

# Heading off Hunger:

## *A Snapshot of Child Nutrition in Newark A Kids Count Special Report*

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**New Jersey Partnership  
for Healthy Kids**

Communities Making a Difference  
to Prevent Childhood Obesity

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# 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.





# Heading Off Hunger: *A Snapshot of Child Nutrition in Newark*

- 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.

# 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%

# 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.



# 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

# 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.

# 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.



# 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.

# 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.



# 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.

# 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





# 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.





# Increase participation in the At-Risk After School Meal program

## 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.

# 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.

# 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.



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.



# 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.



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