Heading off Hunger:
A Snapshot of Child Nutrition in Newark
A Kids Count Special Report

June 24, 2014

Advocates for Children of New Jersey
35 Halsey Street
Newark, NJ 07102
973.643.3876
www.acnj.org

Support for this project was provided by a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.
Why look at child nutrition in Newark?

- A nutritious diet is critical for children to grow up healthy and succeed in school and later in life.

- Food insecurity and unhealthy eating and exercise habits are associated with higher risks of health and behavioral problems and being overweight.
ACNJ, with support from the NJ Partnership for Healthy Kids and the RWJF, set out to collect and analyze data on child nutrition in Newark.

Goal: Improve understanding of nutritional needs, identify ways to meet those needs and to improve the health and well-being of Newark children.

What we found: a limited amount of consistent and comprehensive data to measure the nutritional needs of Newark children.
Key Findings

- Growing need in Newark.
- Pockets of great work and effective programs, but many are not city- or even school-wide.
- Underutilization of programs and supports.
- Disjointed efforts to address nutrition.

www.acnj.org
Nutritional Needs of Newark Children

• Growing need: as economic conditions worsen for Newark children, we need to ensure children have adequate and nutritious food.

• 2012: 71% of children in low-income families, 44% in poverty, 23% extreme poverty – all increased in recent years

• Median income down, households spending too much on rent up.

• Nearly all Newark students, 88% percent, qualify for free- or reduced-price school meals.
Nutritional Needs of Newark Children

- Extent of true nutritional needs are unknown.

- However, Essex County had highest incidence of food insecurity in the state at 19.2% in 2012, compared to 13% statewide.
Nutritional Health of Newark Children

• Little is known.

• Study by the Center for State Health Policy at Rutgers:
  • Newark preschoolers are more than twice as likely to be overweight or obese than their peers nationally.
  • 47% of children ages 6-11 are overweight or obese.

• Just 18% of Newark mothers breastfeeding.
Nutritional Supports for Newark Children

- Many supports and programs exist in the city, but few are city-wide and many are underutilized.

- Despite growing poverty and need, participation rates in some programs is on the decline.
Nutritional Supports for Newark Children

- WIC enrollment declined 1%

- More students eligible for school meals, but the amount receiving free- or reduced-price school breakfast and lunch down.

- School breakfast: dropped from 68% receiving in 2010-11, to 59% in 2012-13

- School lunch: dropped from 86% to 73%

www.acnj.org
Nutritional Supports for Newark Children

- NJ SNAP (Food Stamps) is the exception.
- Children receiving NJ SNAP increased 27%.
- More than 34,000 Newark children in 2014.
Nutritional Supports for Newark Children

After School Meals

• At-Risk Afterschool Meal Program offers healthy snacks and dinners to children in communities of need; supported by federal dollars.

• All Newark schools qualify for this program, yet just a fraction of students are being fed.

• 43,000 students in Newark schools; in 2013, a total of just 21,000 snacks and dinners were served.

• Decline between 2012 and 2013.

www.acnj.org
Nutritional Supports for Newark Children

Summer Meals

• Summer Meals Program – Newark Public Schools
  • 2013: 164,000 breakfasts and lunches served
  • 10% drop in total meals served from 2009

• SuNup Food Program – City of Newark, funded by Dept. of Agriculture
  • 2013: 137 sites, 386,000 meals served

www.acnj.org
Nutritional Supports for Newark Children

Child Care Meals

Child Care Demographics 2013:
• 183 licensed centers with a capacity of 16,000
  • 159 Newark family child care providers

• No data were available on the number of meals served in licensed centers in Newark; inability of state data system to sort by city.

www.acnj.org
Nutritional Supports for Newark Children

Family Child Care Meals

- Low participation in program – of the 159 Newark providers, just 43 participated in the meal program in 2014, down 16% from 2010.

- 231 Newark children enrolled in CACFP in 2014, also down from 2010.

www.acnj.org
Programs that Support Nutritional Health

- Numerous programs exist throughout the city – in schools, community agencies and hospitals.

- Examples: Healthy U/CATCH Program through Newark YMCA, Kids Fit, Activity Works, Great Newark Conservancy, Alliance for a Healthier Generation, among others.

- Great programs, but not city- or school-wide.

www.acnj.org
Programs that Support Nutritional Health

Federal Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program

• Newark School District – provides fresh fruit or vegetable snack to students.

• In 2013-14, 18 NPS schools participated, up from 4 schools in 2011-12.

• While positive, still, just 25% of NPS schools and students are currently participating.
Food and Physical Activity Environment

- Newark has many options for residents to buy food, but no comprehensive pictures of all stores and places people can buy food in Newark.

- Not much is known about the quality and availability of fresh and healthy food.
Food and Physical Activity Environment

NJ SNAP in Newark

- 34,000 Newark children receiving; their families had 359 different stores throughout the city at which to shop.

WIC in Newark

- 13,500 Newark recipients; just 52 stores accept benefits.
- Per federal regulations, Newark could have up to 88 stores authorized to accept WIC.
- Waiting list statewide and in Newark to become WIC authorized.

www.acnj.org
Issues and Recommendations
Increase gathering and availability of information and data
Increase gathering and availability of information and data

- Lack of data makes it difficult to understand the true need and to formulate solutions.

- Creation of a city-wide guide on all child health and nutrition programs.

- Mapping of all places residents can purchase and obtain food.

[www.acnj.org]
Establish city-wide coordination of child nutrition
Establish city-wide coordination

- City-wide commitment and coordination necessary to understand broad and complex issue.

- Creation of a formal council or taskforce on child health and nutrition

- Representation from all relevant stakeholders

- Identify ways to collect data, to better understand issues, guide use of limited resources

www.acnj.org
Streamline data systems and food programs
Streamline data systems and food programs

- Different food programs are operated in different agencies of state government, but same department (At-Risk After School Meal Program and child care meals vs. school meals).

- Agencies do not share information and have different data systems.
Streamline data systems and food programs

• School meals has online data system, after school and child care meal data need to be handwritten.

• Very burdensome for schools and programs – some report not participating in programs due to lack of resources for this.

• More efficient if all meals could be tracked in compatible data systems within same agency.

www.acnj.org
Increase participation in the At-Risk After School Meal program

www.acnj.org
Increase participation in At-Risk After School Meal program

- Every Newark student is eligible and there is federal funding for program.

- Yet, only 21,000 dinners were served in 2013.

- Outreach to parents to raise awareness of the program and assistance to schools and programs to increase participation are needed.

www.acnj.org
Increase participation in the child care food program
Increase participation in child care food program

- Family child care providers report bureaucratic difficulties in accessing the program.

- State currently cannot provide information on participation for licensed centers.

- City and state officials should work together to address data and participation issues.

www.acnj.org
Issue specific guidance on food and nutrition for Newark schools
Issue specific guidance for Newark schools

- NPS has a nutrition and wellness policy, but schools can choose to opt in or out of programs, many do not participate in programs.

- More specific guidance and direction should be provided on the district level to school leaders.
Issue specific guidance for Newark schools

School Breakfast

• Newark schools should be required to serve “breakfast after the bell.”

• District’s practice for many years, recently been eroded resulting in decline in children receiving breakfast.

Charter Schools

• Newark is home to many charter schools, yet little is known about the wellness and nutrition in these schools.

• An assessment of charters should be completed.

www.acnj.org
Increase stores that are able to accept WIC benefits in Newark
Increase stores able to accept WIC benefits

- Up to 88 stores can be authorized, but only 52 currently; waiting list.

- NJ Department of Health is taking steps to address, goal should be to eliminate waiting list and expedite certification.

- Decline in WIC enrollment is concerning; additional outreach strategies should be developed and implemented.

www.acnj.org
Promote breastfeeding among new mothers
Promote breastfeeding

- Proven health and nutritional benefits to baby and mother.

- In 2010, just 759 mothers were breastfeeding babies at hospital discharge.

- Some progress, but more work needs to be done to promote breastfeeding through proven policies and practices.

www.acnj.org
Giving Every Child A Chance

www.acnj.org

Find us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/acnjforkids

Find us on Twitter at twitter.com/acnjforkids