



# **Need and Asset Assessment of Child Nutrition in Tompkins County**

A report detailing the results of a comprehensive evaluation  
of the resources available and the unmet needs  
related to child nutrition in Tompkins County, NY

*Lisa Horn, President  
Horn Research LLC*

**Executive Summary  
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**Park Foundation  
140 Seneca Way #100  
Ithaca, NY**

**Human Services Coalition of Tompkins County  
171 E. MLK Jr. St, #133  
Ithaca, NY**

## **NEED & ASSET ASSESSMENT OF CHILD NUTRITION IN TOMPKINS COUNTY EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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At the request of the Park Foundation, Horn Research conducted a comprehensive needs and asset assessment of child nutrition in Tompkins County. Well over a million dollars have been granted to various programs serving youth in Tompkins County in the past 5 years to improve nutrition and reduce food insecurity, but there has been little concrete information on the impact of these programs or the ongoing gaps and needs. This needs and asset assessment hopes to provide baseline information to benchmark improvements and guide future programming efforts.

The project plan for the assessment included: 1) a gap analysis of available resources and the needs of children related to nutrition and food security with a focus on determining whether children within various demographic groups face more or different challenges; 2) the identification of key structural and attitudinal barriers; and 3) the identification of innovative programming options that may be implemented to improve childhood nutrition in Tompkins County.

### **Methodology**

Surveys were conducted with parents and students in an effort to understand their viewpoints and experiences related to food and nutrition. Horn Research was able to gain the support of two school districts in the county to conduct student and parent surveys: the Ithaca City School District (ICSD) and the Lansing School District. In an effort to expand participation beyond ICSD and Lansing, the link to the parent survey was also distributed through list-serves and in online Facebook groups such as parents groups and community groups. A total of 640 parent surveys and 364 student surveys were completed.

Qualitative interviews were conducted with stakeholders from non-profit programs and school districts as well as with parents and students. The list of stakeholders was compiled with an effort toward receiving feedback from a variety of viewpoints as well as from all areas of the county. Qualitative data was gathered from parents and students from each school district.

Secondary data from a variety of sources (including, but not limited to: US Census, New York State Education Department, New York State Department of Health, New York State Open Data) were explored and analyzed to provide context to the Tompkins County landscape. In addition, agency websites and annual reports were reviewed to provide a greater understanding of the types of assets available in the county, the criteria for participating, and the overall level of participation related to the level of need.

### ***Food Security***

Food security, or having reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food, is at the base of understanding the state of child nutrition in Tompkins County. A child's food security is a function of family resources and the availability of and access to community resources and can have dramatic impacts on child outcomes. Research has shown that food insecurity has many adverse consequences for children's physical and mental health and impacts, among other things, academic performance, emotional development and social skills. Based on Census data and estimates from Feeding America, approximately 17-18% of children in Tompkins County are at risk of being food insecure. Data from the parent survey found that 19.5% of respondents were likely to be at risk of being food insecure.

### ***Quality of Diet***

The effects of food insecurity are not only dependent on the quantity of food, but also the kind and quality of food. Research has shown that food insecurity can reduce children's consumption of adequate micronutrients and put them at greater risk of obesity and subsequent health issues. Data from the New York State Education Department (NYSED) show that the percent of children in Tompkins County who are overweight or obese has decreased since 2010 and is well below the NYS rate of 34%, but remains relatively high at 28.1%. There are noteworthy differences in body weight data based on district. Newfield (46.6%) and Groton (38.4%) have the highest percentage of children who are not at a healthy weight and Ithaca (28.1%) and Trumansburg (27.3%) have the lowest percentage.

Data from the parent survey showed that families identified as at risk for being food insecure reported eating fast-food and pre-packaged meals more often and eating dinner together and eating fresh fruits and vegetables less often than food secure families. In addition, families that are food secure are statistically significantly more likely to say the food they eat is healthy and that healthy foods are available to their family.

Data from the middle and high school survey found that nearly 18% of middle and high school students eat fast food for lunch, and almost 14% eat lunch from a convenience store or gas station, at least once per week.

When asked to indicate what challenges they faced in providing healthy food for their families, parents most frequently said that healthy foods were too expensive (29.5%), they didn't have enough time to shop for or cook healthy foods (29.5%) and that their children don't like healthy foods (24.4%). Food security status had a significant impact on how frequently parents said they experienced challenges related to trying to eat healthy foods. Seventy percent of parents at risk for food insecurity said that healthy foods are too expensive as compared with 20% of food secure parents. Significantly more food insecure parents also said not having enough time to shop or cook healthy foods was a challenge.

**Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**

SNAP is the program formerly known as food stamps. It is a federal nutrition program that helps families purchase food at grocery stores, convenience stores, and some farmers' markets and co-op food programs. In 2015, 2,904 Tompkins County children aged birth-17 years (18.5%) received SNAP benefits. SNAP participation is typically higher among households with children with an estimated 93% of eligible households in NYS participating in 2015. The primary barriers to enrollment in SNAP are the restrictive eligibility guidelines, the long and complicated process, and privacy concerns.

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

WIC is a federal assistance program of the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) of the USDA charged with improving the healthcare and nutrition of low-income pregnant women, breastfeeding women, and children under the age of five. WIC participation in Tompkins County has been steadily declining over the last four years. The number of participants with active checks declined from 1,386 participants in 2014 to 1,184 in 2017. According to Census data, approximately 1,387 families in Tompkins County have children under age 5 and with incomes below 185% of poverty which suggests that there may be more families that could be served by WIC, but are not. The most commonly reported barriers to participation in WIC were negative shopping experiences and a low perceived value of the WIC food package in comparison to the amount of time and effort required to meet program obligations.

**National School Lunch Program (NSLP)**

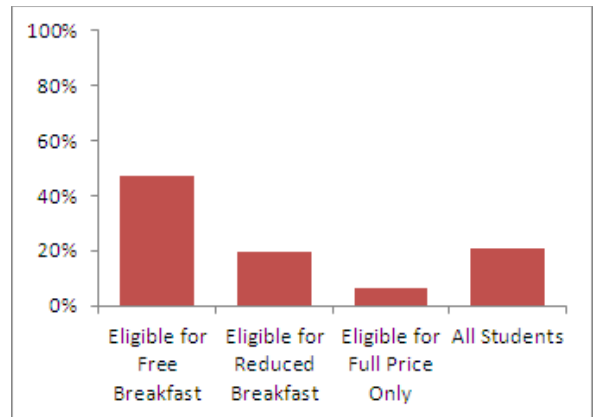
The NSLP provides low-cost or free school lunch meals to qualified students through subsidies to participating schools. Students are eligible for free breakfast and lunch if their family's income is below 130% of poverty and are eligible for reduced price meals if their family's income is below 185% of poverty.

In Tompkins County, the NSLP is an important resource in providing meals to children. During the 2016-2017 school year, Tompkins County schools served 405,978 breakfasts and 902,368 lunches to students. The percent of children enrolled in the NSLP has increased from 36% in the 2009-2010 school year to 40% in the 2015-2016 school year.

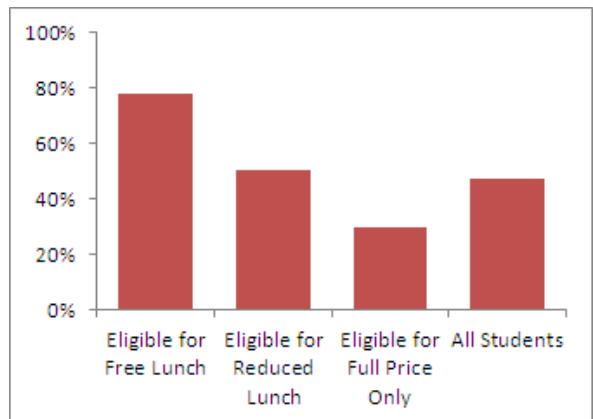
There is wide variation in the percent of children enrolled in the NSLP program across districts. The highest percentage of enrollees is at TST BOCES (71%) followed by Newfield (55%), Dryden (46%) and Groton (44%).

While enrollment in NSLP is relatively high, the actual participation in meals varies substantially by both meal and program eligibility. Breakfast participation is very low across all eligibility groups. Fewer than half of students eligible for free breakfast participate in the program and less than 1 in 5 children eligible for reduced price eat school breakfast. Only 6% of students paying full price

Average Daily Participation in School Breakfast



Average Daily Participation in School Lunch



buy school breakfast.

There is greater participation in lunch with the average daily participation for students eligible for free lunch approaching 80%. However, only half of students eligible for reduced price lunch participate and less than a third of students paying full price eat school lunch.

Some of the key barriers to the NSLP include the tight budgets food services departments must maintain, the quality and taste of foods, the variety within school meals, the nutritional value of the food served, difficulties meeting special dietary needs, the amount of time and environment allowed for meals, portion sizes, and communication between parents, students and schools about food and nutrition.

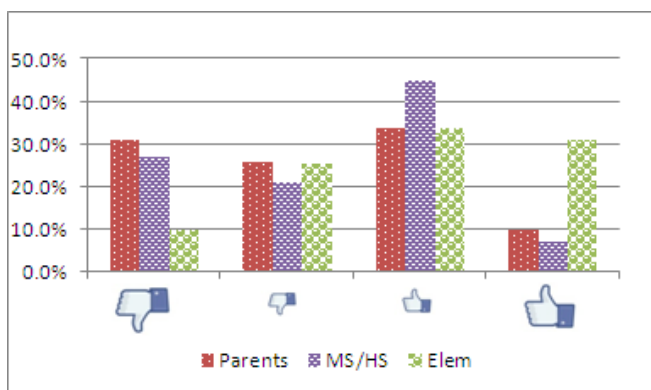
### *Budget*

For the bulk of the school districts in Tompkins County, the food services program are self-supporting and must generate enough revenue to cover all expenses including food, labor, and equipment. Most districts rely heavily on reimbursement from the NSLP and on government commodity foods. Overall, food services departments have very little money in their budget for food costs. For example, during the 2016-2017 school year ICSD generated \$1,674,405 in revenue from sales of meals and reimbursement from the NSLP averaging \$3.13 in revenue per meal. Of that revenue, \$569,325 was spent purchasing food (not including commodity foods) for an average of \$1.06 per meal spent on food costs.

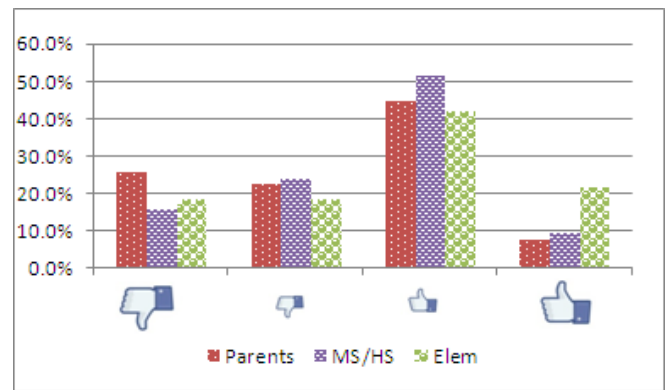
### *Taste and Nutrition*

Of parents who indicated that their child ate school breakfast at least some of the time, just over half (56.7%) indicated that they thought the breakfast did not taste good. Students had a higher opinion of the taste of school breakfast with just over half of middle and high school students and two-thirds of elementary students giving a “thumbs up” to the taste of school breakfast. About half of parents and just over 60% of middle and high school students and elementary students agreed that school lunch tastes good.

How School Breakfast Tastes



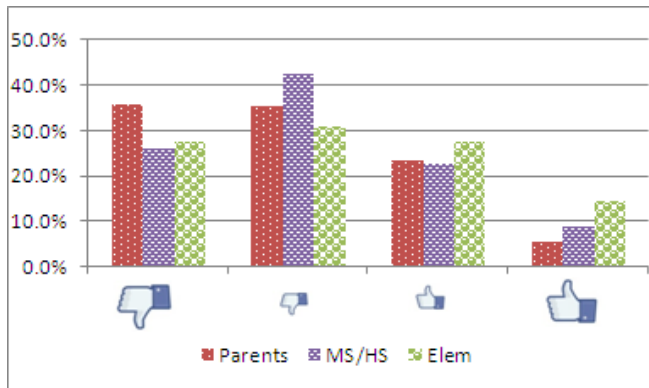
How School Lunch Tastes



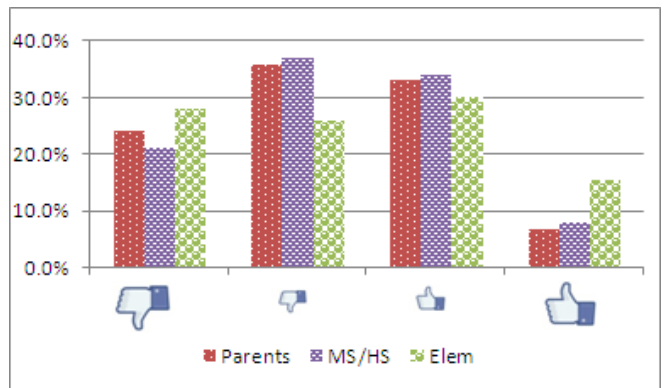
The vast majority of parents (71.3%) and middle and high school students (68.5%) said they did not think school breakfast is healthy. Fewer, but still the majority of, elementary students (58.4%) agreed.

School lunch fared slightly better in terms of how healthy survey respondents think it is, but the majority indicated they think school lunch is not healthy. Sixty percent of parents, 58.1% of middle and high school students and 54.1% of elementary students gave lunch a “thumbs down” when asked how healthy their school lunch is.

How Healthy School Breakfast Is



How Healthy School Lunch Is



### Time to Eat

When asked a series of questions about whether their children have time to eat meals either at home or at school, over half of parents indicated that their child does not have enough time to eat school breakfast and over a third said their child does not have time to eat breakfast at home. About half of parents said their child doesn't have enough time to eat school lunch and nearly three-quarters said the lunch lines are too long.

Surveyed students were much less likely than parents to say they don't have enough time to eat school meals with fewer than 20% of students saying they don't have time to eat breakfast either at school or at home and fewer than 10% saying they don't have enough time for lunch. However, a quarter of elementary students and nearly half of middle and high school students reported that lunch lines were too long.

### Portion Size

About an equal number of elementary students (12.3%) and middle/high school students (13.3%) said they're still hungry after eating breakfast. More middle and high school students (24.3%) than elementary students (13.7%) said they are still hungry after eating lunch. How often students eat school meals has a bearing on whether they say they are still hungry after eating. There is a statistically significant correlation for both elementary students and middle and high school students between the number of days they eat breakfast and whether they said they are still hungry after eating breakfast. Students who eat school breakfast were more likely to say they were hungry after eating. Survey results show a similar finding for school lunch. Both elementary and middle and high school students were statistically more likely to say they were still hungry after lunch the more days they eat school lunch.

### **Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)**

CACFP is similar to the NSLP program in that it provides federal reimbursement for meals provided at child care centers, family or group day care providers, and after school programs. With CACFP, care providers buy and serve meals or snacks to all children and receive reimbursement. In Tompkins County, fewer than half of eligible care providers participate in CACFP. The lack of participation by all types of care providers represents a loss of federal dollars that could be beneficial to the county and improve children’s access to healthy meals. Stakeholders noted several barriers to participating in CACFP including low reimbursement and demanding record keeping and menu planning requirements.

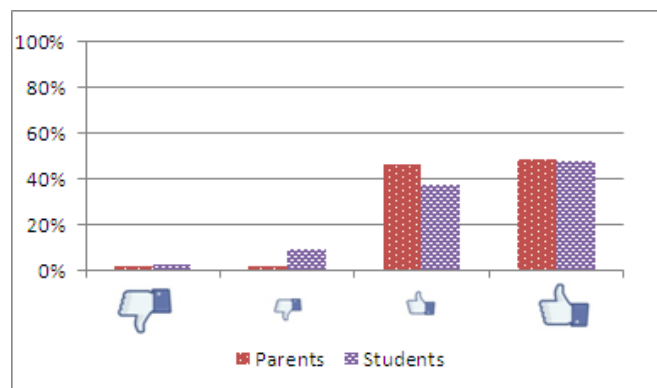
### **Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)**

The SFSP provides free meals to children in low-income areas during the summer months. In Tompkins County, six open sites operated during the summer of 2017 with two sites in Dryden, one site in Groton, two sites in Ithaca, and one site in Newfield. In addition, meals were served at 14 summer recreation programs. A total of 40,872 meals (including snacks) were provided to Tompkins County children through the SFSP. Assuming the number of food insecure children is 3,020 as per the Feeding America estimates, SFSP is serving less than a third of the number of children who may need support. Summer meals are reaching less than a quarter of the children enrolled in NSLP.

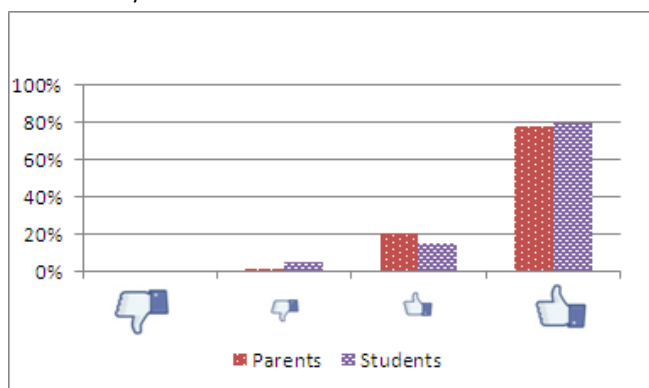
### **Fresh Snack Program**

The Fresh Snack Program, a program of the Youth Farm Project, provides a fresh fruit and vegetable snack two or three times per week to students at five of the eight ICSD elementary schools. The snack is locally sourced from area farmers and processed at an Ithaca based food processing business. The Fresh Snack Program distributes to approximately 28% of elementary students in the county. Based on enrollment, the Fresh Snack Program distributes an estimated 114,000 servings of fresh produce per year to area children. Assuming that eight servings equal a meal on a vegetarian diet, the Fresh Snack Program distributes the equivalent of 14,250 meals per year to Tompkins County students.

How Fresh Snack Tastes



How Healthy Fresh Snack Is



Nearly three-quarters of students who attend schools that participate in the Fresh Snack Program said they eat the snack always or most of the time it’s offered. Nearly all students and parents gave a “thumbs up” for how the snack tastes and how healthy it is. Stakeholders said the limited resources of the program prevent the program from being able to be in all schools creating equity issues. The Fresh Snack Program likely does not have a significant impact on food security due to the small portion size and frequency of availability. Over half of parents said they believed that their child was still hungry after eating the Fresh Snack.



### ***Food Bank of the Southern Tier (FBST)***

The food pantry network supported by the FBST served an average of 3 days of meals a month to nearly 2,000 children monthly during 2016 for a total of 212,085 meals. FBST has placed a priority on increasing the amount of produce distributed by agency pantries and has met with significant success in Tompkins County. In 2015, over 71,000 pounds of produce were distributed through Tompkins County food pantries. This increased to 132,000 pounds in 2016. The amount of produce distributed through pantries varies dramatically by region. The food pantries in Dryden, Groton and Lansing distribute significantly less produce as a percent of total pounds than pantries in other school districts in the county. The Newfield pantry nearly doubled the amount of produce they distributed, the Trumansburg pantry nearly tripled their produce distribution and pantries serving the ICSD region increased produce distribution by almost 85% between 2015 and 2016.

FBST also provides packs of food for the weekend to children at risk for food insecurity through its Backpack Program. FBST partners with schools and districts to distribute the packs to children on Friday to take home for the weekend. The reach of the Backpack Program is relatively limited. In the 2015-2016 school year, Tompkins County schools distributed 292 packs per week totaling approximately 63,000 meals for Tompkins County students. A recent evaluation of FBST's Backpack Program found that the complexity of the production process, the small amount of food in the packs, and the time and dollar costs are fundamental limitations of the program.

## **Nutrition Education**

The effect of nutrition education on children has been widely researched and has consistently found that well-designed nutrition education programs can lead to healthier food choices among children. Schools and non-profits in Tompkins County have engaged several efforts to provide nutrition education to children including offering nutrition information through health curricula and case study approaches, exposing children to brief marketing messages and taste tests, and through projects integrating gardening, cooking, studying, and eating. Despite the number of organizations providing nutrition education opportunities, there is very little assurance that every child receives equal and effective exposure. The majority of nutrition education programming is class, school or program based and comparable experiences are not available to all children.

### ***School-Based***

For the most part, school-based nutrition education in Tompkins County is scatter shot in nature. Interviews with school administrators and teachers across the county revealed that the majority of children in the county are exposed to very little nutrition education information and that there are limited efforts to teach children about healthy food choices. For the most part, nutrition education is not required nor is it available to all children equally. Nearly all school stakeholders interviewed noted that nutrition education is often only a brief element of students' health classes. Interviews with teachers and administrators in ICSD suggested that the majority of nutrition and health information available to students is integrated through a case study approach which offers teachers the opportunity to focus on a specific topic and use a cross-disciplinary approach to engage students. Overall, teachers, administrators and parents are pleased with the case-study approach and noted successful efforts to engage students in gardening and cooking. Despite the excitement and success of the case studies, it is clear that only a portion of ICSD students are engaged with nutrition-based case studies which dramatically limits the overall impact of the programming.



### ***Cornell Cooperative Extension-Tompkins***

CCE-Tompkins has a long history of providing nutrition education to adults and youth in Tompkins County. On average, CCE-Tompkins enrolls 115 adults and 50 youth in a 6-8 session EFNEP (Expanded Food & Nutrition Education Program) workshop series each year. In addition, in collaboration with the regional SNAP-Ed program (Finger Lakes Eat Smart New York), CCE-Tompkins' work includes both series and one-time lessons, social marketing and environmental interventions with schools and gardens. During the first quarter of 2017, FLESNY conducted 194 educational nutrition events reaching 3,291 adult and youth contacts. Several years ago, CCE experienced severe budget cuts in nutrition education resulting in staff cuts.

### ***Fresh Snack Program***

The Fresh Snack Program offers some nutrition information to schools in conjunction with the produce they provide. Schools have the responsibility to share the information with students and the implementation varies between schools. Some schools have students read the information during announcements while others send the information to the classroom for teachers to share. It is clear that the Fresh Snack Program's primary impact is providing students the opportunity to be regularly exposed to healthy fruits and vegetables that they may not otherwise have. The current level of nutrition education provided by the program is not robust enough to have much impact on its own, but it may contribute to the cumulative effect of other programs students' experience.

### ***Food Studies Institute***

The Food Studies Institute in Trumansburg has a cross-curricular program which engages children around food through the integration of art, geography, history, language arts, mathematics, science, writing and physical education. The lessons are participatory with students using all five senses to study whole foods, cook, create art, plant seeds, and write in journals. In addition, students prepare and consume food. The program has been implemented in the Cayuga Heights, Enfield, and Trumansburg elementary schools. Stakeholder interviews indicate that the curriculum created and conducted by the Food Studies Institutes is effective; however, the program is only implemented when funding has been made available through one-time grants. In order for the curriculum to be comprehensively integrated into schools and classrooms, long-term funding and staff committed either by the county, school districts or some other non-profit organization.

### ***Youth Farm Project***

The Youth Farm Project provides opportunities for ICSD students to go on field trips to their farm. While on the farm, students harvest and make fresh snack together while learning about nutrition. The field trips are popular among ICSD teachers and students; however, the farm only hosts field trips on Wednesday and Friday for five weeks in the fall which limits the number of children able to take advantage of the opportunity.

### ***Cool School Food***

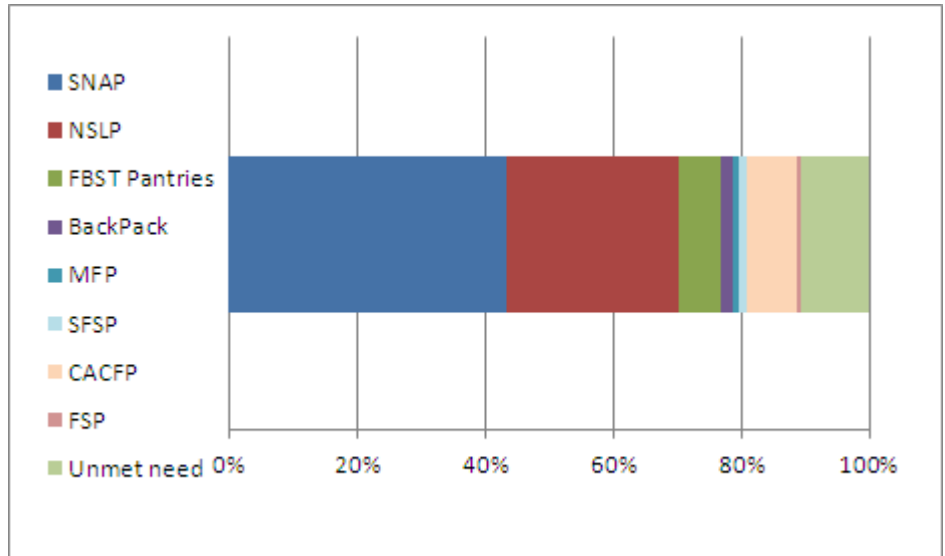
The Cool School Food program from the New York Coalition for Healthy School Food has the goal of integrating plant-based, made from scratch recipes into school cafeterias. The program developed four plant-based recipes for ICSD to add to their monthly menu. One of the Cool School Food recipes is offered as an option once a week to students as part of the school lunch. While some stakeholders mentioned the Cool School Food options as a successful aspect of ICSD's food service program, actual uptake of the food is relatively low. An evaluation of the program from 2015 found that only 5% of students buying school lunch chose the Cool School Food entrée. Information from students, parents,

and program observations indicate that uptake of the entrées have not increased substantially since then.

**Key Gaps**

Taking into account the primary resources available to food insecure families with children, there is an estimated unmet need of approximately 343,059 meals or 10.3% of all meals needed, per year.<sup>1</sup>

Source	Meals
SNAP	1,437,624
NSLP	897,873
FBST Pantries	212,085
BackPack	63,072
MFP	34,344
SFSP	38,236
CACFP	266,357
FSP	14,250
<i>Unmet need</i>	<i>343,059</i>



**Socioeconomic Class and Race**

When asked where they saw the greatest gaps in child nutrition in the county, many stakeholders noted that socio-economic class, and how class interacts with race and household type, was where the primary disparities occur. Census data show that Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino families in Tompkins County are disproportionately more likely to have incomes below poverty and thus are more likely to be at risk for food insecurity. In addition, Black/African American families are also much more likely to be very low-income as compared to other races. Census data regarding SNAP participation by race and ethnicity show Asian families are less likely to receive SNAP benefits when they are theoretically eligible. It may be an area of interest to determine whether there is a population that is eligible for SNAP benefits, but are not participating, and if outreach efforts could improve participation. If this population is ineligible to receive SNAP benefits due to citizenship status, it may be useful to explore whether there are other options to support their food security.

<sup>1</sup> Assumes 3,020 children in Tompkins County are food insecure  
 SNAP: 2,904 children receiving benefits at an average of \$125/month. (2,904 children \*\$125/month\*12 months)/\$3.03/meal=1,701,563 meals  
 FBST Pantries: Pantries average 3 days of meals per month = 9 meals \* 23,565 children served yearly = 212,085 meals  
 Backpack Program: The Backpack Program provides 6 meals per week. 292 packs per week\* 6 meals \* 36 weeks = 63,072 meals  
 MFP: The MFP Program serves an average of 3 days of meals per month. 318 children per month \* 12 months \* 9 meals = 34,344 meals  
 SFSP: SFSP provided 40,872 meals during the summer of 2017  
 CACFP: CACFP provided reimbursement for 83,000 meals during 2016  
 FSP: The Fresh Snack Program provides 114,000 servings per year. Assuming 8 servings of fruits and vegetables would make a meal, FSP provides 14,250 meals/year

### ***Single Mothers***

Families with a single female head of household are much more likely to have incomes below poverty and over 40% of these households can be considered to be at risk for food insecurity.

### ***Children in Informal Care***

Children receiving child care through the legally exempt providers or other informal providers may have insufficient access to healthy and adequate food. Stakeholders suggest that low-income children who receive subsidies very often have their care provided by other low-income households and thus have limited access to nutritious food options.

### ***Independent Youth***

Over a third of the estimated 985 independent youth who are homeless in Tompkins County indicate that they are food insecure. A significant portion of these youth also indicated they either have children in their custody or are currently pregnant.

### ***Rural Areas***

Several stakeholders noted that rural populations have disparities in their access to healthy foods.

## **Suggestions for Improvement**

Stakeholders, parents, and students were all asked to provide their ideas for how child nutrition could be improved in the county. Stakeholders frequently suggested that higher quality and more nutritious options should be available at school meals; that non-profits and schools should have more effective partnerships; that parents should have better connections to information and resources; and that the community should develop a united vision for wellness and child nutrition and cultivate sustainable funding and programming. Parents most frequently suggested that schools provide higher quality and more nutritious options at school meals; giving students more opportunities to cook and garden, offering more farm to school opportunities; and increasing the availability of fresh produce. Students were most concerned with improving the taste and appeal of foods available at school lunch; increasing portion sizes and the variety available; and giving them more time to eat.

## **Conclusion**

What seems very clear from the results of this study is that there is no cohesive vision of how child nutrition should be valued, addressed, or assessed in Tompkins County. The non-profits working in the area frequently have very specific agendas and philosophies, school districts have little focus other than meeting USDA guidelines for meal programs, and there are no comprehensive curricula or assessments for students' skills or knowledge attainment related to nutrition. This lack of community vision has resulted in silo-ed efforts reaching pockets of children with narrowly focused goals.

In order to ensure that children in Tompkins County have access to healthy and nutritious food, stakeholders from all areas, schools, cafeterias, non-profits, parents, and health providers, must come together and create an over-arching vision of what it would mean for Tompkins County to successfully address child nutrition. There are several critical elements that must be achieved to create this vision.

First and foremost, the county must coalesce around the reasons for improving child nutrition. Some stakeholders suggest that childhood obesity and the negative individual and public health outcomes is reason enough to pursue improving child nutrition. While public health is clearly a vital issue for the

county, it has proven to be a challenge to rally meaningful public support using obesity as the marker. Our society places a great deal of emphasis on individual responsibility with reference to the health complications related to obesity and diminishes the community's role in addressing the issue. Confounding this challenge is the prevalence of adult obesity. There is a danger in stigmatizing and alienating critical stakeholders such as food service workers, parents, and service workers by focusing the discussion on weight.

A more fundamental motive for focusing on child nutrition is the notion that children have a fundamental human right to adequate, nutritious food and the knowledge necessary to reach their full physical potential. An acknowledgement and embracement of this human right would require all stakeholders to be accountable in their efforts and bring equity into conversations about programming priorities. Within these efforts it will be important to change who carries the mantle of responsibility for deciding what children eat. A message heard from all types of stakeholders in this study is that children are the decision makers of what they eat both at home and at school. Parents of all economic backgrounds frequently said that their biggest challenge in incorporating healthy foods is that their children are picky. Food services directors create their menus based on the assumption that children won't eat anything except hot dogs, chicken nuggets, tacos, and pizza. However, results from this study clearly show that students want nutritious food that is appealing and tastes good and are interested and willing to learn about how to have a healthy diet. A shift in perspective will be a key in overcoming these pervasive attitudinal barriers to change.

To overcome structural barriers, it will be necessary to identify who will drive the process for developing the community vision, supporting collaborations and facilitating the process of change and improvement. Currently, Tompkins County does not have a fully-funded, staffed organization focused on improving child nutrition. The Collective Impact group working on child nutrition has been hindered by a lack of organizational "backbone" to push the initiative meaningfully forward. Identifying and funding the proper group or groups to facilitate change will be a critical step. An important element of this work will be to determine how to measure success and identify on-going challenges. A coordinated approach will help to codify indicators and methods for measuring achievement.

## Opportunities

- 1) Increase the quality of school food in terms of taste and nutrition**
  - a. Make more meal items from scratch
  - b. Eliminate/reduce highly-processed, high sugar products
  - c. Incorporate unlimited salad bars with meal purchase which include sufficient proteins and grains to create a fully reimbursable meal
  - d. Provide healthy, meal-based vending options in the high school
  - e. Extend lunch menu cycles to incorporate more variety
- 2) Increase participation in school food programs**
  - a. Communicate the value and healthiness of school meals to parents and market the convenience and quality of school lunch to justify cost
  - b. Make ingredient and recipe information available to families, invite parents to come experience school meals, provide parents the option to monitor what their child selected for breakfast/lunch
  - c. Expose students to engaging marketing efforts such as “Chef Meals”
  - d. Consider implementing the Community Eligibility Provision in schools where possible
- 3) Bolster district food services budgets**
  - a. Subsidize school food services
  - b. Consider increasing per meal prices for paid meals to increase the budget and purchase higher quality foods
- 4) Create a school culture where students are engaged with food decisions**
  - a. Involve students in decisions about menu items through taste-testing and voting on new items
  - b. Incorporate student-led research and evaluation of the food environment to find and develop recipes; market to peers; and partner with students participating in farm to school programs for produce to integrate into recipes
  - c. Conduct “Student Chef Contests” with taste-tests and judging by other younger students
- 5) Create an environment conducive to healthy eating and conversations about nutrition**
  - a. Increase the amount of time for meals
  - b. Experiment with family style meals
  - c. Experiment with offering recess before lunch for elementary students
  - d. Encourage school adults to focus on conversation rather than discipline in the meal environment
  - e. Experiment with lunch room design
- 6) Expand nutrition education opportunities and increase kids’ opportunities to grow, cook, eat food**
  - a. Empower an organization or coordinator to manage programs and partnerships to ensure equity and consistency
  - b. Ensure on-going, consistent funding
  - c. Explore using Food Corps/AmeriCorps members as food educators in schools
  - d. Consider tapping Cornell Nutrition students as food educators
  - e. Provide easy grant opportunities for teachers using a food-based case study approach
  - f. Consider opportunities to support more consistent and expanded integration of nutrition education with the Fresh Snack Program
  - g. Explore offering FBST’s Kids’ Farmers’ Markets or school-based food fairs in conjunction with nutrition education opportunities and food giveaways

**7) Improve charitable food access and offerings**

- a. Support FBST's efforts to expand produce availability in pantries
- b. Support efforts to deliver and provide healthy food options to low-income families
- c. Support efforts for school districts and child care centers to donate unused food to charitable organizations

**8) Support food and wellness policy improvements**

- a. Encourage robust school-based wellness policies
- b. Support food service departments to collaborate and explore group buying power
- c. Encourage community-based wellness plan/group
- d. Ensure year-round availability of food resources to all children
- e. Develop metrics to evaluate progress