NCLR
National Council of La Raza

2015 Profiles of Latino Health
A Closer Look at Latino Child Nutrition

ISSUE 10: HISPANIC PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL-BASED NUTRITION PROGRAMS*

School-based nutrition programs provide children with a consistent source of nourishment and have been tied to better educational, health, and behavioral outcomes.[1] The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the School Breakfast Program (SBP) are two programs that provide nutrient-rich meals at reduced or no cost to millions of children each year. They are particularly important to the Latino community because a disproportionate share (28%) of Latino children lived in food-insecure households in 2013 compared to just 10.6% of non-Hispanic White households.

THE NATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM AND SCHOOL BREAKFAST PROGRAM

NSLP and SBP serve millions of children in grades K–12 in public and private schools throughout the United States. Both programs are administered by the Food and Nutrition Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). USDA reimburses schools for meals that meet certain nutritional standards, including minimum nutrient levels and calorie limits, to ensure age-appropriate meals for grades K–5, 6–8, and 9–12.

Any child at a participating school may purchase a meal through these programs. Children from families with incomes at or below 130% of the poverty level are eligible for free meals. Those with incomes between 130% and 185% of the poverty level are eligible for reduced-price meals, for which students cannot be charged more than $0.40. In 2012, about 31 million children participated in NSLP and 13 million children participated in SBP.

Sources: USDA, "National School Lunch Program." Alexandria, VA, 2013, www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/NSLPFactSheet.pdf (accessed May 2015); and USDA, "The School Breakfast Program." Alexandria, VA, 2013, www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/SBPfactsheet.pdf (accessed May 2015).

Most Hispanic children participating in school-based nutrition programs are receiving meals at free or reduced cost.[2]

- According to the most recent estimates, in 2004–2005 Latinos represented about one-quarter (24%) of all children participating in NSLP.[3]
- Hispanic children make up nearly one-third of all school children receiving free (32%) and reduced-price (29.7%) lunch through NSLP.[4]
- Over three-quarters of all Hispanic children participating in NSLP receive free (64.2%) or reduced-price (12.8%) lunch (see Figure 1).[5]

Many potentially eligible Latino children are not enrolled in school-based nutrition programs.

- Hispanics make up a large share of children who are likely eligible for free or low-cost school meals but not receiving them. Researchers estimate that for 1999–2004, Mexican American children (28.4%) and children of other Hispanic origin (6.6%) made up more than one-third of income-eligible nonparticipants in NSLP.[6]
- Limited English proficiency, limited transportation, apprehension or confusion about application requirements, and other barriers likely prevent many eligible children and families from accessing nutrition programs, including school-based nutrition programs.[7]

School-based meals increase children's energy and nutritional intake.

- In general, children participating in school meal programs are more likely than nonparticipants to consume more nutrients and have an adequate daily intake of certain important vitamins and minerals.[8,9,10]
- Compared to nonparticipants, children who took part in SBP consumed more calories in the morning and researchers

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† The terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and throughout this document to refer to persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent; they may be of any race. Furthermore, unless otherwise noted, estimates in this document do not include the 3.7 million residents of Puerto Rico. Comparison data for non-Hispanic Whites and non-Hispanic Blacks will be identified respectively as "Whites" and "Blacks."

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found that "participants' energy appears to be spread out a bit more evenly over the course of the day than [that of] nonparticipants."[11]

- School meals offer much-needed nutrition to children living with food insecurity, representing a larger portion of the daylong caloric and nutrient intake for children from food-insecure (26%) households compared to children from food-secure (16%) households.[12]

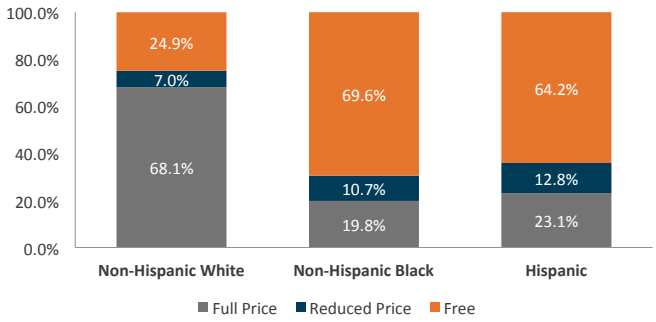
Latino children stand to benefit from new nutrition requirements for snack foods and beverages sold at schools.

- Hispanic students have greater exposure to supplemental snacks and beverages in schools compared to White or Black students.[13]
- Latino students are significantly more likely to purchase and consume unhealthy snack items in school compared to White students.[14]
- Latino students are less likely than White students to have an assortment of healthy snack options available in school, including fruits, vegetables, salads, and whole grains.[15]

Federal school-based child nutrition programs are an important source of sustenance for millions of Hispanic children. To make progress in eliminating child hunger and improving access to nutritious foods for Latino children living with food insecurity, all eligible families must be able to enroll in these programs that provide nutritious meals at low or no cost.

Figure 1:

Child Participation in the National School Lunch Program by Race/Ethnicity and Cost, 1999–2002



Source: Constance Newman and Katherine Ralston, *Profiles of Participants in the National School Lunch Program*. Economic Information Bulletin 17. USDA. Alexandria, VA, 2006, www.ers.usda.gov/publications/eib-economic-information-bulletin/eib17.aspx (accessed May 2015).

Endnotes

1 For information on the effects of school meal programs, see Craig Gunderson et al., "The Impact of the National School Lunch Program on Child Health: A Nonparametric Bounds Analysis," *Journal of Econometrics* 166, no. 1, (2012): 79–91; and Larry Brown, William Beardslee, and Deborah Prothrow-Stith, *Impact of School Breakfast on Children's Health and Learning: An Analysis of the Scientific Research* (Gaithersburg, MD: Sodexo Foundation, 2008), www.sodexofoundation.org/hunger_us/Images/Impact%20of%20School%20Breakfast%20Study_tcm150-212606.pdf (accessed May 2015).

2 USDA does not collect the of NSLP and SBP participants. This brief uses data from national surveys to estimate the demographics of children in NSLP.

3 Katherine Ralston et al., *The National School Lunch Program: Background, Trends, and Issues*. Economic Research Report 61. USDA. Alexandria, VA, 2008.

4 Constance Newman and Katherine Ralston, *Profiles of Participants in the National School Lunch Program*. Economic Information Bulletin 17. USDA. Alexandria, VA, 2006, www.ers.usda.gov/publications/eib17/eib17.pdf (accessed March 2015). This survey reports estimates from multiple sources. In this profile, NCLR reports estimates from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey.

5 Ibid.

6 Nancy Cole and Mary Kay Fox, *Diet Quality of American School-Age Children by School Lunch Participation Status: Data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 1999-2004*. USDA. Alexandria, VA, 2008.

7 Crystal Weedall FitzSimons, James D. Weill, and Lynn Parker, *Barriers That Prevent Low-Income People from Gaining Access to Food and Nutrition Programs* (Washington, DC: Food Research and Action Center, n.d.), www.hungercenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Barriers-to-Food-and-Nutrition-Programs-FRAC.pdf (accessed October 2010).

8 Anne Gordon and Mary Kay Fox, *School Nutrition Dietary Assessment Study III: Summary of Findings*. USDA. Alexandria, VA 2007.

9 Elizabeth M. Condon, Mary Kay Crepinsek, and Mary Kay Fox, "School Meals: Types of Foods Offered to and Consumed by Children at Lunch and Breakfast," *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* 109, no. 2 (2009): S67–S78.

10 Nancy Cole and Mary Kay Fox, *Diet Quality.*

11 Philip Gleason et al., *School Meal Program Participation and Its Association with Dietary Patterns and Childhood Obesity* (Washington, DC: Mathematica Policy Research, 2009).

12 Elizabeth Potamites and Anne Gordon, "Children's Food Security and Intakes from School Meals: Final Report" (Washington, DC: Mathematica Policy Research, 2010), http://naldc.nal.usda.gov/download/42320/PDF (accessed May 2015).

13 Carolyn Beam, Amelie Ramirez, and Kipling Gallion, *Competitive Foods and Beverages Among Latino Students* (Princeton, NJ: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, May 2013), www.communitycommons.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Healthier-School-Snacks-Research-Review.pdf (accessed May 2015).

14 Ibid.

15 Lloyd Johnston et al., *School Policies and Practices to Improve Health and Prevent Obesity: National Secondary School Survey Results*, Volume 3 (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Institute for Social Research, 2013).