject matter experts, there are a number of reasons that providers are reluctant or unwilling to participate in CACFP; each of these is detailed in one of the following sections.

Standardized Menus

The steep decline in CACFP participation in Montgomery County is primarily a result of recent policy changes requiring providers that receive CACFP funds use and fully document a standardized menu.¹⁰⁴ Offering such a menu can be a major challenge for those providers seeking to provide culturally appropriate or specialized meals to children. Furthermore, documenting details, like all ingredients used and meal plans, can be prohibitively time consuming; this concern is amplified for providers without a dedicated administrative staff. Montgomery County should advocate to the USDA to change standardized menu restrictions to better accommodate diverse diets and food preparations. Additionally, the County should advocate to reduce the administrative burden involved in documenting daily menus. If and until the menu rules change, extra training and support staff could help train providers and assist providers with initial menu setup.

Lack of Computer Access

CACFP reimbursement is a paperwork intensive process, and that weekly paperwork must be completed and submitted online. This requires that providers have access to a computer that can be used to complete the forms, and have the technical knowledge to navigate the submission process. According to CACFP administrators at MCPS, many eligible providers miss out on CACFP because they do not have access to a computer to fill out the application. Montgomery County already provides free computers, discounted Internet access, and

computer training to residents through the Montgomery County Connects program.¹⁰⁵ This program could be leveraged to ensure that any family child care home that needs a computer and connectivity to complete CACFP forms has the ability to access one.

Other Causes for Reluctance

The CACFP program requires annual in-person inspections, which dissuades some home daycares from joining. While these inspections are purely to ensure CACFP compliance, many providers are concerned and skeptical of allowing government inspectors into their child care home. This fear is most common in providers that serve immigrant populations or children whose families have concerns about government inspectors questioning their citizenship status. While this fear is unfounded (CACFP inspections do NOT inquire as to citizenship status), it is still a serious concern keeping many eligible providers from seeking CACFP reimbursement. Community outreach will be key in dispelling rumors about CACFP paperwork and inspections, which could lead to increased enrollment. It is important that those individuals conducting said outreach do so in the primary language of the providers and households served.

Cost

Ensuring that all childcare providers have access to computers to complete required paperwork may come at no new cost to the County if existing laptop programs can be leveraged.

MCPS CACFP staff do not have the excess capacity to conduct additional enrollment support and outreach, so this effort would require new bi-lingual CACFP outreach and support staff. One or two new full time staff

members could be acquired to work as part of the MCPS CACFP administration team; their purpose would be to conduct outreach and onboarding. These additions would likely cost the County less than \$150,000 per year. Given that the annual maximum CACFP reimbursement for a single family child care home is \$8,377, this investment seems more than justified.¹⁰⁶

Impact

CACFP is unique in that it focuses on providing direct support to children too young to benefit from the National School Lunch Program. This is a critical population of children, but they are difficult to reach. Reaching them is critical because their developing minds and bodies depend on healthy and consistent nutrition. These children are harder to reach than older children because, unlike their older counterparts,

the vast majority of them are not attending public school or public daycare. The CACFP program reaches these children where they are, and brings federal dollars into Montgomery County to combat food and nutritional insecurity. If the County was able to re-enroll the 250 home daycares that have dropped out of the system since 2019, that could bring an additional \$1,276,074 in federal funding to buy meals for 1,500 food insecure children in Montgomery County home daycares.¹⁰⁷

Champions

The County would be the primary source of funding and provide laptops under existing programs with MCPS administering the CACFP program.

Expand Early Head Start, Head Start, and Pre-K

Proposal

Expand Early Head Start, Head Start, and Pre-K programs. This expansion should particularly focus on Community Based Early Head Start (EHS)¹⁰⁸ providers to create more classrooms for three-year-olds and to ensure they have care until they can join Head Start programs. Based on interviews with Montgomery County EHS providers, this strategy recommends creating **two new community based three-year-old classrooms** to serve sixty children at an approximate first-year cost of \$1,000,000. This proposal is only a first step in addressing the tremendous need for more Early Head Start, Head Start, and Pre-K programs. Many additional locations and classrooms will need to be opened to fully serve all Head Start eligible children.

Background

EHS, Head Start (HS), and Pre-K programs offer critically needed childcare services to low-income parents. They also provide important access to healthy and nutritious breakfasts and lunches to children at a critical time in mental and physical development. HS and Pre-K programs are administered by MCPS, and take place in MCPS school sites. These programs are part of the MCPS feeding programs. EHS-model classrooms offer free and nutritious breakfasts and lunches.¹⁰⁹ HS and EHS also provide families with wrap-around services, connecting them to food assistance programs and other needed resources that either provide direct access to food (SNAP/WIC/pantries) or to other supports that can create additional resources for food.

Unfortunately, these critical programs are not serving all those who are eligible due to a lack of funding, space, and staff.¹¹⁰ Accord-

SCHOOL & CHILDCARE ADJACENT FOOD ASSISTANCE

Expand Early Head Start, Head Start, and Pre-K

BACKGROUND

Head Start and Pre-K programs provide free meals to those enrolled, directly addressing childhood food insecurity.

PROPOSAL

Unfortunately, the demand for these programs greatly outstrips the supply of programs, and gaps exist in program coverage for three-year-olds. More classrooms are needed.

IMPACT

Classroom seats for 60 children

HIGH COST

\$1M

ing to the Montgomery County Head Start Assessment 2020, “Montgomery County Head Start is currently serving 40% of all Head Start eligible children.”

With respect to HS and Pre-K, new state funding should help. MSDE’s Blueprint for Maryland’s Future will, “[o]ver its 10-year implementation ... deliver a significant expansion of full-day pre-kindergarten.”¹¹¹ This is excellent news, as continued expansion of these programs will be an important way to address food insecurity among those enrolled.

Of specific concern is a critical gap between community-based EHS programs, which ends at three years of age, and the MCPS Head Start program where the vast majority of classrooms start at four years

of age. This means many children in EHS age out of the program a year too early to enter a Head Start classroom. Three year old children who fall through this crack in the system lose access to a critical source of hunger support just when their growing minds and bodies need it the most.

Cost

The County should pursue the expansion of EHS, HS, and Pre-K programs - leveraging increases in state educational funding wherever possible.¹¹²

The specific cost of closing the EHS to HS gap by establishing two new community-based EHS-model classrooms for three-year-olds would be approximately **\$1,000,000**. Interviews with current EHS providers indicate that the typical start-up (capital and classroom setup) costs for a community-based EHS model classroom for 30 three-year-old children is roughly \$50,000. Both direct and staffing costs for each classroom is roughly \$380,000 per year - making the first year cost of establishing a new classroom approximately **\$430,000**. With administrative and grant-making costs factored in, the cost to the County of establishing **two new com-**

munity-based EHS-model classrooms for three-year-olds would be about **\$1,000,000**.

Impact

Creating these classrooms would play a significant role in filling the EHS - HS gap. Establishing two new community-based classrooms for three-year-olds using the EHS model would provide slots for 60 children who would most likely go without care, and without free breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks.¹¹³

The total impact of these classrooms is hard to directly measure, but it is clear that it will provide food, educational and emotional support, wraparound services, and economic relief to the families served. It would also ensure better continuity between EHS and HS - two programs that should theoretically work together.

Champions

MCPS would be the logical champion of these efforts, but would need to work in collaboration with existing Early Head Start Programs.

Community School Distributions and Pantries

Proposal

Create a grant program to ensure that many, if not all, new MCPS Community Schools have an in-school pantry or at-school distribution.

Background

Community Schools¹¹⁴ are a critical pathway to providing wraparound services to children in areas of concentrated poverty. These schools

“serve as hubs that provide students, families, and communities with needed wraparound services. ... Community Schools will provide the health, mental health, academic, and extracurricular support services needed to flourish. [They] focus on family and community engagement, culturally responsive relationship building, mental and emotional health, trauma informed practices, restorative practices, and physical health and wellness in addition to MCPS’ quality instruction.”¹¹⁵

Currently, Montgomery County has 26 Community Schools. The Maryland Department of Education’s Blueprint for Maryland’s Future¹¹⁶ calls for a significant expansion of Community Schools, supported by grants from the State. Currently the threshold to become a Community School is a FARMS rate of more than 70% of the school population. Under the Blueprint, this threshold is slated to decrease by 5% a year until it reaches 55% by 2027. This change will result in an extra 32 new Community Schools by 2025.¹¹⁷

All 26 of Montgomery County’s current Community Schools are able to connect children experiencing food insecurity with

SCHOOL & CHILDCARE ADJACENT FOOD ASSISTANCE

Community School Distributions and Pantries

BACKGROUND
Community Schools are a critical pathway to providing wraparound services to children in areas of concentrated poverty.

PROPOSAL
Ensure that new MCPS Community Schools have an in-school pantry or at-school distribution to address food insecurity as part of those wraparound services.

IMPACT

At-school food access for 3K children

MEDIUM COST

\$670K per year

food via one of two food assistance models: an at-school distribution or in-school pantry. These resources are supplied by local non-profit food assistance providers using philanthropic and County funds. As the number of Community Schools expand, however, it will be difficult for food assistance providers to be able to scale these resources to ensure that each Community School has these critical wraparound services.

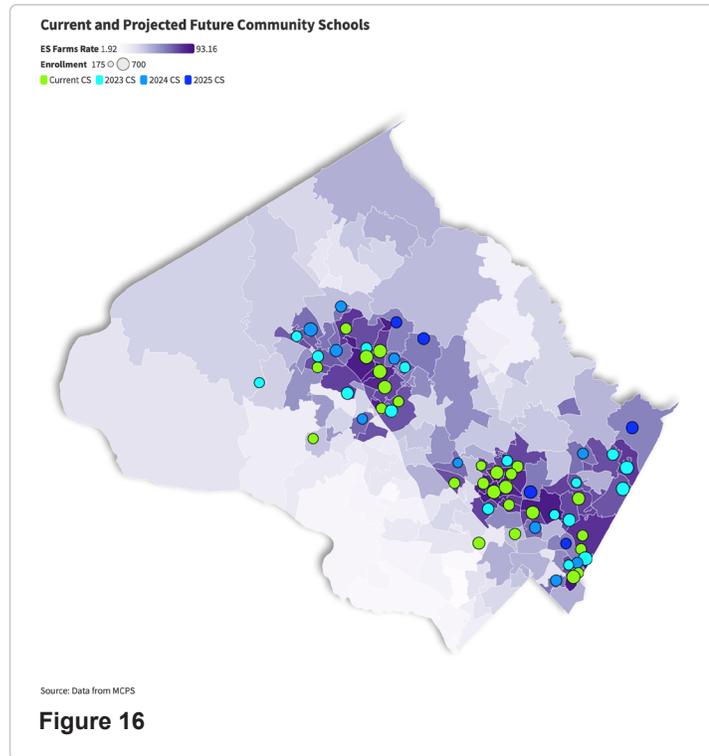
A grant program could be created to ensure that as many, if not all, new Community Schools have an in-school pantry or at-school distribution. These resources provide a direct link between families experiencing food insecurity and food support. They are conveniently in locations that families are familiar with and trust (their local Commu-

nity School). Moreover, having these resources available at the schools allows them to become an integrated part of wraparound services provided; thus, the investment that both the County and State have made in Community School staff and infrastructure can be leveraged.

Each of the two school-based food assistance models have benefits and challenges. Monthly food distributions feature fresh produce and often provide larger (boxed) quantities of food than in-school pantries. Pantries, however, are open daily, and are better able to meet the immediate needs of children with smaller quantities of shelf-stable and canned foods; these pantries may not be able to provide fresh produce as they often lack refrigeration. Some schools have room to host a pantry, while others lack adequate space. Some schools are located near other food distributions, and so duplicating those efforts at the school may not make sense. For this reason, the decision to place a pantry or distribution at a Community School should be made on a school-by-school basis. That said, every Community School would benefit from a way to directly provide food insecure children with food. The majority of Community Schools currently have at-school food distributions.

Cost

The cost of providing an at-school distribution or pantry is approximately \$21,000 per school per year.¹¹⁸ For 32 new Community Schools, this would make the total cost \$672,000 per year.



Impact

Current at-school food support models serve an average of 100 families per school. With an additional 32 schools, another 3200 families would be served by these resources, greatly impacting the community.

Champions

This effort would be a partnership between the County, who would provide some of the funding and administration, food assistance providers, and MCPS through running the Community Schools.

Expansion of Weekend Bag Distributions

Proposal

The County should consider expansion of weekend bag distribution.

Background

Weekend bags include a weekend’s worth of food for a child, and are typically distributed to school children at school on the last day of the school week. For children receiving free school meals, weekend bags “bridge the gap between Friday and Monday, providing nutritious foods for children and their families who might not have another meal until after the weekend.”¹¹⁹ Currently, the County funds three food assistance providers to provide weekend bags: Manna Food Center¹²⁰, Women Who Care Ministries, and Kids In Need Distributors (KIND). County-funded distributions by these groups in FY 2021 provided weekend bags to more than 14,000 children at 108 different MCPS schools.¹²¹ These providers reach additional children with weekend bags through other fundraising efforts, but philanthropic dollars are not unlimited. Both school and student participation rates depend on a variety of specific factors, including the needs of the school’s population, location, staff capacity, storage capacity, transportation needs, cultural preferences, and the presence of other food support services like in-school pantries or school-adjacent distributions. It is important to note that weekend bag distribution could benefit **all food insecure students**, including those attending schools with a relatively low number of students receiving FARMs. For this reason, MCPS, DHHS, and food assistance providers should consider expanding weekend bag distributions to a larger number of schools, including those with low FARMs eligibility rates.

Cost

Each weekend bag costs approximately \$6 per child per week.¹²² Note that this cost per bag varies based on the provider and both the quantity/type of food included in the bag.

SCHOOL & CHILDCARE ADJACENT FOOD ASSISTANCE

Expansion of Weekend Bags

BACKGROUND

Weekend bags provide a weekend’s worth of food for school-age children who rely on free school meals during the school week.

PROPOSAL

An expansion would include a larger number of schools in the MCPS system.

IMPACT

100s of children

MEDIUM COST

\$6 per child per week

Assuming a 43 week school year (late Aug - mid June), providing one child with weekend bags all year would cost \$258 per year.¹²³ Any significant expansion will likely also come with costs to increase capacity, storage space, transportation, and staffing.

Impact

Expanding weekend bags distribution could have a huge impact on children who rely on school as a primary source of nutrition who are not currently served by an existing weekend bag program or other school-adjacent out-of-school-time food distribution program.

Champions

To be successful, this program needs three champions to work together: (1) MCPS to help identify which schools are good candidates for new weekend bags programs and can commit the necessary storage and on-site coordination for program operations; (2) community organizations to source, package, and coordinate distribution; and (3) DHHS to administer the grant or contract funding.

Novel Approaches and New Pathways

In addition to the more traditional approaches detailed above, the subject matter expert working groups also suggested a

number of novel approaches and pathways to reach food insecure children. These strategies are detailed below.

Direct-to-Household Food Assistance

Proposal

Pursue the implementation of a modern platform to link busy families experiencing food insecurity with delivery of free food.

Background

Lack of transportation and busy schedules were a recurring theme of both subject matter and resident engagement sessions. Specifically, many households with young children struggle to find the time and transportation to pick up food from traditional food assistance distributions, like pantries. A common suggestion from these groups is to expand the number of options for direct delivery of food assistance to households. The Montgomery County Childhood Hunger survey supported this conclusion, showing that those who are food insecure are far more likely to walk, bike, or ride-share to get food and far less likely to drive than those who are food secure.

Research and interviews indicated that there are a number of novel approaches to implementing modern direct-to-household food support. Many traditional food delivery apps such as DoorDash¹²⁴, Uber¹²⁵, and InstaCart¹²⁶ offer free or low cost delivery to food insecure households. These apps could help families overcome the transportation barriers by connecting them with existing food assistance providers.

NOVEL APPROACHES AND NEW PATHWAYS

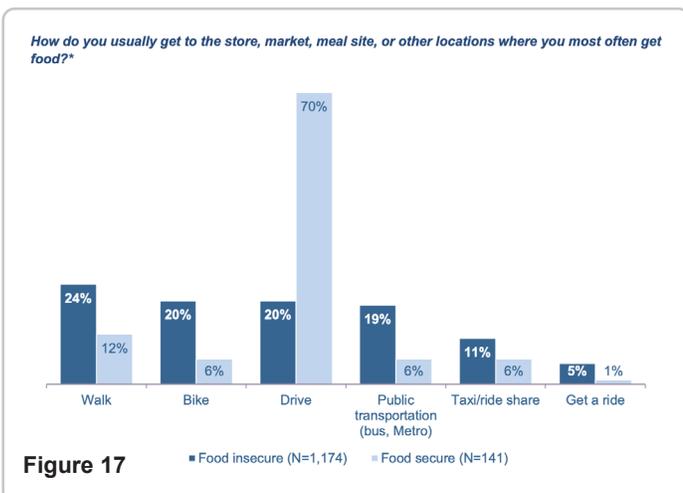
Direct-to-Household Food Assistance

BACKGROUND
Many families with children lack transportation and have busy schedules, making it hard for them to access and receive food from food distributions.

PROPOSAL
Create a platform to link food insecure families with free food delivery.

IMPACT TBD, delivered food for 2K+ children

HIGH COST TBD with RFP, likely >\$1M



Others, such as Tangelo¹²⁷ and Bento¹²⁸, are building new platforms dedicated to supporting those in need by connecting them to a marketplace for free delivery.

This type of program would offer the County a viable platform to provide direct food or financial assistance to two important groups of households: (1) households with children who currently receive SNAP benefits, but find those benefits insufficient to meet their actual needs; and (2) food insecure households with children who are not eligible for SNAP. The County could use a direct-to-consumer online platform as a way to distribute funds aimed at addressing the issue of benefit inadequacy¹²⁹ by either providing a set amount of funding for households to spend, or an amount that matches benefits they already receive similar to the Maryland Market Money program (which doubles benefits spending power at farmers' markets).¹³⁰ The County could also choose to provide money on the platform to families that are not SNAP eligible or enrolled; the amount provided would be sufficient enough to meet those households' needs.

If the County chose to pursue the implementation of one or more of these solutions to link busy families experiencing food insecurity with food delivery, the logical next step would be to request proposals from vendors to provide a platform that could:

- Deliver food directly to families;
- Provide nutritious, culturally appropriate options;
- Be easy to sign-up for and use;
- Allow families to spend SNAP or other benefit dollars;

- Allow the County to fund the purchase of food in whole or in part;
- Link families with local food producers, farms, and/or restaurants;
- Collect reliable data on those served to inform decision making and outreach; and
- Serve as a pathway for wraparound services and additional support.

Cost

The cost of implementing and operating a direct-to-consumer platform of this type is hard to define without the completion of a formal request for proposal from vendors; however, this will likely cost in the tens of thousands of dollars. Food purchases, credits, or other funding for the consumer to make purchases would be additional, at whatever rate the County decided to fund.¹³¹

Impact

The primary impact of this program is linking households that struggle with transportation to healthy food. While difficult to quantify, transportation was a critical challenge gap highlighted in the resident survey, resident listening session, and subject matter expert meetings. This program also creates an avenue for the County to provide food assistance benefits to those who do not qualify for SNAP for non-financial reasons.¹³²

Champions

The County's forthcoming Office of Food System Resilience would be well positioned to oversee a pilot of a direct-to-family food assistance solution.

Food is Medicine

Proposal

Establish a “food is medicine” program to build partnerships with pediatricians and other clinicians, educating and empowering them to: (1) screen for childhood food insecurity; (2) “prescribe” free food for children who screen as food insecure; and (3) refer households with food insecure children to benefits enrollment experts and other support.

Background

Pediatricians and family practice doctors provide a critical pathway to identifying and reaching children experiencing food security. Realizing this, the American Academy of Pediatrics has supported the use of the “Hunger Vital Sign” screening tool, including the results of this tool in electronic health medical records.¹³³ The challenge is that “providers who screen for social determinants of health are still learning the best ways to administer screeners and respond to positive screens. Some practitioners do not have the resources to support families, and many families already are connected to resources.”¹³⁴

Food is medicine efforts are aimed, in part, at closing this gap by giving physicians an ability to directly link patients experiencing food insecurity with healthy food. According to the American Society for Nutrition, “Food as medicine, also known as ‘food is medicine,’ sits at the crossroads of nutrition and healthcare. It may take many forms, including medically tailored meals, medically tailored groceries, and produce prescription programs.”¹³⁵ In Montgomery County, the Primary Care Coalition’s (PCC) Food is Medicine program “integrates food insecurity screening and referral to food

Food is Medicine

BACKGROUND

Clinicians and pediatricians are in a unique position to screen children for food insecurity, and “prescribe” free food to children as treatment.

PROPOSAL

Expanded food is medicine programs would allow health professionals to refer families with children for benefits, resources, and support.

IMPACT Food prescriptions for 500 children

MEDIUM COST \$400K per year

assistance and nutrition education into primary care services.”¹³⁶ Currently, the PCC Food is Medicine pilot program is operating at three clinics, two Mobile Medical Cares’ clinics, and Mercy Health Clinic; the program has a goal of expanding.¹³⁷ There are also adult food as medicine programs that could serve as a model.¹³⁸

A food is medicine program could be established to specifically address childhood food insecurity. Ideally, such a program would provide pediatricians (and potentially other clinicians working with children) the ability to “prescribe” healthy food to children experiencing food insecurity. This healthy food could be sourced from any number of channels, but two important sources could be food assistance providers and Community Supported Agriculture

NOVEL APPROACHES AND NEW PATHWAYS

programs (CSAs). In addition to prescribing food, physicians could make direct referrals for benefits enrollment assistance.¹³⁹ In addition to pediatric offices, food is medicine programs could be implemented in pediatric health clinics, hospitals, and School-Based Health Centers and other school health offices.

Efforts could also focus on connecting with physicians and children in the Care for Kids program. Montgomery County's "Care for Kids [program] provides affordable primary, specialty, behavioral health, and dental care for nearly 6,000 children of low-income families who are not eligible for other state or federal health insurance programs."¹⁴⁰ Many of these children are not eligible for federal food benefit programs, and so connecting with them through a food is medicine program could help fill this critical gap.

At its core, this program would represent a partnership with medical professionals that work directly with children. This program would educate and empower these medical professionals to:

1. Screen for childhood food insecurity;
2. "Prescribe" free and nutritious food for children who screen as food insecure; and
3. Refer households with food insecure children to benefits enrollment experts.

Considering each of these in turn: screenings are more likely to occur if pediatricians are reimbursed for performing the screening. Ideally, this would be done by insurance providers, and the County should strongly advocate for such reimbursements. MCPS school health services clinicians could also perform food insecurity

screenings. Next, "prescribing" free food requires a steady supply of such food as well as someone to manage program logistics. This could take the form of a grant to one or more local food assistance providers to supply food boxes aimed at meeting the needs of food insecure children. It could also take the form of linking those households with free CSA farm share boxes. The later approach would have the benefit of supporting local farmers. Whatever approach is taken, the "prescription" needs to both be easy and fast to make and result in a reliable supply of healthy food. Finally, any "prescription" for food needs to also come with a referral to a benefits enrollment expert. Ideally, this referral would take the form of a "warm handoff" and not a simple brochure or phone number.

Cost

Linking children experiencing food insecurity with CSA farm share boxes or food assistance provider packed boxes would cost roughly \$15 per child per week.¹⁴¹ Supporting food "prescriptions" for 500 children would cost \$390,000 per year.¹⁴²

Impact

The impact will depend on the success and scale of the program, but it could easily be scaled to reach thousands of households.

Champions

This program would be a partnership between the County, pediatricians and clinicians, food access providers, and benefits enrollment experts. There is also a significant role for the private sector, including philanthropists, businesses (including grocery chains), and local farmers.

Caretaker Nutritional Training

Proposal

Work with non-profit organizations and local universities to deploy an online nutritional educational class for caretakers of young children. The class should focus on the unique challenges caretakers face when trying to feed young children experiencing food insecurity. Once the course(s) are developed and deployed, **completion of an online nutritional training course should be a condition of receiving support** via the other strategies highlighted in this plan.

Background

Stakeholders in multiple sessions highlighted the importance of adequate nutritional education for caretakers preparing meals for food insecure children. Many of the other strategies detailed in this plan focus on getting more nutritious food to food insecure children or increasing the buying power of food insecure families to purchase nutritious foods. Those important efforts should be combined with caretaker nutritional education aimed at helping families get the most out of the food and money. It is critical that caretakers help children develop good eating habits early, and ensure that those children have well-balanced meals to support their development. Many also highlighted excellent existing educational programs and materials developed by non-profit organizations including Capital Area Food Bank¹⁴³ and Manna Food Center, as well as the University of Maryland Extension's SNAP-Ed Program.¹⁴⁴ Both the subject matter experts and residents consulted indicated that the primary challenges of getting parents and other caretakers to complete nutritional training classes are a lack of time, a lack of childcare, and a lack of transportation. To overcome challenges,

NOVEL APPROACHES AND NEW PATHWAYS

Caretaker Nutritional Training

BACKGROUND

Stakeholders highlighted the importance of adequate nutritional education for caretakers preparing meals for food insecure children.

PROPOSAL

Working in collaboration with universities and nutritional experts, a nutritional program specifically for caretakers of young children could be developed and delivered to fill this gap.

IMPACT

Education for 100s of caretakers

LOW COST

\$50K development, \$10K delivery

nutritional education should be moved online, and provided asynchronously, so that parents can complete the courses when and where they can. The County should work to ensure that individuals who want to take the course have access to laptops and the Internet.¹⁴⁵ Many nutritional education programs operated virtually during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, proving that this mechanism can work. Courses should be offered in English and Spanish to reach a broad audience. Course(s) should be developed and deployed in coordination with organizations that already have good coursework that can be adapted easily. The County's primary role in this would be establishing and administering this training program in conjunction with the other strategies highlighted in this plan.

Cost

The cost of this solution is **\$50,000 as an initial investment, with \$10,000 per year to continue running the program.**¹⁴⁶ Many nutritional education programs already exist, so the cost of executing this strategy is that of adapting existing online program(s) and then administering a course completion requirement for receiving support.

The County should work with non-profit organizations and local universities to develop and deploy an online nutritional educational class for caretakers, leveraging the good work that is already being done in this area.

Impact

Thousands of children could be impacted by this strategy – especially if completion of this course is a condition of receiving County support. The long-term benefits of developing healthy eating habits is hard to understate.

Champions

This strategy should be executed collaboratively with local nutritional education experts, and leverage existing courses.

Financial Literacy Training and Education

Proposal

Work with non-profit organizations, local universities, and financial institutions to provide food insecure families with financial education, financial counseling, and budgeting tools. Financial literacy training should focus on the unique challenges faced by those trying to stretch limited budgets and those relying on benefit programs to buy necessities like food.

Background

Food insecurity stems from a lack of buying power, and many of the solutions proposed in this plan are aimed at increasing the buying power of families experiencing food insecurity by providing them direct fiscal support. Better budgeting, financial planning, and spending habits can also significantly increase a family's buying power. Making ends meet in a household with a budget that relies on SNAP, WIC, or other public benefits programs can be extremely difficult. Sadly, semi-predatory and unfair financial "service providers" are quick to offer high-interest pay-day loans, check cashing services, and high-interest credit cards as a way to "help" families make ends meet. Once families have accumulated debt they cannot repay, the damage to their credit score can preclude them from getting lower interest loans to purchase vehicles, cell phone plans, or homes. In this way, a relatively small bump in the road can have long-term impacts on a family's ability to stay solvent, and remain (or become) food secure.

Food assistance providers conveyed that a large number of SNAP participants still needed assistance by the end of the month. This all-too-common phenomenon is due in large part to insufficient benefits (SNAP/

NOVEL APPROACHES AND NEW PATHWAYS

Financial Literacy Training and Education

BACKGROUND
Food insecurity stems from a lack of buying power. Budgeting, financial planning, and spending habits can significantly increase a family's buying power.

PROPOSAL
Financial literacy and budgeting training could be offered to families facing food insecurity.

IMPACT

Support for 1000s of caretakers

MEDIUM COST

\$350K per year

WIC/etc. payments are too low to meet people's actual need). Providers also suggested that many of these situations could be avoided with appropriate planning, budgeting, and access to good financial counseling. They also indicate that financial literacy training and counseling is hard to come by, can be challenging to deliver, and much of the messaging around building savings, preparing for retirement, or saving for a home is not always relevant to the everyday budget challenges food insecure families face. It is critical to note, however, that while financial literacy training can help families make limited income and benefit dollars go further, it alone cannot alleviate childhood food insecurity for families that lack the financial resources to purchase enough healthy food.

The County could work with non-profit

organizations, local universities, and financial institutions to provide food insecure families with financial education, financial counseling, and budgeting tools. This financial literacy training should focus on the unique challenges faced by those trying to stretch limited budgets and those relying on benefit programs to buy necessities like food. Excellent programs already exist, like the **Gaithersburg Financial Empowerment Center** that “provides free one-on-one financial coaching to help you move toward greater financial stability.”¹⁴⁷ Gaithersburg is also working through their **Bank on Gaithersburg** program to provide “a path to mainstream banking for every resident.”¹⁴⁸ Programs like **CAFE Montgomery** leverage philanthropic dollars “to offer high-quality financial coaching at no cost ... in the Montgomery County area.”¹⁴⁹ CAFE Montgomery’s services include financial planning, counseling, benefits enrollment, and tax filing services; all offered at no cost.

Effective financial literacy programs should be scaled and colocated with food distributions in places like the County’s eight Service Consolidation Hubs. The County’s primary role in this would be establishing and administering this financial literacy support program in conjunction with the other strategies highlighted in this plan.

Cost

The approximate cost of operating a financial empowerment program out of the Service Consolidation Hubs would be approximately **\$350,000 per year**.¹⁵⁰ Many excellent financial literacy and counseling programs currently exist, so the cost of executing this strategy is that of scaling them to serve more families experiencing food insecurity, colocating them with food distributions, and then administering a course completion requirement for receiving support.

Impact

Thousands of children could be impacted by this strategy - especially if completion of this financial literacy training is a condition of receiving County support.

Champions

This work would be a partnership between existing financial empowerment programs (which could likely scale up), food assistance providers in general and the food assistance Hubs in particular (who could serve as referrers and host organizations), the County (who could serve a funding and administrative role), foundations and philanthropic donors (like the Cities For Financial Empowerment Fund¹⁵¹), and local banks and financial services providers.

Gardening Grant Program

Proposal

Create an annual \$50,000 grant to fund the creation of a dozen new community gardens or hydroponic indoor gardens a year specifically aimed at addressing childhood food insecurity.

Background

Gardening is a cost-effective way to supplement food insecure children’s diets with nutritious fruits and vegetables. Gardens produce fresh fruits and vegetables, which are the most expensive and difficult ingredients to provide to food insecure families. Garden crops can be tailored to tastes and cultural preferences, and children can be involved in the setup, maintenance, and harvesting of these fresh ingredients. Involving children in gardening helps them build an appreciation of healthy eating habits.

The County has a gardening grant program designed to provide financial support to community and personal gardening efforts that serve food insecure individuals. This existing grant program could serve as a model for a grant program designed to fund gardens specifically aimed at supporting food insecure children. Schools, Head Start and Early Head Start locations, libraries, and public parks would be ideal locations for these gardens.

Technology has made it possible to garden indoors as well, meaning that indoor gardens could be established in places that do not have outdoor space. Hydroponic towers make it possible to garden indoors at daycares, childcare centers, recreation centers, and other places where their bounty could be shared directly with food insecure children. Indoor hydroponic systems have been successfully piloted by local food access

NOVEL APPROACHES AND NEW PATHWAYS

Gardening Grant Program

BACKGROUND
Gardening is a cost-effective way to supplement food insecure children’s diets with nutritious fruits and vegetables.

PROPOSAL
Expansion of gardening grant programs could focus on funding the establishment of community gardens and/or indoor gardens aimed at combating childhood food insecurity.

IMPACT Fresh vegetables for 100s of children

LOW COST \$100K per year

providers who report that a single grow tower can produce \$3,000 dollars in fresh vegetables a year.¹⁵²

Cost

Currently, the County’s annual base budget includes \$50,000 for gardening grants, but high quality applications for these grants far exceeded this amount in 2022. This grant program could be expanded to \$150,000, and a preference could be given to funding gardens whose harvest goes to specifically support food insecure children.¹⁵³ This would fund the creation of a dozen new community gardens or hydroponic setups a year.

Impact

Gardens produce fresh fruits and vegetables, which are the most expensive

and difficult ingredients to provide food insecure families. The practical impact of garden-grown food on food insecurity is limited by the inherently small scale of gardening, the limited growing season, and the consistent hard work that successful gardening requires. Gardening's impact goes beyond calories though, as it offers an opportunity for children to get involved in food production and helps them develop healthy eating habits.

Champions

The forthcoming Office of Food System Resilience would be a logical champion for this effort. The new office would be in a good position to conduct outreach to potential grant applicants, including schools, childcare centers, home daycares, libraries, and recreation centers. Community gardening groups are also an ideal place to form philanthropic partnerships.

Improved Data-driven Decision Making

Proposal

The County's forthcoming Office of Food System Resilience, with its dedicated Food System Research Analyst, should undertake updating FoodStat and expanding the data sources analyzed to include grant and programmatic data from County-funded childhood hunger interventions. Specific efforts around data collection and analysis are covered in the sections that follow.

Background

Collecting data on food insecurity is notoriously difficult.¹⁵⁴ Without reliable data, it can be difficult to evaluate the impact of current and new interventions and inform future policy and investment decision making. Most measurements of childhood hunger are indirect, as they are often whole-population measurements based on census data. Even when smaller scale interventions (like gardening, for example) are highly effective, they do not address the food insecurity of enough individuals to have a measurable impact on whole-population measurements. Moreover, even the effect of large-scale interventions (universal school meals, for example) can get lost in the tide of general economic prosperity or decline. A further complicating issue is the interpretation of common measures - like that of the total number of food insecure individuals in Montgomery County. Effective large-scale interventions could drive this number down as more residents are lifted out of poverty. They could also increase this number, by making it possible for more families to stay in Montgomery County and endure the high cost of living instead of moving away. There are many poverty reduction interventions taking place in Montgomery County at the same time, which can make it difficult to measure the impact of any single intervention on macroeconomic indicators accurately. A lack of

NOVEL APPROACHES AND NEW PATHWAYS

Improved Data-driven Decision Making

BACKGROUND

Without reliable data it can be difficult to evaluate the impact of current and new interventions and inform future policy and investment decision making.

PROPOSAL

Updating FoodStat and expanding the data sources analyzed to include grant and programmatic data from County-funded childhood hunger interventions.

IMPACT

More efficient programs

LOW COST

Positions already funded.

reliable food insecurity data was identified by the Montgomery County Food Security Task Force in its Final Report of Challenges and Solutions, and encountered again in drafting this plan. With all this in mind, presented below are a set of actionable strategies to improve data-based decision making as it relates to childhood hunger interventions.

Update and Maintain FoodStat

FOODSTAT

The Montgomery County Food Council, along with Manna Food Center, the Capital Area Food Bank, and Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services worked closely with CountyStat to create FoodStat - an online platform that provides context for and further supplements the Feeding America data on levels of food insecurity.¹⁵⁵ Food-

Stat brought together more than 60 data indicators of need and vulnerability. The goal was that FoodStat would enable government agencies, food assistance providers, and any other interested parties to analyze the community's access to food, its transportation and infrastructure needs, high priority zones, and service delivery gaps. This would then lead to the creation of policies and strategies that would inform priorities, drive collective impact, and ultimately reduce food insecurity in Montgomery County.

FoodStat is a great start to measuring the impact of, and need for, additional food insecurity interventions, but it needs to be updated. The data presented on FoodStat is years old, and does not reflect the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Montgomery County. Ideally, FoodStat would be: (1) updated regularly (with automatic data feeds where possible); and (2) include programmatic data from County funded food systems grants and programs.

Improve Data Collection from Food Insecurity Interventions

Currently, each food insecurity-related County grant comes with its own set of reporting requirements. These reports, designed to track the effectiveness of County-funded interventions, should be a goldmine of critical data on the state of food insecurity in the County. Unfortunately, these reports vary significantly in how they measure intervention. Some require the submission of unduplicated numbers of individuals served, while others only collect aggregate numbers. A recurring theme of these reports is that they focus on what **actions** were taken and how money was spent (number of people assisted, pounds of food served, meals prepared, etc.), but they do not tend to track the **actual outcomes** (measuring changes in health, food insecurity, etc.) of those served. Coun-

ty-funded interventions should include outcome measures to the greatest extent possible, and be standardized for cross-program comparison. When possible, these should feed directly into FoodStat.

Data Sharing Agreement with WIC

The WIC program is administered through a state office that has address-level data on WIC receipts and usage. This data would be helpful for mapping areas of particular need. Unfortunately, this data can only be shared with counties under a special data-sharing agreement, which Montgomery County currently lacks. Montgomery County should get a data sharing agreement in place, and add geographic and WIC trend data to FoodStat.

Longitudinal Cohort Studies

Measurements of food insecurity that present the state of food insecure individuals as a set number or percentage fail to paint a full picture of food insecurity in Montgomery County. They do not measure how long individuals have been food insecure, or if they have been food insecure before. They do not indicate which benefits programs are helping the most, or how many individuals are relying on which food assistance programs. This information is critical to understanding the true nature of food insecurity in Montgomery County. In Montgomery County, is food insecurity an issue mostly of benefit inadequacy or benefit ineligibility? Does providing a child a free school meal make their family less reliant on food distributions? How long does a food insecure child typically stay food insecure in Montgomery County? How many food insecure families leave Montgomery County to seek a lower cost of living? These questions can only be answered by conducting organized longitudinal cohort studies that follow sets of food insecure individuals in Montgomery County

for long periods of time. These studies could track what benefits and service programs they interact with, and how those programs change their situation over time. Without primary research that follows Montgomery County families over time, decision makers will be left to rely on generalized academic research about intervention effectiveness in other places, census-based population data, and anecdotes from subject matter experts.

Better Coordination of MCPS Adjacent Program Data

The MCPS system is a unique and critical asset in the community's effort to end childhood hunger. For this reason, many social service interventions are colocated at public schools. One challenge faced in compiling this plan was determining which food insecurity related programs were operating at which schools. At a minimum, a definitive single source responsible for tracking the following would be very helpful:

- School geospatial data - including location and territory;
- School Enrollment data;
- FARMs rate and FARMs direct certification data;
- Locations of special services programs such as:
 - Title I Schools
 - Focus Schools
 - Community Schools
 - Linkages to Learning
 - School-Based Health and Wellness Centers
 - Pre-K and HeadStart classrooms
- Locations of feeding/food assistance programs such as:
 - Universal free meal schools
 - Maryland Meals For Achievement
 - Summer meals
 - Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Program

- In-school pantries
- School distributions and fresh markets
- Weekend bag programs

The authors of this plan were able to locate (and include in this report) this information, but the process involved reaching out to the various program administrators to determine in which schools they operated. It would be beneficial to MCPS, DHHS, and the OFSR to have a single and reliably updated list of all the school-adjacent social services; these services could then be organized according to which schools participate in them. This is a list that the OFSR could produce and maintain in collaboration with MCPS. The OFSR could use the data from the list to identify potentially duplicative programs and inform decisions about where additional services might be needed.

Cost

The cost of a dedicated research and data analysis professional is already a part of the Office of Food System Resilience budget. Conducting longitudinal cohort studies would come at additional cost, and would likely require a partnership with an academic institution with expertise in this area.

Impact

Ironically, it is difficult to measure the impact of good data without having said data - but in a world of limited resources, it is hard to understate its value. It is difficult to efficiently address childhood hunger without accurately measuring food insecurity, poverty, demographic trends, and intervention effectiveness.

The County's forthcoming Office of Food System Resilience, with its dedicated Data and Research Analyst, will be well positioned, and funded, to champion this work. Local academic institutions could play a key role in helping the County design cohort studies to measure long-term trends and patterns.

Advocacy, Leadership, and Change

This plan focuses on actionable items that the Montgomery County government can do to address childhood food insecurity within its borders, but there are a number of changes at the state and federal level that would have a huge impact locally. Each section below details an area that would benefit from Montgomery County's vigorous advocacy.

Changes to SNAP

Montgomery County should continue to advocate at the state and local level for:

1. SNAP benefits to increase, as many residents report that current benefit amounts are inadequate to meet their needs.¹⁵⁶
2. Expanded eligibility for SNAP to provide more support to more people. Raising the income threshold, as well as reducing barriers to participation would benefit Montgomery County.¹⁵⁷
3. Streamlined and simplified enrollment and recertification process to make it easier for residents to complete without professional assistance.¹⁵⁸

Changes to Free Meal Programs

Montgomery County should continue to advocate at the state and local level for:

1. Universal free school meals. Eating lunch is a part of going to school, and similar to riding the bus or using the school's library, school meals should be available to any child that needs them, regardless of household income level. This expansion could be funded at either the state or federal level.¹⁵⁹
2. The continued expansion of school breakfast programs, like the Maryland Meals For Achievement program.¹⁶⁰
3. The removal or revision of the "standardized menu" requirement of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). The steep decline in CACFP participation in Montgomery County in the past three years is primarily a result of the recent policy change requiring providers that receive CACFP funds to use and fully document a standardized menu.¹⁶¹ Offering such a menu can be a major challenge for those providers seeking to provide culturally appropriate or specialized meals to children.

Changes to Other Programs

1. The Maryland Market Money program doubles benefits spending power at farmers' markets.¹⁶² These markets are at their peak in the summer, when many children are out of school. The County should consider expansion of the Maryland Market Money program and promote its use to households with children.
2. The County should consider additional training for MCPS teachers on how to recognize food insecurity in students and where to refer those students.

Other Systemic Changes

Montgomery County should advocate for:

1. The expansion of reimbursement for the use of the Hunger Vital Sign.¹⁶³ Reimbursement by insurance companies will be critical to increasing the adoption of this important food insecurity screening tool.
2. The adoption of case-management system(s) by food assistance providers, benefits enrollment experts, and others. The County does not currently have a unified case management system for tracking and assisting children experiencing food insecurity. Families who receive free food from providers largely go untracked. This means that they are often not linked with additional forms of assistance that could address the root causes of their food insecurity (e.g. benefits enrollment, rental assistance, educational or job training, etc.). This also contributes to the lack of reliable data on how many people are truly in need, as a single individual might be served by multiple providers.¹⁶⁴
3. State and local tax changes that increase the buying power of households with children, including continuation and expansion of child tax care credits.¹⁶⁵

Conclusion and Next Steps

This plan represents the first step in the process of ending childhood hunger in Montgomery County, providing a variety of strategies for County leaders to consider. When considering which strategies to pursue, special attention should be paid to forthcoming federal and state efforts aimed at addressing food insecurity. The COVID-19 pandemic shined a spotlight on how fragile food systems can be, and highlighted the need for additional federal and state resources to combat food insecurity. As of the publication of this report multiple funding, rule, and legal changes are being considered at both the federal and state level to address food insecurity. Montgomery County would be wise to follow those changes carefully, and align local strategies accordingly. The next step is for County leaders to identify which recommendations they would like to explore further in partnership with the identified champions, and commit to long-term action in partnership with residents, community partners, and the private sector to leverage all available tools and resources to end childhood hunger in Montgomery County.

When considering the cost of implementing these strategies the County should bear in mind the substantial cost of inaction. Research notes that prolonged food insecurity among children can have implications over their entire lives, including negative impacts on health, education, and employment.^{166,167} Childhood food insecurity in Montgomery County can, and should, be addressed.

Plan Creation

The Strategic Plan to End Childhood Hunger resulted from the passage of Resolution Number 19-1235, which was introduced in the Montgomery County Council by then-Council President Gabe Albornoz in May 2022. This resolution funded a contract between the Department of Health and Human Services and the Montgomery County Food Council to design a comprehensive government strategy to end childhood hunger in the County.

The Montgomery County Food Council hired a consultant with the University of Maryland's Center for Health and Homeland Security to establish baseline data and conduct landscape assessment, and, in collaboration with Food Council staff, to lead the writing process and working group operations. Over the course of four months, the Montgomery County Food Council conducted multiple stakeholder meetings, an online resident survey, and, together with community partners, resident listening sessions, to gather feedback to inform the creation of this plan:

Advisory Group Meetings: An Advisory Group composed of 31 representatives from a total of 23 public and private organizations working to support children experiencing food insecurity was established to guide the plan's development process; advise on matters relating to data sources, resident engagement, and stakeholder outreach; and, provide feedback and direction on plan recommendations. The Advisory Group met four times and a subgroup met on one occasion to review resident listening session questions and protocols.

Stakeholder Meetings: The Montgomery County Food Council held a total of 13 Strategic Brainstorming Group meetings and 20 key informant meetings with subject matter experts with a total of over 142 participants across all 33 meetings. Strategic Brainstorming Group Meetings covered six different intervention pathways: Benefits program centered approaches, Early Childhood, School-based strategies, Out-of-school strategies, Emergency Food Access, and Healthcare-focused strategies. Each of these groups met twice, and then all six groups convened together in a third and final Strategic Brainstorming Group Meeting.

Resident Survey: The Montgomery County Food Council developed and disseminated the Montgomery County Childhood Hunger Survey in both English and Spanish. The 15-question survey was created by Community Science, a county-based evaluation firm, and implemented via SurveyMonkey from August 25, 2022 through September 15, 2022. It was shared through the Food Council's channels (e.g., distribution lists, social media) and partners to share with others (e.g., food assistance providers) and also distributed via the county Department of Health and Human Services and other county government communication channels. More than 1,300 responses were received. Results were analyzed by SharpInsight, a county-based evaluation firm. See Appendices for a summary report of findings.

Resident Listening Sessions: To obtain qualitative input from County residents with children who were experiencing food insecurity, the Montgomery County Food Council worked with three community partner organizations to host four listening sessions with their clients and within their communities.

- Identity, Inc. (10 participants, conducted in Spanish)
- Manna Food Center (5 participants, conducted in English)
- Manna Food Center (5 participants, conducted in Spanish)
- The UpCounty Hub (10 participants, conducted in Spanish)

Key takeaways were summarized and compared against the Montgomery County Childhood Hunger Survey findings by Community Science, a County-based evaluation firm. See Appendix D.

Additional Outreach: The Montgomery County Food Council comprehensively shared information regarding the plan's purpose, progress, and content across its network of over 2,000 contacts through stakeholder meetings and communications channels during the development phase, including the Montgomery County Food Council's Food Security Community Call, Food Education Working Group Meeting, Environmental Impact Working Group, Food Economy Working Group, Food Council Board Meeting, Food Council Member Internal Meeting, Food Security Community Advisory Board, website, and newsletters shared with more than 2,500 subscribers; the Healthy Montgomery Steering Committee Meeting; the Montgomery County Public Schools Food Access Team Meeting; the All Hubs Monthly Meeting; and, the Healthcare Initiative Foundation Community Partners Meeting.

Prepared by



MONTGOMERY COUNTY
FOOD COUNCIL

www.mocofoodcouncil.org

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Glossary of Terms

Case Management

A collaborative process of assessment, planning, facilitation, care coordination, evaluation, and advocacy for options and services to meet an individual's and family's comprehensive health needs through communication and available resources to promote quality, cost-effective outcomes.

Community Eligibility Provision

The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) is a non-pricing meal service option for schools and school districts in low-income areas. CEP allows the nation's highest poverty schools and districts to serve breakfast and lunch at no cost to all enrolled students without collecting household applications. Instead, schools that adopt CEP are reimbursed using a formula based on the percentage of students categorically eligible for free meals based on their participation in other specific means-tested programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/community-eligibility-provision>

Community Schools

In Maryland, a community school is any school that receives Concentration of Poverty Grants. The grants are formula-based and awarded to schools on an annual basis. The determining factor for eligibility is the 4-year average of the percentage of the school's students living in poverty (excluding 2020-2021 school year), as determined by the compensatory education enrollment. This is essentially the number of students receiving free and reduced price meals.

<https://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Pages/DSFSS/Community-Schools/Index.aspx>

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

A community of individuals who pledge support to a farm operation so that the farmland becomes, either legally or spiritually, the community's farm. The growers and consumers provide mutual support and share the risks and benefits of food production.

<https://www.nal.usda.gov/farms-and-agricultural-production-systems/community-supported-agriculture>

Electronic Benefits Transfer Card (EBT)

Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) is an electronic system that allows a Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participant to pay for food using SNAP benefits. When a participant shops at a SNAP authorized retail store, their SNAP EBT account is debited to reimburse the store for food that was purchased. EBT is in use in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and Guam. EBT has been the sole method of SNAP issuance in all states since June of 2004.

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/ebt>

Farmers Markets

A food market at which local farmers and food producers sell food and beverage products directly to consumers.

Free and Reduced-price Meals (FARMs)

Free and Reduced-price Meals are available to eligible students through the National School Lunch Program.

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/nslp>

Food Banks

A nonprofit organization (large in size) that distributes food to smaller food pantries as well as directly to people experiencing food insecurity.

Food Insecurity

Food insecurity is the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.

<https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/definitions-of-food-security/>

Food Pantry

A nonprofit organization (typically small in size), such as faith-based organizations or community agencies, that receives donated food items and distributes them to food insecure people for preparation at home. A food pantry will often receive its supply of food from a food bank.

Food Security

For a household, food security means access by all members at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. Food security includes at a minimum: the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods; and assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways (that is, without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing, or other coping strategies).

<https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/definitions-of-food-security/>

Linkages to Learning

Linkages to Learning is a prevention and intervention initiative established by the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services (MCDHHS), MCPS, and local public and private nonprofit agencies. Linkages to Learning assists students and their families by providing or connecting them to services and resources that address the social, economic, health, and emotional issues that may interfere with student success. The organization assists whole school communities by bringing additional partners and resources into the school house to offer a range of supports and opportunities to students and families.

<https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/community-engagement/linkages-to-learning/>

Maryland Market Money (MMM)

Maryland Market Money (MMM) is a statewide food access program that feeds Marylanders and supports farmers. MMM removes economic barriers for Marylanders experiencing food insecurity, providing a dollar-for-dollar match for purchases made using federal nutrition benefits at participating Maryland farmers markets, farm stands, and CSAs.

<https://www.marylandmarketmoney.org/>

Maryland Meals For Achievement (MMFA)

Maryland Meals for Achievement (MMFA) provides state funds to allow participating schools to implement free breakfast in the classroom. This model increases students' access to and participation in breakfast.

<https://www.marylandpublicschools.org/programs/Pages/School-Community-Nutrition/MMFAData.aspx>

Maryland Summer SNAP for Children

Maryland Summer SNAP for Children provides a \$30 monthly cash benefit for food during the summer months and \$10 during winter break to reduce food insecurity and improve the diets of low-income children. The Maryland Department of Human Services' Family Investment Administration administers Summer SNAP. State law requires that local jurisdictions apply to participate in Summer SNAP and agree to contribute local funds.

<https://dhs.maryland.gov/p-ebt/>

Medicaid Direct Certification

The Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 amended section 1902(a)(7) of the Social Security Act (the Act) to permit Medicaid agencies to enter into data-sharing agreements with state agencies that administer the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program. These data-sharing agreements allow the state agencies to directly certify students to receive both free and reduced price school meals based on the child's Medicaid eligibility and verified income. Direct certification has the potential to improve student access to school meals, reduce administrative burden for schools and families, and improve certification accuracy.

<https://www.medicaid.gov/federal-policy-guidance/downloads/cib08182022.pdf>

National School Lunch Program (NSLP)

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is a federally assisted meal program operating in public and nonprofit private schools and residential child care institutions. It provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free lunches to children each school day.

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/nslp>

Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT)

Pandemic-EBT, or P-EBT, are intended to help families in Maryland purchase food while schools are closed due to COVID-19. P-EBT provides SNAP-like to children that would have received free or reduced price meals if not for COVID-related school closures.

<https://dhs.maryland.gov/p-ebt/>

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/ebt>

Self-Sufficiency Standard

The amount needed to meet each basic need at a minimally adequate level, without public or private assistance. The assumptions and data components that go into the calculations are: costs of housing, food, health care, child care, transportation, taxes and tax credits, emergency savings, and miscellaneous expenses. In Montgomery County, the Self-Sufficiency Standard for a family of four (2 adults, 1 preschool aged child, 1 school-aged child) is \$91,252 (calculated by the Center for Women's Welfare at the University of Washington).

<https://selfsufficiencystandard.org/>

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly the Food Stamp Program) is the Nation's largest domestic food and nutrition assistance program, administered by the USDA for low-income Americans. SNAP provides nutrition assistance to eligible, low-income individuals, and households via a monthly benefit on an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card. Similar to a debit card, it can be used at authorized retailer stores to purchase food. SNAP is the largest Federal nutrition assistance program in the US.

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/>

The Blueprint

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future was passed by the Maryland General Assembly in 2021 to transform public education in the state into a world-class education system. The Blueprint will increase education funding by \$3.8 billion each year over the next 10 years, enrich student experiences and accelerate student outcomes, as well as improve the quality of education for all children in Maryland, especially those who have been historically underserved.

<https://blueprint.marylandpublicschools.org/>

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)

A federal program that provides reimbursements for nutritious meals and snacks to eligible children and adults who are enrolled for care at participating child care centers, day care facilities, and adult day care centers. CACFP also provides reimbursements for meals served to children and youth participating in afterschool care programs, children residing in emergency shelters, and adults over the age of 60 or living with a disability and enrolled in day care facilities.

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp>

WIC (The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children)

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provides federal grants to states for supplemental foods, health care referrals, and nutrition education for low-income pregnant, breastfeeding, and non-breastfeeding postpartum women, and to infants and children up to age 5 who are found to be at nutritional risk.

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic>

Working Parents Assistance (WPA)

Montgomery County's Working Parents Assistance (WPA) Program is a County-sponsored program that is committed to helping eligible county residents pay for child care. While parents are at work or school, they can feel confident that their children are in a safe and caring environment.

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Program.aspx?id=CYF/CYFChildCareSubs-p307.html>

End Notes

- 1 <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/definitions-of-food-security/>
- 2 Gundersen, C., M. Hake, A. Dewey, E. Engelhard (2021). The Impact of the Coronavirus on Food Insecurity in 2020 & 2021, Update March 2021 [Data file and FAQ]. Available from Feeding America: research@feedingamerica.org.
- 3 Based on estimates in the U.S. Census, American Community Survey, Table B17024. (2021).
- 4 The University of Washington Center for Women's Welfare Self-Sufficiency Standard "defines the income working families need to meet a minimum yet adequate level, taking into account family composition, ages of children, and geographic differences in costs. The Standard is an affordability and living wage economic security measure that provides an alternative to the official poverty measure." <https://selfsufficiencystandard.org/washington/>
- 5 For a detailed discussion of the University of Washington's Self-Sufficiency Standard, and its application to Montgomery County, see "Children Living in Households below Poverty of Self-Sufficiency" section below.
- 6 For a detailed discussion see "Considering Race" section below. U.S. Census Data. 2015 ACS 5-Year Estimate Selected Population Detailed Table B17001.
- 7 For a more detailed discussion see "Considering Languages Spoken" below. U.S. Census Data. 2020 ACS 5-Year Estimate Detailed Table B16009.
- 8 Food Research and Action Center. "Screen and Intervene: A Toolkit for Pediatricians to Address Food Insecurity". January 2021. https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/FRAC_AAP_Toolkit_2021_032122.pdf
- 9 Food Research and Action Center. "Hunger, Poverty, and Health Disparities During COVID-19 and the Federal Nutrition Programs' Role in an Equitable Recovery." September 2021, <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/COVIDResearchReport-2021.pdf>
- 10 Drennen, Chloe et. al. "Food Insecurity, Health, and Development in Children Under Age Four Years." Pediatrics vol. 144, no. 4. Oct. 2019.
- 11 Id.
- 12 See, Food Research and Action Center. "Hunger, Poverty, and Health Disparities During COVID-19 and the Federal Nutrition Programs' Role in an Equitable Recovery." September 2021, <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/COVIDResearchReport-2021.pdf>
- 13 U.S. Census, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Table S0101 (2020).
- 14 Id.
- 15 Making this distinction explicitly clear was recommended by the Committee on National Statistics (CNSTAT), an arm of the National Research Council (a body of the National Academies), in a requested review of the USDA's efforts to measure food insecurity. Available at <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/definitions-of-food-security/>.
- 16 Webb, Patrick, Jennifer Coates, Edward A. Frongillo, Beatrice Lorge Rogers, Anne Swindale, and Paula Billinsky. "Measuring Household Food Insecurity: Why It's So Important and Yet So Difficult to Do." The Journal of Nutrition 136, no. 5 (May 1, 2006): 1404S-1408S. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1093/jn/136.5.1404S>.
- 17 Gundersen, C., M. Hake, A. Dewey, E. Engelhard (2021). The Impact of the Coronavirus on Food Insecurity in 2020 & 2021, Update March 2021 [Data file and FAQ]. Available from Feeding America: research@feedingamerica.org
- 18 Id.
- 19 Map The Meal Gap 2020 Technical Appendix at 3. Available at <https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/Map%20the%20Meal%20Gap%202020%20Technical%20Brief-Updated.pdf>
- 20 87 FR 3315
- 21 Based on estimates in the U.S. Census, American Community Survey, Table B17024. (2021).
- 22 The University of Washington Center for Women's Welfare Self-Sufficiency Standard "defines the income working families need to meet a minimum yet adequate level, taking into account family composition, ages of children, and geographic differences in costs. The Standard is an affordability and living wage economic security measure that provides an alternative to the official poverty measure." Further information is available at: <https://selfsufficiencystandard.org/washington/>
- 23 To see specific self-sufficiency levels please explore the Montgomery County Interactive Self-sufficiency Tool at [Interactive Self-Sufficiency Standard](#).
- 24 Too much being more than 185% of the FPL.
- 25 Too much being more than 130% of the FPL. Based on estimates in the US Census, American Community Survey, Table B17024. (2021). Note - Census does not report specifically on 130% of FPL so this is calculated as those below 125% plus 20% of those below 150%.
- 26 U.S. Census Data. 2020 ACS 5-Year Estimate Detailed Table B17024.
- 27 Based on estimates in the US Census, American Community Survey, Table B17024. (2021). Note - Census does not report specifically on 130% of poverty level so this is calculated as those below 125% plus 20% of those below 150%.
- 28 U.S. Census Data. 2015 ACS 5-Year Estimate Selected Population Detailed Table B17001.
- 29 U.S. Census Data. 2020 ACS 5-Year Estimate Detailed Table B16009.
- 30 U.S. Census Data. 2020 ACS 5-Year Estimate Detailed Table B09010.
- 31 See generally. USDA Food & Nutrition Service. "National School Lunch Program." 2022. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/nslp>
- 32 Data provided by Montgomery County Public Schools. (November, 2022)
- 33 Data from MCPS.
- 34 See USDA Food & Nutrition Service. "Child Nutrition Programs: Community Eligibility Provision." 2019. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/community-eligibility-provision>
- 35 "This model increases students' access to and participation in breakfast. School administrators credit the MMFA with improving students' test scores, behavior, attendance, and wellbeing. Parents praise the program for assisting children to prepare for their academic day." MSDE. "Maryland Meals for Achievement." <https://www.marylandpublicschools.org/programs/SchoolandCommunityNutrition/Pages/Programs/MMFA.aspx>.
- 36 Data from MCPS, number of children receiving free breakfast is based on 2022 enrollment numbers at the 91 participating MCPS schools.
- 37 Maryland Hunger Solution, Maryland Meals for Achievement, available at <https://www.mdhungersolutions.org/federal-nutrition-programs/school-breakfast-program-sbp/maryland-meals-for-achievement/>
- 38 The 26 schools that have FARMs rate above 40%, but are not in MMFA are Albert Einstein, Bayard Rustin, Clearspring, Col. Zadok A. Magruder, Damascus, Gaithersburg HS, Harriet R. Tubman, James Hubert Blake, Longview School, Lucy V. Barnsley, MacDonald Knolls, Montgomery Blair, Northwood, Paint Branch, Regional Inst. for Children & Adolescents (RICA), Ridgeview, Rock Terrace, Rockville, Rocky Hill, Rosemary Hills, Seneca Valley, Stephen Knolls School, Takoma Park, Thurgood Marshall, Up County Early Childhood Center, Wheaton. Estimate of new children getting breakfast is based on 2022 enrollment. Data from MCPS.
- 39 Montgomery County Food Security Task Force, Final Report of Challenges and Solutions. (July 2022).
- 40 "The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the largest federal nutrition assistance program." [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\) | Benefits.gov](#)
- 41 Id.
- 42 Food Research Action Center (FRAC). "The Positive Effect of SNAP Benefits on Participants and Communities." 2023. <https://frac.org/programs/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap/positive-effect-snap-benefits-participants-communities>
- 43 See for example: the Pandemic Electronic Benefits Program (P-EBT) which, "provide[d] benefits to younger [than school-aged] children in households participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) whose covered child care facility is closed or operating with reduced hours or attendance, or

- who live in the area of schools that are closed or operating with reduced hours or attendance.” [State Guidance on Coronavirus P-EBT | Food and Nutrition Service](#). See also the significant expansion of SNAP during COVID via emergency allotments, waivers, and flexibilities, a list of which can be found at [Maryland: COVID-19 Waivers & Flexibilities | Food and Nutrition Service](#).
- 44 “SNAP is a proven intervention to address food insecurity; however, not everyone who has income low enough to qualify for the program is eligible. For example, federal law currently prohibits many formerly incarcerated individuals—a number of whom are parents of young children—from accessing SNAP benefits, jeopardizing their health and making it more likely they will struggle to successfully re-enter society and avoid re-offending.” [Biden-Harris Administration National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health](#) at 9, citing The Sentencing Project, *A Lifetime of Punishment: The Impact of the Felony Drug Ban on Welfare Benefits* (2015, September).
- 45 Note: SNAP was formerly (colloquially sometimes still is) referred to as “food stamps”.
- 46 See Baltimore Banner, SNAP enrollment drops sharply in Maryland; some say staffing shortages, policy shifts partially to blame (August 08, 2022) which documents the many reasons eligible people are dropped from SNAP rolls, and the highlights the critical role enrollment coordinators play in keeping people in the program.
- 47 Q15 9A: “I don’t know how to apply (26.69%).”, “I’m not sure if my child is eligible (26.10%).”, “I feel embarrassed (24.14%).”, “I’m not sure if I’m eligible (23.75%).”
- 48 See “Joint Letter on Public Charge: Food and Nutrition Service.” Oct 2019. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/joint-letter-public-charge>
- 49 Citation to survey needed.
- 50 See “SNAP Outreach Community Based Organizations - Maryland Department of Human Services.” 2023. <https://dhs.maryland.gov/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program/snap-outreach-program/snap-outreach-community-based-organizations>
- 51 Id.
- 52 This is based on an estimated cost for the training and outreach expert with an annual salary of \$80,000, and five enrollment experts with an annual salary of \$60,000 each with \$50,000 of administration, technology, materials, and other costs per year. This assumes that the training and outreach expert can also supervise the efforts of the five enrollment experts.
- 53 Under the USDA’s National School Meals Program, which is discussed at length in the “Expanding Free School Meals” section of this plan.
- 54 Under the USDA’s Child and Adult Care Feeding Program, which is discussed at length in the “Expanding Free Daycare Meals” section of this plan.
- 55 Food Research Action Center (FRAC). “The Positive Effect of SNAP Benefits on Participants and Communities.” 2023, <https://frac.org/programs/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap/positive-effect-snap-benefits-participants-communities>
- 56 This is based on anecdotal data from CBOs, who indicate that they are working at full capacity without advertising their services, or performing outreach, and feedback from residents that many of them do not know where to or how to seek help signing up for benefits. Additionally, many of the likely “front-line” referral sources interviewed are not currently making SNAP enrollment referrals, but would if properly trained to do so. Furthermore, from March to June 2022, 7,676 children in Montgomery County were dropped from SNAP enrollment. While the exact reason for this steep decline is unknown, this drop coincides with the post-COVID reintroduction of redeterminations.
- 57 See Food Action Resource Center (FRAC), “Initiatives to Make SNAP Benefits More Adequate Significantly Improve Food Security”, which analyzes why SNAP benefits are inadequate, reviews the body of research showing positive effects from more adequate SNAP benefits, and offers key policy solutions to improve benefit adequacy. More information is available at <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/snap-initiatives-to-make-snap-benefits-more-adequate.pdf>
- 58 Food Resource Action Center (FRAC). “Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Initiatives to Make SNAP Benefits More Adequate Significantly Improve Food Security, Nutrition, and Health.” February 2019. <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/snap-initiatives-to-make-snap-benefits-more-adequate.pdf>
- 59 Maryland SB 218/HB 338 (2019).
- 60 Data provided by Montgomery County Health and Human Services. Special thanks to Social Services Officer & Deputy Chief Oscar Mensah, Ph.D. for helping compile these numbers.
- 61 USDA Food and Nutrition Services. “Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT) Questions and Answers for Retailers.” Nov 2020. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/pandemic-ebt-questions-and-answers-retailers>
- 62 Maryland Department of Human Services. “Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) Program.” Oct. 2021. <https://dhs.maryland.gov/p-ebt/>
- 63 Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. “New Food Insecurity Data Highlighted Need for Permanent Summer EBT Program.” Sept. 2022. <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/new-food-insecurity-data-highlight-need-for-permanent-summer-ebt-program>
- 64 See for example: The Hamilton Institute finding, “that Pandemic EBT reduced food hardship experienced by low-income families with children and lifted at least 2.7-3.9 million children out of hunger.” Full report at [The Effect of Pandemic EBT on Measures of Food Hardship](#).
- 65 H.R.8450 — 117th Congress (2021-2022) [Text - H.R.8450 - 117th Congress \(2021-2022\): Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids Act | Congress.gov](#)
- 66 Maryland Department of Human Services. “Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): Eligibility Rules.” 2022. <https://dhs.maryland.gov/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program/eligibility-rules/>
- “There are exceptions for refugees, asylees, immigrants whose deportation has been withheld, Cuban/Haitian entrants, Amerasians and some immigrants legally admitted for permanent residence, parolees, aliens granted conditional entry, and certain battered spouses and children. Border Crossing Native Americans, certain Iraqi and Afghan immigrants, victims of human trafficking and Hmong or Laotian tribe members may also be eligible. Even if some members of your household are not eligible, those who are may be able to get food supplement benefits.”
- 67 Primary Care Coalition. “Care for Kids.” 2019. <https://www.primarycarecoalition.org/care-for-kids.html>
- 68 “One in 5 adults in immigrant families with children (20.0 percent) and almost 3 in 10 of those in low-income immigrant families with children (28.8 percent) reported that they or a family member avoided one or more noncash public benefits or other help with basic needs in 2020 because of concerns about green card status or other immigration-related reasons. . . . Adults in immigrant families with children reported that their families most often avoided SNAP (7.7 percent), followed by Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (6.3 percent).” Jennifer M. Haley, Genevieve M. Kenney, Hamutal Bernstein, Dulce Gonzalez, *Many Immigrant Families with Children Continued to Avoid Public Benefits in 2020, Despite Facing Hardships*, Urban Institute (2021). <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/many-immigrant-families-children-continued-avoid-public-benefits-2020-despite-facing-hardships>.
- See also, USDA and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, *Joint Letter on Public Charge*. (2022). <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/joint-letter-public-charge>.
- 69 Primary Care Coalition. “Care for Kids.” 2019. <https://www.primarycarecoalition.org/care-for-kids.html>
- 70 A note on the average SNAP benefit: There are a number of different groups and methods used to make this estimate. Two reasonable measures are the USDA FNS Maryland average - \$111 per person, and the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) 2013 estimate - \$180 per person per month. \$145 per person per month is an average of these estimates.
- According to USDA FNS, in 2018, the average household SNAP benefit in Maryland was \$211, and the average household size was 1.9 people, so that’s an average of \$111/person per month. (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/SNAP-household-state-averages/2018#>).
- The CBPP estimates the average SNAP benefit per household size in 2023 for a household of 4 will be \$718/month (or 179.50 per person). (<https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/a-quick-guide-to-snap-eligibility-and-benefits>).
- 71 Note, this number does NOT include administrative or other costs.
- 72 The Care for Kids program is administered by the Primary Care Coalition. More information is available at <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Program.aspx?id=PHS/PHSMedCareforUninsChildrenCareForKids-P1703.html>
- 73 See USDA Food and Nutrition Service. “National School Lunch Program.” 2022. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/nslp>
- 74 See generally USDA Food and Nutrition Service. “National School Lunch Program.” 2022. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/nslp>

- 75 Data provided by Montgomery County Public Schools. (November 2022)
- 76 See Maryland Cares for Kids Act (Chapter 560) of 2018.
- 77 See USDA Food and Nutrition Service. "FNS Responds to COVID-19." 2022, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/coronavirus>
- 78 Cohen JFW, Polacsek M, Hecht CE, Hecht K, Read M, Olarte DA, Patel AI, Schwartz MB, Turner L, Zuercher M, Gosliner W, Ritchie LD. Implementation of Universal School Meals during COVID-19 and beyond: Challenges and Benefits for School Meals Programs in Maine. *Nutrients*. 2022 Sep 28;14(19):4031. doi: 10.3390/nu14194031. PMID: 36235683; PMCID: PMC9571988.
- 79 U.S. Census Data, American Community Survey, Table B17024 (2022). Note, the SSS varies by family composition - a detailed discussion of the 400% of FPL reasoning and the population of children at different FPL multiples is provided in the previous "Childhood Food Insecurity in Montgomery County" section. To see specific self-sufficiency levels please explore the Montgomery County Interactive Self-sufficiency Tool at [Interactive Self-Sufficiency Standard](#).
- 80 Note - there is a significant discrepancy between the census estimate of FARMs-eligible children (school-aged children in households with incomes below 185% of FPL) which is 34,755, and the number of children actually enrolled in FARMs in MCPS, which is 70,348. At the time of publication this discrepancy has not been accounted for. Subject matter experts offered a number of theories to account for so many more children being FARMs enrolled than are theoretically eligible. Among those theories was that direct certification of those receiving SNAP or Medicaid benefits might account for some of those children - as those programs have different eligibility requirements. Also suggested was that FARMs enrollment forms are rarely audited, and so it is possible that MCPS is enrolling some number of children from households that do not qualify. Finally, some feel this gap is indicative of flawed census estimates, especially when compared to the groundtruth of MCPS FARMs enrollment data. At this time the authors are not confident in speculating on the source of this discrepancy beyond the proposed theories above.
- 81 White House National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/White-House-National-Strategy-on-Hunger-Nutrition-and-Health-FINAL.pdf> "Elevating school meals is a key strategy to improve our nation's health and would benefit all children – importantly, it would significantly strengthen the school meals program for those children who rely upon it the most. The Biden-Harris Administration will take a major first step by working with Congress to expand access to healthy, free school meals for 9 million more children by 2032"
- 82 See USDA Food and Nutrition Services. "Community Eligibility Provisions." 2019. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/community-eligibility-provision>
- 83 MSDE Office of School & Community Nutrition Programs. "Maryland Meals for Achievement." 2022. <https://www.marylandpublicschools.org/programs/School-andCommunityNutrition/Pages/Programs/MMFA.aspx>. "This model increases students' access to and participation in breakfast. School administrators credit the MMFA with improving students' test scores, behavior, attendance, and wellbeing. Parents praise the program for assisting children to prepare for their academic day."
- 84 Data from MCPS, number of children receiving free breakfast is based on 2022 enrollment numbers at the 91 participating MCPS schools.
- 85 Colorado Proposition FF, passed November 8th, 2022. See [https://ballotpedia.org/Colorado_Proposition_FF_Reduce_Income_Tax_Deduction_Amounts_to_Fund_School_Meals_Program_Measure_\(2022\)](https://ballotpedia.org/Colorado_Proposition_FF_Reduce_Income_Tax_Deduction_Amounts_to_Fund_School_Meals_Program_Measure_(2022)); Maine, Act Regarding Expanding Access to Free School Meals, LD1678-SP540 (2021), See also https://legislature.maine.gov/bills/display_ps.asp?snum=130&paper=SP0540&PID=1456
- 86 To see specific self-sufficiency levels please explore the Montgomery County Interactive Self-sufficiency Tool at [Interactive Self-Sufficiency Standard](#).
- 87 U.S. Census Data, American Community Survey, Table B17024.
- 88 SPECIAL NOTE ON ENROLLMENT PERCENTAGE ESTIMATION - This is based on the Census Estimate of all school aged children living in Montgomery County in 2022 (Table S0101 AGE AND SEX 2021: ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables) compared to MCPS 2022 enrollment data.
- 89 U.S. Census Data, American Community Survey, Table B17024.
- 90 SPECIAL NOTE ON VALIDITY OF ESTIMATES - This is the estimated 73,848 school aged children living in households below 400% of FPL estimated to be enrolled in MCPS minus the 71,547 children who already get free meals through FARMs enrollment and/or attendance at a universal meals school. This is a ROUGH and imprecise estimate. It is based on a number of simplifying assumptions. Two critical assumptions limit this number's value for budgeting. First, it uses 400% of FPL as a universal measurement of self-sufficiency - when self-sufficiency is correctly measured by considering family composition. Second, it assumes that all of the 71,547 children currently getting free meals are below 400% of the FPL - which almost certainly is not true for all children in universal schools. So why present this flawed number here? Because the authors believe it is close enough to give readers a sense of the rough scale of providing free meals to all those below self-sufficiency. Specifically, such a program would likely serve a few thousand extra students, but not many thousands, or tens of thousands.
- 91 Data from 2022, courtesy of MCPS.
- 92 See SPECIAL NOTE ON VALIDITY OF ESTIMATES above as it impacts the validity of this calculation.
- 93 Data from 2022, courtesy of MCPS. Free meals number includes those enrolled in FARMs, as well as those attending a universal meals school.
- 94 Based on \$4 per meal per day, with 182 school days in the year.
- 95 Data from interviews with MCPS Food and Nutrition staff.
- 96 USDA Food and Nutrition Program. "Child and Adult Care Food Program." 2022. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp>
- 97 Note that the CACFP Program for larger "child care centers" is administered by the Maryland State Department of Education.
- 98 Maryland State Department of Education, Office of School and Community Nutrition Programs, Training and Technical Assistance, available at <https://www.marylandpublicschools.org/programs/SchoolandCommunityNutrition/Pages/TTA.aspx>. Note that some providers can be eligible for reimbursement for all children based on a Community Assessment, and/or their local school meeting the requirements of the USDA Community Eligibility Provision.
- 99 87 FR 143 at 44329. Note that currently providers receive additional funding through additional temporary reimbursements as part of the Keep Kids Fed Act of 2022. Id. at 44328.
- 100 Id.
- 101 Id.
- 102 Numbers based on interviews with MCPS.
- 103 Id.
- 104 Based on subject matter expert interviews with administrators and providers. For information on the "standardized menu" requirements see Maryland State Department of Education, Office of School and Community Nutrition Programs, Training and Technical Assistance, available at <https://www.marylandpublicschools.org/programs/SchoolandCommunityNutrition/Pages/TTA.aspx>. See also, USDA Food and Nutritional Services, CACFP Training Tools on Meals and Snacks, available at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp/meals-and-snacks>
- 105 Montgomery Connects. "Computer for You." 2021. <https://www.montgomery-countymd.gov/obp/computer-for-you.html>
- 106 \$8,377 is based on 6 children all receiving breakfast, lunch, and a snack five days a week for 52 weeks at the rate of \$5.37 per day per child.
- 107 Assumes 62 newly enrolled home daycares will be "free" reimbursement level eligible, and the remaining 188 will be "reduced" reimbursement level eligible. These estimates assume the proportion of "free" to "reduced" eligible remains at the current split of 25% and 75%. "Free" eligible family child care home providers could receive as much as \$8,377 (see note above), and "reduced" eligible providers could receive as much as \$4025 (which is based on 6 children all receiving breakfast, lunch, and a snack five days a week for 52 weeks at the rate of 2.58 per/day/per child). This means, in all these providers could receive as much as \$1,276,074 (\$519,374 for the 62 "free" level providers, and \$756,700 for the 188 "reduced" level providers). See 87 FR 142 at 44329.
- 108 "The County is home to three Early Head Start programs. A companion program to Head Start, Early Head Start (EHS) is also a federally-funded comprehensive health, education, parent engagement and social services program for low-income families with children birth to 3 years of age and pregnant women. Family Services, Inc., CentroNia and the Reginald S. Lourie Center serve as the County's EHS grantees." [2019-2022 Community Needs Assessment](#) at 28.
- 109 Note, the challenges for EHS 3 year olds is well documented in the 2019-2022 Community Needs Assessment: [2019-2022 Community Needs Assessment](#) at 28.
- 110 PLEASE NOTE: The EHS, HS, and Pre-K gap in Montgomery County is a well

- known and documented shortcoming. This report concerns itself only with the issue as much as it relates to hunger - specifically that children in these programs benefit from free nutritious meals, and their families benefit from wraparound services that help them cope with food insecurity. For a detailed analysis of the HS, EHS, and Pre-K gap, as well as the expected implications of the new Maryland Blueprint for Education please see Montgomery County Implications of the New Blueprint for Maryland's Future Prekindergarten Program for Families and Child Care Providers (October, 2021), available at [https://www.montgomery-countymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/FY22%20Blueprint%20Report%20FINAL%20Report%20October%202022\(2\).pdf](https://www.montgomery-countymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/FY22%20Blueprint%20Report%20FINAL%20Report%20October%202022(2).pdf)
- 111 Maryland State Department of Education. "Blueprint for Maryland's Future." 2023. <https://marylandpublicschools.org/Blueprint/Pages/Overview.aspx>.
- 112 See "Montgomery County Implications of the New Blueprint for Maryland's Future Prekindergarten Program for Families and Child Care Providers." October 2021. [https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/FY22%20Blueprint%20Report%20FINAL%20Report%20October%202022\(2\).pdf](https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/FY22%20Blueprint%20Report%20FINAL%20Report%20October%202022(2).pdf)
- 113 The majority of three-year-olds who fall into the EHS - HS gap do not get transitioned to another early childhood environment:
- "In 2018: 2 of the 45 FSI EHS three-year-old children who aged out of the program transitioned to Head Start. Only 18 children total transitioned to another early childhood environment."
- "0-60% of three-year-olds at FSI and 30% of three-year-olds at CentroNia do not continue in early care and education after aging out of EHS. Children fall back in language and socio-emotional development."
- Community Action Partnership, "Montgomery County 2019 - 2022 Community Needs Assessment" at 28. [https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/Montgomery%20County%202019-2022%20Community%20Needs%20Assessment%20Community%20Action%20Agency\(1\).pdf](https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/Montgomery%20County%202019-2022%20Community%20Needs%20Assessment%20Community%20Action%20Agency(1).pdf)
- 114 "Community schools are defined in Maryland law as 'a public school that identifies a set of strategic partnerships between the school and other community resources that promote student achievement, positive learning outcomes, and the well-being of students by providing wraparound services.'" <https://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Pages/default.aspx>
- 115 Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). "Community Schools." 2023. <https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/community-engagement/community-schools/>
- 116 MSDE: Maryland Public Schools. "Blueprint for Maryland's Future." 2022. <https://marylandpublicschools.org/Blueprint/Pages/Overview.aspx>
- 117 This number assumes FARMs rates remain steady at 2022 levels.
- 118 \$21,000 per school per year is the average of all the cost estimates provided by the food assistance providers currently providing at-school distributions at Community Schools. The cost per school per year ranged from \$12,000-30,000 depending on the model used, the amount delivered, and the food access provider running the distribution.
- 119 Manna Food Center. "Smart Sacks." 2022. <https://www.mannafood.org/smart-sacks/>
- 120 Note - Manna refers to their weekend bags as "Smart Sacks". Id.
- 121 Based on data provided by the Department of Health and Human Services, who oversees the Weekend Bag Program.
- 122 Based on interviews with providers and DHHS data.
- 123 Note, this amount does not include administrative or other costs.
- 124 See Kastelman, Daniel, Andrew Susanto, and Elle Pak. "Introducing Project DASH." Doordash News, Jan. 2018. <https://doordash.news/consumer/introducing-project-dash/>
- 125 See Uber. "Uber Impact." 2023. <https://www.uber.com/us/en/impact/10-million-pledge/>
- 126 See Instacart Company Updates. "Instacart and Feeding America Team Up to Deliver Groceries and Essentials to Homebound Individuals in Times of Disaster." Sept. 2022. <https://www.instacart.com/company/updates/instacart-and-feeding-america-team-up-to-deliver-groceries-and-essentials/>
- 127 See Tangelo. "Our Company and Our Mission." 2023. <https://jointangelo.com/our-company/>
- 128 See "Bento." 2023. <https://www.gobento.com/>
- 129 Benefits inadequacy is discussed at length in the "Address Benefit Inadequacy, Especially During the Summer" section of this plan.
- 130 See <https://www.marylandmarketmoney.org/> for more on the MMM program.
- 131 Note - Potential funding amounts to address benefit inadequacy are discussed at length in the "Address Benefit Inadequacy, Especially During the Summer" section of this plan.
- 132 See Provide Direct Benefits to SNAP Ineligible Households section of this Plan.
- 133 Joyce, Katherine. "Food Security Screening: Addressing EHR, coding challenges." American Academy of Pediatrics News, April 2018. https://aap2.silverchair-cdn.com/aap2/content_public/autogen-pdf/cms/9839/9839.pdf
- "A positive screen requires a response of "often true" or "sometimes true" to either or both of the following statements:
- 'Within the past 12 months we worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more.'
- 'Within the past 12 months the food we bought just didn't last and we didn't have money to get More.'" Id.
- 134 Id.
- 135 Graber, Eric. "Food as Medicine." American Society for Nutrition, Feb 2022. <https://nutrition.org/food-as-medicine/>
- 136 Primary Care Coalition. "Food is Medicine." 2022. <https://www.primarycarecoalition.org/food-is-medicine.html>
- 137 Id.
- 138 See CHEER's Healthy Food Access Program, available at <https://www.community-cheer.org/healthyfoodaccessprogram>
- 139 The need for and role of benefits enrollment experts is discussed in the "Expansion of SNAP Enrollment Programs" section of this plan.
- 140 Primary Care Coalition. "Care for Kids." 2022. <https://www.primarycarecoalition.org/care-for-kids.html>
- 141 Pricing data is a rough estimate based on discussion with Community Farm Share. More information is available at <https://www.communityfarmshare.org/>.
- 142 Calculation is \$15 per bag per week for the 25 week growing season, and \$15 per bag per week for FAP packed boxes for the other weeks, for 500 children. Note that this price does not include overhead or administrative costs. Pricing data from Community Farm Share, <https://www.communityfarmshare.org/>.
- 143 Capital Area Food Bank. "What We Do: Nutrition & Wellness." 2019. <https://www.capitalareafoodbank.org/what-we-do/nutrition-and-wellness/>
- 144 University of Maryland Extension. "Maryland SNAP-Ed." 2020. <https://extension.umd.edu/programs/family-consumer-sciences/snap-ed>
- 145 See Montgomery Connects. "Computer for You." 2021. <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/obp/computer-for-you.html>.
- 146 Pricing is a rough estimate based on interviews with nutrition education subject matter experts. Potential costs will vary based on the complexity and interactivity of the course and the learning management software chosen.
- 147 "Gaithersburg Financial Empowerment Center." 2022. <https://www.gaithersburg-md.gov/services/community-services/financial-empowerment-center>
- 148 "Bank on Gaithersburg." 2022. <https://www.gaithersburgmd.gov/services/community-services/bank-on-gaithersburg>
- 149 "CAFE Montgomery." 2022. <https://cafemontgomerymd.org/>
- 150 This is based on interviews and data provided by the Gaithersburg Financial Empowerment Center, and assumes a similar model and cost structure. This amount would vary significantly based on the scale and model employed.
- 151 See "Cities for Financial Empowerment Fund." 2023. <https://cfefund.org/>
- 152 Data from Clifton Park Baptist Church, who have been using hydroponic grow towers to produce greens for distribution to food insecure families for over a year. They report that a hydroponic grow system can produce a bag of greens per tower per day, using only a gallon of water a day and minimal regular maintenance.
- 153 Note that grant requirements should also make clear that funds could be used to establish indoor hydroponic gardens.

- 154 See, Webb, Patrick, Jennifer Coates, Edward A. Frongillo, Beatrice Lorge Rogers, Anne Swindale, and Paula Bilinsky. "Measuring Household Food Insecurity: Why It's So Important and Yet So Difficult to Do." *The Journal of Nutrition* 136, no. 5 (May 1, 2006): 1404S-1408S. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jn/136.5.1404S>.
- 155 FoodStat available at <https://mocofoodcouncil.org/foodstat/>
Feeding America available at <https://map.feedingamerica.org/>
- 156 See Address Benefit Inadequacy, Especially During the Summer section of this plan.
- 157 See Provide Direct Benefits to SNAP Ineligible Households section of this plan.
- 158 See Expansion of SNAP Enrollment Programs section of this plan.
- 159 See Expansion of Free School Meals section of this plan.
- 160 See Maryland Office of School and Community Programs, Maryland Meals for Achievement, available at <https://www.marylandpublicschools.org/programs/SchoolandCommunityNutrition/Pages/Programs/MMFA.aspx>.
- 161 Based on subject matter expert interviews with administrators and providers. For information on the "standardized menu" requirements see Maryland State Department of Education, Office of School and Community Nutrition Programs, Training and Technical Assistance, available at <https://www.marylandpublicschools.org/programs/SchoolandCommunityNutrition/Pages/TTA.aspx>. See also, USDA Food and Nutritional Services, CACFP Training Tools on Meals and Snacks, available at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp/meals-and-snacks>
- 162 See <https://www.marylandmarketmoney.org/> for more on the MMM program.
- 163 See Katherine Joyce, American Academy of Pediatrics News, Food security screening: addressing EHR, coding challenges (April, 2018) available at https://aap2.silverchair-cdn.com/aap2/content_public/autogen-pdf/cms/9839/9839.pdf
- 164 A detailed discussion of this shortcoming is presented in the Montgomery County Food Security Task Force, Final Report of Challenges and Solutions (July 2022).
- 165 See <https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/child-and-dependent-care-credit-faqs>
- 166 Food Research and Action Center. "Hunger, Poverty, and Health Disparities During COVID-19 and the Federal Nutrition Programs' Role in an Equitable Recovery." September 2021, <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/COVIDResearchReport-2021.pdf>
- 167 Id.

Further Reading

Montgomery County Food Security Plan: https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/exec/Resources/Files/pdf/MoCo_Food-Security-Plan_2017.pdf

Maryland State Department of Education Blueprint for Maryland's Future: <https://blueprint.marylandpublicschools.org/>

White House National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/White-House-National-Strategy-on-Hunger-Nutrition-and-Health-FINAL.pdf>

Appendices

- A. Resident Survey Data Summary
- B. Resident Engagement Overview and Highlights

APPENDIX A

Resident Survey Data Summary

Prepared by Sharp Insight, LLC



Montgomery County Childhood Hunger

2022 Survey Results

Montgomery County Food Council
October 2022

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Survey Background

The Montgomery County Food Council developed and disseminated the *Montgomery County Childhood Hunger Survey*, seeking input from county residents to guide the development of strategies to address hunger among children and youth.

The 15-question survey was created by Community Science, a county-based evaluation firm, and implemented via SurveyMonkey.com from August 25, 2022 through September 15, 2022. The survey used a convenience sample and was available in English and Spanish. It was shared through the Food Council's channels (e.g., distribution lists, social media) and partners to share with others (e.g., food assistance providers) and also distributed via the county Department of Health and Human Services and other county government communication channels. Respondents were randomly selected to receive gift cards if they provided their email addresses.

The survey focused on parents, grandparents, and/or legal guardians of children in Montgomery County, Maryland. If a respondent did not fall within one of these categories, they were excluded from this analysis. The survey started first with questions regarding obtaining food for the household, whether the household was food secure, and reasons that have kept households from getting food over the last year. This was followed by multiple questions about food assistance from distribution avenues, such as food pantries and meal sites, and benefit programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Demographic questions regarding household size, languages spoken, race/ethnicity, and household income were the final survey questions.

In the fall of 2022, the Montgomery County Food Council engaged a county-based evaluation firm, Sharp Insight, LLC, to analyze the data and develop a summary report of findings from the *Montgomery County Childhood Hunger Survey*. With guidance from the Food Council, Sharp Insight cleaned the data, ran both descriptive and inferential analyses, and developed this summary report. This report provides the survey results, starting with demographics of the respondents and indicators of household food security. The report then delves into household food access and food assistance, with a particular focus on examining differences between food secure and insecure households.

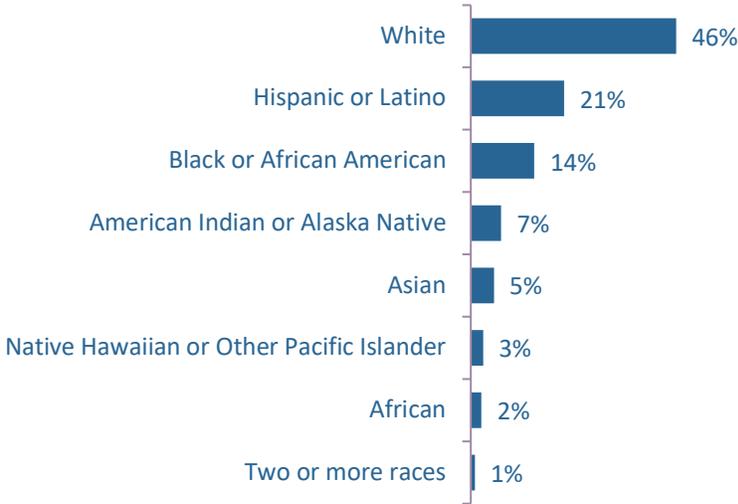
Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Overall, 1,315 respondents completed the 2022 *Montgomery County Childhood Hunger Survey*. Of these, 84% took the survey in English and 16% in Spanish. Household size of the respondents averaged 4.5 people (children and adults), with an average of 1.8 children (n=1,170).



The survey included a diverse group of respondents. Respondents were asked to choose their race or ethnicity and could only chose one option. Almost half of the survey respondents (46%) identified as White, 21% as Hispanic or Latino, 14% as Black or African American, and 7% as American Indian or Alaska Native. Five percent identified as Asian, 3% as Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, 2% as African and 1% as having two or more races.

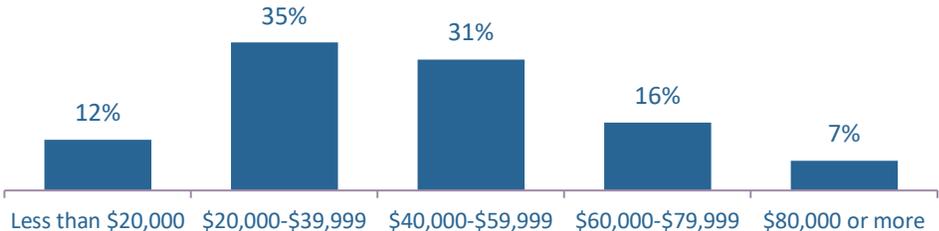
Race and ethnicity of survey respondents (n=1,232)



Two-thirds of respondents reported an annual household income between \$20,000 - \$59,999.

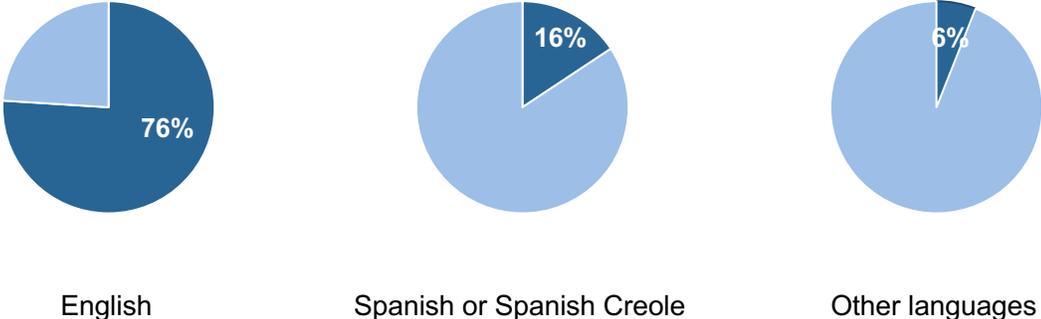
Approximately a quarter of the respondents (23%) had annual incomes above \$60,000. About a third each had annual household incomes between \$20,000 and \$39,999 (35%) and \$40,000 and \$59,999 (31%). About one in ten (12%) had annual incomes below \$20,000.

Total annual household income (n=1,198)



The majority of respondents reported that English was the primary language spoken in their childhood home. More specifically, English was spoken in most (76%) of the respondents’ childhood homes, followed by Spanish or Spanish Creole (16%) and other languages (6%). Of the other languages, most were Asian languages, such as Chinese, Vietnamese, and Tagalog.

Primary language spoken in respondents’ childhood home (n=1,249)



Household Food Security

Survey respondents were asked questions to gauge household level of food security. One question asked whether, “In the last year, how often did you worry that your household would run out of food before you could get more?” Response choices included never, sometimes, often, or all of the time. Those responding “never” were deemed food secure. Those responding “sometimes” were defined as moderately food insecure, while those who marked “often” or “all of the time” were defined as high food insecure.

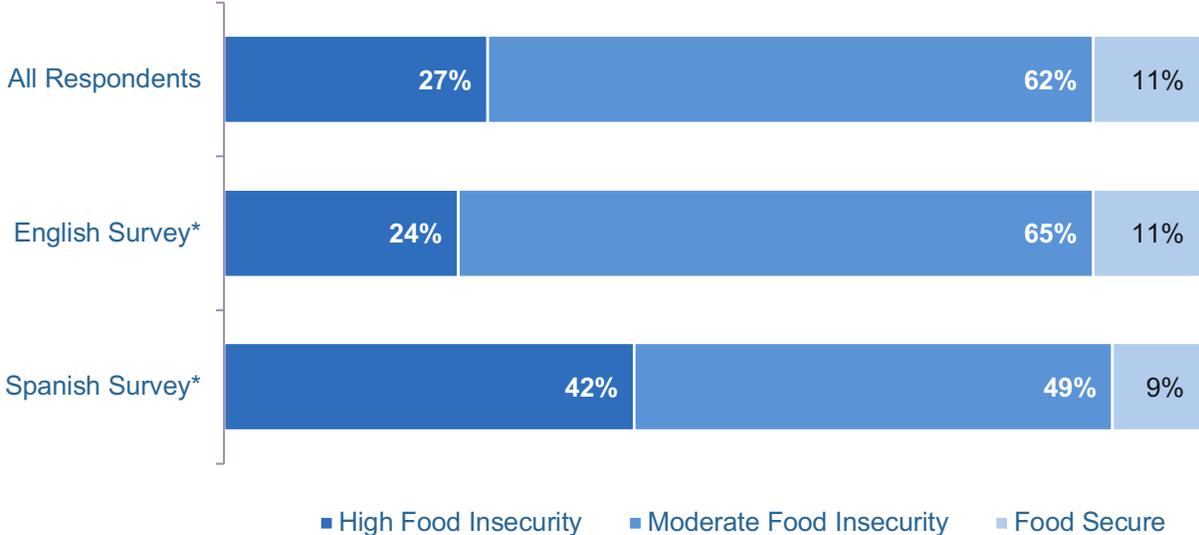
Overall, 27% of the respondents reported high food insecurity levels, 62% reported moderate levels, and 11% reported being food secure.

Those taking the Spanish survey were significantly more likely than those taking the English survey to report high levels of insecurity over the last year. A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relation between those taking the English and Spanish surveys and their food security levels. The relation between these variables was significant, $X^2 (2, N = 1,315) = 28.8, P < .001$.

Other indicators reviewed for differences in food security levels were household size and number of children; however, no statistical differences were found.

Reported household income statistically aligned with reports of food security. Households with incomes below \$20,000 were more likely to report high food insecurity, those with household incomes between \$20,000 and \$59,999 were more likely to report moderate food insecurity, and those making \$60,000 or more annually more likely to report being food secure ($X^2 (8, N = 1,198) = 328.9, P < .001$).

Levels of household food security



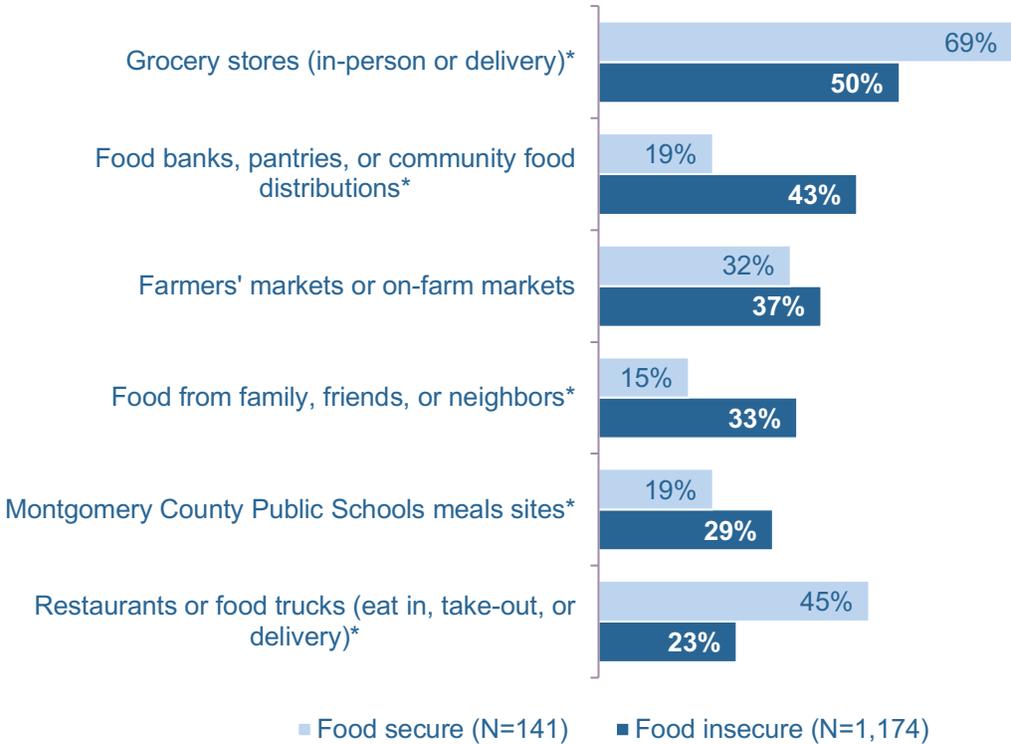
Household Food Access

Survey participants were asked a number of questions about how they access food for their household. When looking at food access avenues, the results show statistically significant differences between those households that are food secure (reporting never worrying the household would run out of food before they could get more) and food insecure.

Food secure households are more likely to usually get food from grocery stores (69%) than food insecure households (50%), whereas food insecure households are more likely to use food banks, pantries, or community food distribution sites (43%) than food secure households (19%).

About a third of both household types utilize farmers markets or on-farm markets at generally the same rates -- for food secure (32%) and food insecure households (37%). Food insecure households are more likely to obtain food from family, friends or neighbors (33%) and MCPS meal sites (29%) than food secure households, whereas food secure households are more likely to use restaurants or food trucks.

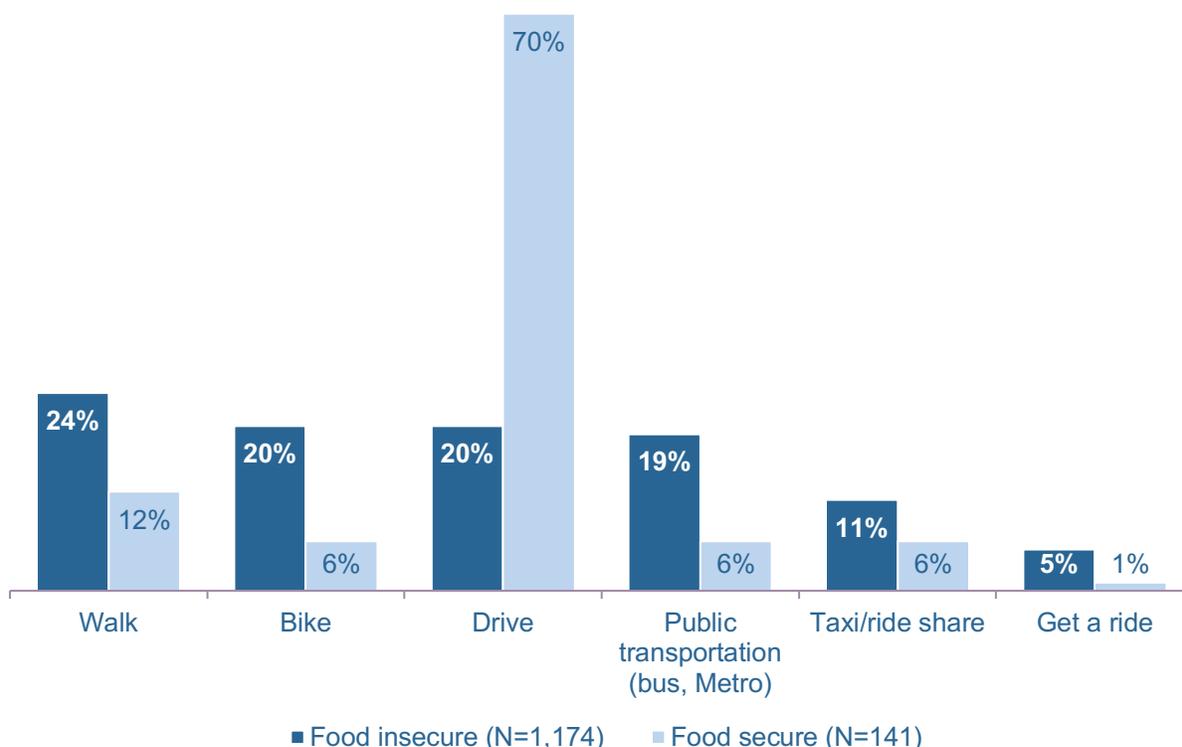
How do you usually get your food for the household? (Select all that apply).



*Statistically significant difference at P <.01

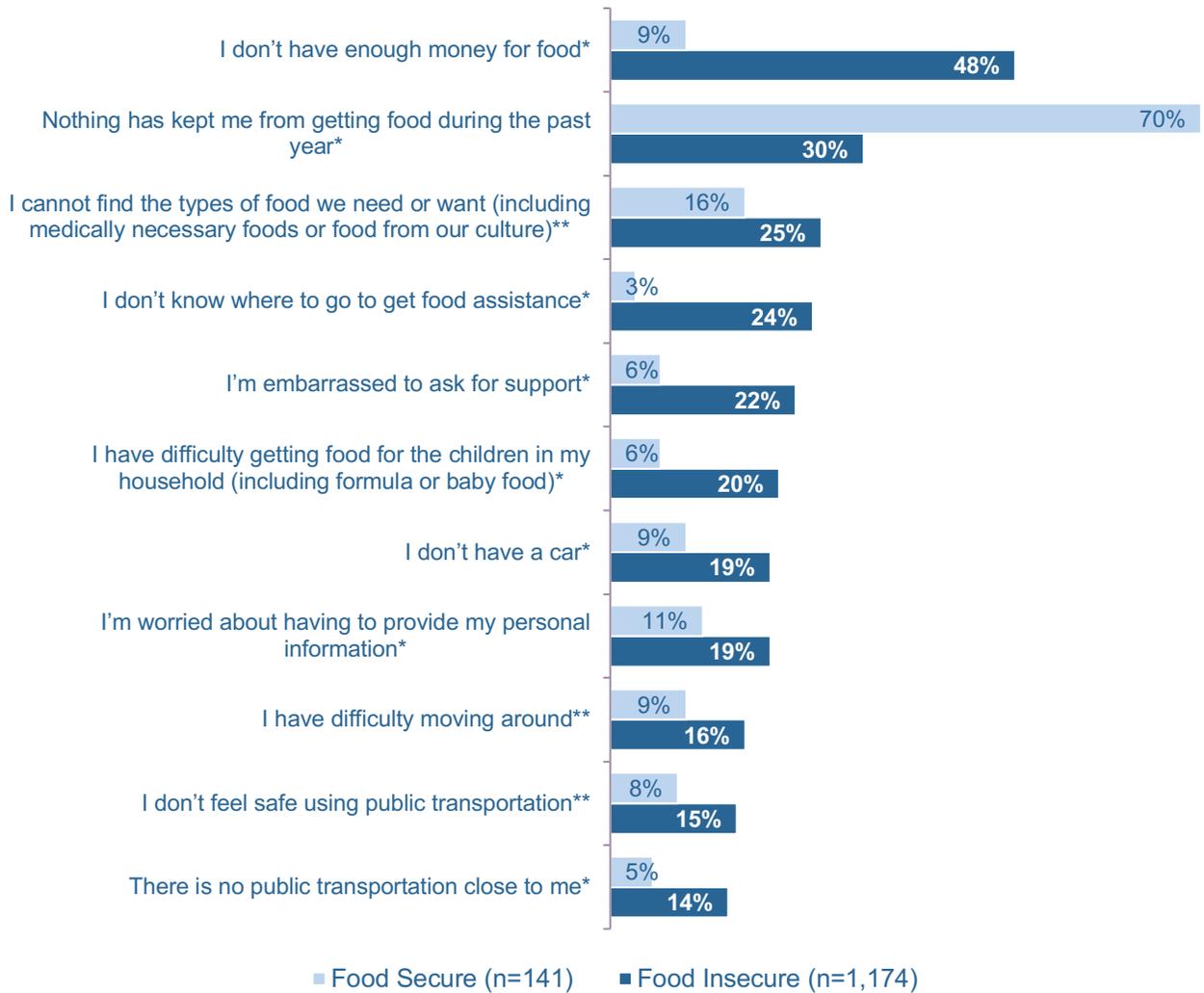
With respect to food security and transportation, food secure households were significantly more likely to drive to obtain food (70%), whereas food insecure households rely equally on walking (24%), driving (20%), biking (20%), and public transportation (19%). A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relation between food security and transportation to food access sites and it was significant, $X^2(6, N = 1,315) = 161.2, P < .001$.

*How do you usually get to the store, market, meal site, or other locations where you most often get food?**



For all barriers to obtaining food asked in the survey, there were statistically significant differences between households who reported being food secure and food insecure. On the survey, participants were asked what has kept them from getting food for their household over the last year and were given a list of possible reasons. Not surprisingly, food secure respondents were much more likely to report that nothing kept them from getting food during the last year (70%) than food insecure respondents (30%). For respondents with food insecure households, the top barriers to obtaining food were not having enough money (48%), not being able to find the food they want or need (25%), not sure where to go to get food assistance (24%), being embarrassed to ask for support (22%) and having difficulty getting food for the household’s children (20%).

During the past year, what has kept you from getting food for your household? (Select all that apply.)

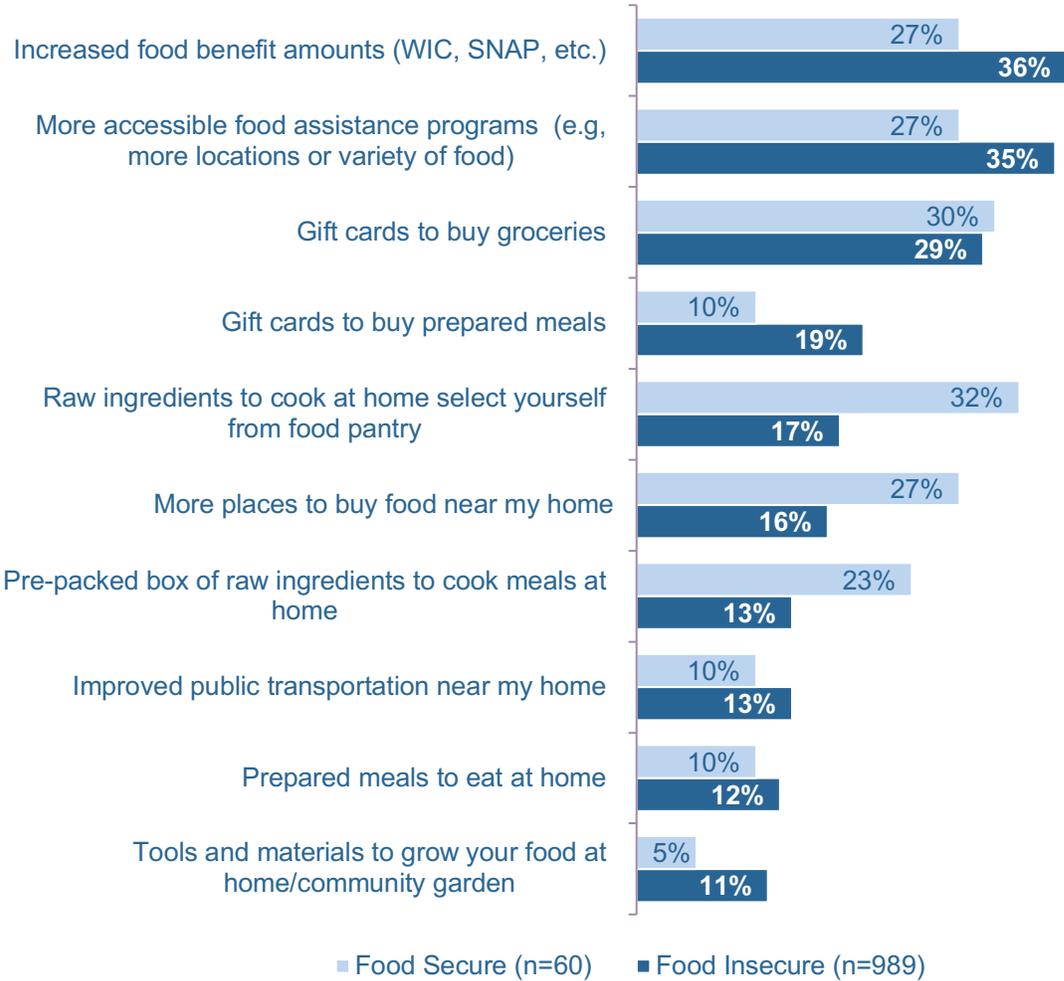


*Statistically significant differences at P <.01

**Statistically significant difference at P <.05

Near the end of the survey, respondents were asked to choose two aspects that would make it easier to get food for their household from a list. **For food insecure households, the top three food resources desired included increased food benefit amounts (36%), food assistance programs that are more accessible (35%), and gift cards to buy groceries (29%).** Top resources for food secure households include raw ingredients to cook at home selected themselves from food pantries (32%), gift cards to buy groceries (30%), increased food benefits (27%), and more accessible food assistance programs (27%).

Choose top two resources that would make it easier to get food for your household.



Food Assistance Program Use

Survey respondents were asked a number of questions about food assistance via food distribution avenues, such as food banks, food pantries, and other community food distribution or meal programs, and food benefit programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and Free and Reduced Meals at Schools (FARMS).

Among the respondents (n=1,315), 63% used both food assistance programs (e.g., food distribution and food benefit) while 17% used neither of these programs. Another one in five received assistance solely through food distribution avenues (8%) or food benefit programs (13%). When analyzed by language of survey completion (Spanish and English), there were no statistically significant differences found.



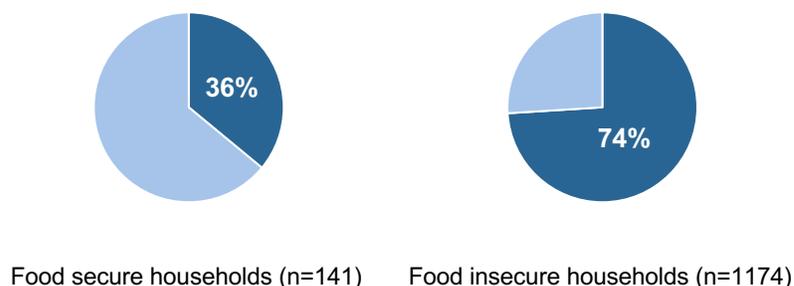
Assistance via Food Distribution Avenues

To examine one part of food assistance, survey participants were asked whether their household currently receives assistance from food banks, pantries, and/or other community food distribution or meal programs.



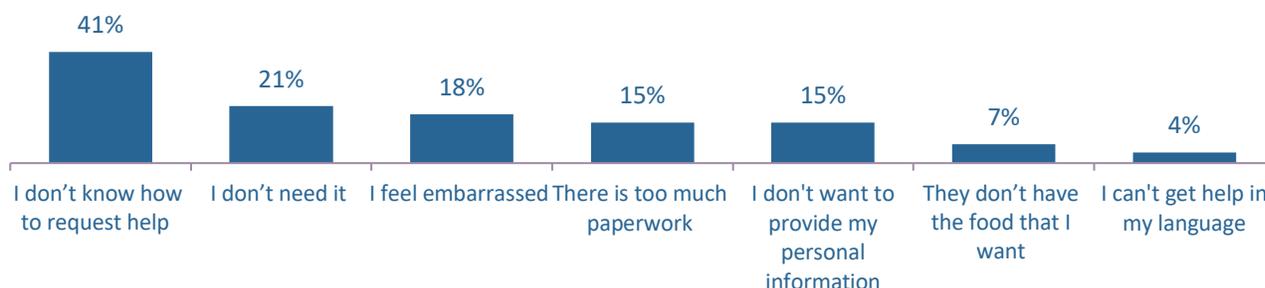
Food insecure households were statistically more likely to report receiving food distribution assistance (74%) than food secure households (36%). This difference was measured through a chi-square test of independence to examine whether receiving this assistance is related to whether the household is food secure, and it was significant, $X^2 (1, N = 1,315) = 89.7, P < .001$.

Food distribution assistance by food secure and food insecure households. (n = 1,315)



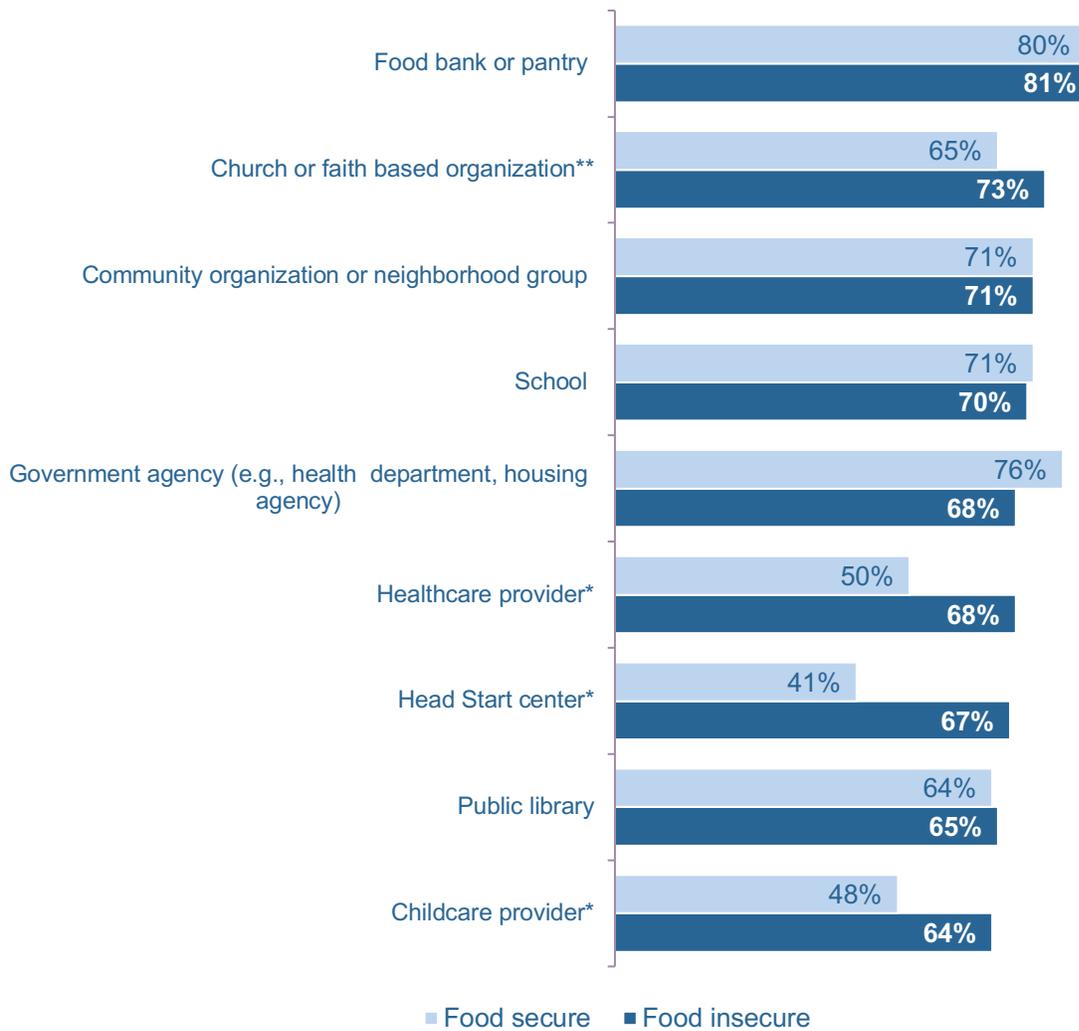
Participants *not* receiving assistance from food banks, pantries and/or other community food distribution or meal programs (n=391) were questioned about what kept them from asking for help from the programs, and provided with a list of choices. **The highest number (41%) of respondents that did not receive food assistance reported that they did not know how to ask for help.** About one in five reported they don't need it (21%) or they feel embarrassed (18%). Fifteen percent (15%) reported there was too much paperwork and/or they didn't want to provide their personal information.

Reasons that kept respondents from asking for help from programs. (Select all that apply) (n=391)



All of the survey participants were asked, “If your household needs assistance getting food in the future, how likely are you to seek help at these sites in your community?” Respondent choices were “very likely,” “likely,” “unlikely,” or “very unlikely.” Overall, food insecure households had higher percentages of respondents marking “very likely” or “likely” over all the selections than did food secure households. **Participants overall were most likely to see help from a food bank or pantry. Food insecure households were next most likely to reach out to a church or faith based organization (73%), a community organization or neighborhood group (71%), and/or schools (70%).** Respondents from food insecure households were significantly more likely to seek future help, if needed, from church or faith based organizations, healthcare providers, or childcare providers.

Percent likely or very likely to seek help from these sites when needed in the future



Note: Overall number of respondents varies from 1,233 to 1,302

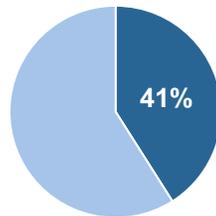
*Statistically significant differences at P <.01

**Statistically significant difference at P <.05

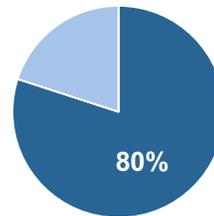
Assistance via Food Benefit Programs

Survey participants were asked whether their household was currently enrolled in food benefit programs such as SNAP, WIC, and FARMS. Overall, 75% reported receiving this assistance. A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine whether receiving this assistance was related to household food security. The relation between these variables was significant, $X^2(1, N = 1,315) = 99.6, P < .001$. That is, food insecure households were much more likely to report receiving this assistance (80%) than food secure households (41%).

75% of respondent households reported being enrolled in food benefit programs such as SNAP, WIC and FARMS. (n=1,315)



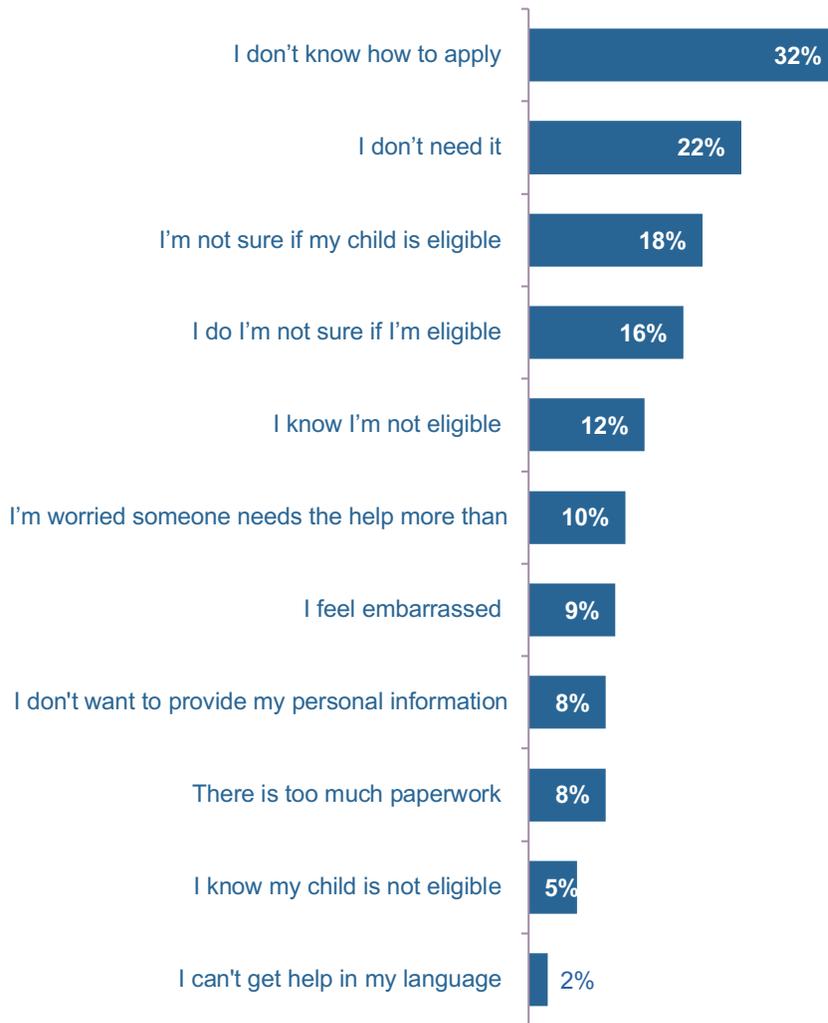
Respondents with food secure households (n=141)



Respondents with food insecure households (n=1,174)

For those participants not receiving food benefit assistance (n=324), the primary reason reported for not asking for help (32%) was that they did not know how to apply. Other reasons were reporting they don't need it (22%), followed by not knowing whether their children are eligible (18%) or their household is eligible (16%) for the assistance.

**Reasons that kept respondents from participating in food benefit programs. (Select all that apply)
(n=324)**



Topline Summary

In the summer of 2022, the Montgomery County Food Council developed and disseminated a survey, *Montgomery County Childhood Hunger Survey*, seeking input from county residents to guide the development of strategies to address hunger among children and youth. The data were analyzed and reported by a county-based evaluation firm, Sharp Insight, LLC. A topline summary of findings by topic is outlined below.

Characteristics of Survey Respondents

- Overall, 1,315 respondents completed the 2022 *Montgomery County Childhood Hunger Survey*. Of these, 84% took the survey in English and 16% in Spanish.
- The survey included a diverse group, with 46% of respondents identifying as White, 21% as Hispanic or Latino, 14% as Black or African American, 7% as American Indian or Alaska Native, 5% as Asian, 3% as Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, 2% as African and 1% as having two or more races.
- Two-thirds of survey participants reported annual household incomes between \$20,000 - \$59,999.

Household Food Security

- Overall, 27% of the respondents reported high food insecurity levels, 62% reported moderate levels, and 11% reported being food secure.
- Those taking the Spanish survey were significantly more likely than those taking the English survey to report high levels of insecurity over the last year.
- Reported household income statistically aligned with reports of food security. For instance, households with incomes below \$20,000 were more likely to report high food insecurity.

Household Food Access

- Food secure households are more likely to usually get food from grocery stores (69%) than food insecure households (50%), whereas food insecure households are more likely to use food banks, pantries, or community food distribution sites (43%) than food secure households (19%).
- Food secure households were significantly more likely to drive to obtain food (70%), whereas food insecure households rely equally on walking (24%), driving (20%), biking (20%), and public transportation (19%).
- There were statistically significant differences for all barriers to obtaining food asked in the survey between households who reported being food secure and food insecure.
- For food insecure households, the top three food resources desired included increased food benefit amounts (36%), food assistance programs that are more accessible (35%), and gift cards to buy groceries (29%).

Food Assistance Program Use

- About two-thirds of the respondents (63%) used **both** food assistance programs (e.g., food distribution and food benefit), while 17% used neither of these programs.

Food Distribution Assistance

- The majority of respondents (70%) reported receiving food distribution assistance from food banks, pantries, and/or other community distribution or meal programs.
- Food insecure households were statistically more likely to report receiving this food distribution assistance (74%) than food secure households (36%).
- The highest number (41%) of respondents that did not receive food assistance reported that they did not know how to ask for help.
- In regard to seeking assistance in the future, participants (80-81%) were most likely to see help from a food bank or pantry. Food insecure households were next most likely to reach out to a church or faith based organization (73%), a community organization or neighborhood group (71%), and/or schools (70%).

Assistance from Food Benefit Programs

- Three-quarters (75%) of respondent households reported being enrolled in food benefit programs such as SNAP, WIC and FARMS.
- For those participants not receiving food benefit assistance, the primary reason reported for not asking for help (32%) was that they did not know how to apply.

Discussion Questions

As the Montgomery County Food Council and partners review findings from the 2022 *Montgomery County Childhood Hunger Survey*, Sharp Insight, LLC respectfully offers the following questions for discussion:

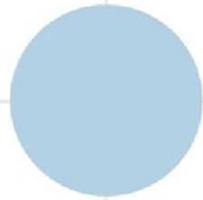
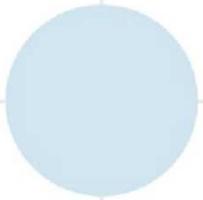
- What findings, if any:
 - **Confirmed** what you already knew or understood to be true in the county?
 - Raised additional questions or areas for potential **future exploration**?
 - Will be most useful in **advocating** for the work of the Montgomery County Food Council?
- How might the Montgomery County Food Council engage its partners in **strategically using** these findings?

APPENDIX B RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW AND HIGHLIGHTS

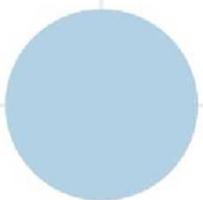
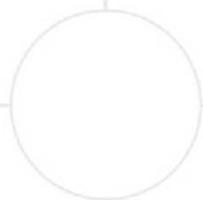
Prepared by Community Science



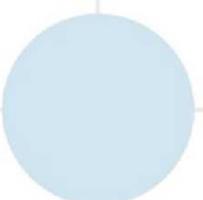
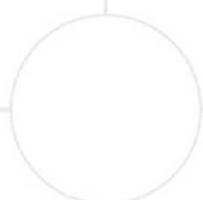
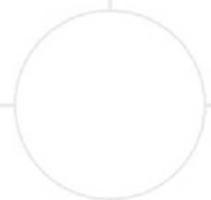
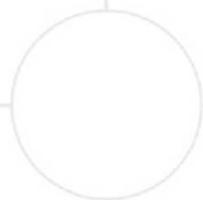
**Montgomery County's Strategic Plan to
Address Childhood Hunger
Resident Engagement Overview and
Highlights**



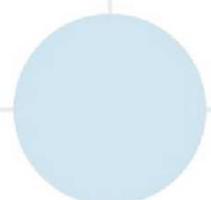
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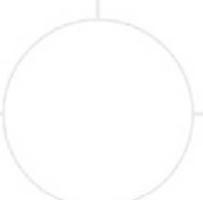
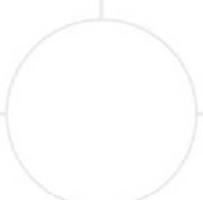
HOPE



STRENGTH



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Introduction

The Montgomery County Food Council worked with various community partners to implement resident engagement efforts. The goal of this partnership was to gain a better understanding of the food access challenges that children and youth are currently facing. Responses to the Montgomery County Childhood Hunger Survey¹, which was administered in English and Spanish and received more than 1300 responses, together with the information gathered at 3 listening sessions² attended by a total of 30 residents, provided quantitative and qualitative data that helped inform the creation of this plan. Key takeaways from these engagement efforts include focusing on barriers to food access, utilization and experience with food assistance resources, and strategies to address food access barriers are summarized below.

¹ The Montgomery County Childhood Hunger Survey was created by the Montgomery County Food Council and Community Science. Analysis of survey results was performed by Sharp Insight.

² Resident listening sessions were hosted by Identity, Inc., Manna Food Center, and The UpCounty Hub. The listening session toolkit and protocols were created by Community Science.

Barriers to Food Access

Food affordability and the overall high cost of living are the most significant factors affecting access to adequate food among families with children; healthcare needs, childcare costs, and household size are related considerations. Participants in community engagement activities reported that the cost of food compared to their incomes was the main barrier they faced in acquiring food for their households.

- Survey participants with incomes below \$20,000 were more likely to report high food insecurity, those with household incomes between \$20,000 and \$59,999 were more likely to report moderate food insecurity, and those making \$60,000 or more annually were more likely to report being food secure. Almost **half of the survey respondents (48%) with food insecure households reported that not having enough money was the main factor** that kept them from getting food for their household over the last year.
- Similarly, participants in listening sessions overwhelmingly stressed price as the most important factor when deciding where to shop for their food. Participants frequently cited the **economic difficulties associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and the high costs of living as major barriers to accessing the foods that they prefer**. Many noted that either they or a family member lost work during the pandemic and had to contend with this loss of income and rising food prices to be able to feed their families. Others cited **persisting medical bills and the responsibility of feeding extended family members as major barriers to accessing the foods they need and prefer**. The increase in the cost of living and food forced many of the participants to live in a state of insecurity regarding how they would pay their bills and feed their families.
- The need to cover other expenses, such as childcare and to provide food for many family members, further compounds the effects of the high cost of food relative to income. For example, mothers of small children faced the issue of whether to send their kids to daycare. These **mothers cited the high prices of daycares as a reason to keep them home instead**. This results in them staying home, **limiting their family income and creating a need to purchase more food to feed their children during the day**.
- Mothers with **large families emphasized the difficulties in buying enough food**. Many cited that halfway through the week, their weekly shop runs out. Three women also detailed that they had **trouble feeding a family of their size using food distribution sites** because they often were forced to wait in line two or three times to be able to collect the amount of food they needed.

Accessibility of affordable food retailers and assistance sites as well as cultural relevance are other factors that influence how families with children access food. Participants in community engagement activities also reported not being able to find the types of food preferred or needed by their families as well as transportation-related issues as barriers to food access.

- Approximately a quarter (**25%**) of survey respondents in food-insecure households **reported not being able to find the food they want or need** as a factor that kept them from getting food for their household over the last year.

- **In general, food-secure households are more likely to get food from grocery stores (69%) than food-insecure households (50%).** Food-insecure households are more likely to use food banks, pantries, or community food distribution sites (43%) than food-secure households (19%).
- Participants in listening sessions mentioned supermarkets like **Aldi and Megamart as their favorite markets because of their cheaper prices.** Other participants shared that they go to Safeway, Walmart, and Sam’s Club also due to their cheaper prices. A few participants shared that they go to H-Mart for culturally relevant Latin foods. The English-speaking group noted that they frequent Giant, Whole Foods, international markets, and African stores; they concluded, however, that they ultimately look for the best deals.
- Food-secure households were significantly more likely to drive to obtain food (70%), **whereas food-insecure households rely equally on walking (24%), driving (20%), biking (20%), and public transportation (19%).**
- Two participants in listening sessions cited the **barriers they face without a car.** They shared that the amount of time and energy it takes to use public transit to access markets and food assistance makes it much harder. As noted, **participants with large families faced even more transportation-related challenges in buying enough food.** The need to use public transit to travel to markets or food assistance sites posed additional barriers to these participants’ ability to acquire and transport enough food for their families.
- Participants in listening sessions overwhelmingly emphasized the **importance of having fresh fruits and vegetables in the home.** Overall, participants’ food preferences are highly influenced by **nutritional value and cultural relevance.** Certain fruits and vegetables were stressed in the Spanish-speaking focus groups for their cultural relevance, such as plantains, masa, beans, yuca, elote (corn), mango, and nopales (cactus). Participants relayed the importance of having these foods for the health of their children and family. Participants expressed the importance of having milk, formula, eggs, chicken, fish, yogurt, cereal, and snacks as their specific preferences for their children’s food. One participant stressed the importance of having healthy foods because she has an obese child and a diabetic husband. One participant stressed needing gluten-free and sugar-free foods for her autistic son, which can be very expensive. The English-speaking group expressed wanting low-sodium and low-fat foods and foods with whole grains. An African immigrant participant noted her preference for yams and dried fish.

Utilization and Experience with Food Assistance Resources

Overall, most participants in community engagement activities have used or know about food assistance resources; however, some of them are still unaware of where to go or how to ask for help.

Many participants in community engagement activities reported being aware of or using food assistance resources. However, some reported not knowing where to go to get assistance or how to ask for help.

- Overall, **75% of survey respondents reported being enrolled in food benefit programs such as SNAP, WIC, and FARMS while 70% (n=1,315) reported receiving food distribution assistance** (e.g., food banks, pantries, and/or other community distribution or meal

programs). More than half of the survey respondents, **63% (n=1,315)** reported participating in both food assistance and benefits programs.

- Almost all listening session **participants were aware of one or more food distribution sites, particularly of the facilitating organizations.** Participants shared that they have gone to churches, schools, and other food distribution sites for food assistance. Members of the Spanish-speaking groups shared that they usually find out about these sites from friends, non-profit community organizations, WhatsApp Groups, Facebook pages, and the County website.
- Approximately a quarter (**24%**) of survey respondents with food-insecure households reported not being sure where to go to get food assistance as a factor that kept them from getting food for their household over the last year.
- Approximately two-fifths (**41%**) of all survey participants not receiving food assistance (**n=391**) reported that they did not know how to ask for help. One-third (**32%**) of those not enrolled in benefit programs (**n=324**) reported that they did not know how to apply.
- Participants in two listening sessions noted that they knew they could call 311 to learn about food assistance resources, however, they found it generally unhelpful, getting “the runaround.”

Although residents appreciate the assistance offered through community and school-based food distribution programs, they described issues with the quality and cultural appropriateness of the products offered. Many of the listening session participants expressed their gratitude for the availability of food assistance support in general and for the help they received from the facilitating organizations. However, they described issues faced with the quality and cultural relevance of the food received.

- Participants in two listening sessions spoke at length on the **issue of receiving expired foods and being unsure about their quality even when frozen.** Some participants say they always throw away the food they receive past its expiration. One mother cooked chicken four days past due and her children got sick. Participants appreciated the class that Manna offers on food storage and nutrition labels to address some of these concerns.
- Many of the Spanish-speaking groups noted that the **food assistance sites rarely have the fresh, culturally appropriate Latin foods they prefer.** Mothers of school-aged children in these groups also shared that they were unhappy with the quality of the school meals their children receive and how culturally different they are from what they eat at home.
- The **English-speaking focus group had mixed feelings about the quality of school lunches,** with some complaining about the quality and taste while others shared that they were happy with the nutritional value and amount of food their children receive.

The complexity of application processes, including the lack of staff with the cultural and linguistic skills to help residents most in need, is the main factor affecting enrollment in benefits programs. Most participants in listening sessions were aware of the major benefits programs and agreed that these are helpful resources when received. However, conversations around these programs largely skewed

negative, as many, especially in the Spanish-speaking focus groups, have had negative experiences with government staff and significant complications accessing these benefits.

- Participants in the **Spanish-speaking listening sessions shared that they felt discriminated against for their race, inability to speak English, and lack of documents** when applying for public food assistance programs like SNAP and WIC. The participants have found that the **lack of Spanish-speaking staff** at government agencies and the disrespect they have experienced there to be a major barrier to accessing food assistance.
- Language access was a frequently cited barrier among participants in being able to fill out and ask questions about application forms. Another frequently cited issue among immigrant participants was that they **lacked the paperwork needed to apply because they are paid without taxes being withheld**.
- Others found the paperwork very confusing and difficult to fill out or edit because they **lack access to a computer or do not have computer skills**. One woman noted she attempted to apply for benefits but was declined and was never told why. She had to get help from an organization in Gaithersburg to access benefits.

Strategies to Address Food Access Barriers

In the short term, focus should be placed on increasing sustained participation in assistance programs by engaging trusted community institutions and building providers' capacity to work with the communities most in need. Feedback from residents participating in community engagement activities points to the vital role of faith-based organizations, children and youth-serving institutions, and healthcare providers as important food assistance access points. Residents also reported that increasing food benefit amounts and accessibility of food assistance programs would make it easier for them to get food for their households. However, there is a need to build the capacity of service agencies and staff to facilitate access to this support among the communities most in need.

- Survey participants overall were most likely to seek help from a food bank or pantry. Food insecure households were **next most likely to reach out to a church or faith-based organization (73%), a community organization or neighborhood group (71%), and/or schools (70%)**. Respondents from food-insecure households were significantly more likely to seek future help, if needed, **from church or faith-based organizations, healthcare providers, or childcare providers**.
- Near the end of the survey, respondents were asked to choose two aspects that would make it easier to get food for their household from a list. For food insecure households, the top three food resources desired included **increased food benefit amounts (36%), food assistance programs that are more accessible (35%),** and gift cards to buy groceries (29%).
- Participants in Spanish-speaking listening sessions **felt their communities generally lacked information on where to access and find out about food assistance resources and how to benefit from public programs**. They stressed the importance of **increasing the Spanish-speaking staff of the County** to increase their capacity to help communicate how to navigate the process.

- The participants in the English-speaking listening session stressed the **need for more after-school programs and better resources and capacity for such programs**. This group also stressed their desire to see healthier and fresher foods at food distribution sites and better job training programs to help them achieve the income they need to no longer need assistance.

In the long term, continue to advocate and promote strategies to lower the cost of living and increase families' income. Community feedback on strategies to address systemic barriers to food access centered on ways to lower the cost of living.

- Two Spanish-speaking focus groups agreed that **lowering or regulating the price of rent** would allow them to have more money to feed their children. Some also noted that **lower public transit prices** would significantly decrease how much they have to spend daily to go to work.
- Other participants cited high medical bills as a reason why they cannot access the food they prefer and would like to see medication costs lowered. One mother noted that she would like to see more institutions that provide toys, clothes, shoes, and backpacks for children.
- Two other participants noted that they want to see **better economic opportunities for their community** so they can earn a decent living to afford the foods they want.



STRATEGIC PLAN TO

End Childhood Hunger

