

Witnesses to Hunger New Haven

Winter Break School Meals Survey Report

Introduction

Witnesses to Hunger New Haven is a collective of people with firsthand experience of the struggle with not having enough money and food to get by each month. We are joined by researchers, policy advocates, and fellow activists to form a diverse coalition. Many of us are lifelong New Haven residents. We grew up here, and we live in the neighborhoods where the struggle is a daily reality. Many of us have been fighting for decades so that our kids and all kids in New Haven can get the food they need to thrive. We are not winning the battle right now. We won't give up, because we can't give up.

A central focus of our advocacy is to make sure that kids have something good to eat 3 times a day, 365 days a year. School meals are the cornerstone of feeding kids in New Haven. We went out to New Haven public schools to conduct a brief survey about the school meals being served during winter break. We spoke to people coming to pick up meals. We did not ask for names or any questions that could identify the people who responded.

Survey questions

1. Why does having meals available during school breaks matter to you and your family?

(Choose all that apply)

- We are running low on food.
- We have additional people in our home.
- The holidays took up money we usually use to stretch our food budget.
- Having kids at home instead of in school costs more in food.
- Other: _____

2. Does having school food help you to stretch your household food budget?

- Yes
- No

3. How would meals need to change to meet your child's nutritional needs?

- More attention to allergies
- Less fat in the meals
- More vegetables in each meal
- More variety of milk
- They are fine as they are.
- Other: _____

4. Would you like meals during school breaks to continue?

- Yes
- No

5. Do you have any other comments you would like to share with us?

Schools covered

110 total surveys were completed at 6 different New Haven public schools.

School	Date(s)	# of Surveys
Beecher	12/29/20	13
Lincoln-Bassett	12/30/20	13
Columbus	12/30/20	48
Clemente	12/31/20	8
John Martinez	12/31/20	9
Troup	1/4-1/8/21*	19

*Troup School surveys were completed with cooperation from school staff.

Key Findings

- ✓ 107 out of 110 respondents (97%) said that the school food helps them to stretch their budget
- ✓ 108 out of 110 respondents (98%) said that they would like meals during breaks to continue
- ✓ The top two reasons that meals during breaks mattered to respondents were: having kids at home rather than school costs more (58%) and families running low on food (50%)
- ✓ The top recommendations for improving school meals were: more vegetables in each meal (35%) and less fat in meals (28%), with 43% replying that they are good as they are, with several respondents expressing gratitude for the meals with comments like “I believe it is a wonderful program”, “thank God for this”, and “please keep it up”.

Suggestions from Respondents

- ✓ The highest number comments to Question 5 involved people being grateful for the meals during the winter break and praising the program.
- ✓ There were several comments about having more fruits and vegetables.
- ✓ Several people talked about reducing the amount of sugar in the meals.
- ✓ Some respondents suggested providing larger portion sizes.
- ✓ Some people requested more variety in the meals offered.
- ✓ A few people talked about the importance of meals since they do not have time to prepare food during the day due to their jobs.
- ✓ Some parents, particularly at Troup, suggested alternatives to fruit juice, including water.

Recommendations

- ✦ Continue serving meals during all school breaks. Keep up the good work.
- ✦ Increase fresh fruit and vegetables in meals. Reduce fat and sugar content.
- ✦ Consider larger portions for older children.
- ✦ Partner with other food sources – food pantries/Connecticut Food Bank, university food services, and potentially restaurants to supplement food available during school breaks, including the “August meal gap” between when the Summer Food Service Program ends and school resumes for a new academic year.

Witnesses to Hunger New Haven and our coalition partners reaffirm our longstanding commitment to working with New Haven Public Schools and the Board of Education, and to developing further community partnerships, to ensure that all New Haven kids can get the food they need to thrive.