

GENYOUth Youth Hunger and School Meals Survey: Report Highlights

August 2024

Part 1: Overview

Food insecurity among children in the United States is a critical issue that affects millions of young lives. It has profound implications for their physical health, cognitive development, and emotional well-being. Addressing this issue requires a multifaceted approach, including support for federal and community programs, policy changes, and increased awareness. And according to a new survey conducted by Wired Research and commissioned by GENYOUth, Americans recognize that work needs to be done to address food insecurity among children.

While many aren't totally clear on the exact statistics of how many children live in food-insecure homes or how many rely on school meals for a significant amount of their daily nutrition, they do recognize how critical an issue it is. In fact, millions of Americans are clamoring for more resources and funding from the government to help feed hungry children and provide all children access to nutritious and safe food at school.

The results of the survey underscore GENYOUth's mission to help schoolchildren thrive by living well-nourished and physically active lives. The research reveals that Americans believe that by working together, our country can make significant strides toward ensuring that every child has consistent access to the nutritious food they need to thrive.

Part 2: Millions of Americans Have Experience with Food Insecurity Yet More Awareness is Needed

- **New survey reveals that Americans are all too familiar with food insecurity.** Millions of Americans have some sort of experience with food insecurity (Q5):
 - Close to 2 in 5 (37%) or more than 95 million¹ Americans know of at least one child who has been impacted by food insecurity.

¹ Extrapolated from 257,247,659 US Adults 18+; 2023 Census

- About 3 in 10 (31%) or nearly 80 million² Americans report that they participated in school meal programs when they were growing up.
 - And more than 1 in 4 (26%) or close to 67 million³ Americans admit they personally faced food insecurity as a child.
- **Experience with food insecurity is higher among people of color.** The Black and Latinx communities are more likely than White non-Latinx people to have been touched by food insecurity in some way:
 - Know of at least one child who has been impacted by food insecurity (42% Black, 39% Latinx, 36% White).
 - Participated in school meals programs as a child (48% Black, 37% Latinx, 25% White).
 - Personally have faced food insecurity as a child (40% Black, 31% Latinx, 22% White).
- **Despite their experience with food insecurity, the majority of Americans aren't clear on the exact statistics, suggesting that more work needs to be done to drive awareness:**
 - 1 in 5 U.S. children currently live in food insecure homes. However, 2 in 3 (64%) Americans actually don't know this figure. (Q1)
 - 30 million U.S. children rely on school meals for a significant amount of their daily nutrition. Yet just 26% of Americans know this. This means that 3 in 4 (74%) or 190 million⁴ aren't aware of this critical figure. (Q3)

Part 3: Americans Recognize the Importance of School Meals, Support More Resources and Funding to Help Feed Hungry Children

- Close to 3 in 5 (56%) Americans believe that most U.S. children get their healthiest meals from school. This is significantly more than those who feel the same about a child's home (34%), grocery stores or supermarkets (9%), or restaurants (1%). (Q2)
 - Older generations are more likely than their younger peers to think that American children get their healthiest meals from school (63% of Boomers and Gen X vs. 49% of Gen Z and Millennials).

² Extrapolated from 257,247,659 US Adults 18+; 2023 Census

³ Extrapolated from 257,247,659 US Adults 18+; 2023 Census

⁴ Extrapolated from 257,247,659 US Adults 18+; 2023 Census

- In fact, nearly the same amount (59%) feel that school meal programs are the country's largest safety net for food insecurity among school-age children (Q4)
- This is likely why 7 in 10 (70%) or 180 million⁵ Americans feel that U.S. children should be provided access to nutritious and safe food at school. And 3 in 5 (60%) think that food insecurity among U.S. children should be a national priority. (Q4)
- Americans are clamoring for more to be done at the federal and local level. In fact, 2 in 3 (66%) or nearly 170 million⁶ men and women support the U.S. government doing more to provide resources and funding to help feed hungry children. Similarly, about the same amount (65%) believe that more states need to offer free school meal programs to all children. (Q4)

Methodological Notes

The GENYOUth Youth Hunger and School Meals Survey surveyed 1,008 nationally representative Americans aged 18+. The survey was conducted online between July 22, 2024 and July 29, 2024. The study has a margin of error of +/- 3.1%.

Results of any sample are subject to sampling variation. The magnitude of the variation is measurable and is affected by the number of interviews and the level of the percentages expressing the results.

In this particular study, the chances are 95 in 100 that a survey result does not vary, plus or minus, by more than 3.1 percent from the result that would be obtained if interviews had been conducted with all personas in the universe represented by the sample. The margin of error for any subgroups will be slightly higher.

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