



Middle/High School Hunger Service Learning Program

Step One: Feed the Hungry in Your Community

Volunteer Against Hunger

As part of the process of food collection, students can volunteer at local emergency food program sites where they will see the faces of families for whom hunger is an everyday threat. Understanding this battle and playing a direct part in helping to eradicate hunger leads students to assume greater ownership of the issue: they see it first hand, they learn they can do something about it, and they are encouraged to look into the root causes of the problem. This "on-the-job-training" helps to develop the next generation of leadership to see that the American population must be protected from hunger. Students around the country are working with thousands of communities across the nation.

Donating non-perishables: When you donate non-perishables to your local food pantry, please let us know, and do so in the name of the Gerda & Kurt Klein Foundation so we can track the impact we, as a nationwide community service team, are having. Whether you are in the initial stages of creating an action plan, or are already planning a food drive, please let us know the scope, status and timetable of your project. Thanks!

Find a food bank near you

Students will:

Work with local adults to develop food collection programs and projects to supply emergency food programs in their community
Work as volunteers in emergency food programs to gain first hand knowledge of the problems families and children face

Students also can serve as liaisons between these hunger organizations and the schools. Arrange for students from throughout the district to come and volunteer at hunger organizations



Step Two: Investigate Hunger in Your Community

Before you can begin to take action against hunger in their community you must learn about the problems of hunger. Teachers or group leaders should divvy up their classes into groups or teams. Each of these teams should investigate a different aspect of hunger in their community. After researching hunger each group should report back to the class or group on their findings.

Ideas for hunger research teams:

1. Assessing Need in Your School District

Students can investigate the use of the Federal School Breakfast and the Summer Food Programs in their community. To learn information about the Federal Programs in your district, contact the director of the Department of School Food Services in your district, or your superintendent. This is public information.

A. Use the following questions to gather information about the Federal School Breakfast Program in your district:

- > Find out which schools serve school breakfasts:
- > How many schools are in your district?
- > How many of the schools offer the Breakfast Program?
- > What are the names of the schools that don't?
- > Find out how many kids who may need a breakfast are missed:
- > How many kids in your district's schools eat school lunch? (Average daily attendance)
- > Check the number of kids in your district who receive school lunches at free or reduced-price. (This will give you the number who may need free or reduced-price breakfast.)
- > How many kids in the district actually get free or reduced-price breakfast?
- > How many are missed (total getting free or reduced-price lunch, minus total getting free or reduced-price breakfast).
- > Are more students receiving lunch than breakfast? Why?
- > Is it because some schools fail to offer the breakfast program?
- > Is it because the program needs to be supported publicly?

B. Use the following questions to gather information about the Summer Food Program in your community:

- > How many students in your school system (all schools combined) receive free or reduced-price school lunches?
- > How many students last year participated in your community's summer food programs? (The program usually is offered in community agencies, not in the schools.)
- > Subtract community food program participation from free and reduced-price lunch participation. This will give you the number of needy students not getting summer meals.



- > Does your community summer food program provide both a breakfast and lunch during summer months, or only one?
- > Is the summer food program offered at enough community sites (parks, Y's, etc.) so that all kids have easy access?

2. Assessing Other Needs in Your Community

Contact local food banks and hunger relief groups to assess their role in your community. Use the following questions as a framework:

- > How many food banks, soup kitchens or pantries exist in your community?
- > How many people utilize their services?
- > How many families utilize their services? How many children?
- > Has need increased or decreased this year versus last?
- > How much food do they donate to needy families?
- > Do they ever have to limit donations? Turn people away?

3. Assessing Hunger in our Nation

Students can investigate hunger in their home state and across the nation.

- > How many families go hungry in your own home state?
- > How does your state compare to other states?
- > How many families go hungry in the United States?
- > How many children don't have enough food in the United States?
- > What are factors which can contribute to the problems of hunger in the United States?

4. Assessing the Effects of Hunger

Students in this group can look at the effects of hunger on the body and on the mind. In order to conduct their research students should speak with a biology or health and nutrition teacher. Find answers to the following questions:

- > What are the health effects of going hungry?
- > What are the effects of hunger on the ability of children to learn?
- > How does hunger affect performance in school?
- > What is a well balanced diet?
- > Why is it important to eat a well balanced diet?

MORE INFO:

THE SCHOOL BREAKFAST PROGRAM

The School Breakfast Program provides federal funds to schools and child care institutions to offer nutritious meals to students. Children from households with incomes between 130 and 185 percent of the poverty level receive meals at reduced rates; students from households with incomes 130 percent of poverty and below receive meals free. Although the School Breakfast Program is an entitlement program

(meaning federal funds are available to pay its costs), it is not accessible to many children who need it because many school districts do not offer it. Only one-third of the nation's schools that offer lunch also offer breakfast.

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Research on the benefits of School Breakfast:

In a scientific journal article, Meyers, Sampson, et. al., examined the effect of the School Breakfast program on school performance of low-income elementary school children in Lawrence, Massachusetts. The researchers found that poor children who participated in the School Breakfast program were shown to have significantly higher standardized achievement test scores than eligible kids who did not participate. Children getting school breakfast also had significantly reduced absence and tardiness rates.

THE SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM

Authorized by the Child Nutrition Act in 1946 to "safeguard the health and well-being of the nation's children," the National School Lunch Program is an entitlement program open to schools and residential child care institutions. Lunch is available to all children at participating schools, and the meals must meet specific nutritional requirements in order to qualify for federal funds. Household income is used to determine whether a child will pay a substantial part of the cost for the lunch or will receive a reduced-price or free meal. To receive a reduced-price meal, household income must be below 185% of the federal poverty level. For free meals, household income must fall below 130% of poverty. Children in food stamp households are automatically eligible for free meals.

Research on the School Lunch Program:

USDA research shows that children who participate in school lunch have superior nutritional intake compared to those who do not. Studies also show that low-income children depend on the School Lunch Program for 1/3 to 1/2 of their nutritional intake each day. These findings indicate that this program is highly significant insofar as protecting the nutritional status of participating low-income children.

SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM

The Summer Food Service Program provides meals to low-income children in the summer months and during vacation periods. Sponsoring sites include public or private non-profit organizations such as schools, Boys and Girls Clubs, religious institutions and YMCAs. Eligible sponsors of the Summer Food Program must be located in areas where the majority of children are low-income and meals must meet specific nutritional requirements. All meals are free to participating children regardless of household income.

Many poor children rely on the School Lunch and Breakfast Programs for a major portion of their daily nutrition during the school year. However, during the summer many children miss out on necessary nutrition because there are not enough summer food programs operating where eligible children live. Only about 20% of the low-income children who participate in the School Lunch Program also receive summer meals.

HUNGER HARMS BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

Scientific Research Links Nutrition and Brain Development**

Undernutrition and other factors associated with poverty can permanently retard brain development and function. The longer a child's nutritional, emotional and educational needs go unmet, the greater the likelihood of impairment to the brain. Iron deficiency anemia, affecting nearly 25% of poor children in the U.S., is associated with impaired brain development. Poor children who attend school hungry perform below non-hungry low income peers on standardized test scores. There is a strong association between family income and the growth and brain development of children. Improved nutrition and environmental conditions can modify the effects of early undernutrition. Iron repletion therapy can reduce some of the effects of anemia on learning, attention and memory. Supplemental feeding programs can help to offset

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threats posed to the child's capacity to learn and perform in school which result from inadequate nutrient intake. Once undernutrition occurs, its long-term effects may be reduced or eliminated by a combination of adequate food intake and environmental (home, school) support.

** Contact the [Center on Hunger and Poverty](#) to order a reprint of the full report.

Source: The Link Between Nutrition and Cognitive Development in Children,
Center on Hunger and Poverty, Brandeis University

HUNGER-RELATED READING LIST FOR YOUTH

Brown, J. Larry, Pollitt, Ernesto, "Malnutrition, Poverty and Intellectual Development," Scientific American, February 1996

Brown, J. Larry. Living Hungry in America, Mentor, NY 1989

[World Hunger Year has a compendium of the best 100 publications on domestic hunger, many of which are for youth. Call (212) 629-8850]



Step Three: Take Action to Help End Hunger

Public Action Against Hunger

Students will use the information they collect to take steps to end hunger. They will write to and meet with school officials to discuss the use of Federal school breakfast and school lunch programs in their district. Additional activities such as a lobbying day in the state legislature where students meet with their representatives about childhood hunger should also be arranged.

Tips on Writing Persuasive Letters

State your purpose right away.

Present only one issue per letter.

Know your issue thoroughly; point to facts to support your argument.

Make it clear and concise.

Be positive; don't accuse or attack someone.

Be complimentary; if officials have taken positive steps or proposed legislation to help end hunger, acknowledge their actions.

Type or write your letter neatly and include your return address.

Send a copy of your letter to others who should be included.

Speak Out Against Hunger

Using the knowledge that they have learned from their class' research, students should disseminate information about hunger to their peers and their communities.

Students can:

Publish articles about hunger in their school newsletter.

Write letters in community newspapers about the problems of hunger.

Begin a hunger newsletter for the school or community.

Make and distribute fliers, posters and pamphlets about the problem of hunger.

Design a school website on hunger.

Plan Activities Against Hunger

Students can plan anti-hunger activities in schools in order to educate their peers about the problem of hunger.

Plan an [Oxfam hunger banquet](#).

Hold an event where the price of admission is a non-perishable food item (to be donated to a local hunger relief organization.)

Involve their school in a competition where each class brings a different type of non-perishable food.

Each grade can compete to see who can bring in the most products.

Hold a food drive in the community.

Create events (Halloween for the Hungry, etc.).

Work with State and National Groups

Contact hunger advocacy groups in your state to get involved with their work.

Find out how you can support bills in your legislature.

Link up with national hunger groups (some may have chapters in your state).

Write letters to Congress, including you senators and representatives.

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Reflections

Think about your goals and what you have accomplished so far in your action plan. What do you still want to do? How might your plan be expanded or modified? What are your next steps?

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