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## How Do Schools Deal With Kids Who Come to School Hungry

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It is the fortunate, and rare, school administrator that never needs to think about students coming to school hungry. But with more than 12 million children in the United States in "food insecure" families, or families without resources to provide adequate variety and amount of healthy food daily for their families, most administrators face the challenge of educating hungry children.

Hungry children have problems concentrating and often display social and behavioral problems in the classroom. Teachers and administrators struggle with how best to handle the situation. Some teachers will provide snacks to all of the children in their classes in order to not single out the hungry child. But that practice may result in overfeeding the students who are not hungry and sets children up for not being hungry for school lunch. Some teachers have snacks that they give to a hungry child but that approach may be embarrassing for the child. Both approaches are compassionate acts but may require teachers to spend their own money. In addition, it may be difficult to ensure the healthfulness of snacks that are provided by an individual teacher. Finally, problem-solving what to do with a hungry child takes time away from teachers teaching their classes.

Consider the following options as school and district-wide approaches for making sure that hunger does not get in the way of student learning. First, if your district does not participate in the USDA School Breakfast Program (SBP), make it happen! Currently, over 11 million children in 87,000 schools across the USA participate daily in the SBP. Federal reimbursement as well as technical training and assistance to school food service are available. School breakfast can be a grab-and-go option from the cafeteria, a breakfast cart that is stocked with healthy options, or a time for a simple breakfast offered in classrooms. Cold whole grain cereals, skim milk, fruit, peanut butter, yogurt and whole grain toast or mini bagels are all terrific choices.

Another option is the USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. This program started as a pilot program in 2002 and was so well received that the Farm Bill of 2008 permanently authorized the program nationwide. Selected schools receive reimbursement for the cost of making free fresh fruits and vegetables available to students during the school day. These additional fruit and vegetable offerings must be provided separately from the lunch or breakfast meal. Eligible schools are elementary schools that have a high free and reduced price enrollment, participate in the National School Lunch Program and complete an annual application to the USDA. The USDA also provides assistance for feeding hungry children at schools through their afterschool snack program, their Seamless Summer Program and their Special Milk Program. Visit [fns.usda.gov](http://fns.usda.gov) for more information. Whatever your approach, make feeding hungry children an issue that is addressed at the school or district level. The entire school benefits when children are alert, fed, happy and ready to learn!

*Dr. Lytle is an expert in community-level approaches for preventing childhood obesity. She has been conducting and evaluating programs in schools for more than 20 years.*

### References

[www.feedthechildren.org/site/PageServer?pagename=org\\_us\\_programs](http://www.feedthechildren.org/site/PageServer?pagename=org_us_programs)

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