



# Childhood Hunger in America's Suburbs

A Special Report

**FAIRSHARE**  
Education Fund

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A Special Report by Fair Share Education Fund



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# Executive Summary

**B**efore the Great Recession, of every 1,000 American kids, 421 were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. After it, 485 out of every 1,000 American kids were. Of these additional 64 kids, 29 lived in the suburbs. Only 13 lived in cities, 15 lived in rural areas, and 7 lived in a town.

According to U.S. Department of Education data, eligibility for free and reduced-price lunches rose across the nation between 2006-07 and 2010-11. Before the recession, 42.1 percent of students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunches; afterward, 48.5 percent of students were eligible, an increase of 6.4 percentage points.

Suburban public schools still have a lower percentage of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunches than schools in the rest of the country. But **the rise of child poverty in suburban areas** means that suburbs increasingly look like the rest of America when it comes to the prevalence of poor children.

Even though food insecurity in the aggregate is still greater in the cities than in the suburbs, between the school years 2006-07 and 2010-11, the number of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch grew at a much faster rate in the suburbs than in cities, rural areas or small- to mid-sized towns.

Fair Share Education Fund and Frontier Group examined data from the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) for the years 2006-07 and 2010-11 in order to test the hypothesis that hunger in the suburbs is indeed on the rise.<sup>1</sup>

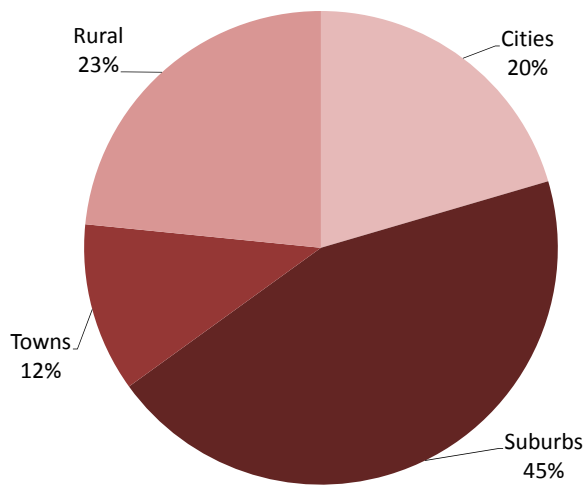
Specifically, we measured the number of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches under the National School Lunch Program. Because eligibility depends on evidence that students' families are low-income, higher eligibility rates in a given community

indicate higher levels of child poverty. We chose to examine statistics from the years 2006-2007 and 2010-2011 because a) these years would give us a snapshot of school lunch eligibility before and after the onset of the 2007-09 Great Recession and b) 2010-2011 are the most recent complete statistics available.

We found:

- **Nationwide, the Great Recession made the risk of childhood hunger worse. The number of public school students eligible for the free or reduced-cost lunch program increased** from more than 17.6 million to more than 19.8 million among schools that reported data in both years. (This number includes 49 states plus Washington, D.C.; Nevada did not report complete data to the U.S. Department of Education.)
- **The Great Recession changed the geography of school lunch eligibility. A strong plurality of students newly eligible for the free or reduced-cost school lunch program live in the suburbs – 45 percent.** By comparison, 23 percent live in rural areas, 20 percent live in cities and 12 percent live in small- or mid-sized towns. (See Figure ES-1.)
- The rise of poverty in the suburbs has had an equalizing effect; **the suburbs now look more like rest of America when it comes to poverty** and children living in food-insecure households. The share of suburban students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch is catching up to the share of eligible students in other types of communities.

**Figure ES-1. Share of Public School Students Newly Eligible for Free or Reduced-price Lunch by Locale, from 2006-07 to 2010-11**



This analysis comes as other data shed additional light on how much worse American poverty and hunger have become:

- Today **one in every six Americans is poor**, according to 2012 census data, compared with one in nine Americans in 2004.<sup>2</sup>
- From 2000 to 2010, **the number of suburban households below the poverty line increased by 53 percent**, compared with a 23

percent increase in poor households in urban areas, according to a Brookings Institute analysis of census data.<sup>3</sup>

- Since 2000, the number of **suburban residents living in poverty has grown by a whopping 64 percent**.<sup>4</sup>
- **Childhood hunger, on the rise since 2000, spiked dramatically in 2008** with the onset of the economic collapse. “In 2009, 23.2 percent of children lived in food insecure households, up from 16.9 percent in 1999,” notes a team of Stanford University researchers.<sup>5</sup>
- And in 2010, there were 2.2 million more suburban households than urban households below the federal poverty line, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics—the first time in U.S. history that **poverty in the suburbs outpaced poverty in the inner cities**.<sup>6</sup>

*Childhood Hunger in America’s Suburbs* shows the changing geography of childhood hunger at a time of growing suburban poverty. This report demonstrates that the risk of childhood hunger is an issue affecting nearly every American community, including communities that might otherwise think that hunger is a problem that occurs “some-where else.”

“ I remembered how those meals took away that hollow, early morning gnawing; that food did help us concentrate and study. It’s painful to realize the persistence of this issue”

—Dolores Byrnes, Ph.D., Arlington, Virginia, who benefited from the food stamp program as a child.

# Introduction

For five decades, going all the way back to the beginning of the War on Poverty, America has treated childhood hunger as a plight that affects primarily the inner cities and rural areas. To be sure, childhood hunger has always existed in the suburbs, but it was not as prevalent, nor did it drive our nation's policies in fighting hunger.

The landscape has changed. Today childhood hunger has significantly rooted itself in the suburbs. In fact, the scourge of childhood hunger is growing more quickly there than it is in urban or rural areas. This new reality demands a new emphasis and perhaps new directions in fighting hunger everywhere it exists – in the suburbs, in the cities, in small and mid-sized towns and in rural areas.

Many circumstances have contributed to the emergence of poverty in the suburbs.<sup>7</sup> Yet too often, debates over anti-hunger and anti-poverty programs pit rural areas against urban neighborhoods.

A recent battle in Congress over the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) bore this out, by attempting to restrict a certain summer meals program to rural areas only. Fortunately, that effort failed, but those behind it have

not backed down.<sup>8</sup> Today, all Americans and our policymakers need to realize that childhood hunger is everywhere, and it will require effort from all of us to end it.

Poverty overall increased in the U.S. during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and faster in suburbs than in urban areas. By 2010, there were more suburban households with incomes below the federal poverty line than urban households in similar straits. Experts Elizabeth Kneebone and Alan Berube note that even though more poor people today live in the suburbs than in cities, our perceptions about poverty have not kept up with this change, and neither have our policies.<sup>9</sup>

Today, America's suburbs are increasingly home to poor families with children at risk of going hungry. Though people often think of childhood poverty as being confined to urban and rural areas, the suburbs saw a disproportionate increase in the number of public school students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches during the Great Recession.

These findings are a disturbing warning sign not just for our children but for our educational system, our economy and our country.

“Hunger increases children’s risk for illness, obesity and other health problems, and is one of the most severe obstacles for learning, even at a time when a person’s brain is rapidly developing”

–Angie Rodgers, president and chief executive officer of the Association of Arizona Food Banks

# School Lunch Program Eligibility Increased Nationwide

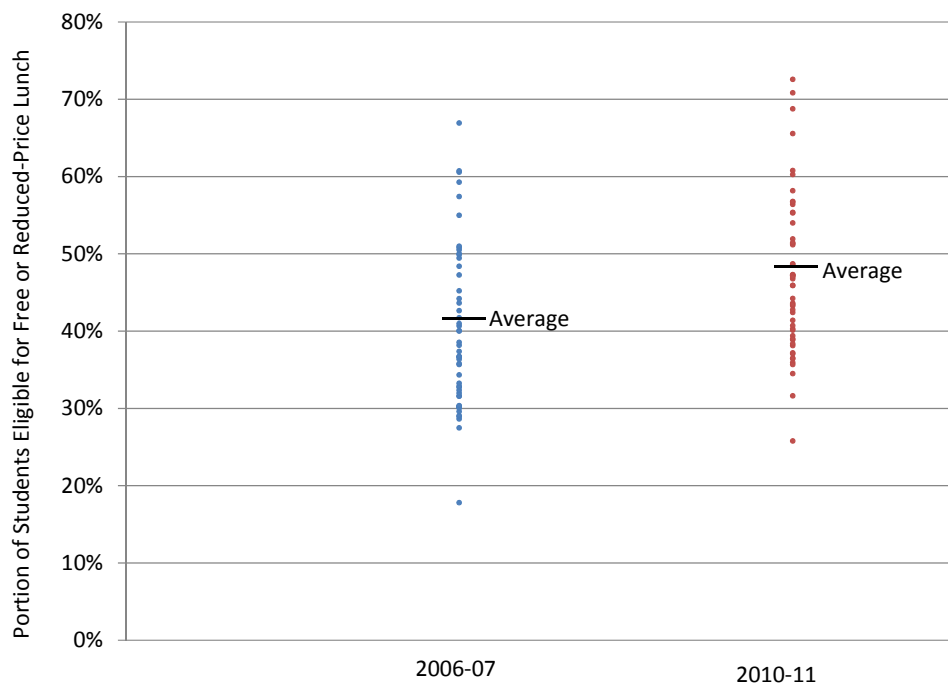
We measured the number of students reported by officials in their local school districts to be eligible under the National School Lunch Act for free or reduced-price lunches through the National School Lunch Program. Because eligibility depends on evidence that students' families are low-income, the more people eligible in a given community, the greater the level of risk of food insecurity.

This report covers those U.S. public schools that reported complete data in both 2006-07 and 2010-11, and, when talking about the type of com-

munity served—city, suburban, rural or town—those schools that served the same type of community in both years. (See Methodology.)

Food insecurity increases with every economic downturn, and with the 2008 Great Recession, this was true with all types of communities—urban, rural, small- and mid-sized towns and the suburbs. Data from the National Center for Educational Statistics suggest that among those U.S. public schools reporting data valid for direct comparison, free or reduced-price school lunch eligibility increased much more quickly in the suburbs than in other places.

**Figure 1. Percentage of Public School Students Eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch by State, by Year**





According to U.S. Department of Education data, eligibility for free and reduced-price lunches rose across the nation between 2006-07 and 2010-11. Before the recession, 42.1 percent of students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunches; afterward, 48.5 percent of students were eligible, an increase of 6.4 percentage points.

State-by-state data show the significance of the 2008 Great Recession in terms of increasing eligibility rates for participation in the National School Lunch Program. (See Figure 1.) Worst hit was the District of Columbia, which saw the share of all students eligible for free

and reduced-price lunch climb 13.3 percentage points, from 59.3 percent to 72.6 percent. Delaware saw total eligibility climb 12 percentage points, from 36.6 percent to 48.6 percent. Michigan, Florida, Ohio and Indiana followed with the next-largest increases in total school lunch eligibility. (See Table 1.)

West Virginia saw the smallest increase in public school eligibility for free and reduced-price lunch, a 2 percentage point jump, from 49.4 percent to 51.4 percent. North Dakota, Arkansas, New York and Texas followed with the next-smallest increases in eligibility. (See Table 2.)

**Table 1. Greatest Increases in Total Eligibility for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch by State**

State	Percent of all enrolled students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, 2006-07	Percent of all enrolled students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, 2010-11	Eligibility change (percentage points)
District of Columbia	59.3%	72.6%	13.3
Delaware	36.6%	48.6%	12.0
Michigan	34.3%	45.9%	11.6
Florida	45.2%	56.4%	11.2
Ohio	32.3%	42.4%	10.1
Indiana	36.7%	46.8%	10.1
Rhode Island	32.9%	42.7%	9.9
Vermont	27.5%	37.2%	9.7
Oregon	41.7%	51.3%	9.6
Wisconsin	30.3%	39.4%	9.0
Kansas	40.0%	48.7%	8.6

**Table 2. Smallest Increases in Total Eligibility for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch by State**

State	Percent of all enrolled students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, 2006-07	Percent of all enrolled students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, 2010-11	Eligibility change (percentage points)
West Virginia	49.4%	51.4%	2.0
North Dakota	28.9%	31.6%	2.7
Arkansas	57.4%	60.3%	2.9
New York	44.2%	47.2%	3.0
Texas	47.2%	51.2%	3.9
Mississippi	66.9%	70.8%	3.9
Washington	36.7%	40.7%	4.0
California	49.9%	54.0%	4.1
South Carolina	51.0%	55.3%	4.3
Arizona	42.6%	47.2%	4.5

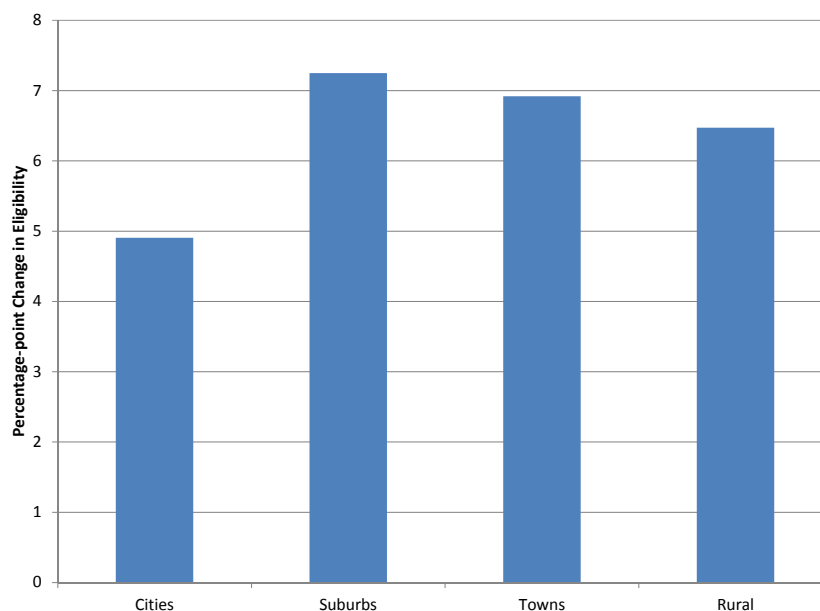
# School Lunch-Assistance Eligibility Increased Faster in the Suburbs than Elsewhere

A greater share of students in city schools are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch than students in suburban, rural or town locations. But suburban public schools saw eligibility rise faster than any other type of public school between 2006-07 and 2010-11. Suburban public schools saw eligibility increase by 7.2 percentage points, versus 6.9 percentage points for schools in towns, 6.5 percentage points for rural schools, and 4.9 percentage points for city schools. (See Table 3 and Figure 2.)

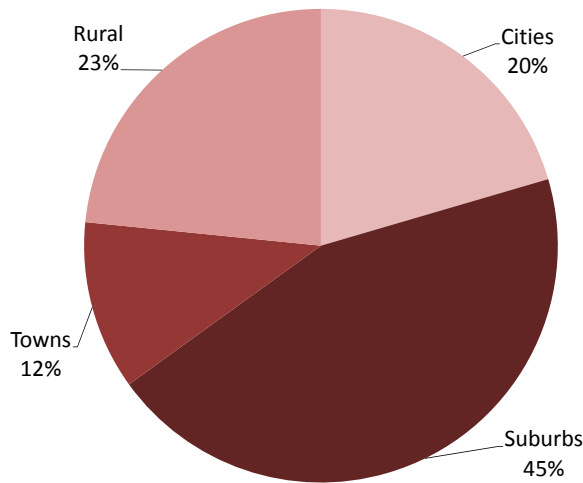
**Table 3. Increases in Total Eligibility for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch by Locale**

	Total eligibility 2006-07	Total eligibility 2010-11	Eligibility change (percentage points)
City	55.6%	60.5%	4.9
Suburb	32.9%	40.1%	7.2
Town	45.9%	52.9%	6.9
Rural	38.3%	44.7%	6.5

**Figure 2. Change in the Share of All Public School Students Eligible for Free or Reduced-price Lunch, Between 2006-07 and 2010-11, By Locale**



**Figure 3. Share of Public School Students Newly Eligible for Free or Reduced-price Lunch by Locale, from 2006-07 to 2010-11**



More than four out of every 10 public school students who became newly eligible for free or reduced-price lunch in 2010-11 versus 2006-07 lived in suburbs. Only 2 out of every 10 newly eligible students lived in cities; 1 in 10 lived in towns; and 2 in 10 lived in rural areas. (See Figure 3.)

The increase in school lunch eligibility in suburban schools since the beginning of the Great Recession has led to those schools more closely resembling city schools when it comes to the share of students eligible for meal assistance. (See Figure 4 and Table 4.)

The difference between the rates of growth in school lunch eligibility in the suburbs versus the city during the Great Recession was the most dra-

**Figure 4. Growth in Public School Student Eligibility for Free and Reduced-price Lunch by Locale, from 2006-07 to 2010-11**



matic in America's largest urban areas. Large cities have historically had very high percentages of public school students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (62.5 percent in 2006-07). However, large cities saw the percentage of eligible students rise by only 3.3 percentage points between 2006-07 and 2010-11, while their neighboring suburbs saw an increase of 7.2 percentage points.

**Table 4. Eligibility for Free and Reduced-Price Lunch, and Total Enrollment, by Locale Type, 2006-07 and 2010-11<sup>10</sup>**

	Total Eligibility 2006-07	Total Enrollment 2006-07	Total Eligibility 2010-11	Total Enrollment 2010-11
City	7,089,428	12,743,758	7,529,643	12,438,397
Rural	3,513,662	9,181,693	4,017,367	8,979,403
Suburb	5,070,631	15,421,796	6,029,703	15,026,211
Town	1,971,490	4,292,054	2,219,822	4,199,966
<b>Total</b>	<b>17,645,211</b>	<b>41,639,301</b>	<b>19,796,535</b>	<b>40,643,977</b>

## Trends by Urban Area Type

To compare trends across urban areas, we tallied school lunch eligibility among schools within Core-Based Statistical Areas, or CBSAs. A CBSA consists of a significant population center such as a city along with nearby communities to which it is linked economically and socially.<sup>11</sup>

Nearly every CBSA (94 percent) for which data were available saw an increase in the share of public school students eligible for free and reduced-price school lunches between 2006-07 and 2010-11. Decreases in eligibility occurred in just 6 percent of CBSAs, with one showing no change.<sup>12</sup> The overall average increase in eligibility across all CBSAs was 6.8 percent.

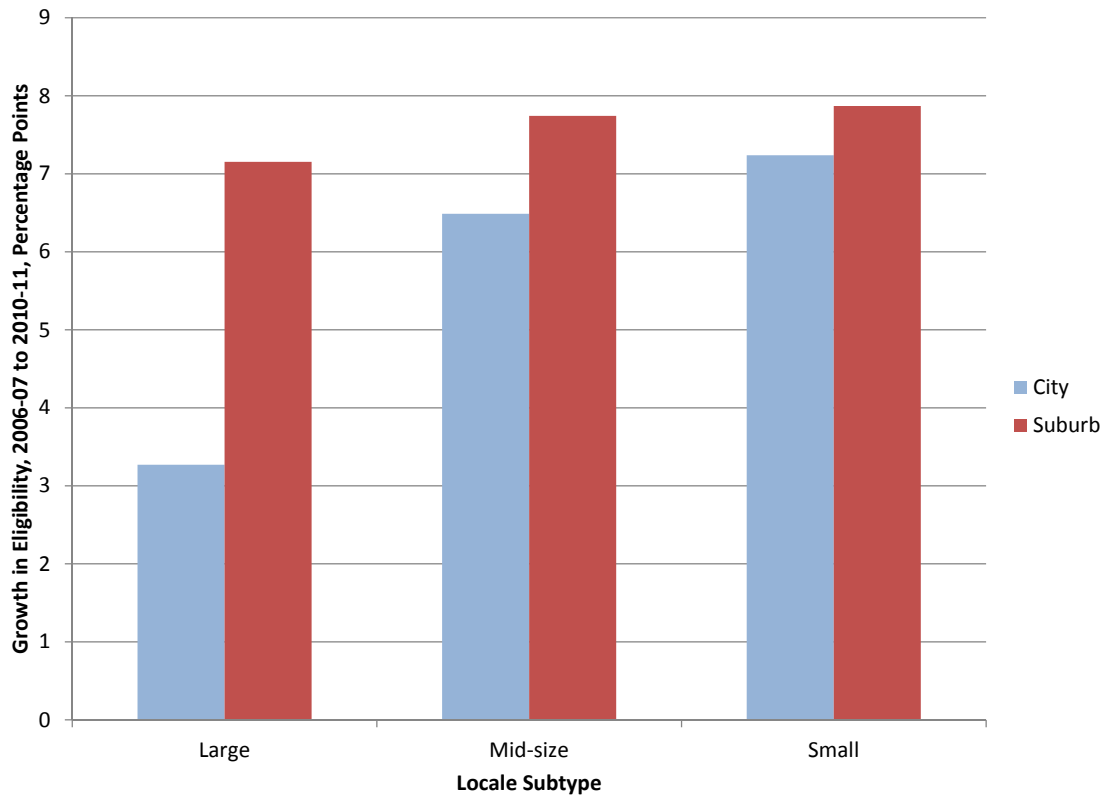
Eligibility in large suburbs grew faster than large cities, in mid-size suburbs faster than mid-

size cities, and small suburbs faster than small cities. (See Figure 5.)

Cape Coral-Fort Myers, Florida, experienced the greatest overall increase in the share of public school students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch between 2006-07 and 2010-11 (among the top 100 CBSAs for total public school enrollment), with a nearly 20 percentage point increase in eligibility. Salt Lake City; Greensboro-High Point, North Carolina; and Modesto, California, followed with the next largest increases in eligibility. (See Table 5.)

McAllen-Edinburg-Pharr, Texas, experienced the greatest decline in the share of public school students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, with eligibility dropping by 11 percentage points between 2006-07 and 2010-11, followed by Brownsville-Harlingen, Texas; and Los Angeles. (See Table 6.)

**Figure 5. Growth in Public School Student Eligibility for Free and Reduced-price Lunch in Cities vs. Suburbs by Size of CBSA from 2006-07 to 2010-11**



**Table 5. Greatest Increases in Total Eligibility for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch by State (Among top 100 CBSAs for total public school enrollment 2010-11)**

<b>CBSA Name</b>	<b>Percent of enrolled students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, 2006-07</b>	<b>Percent of enrolled students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, 2010-11</b>	<b>Eligibility change (percentage points)</b>
Cape Coral-Fort Myers FL	42.0%	61.9%	19.9
Salt Lake City UT	30.1%	43.9%	13.9
Greensboro-High Point NC	40.8%	54.4%	13.6
Modesto CA	51.6%	64.6%	13.0
Stockton CA	49.1%	61.4%	12.3
Albuquerque NM	52.4%	64.7%	12.2
Detroit-Warren-Livonia MI	32.3%	44.5%	12.2
Youngstown-Warren-Boardman OH-PA	34.5%	46.4%	12.0
Jacksonville FL	34.9%	46.7%	11.8
Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Miami Beach FL	49.3%	60.8%	11.6

**Table 6. Smallest Increases in Total Eligibility for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch by CBSA (Among top 100 CBSAs for total public school enrollment 2010-11)**

<b>CBSA Name</b>	<b>Percent of enrolled students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, 2006-07</b>	<b>Percent of enrolled students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, 2010-11</b>	<b>Eligibility change (percentage points)</b>
McAllen-Edinburg-Pharr TX	22.1%	11.2%	-10.9
Brownsville-Harlingen TX	23.1%	19.1%	-4.0
Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana CA	55.9%	55.3%	-0.6
Ogden-Clearfield UT	28.6%	29.9%	1.2
Corpus Christi TX	58.1%	60.4%	2.3
Houston-Baytown-Sugar Land TX	48.0%	50.4%	2.5
Columbia SC	46.1%	49.0%	2.9
Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue WA	29.8%	32.8%	3.0
San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara CA	34.3%	37.5%	3.2
Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Miami Beach FL	49.3%	60.8%	11.6

## Suburban Eligibility Rate: Trends by State

Wyoming saw the largest difference between suburban schools and the state as a whole in increases in eligibility rates for free or reduced-price lunches. Statewide, eligibility increased by 7.5 percentage points, but schools in Wyoming's suburbs saw the eligibility rate increase by 20 percentage points. Next in terms of this difference, but much farther back, were North Dakota, Arizona, Mississippi and South Carolina. (See Table 7.)

In most of America's largest metropolitan areas, the percentage of suburban students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch grew substantially faster than in other parts of their regions.

Of the top 50 CBSAs (ranked by total school lunch eligibility in 2010-11), 34 saw eligibility increase faster in the suburbs than in the rest of the region. The New York City CBSA, for example, experienced a 3.4 percent increase in eligibility region-wide, but suburbs in that region saw eligibility increases of 4.7 percent. (See Table 8.)

The Salt Lake City CBSA saw the greatest relative rise in school lunch eligibility in suburbs between 2006-07 and 2010-11, with the suburban eligibility rate increasing 14.4 percentage points faster than eligibility in that CBSA's non-suburban locales. Corpus Christi, Phoenix, Los Angeles and New Haven also saw suburban child poverty as measured by school lunch eligibility increase much faster than poverty in the region as a whole. (See Table 9.)

**Table 7. Greatest Difference between Suburban and Overall Statewide Eligibility Growth, 2006-07 to 2010-11 by State**

	Increase in suburban eligibility rate (percentage points)	Increase in statewide eligibility rate (percentage points)	Suburban vs. overall eligibility increase (percentage points)
Wyoming	20.0	7.5	12.5
North Dakota	9.8	2.1	7.7
Arizona	8.7	4.2	4.5
Mississippi	7.3	3.9	3.4
South Carolina	7.5	4.2	3.3
Nebraska	9.6	6.4	3.2
Montana	8.1	5.6	2.5
Illinois	8.8	6.6	2.2
California	6.0	4.0	2.0
Virginia	7.5	5.7	1.9

**Table 8. Eligibility for Free and Reduced-price Lunch in 50 Largest CBSAs by Total Enrollment, 2010-11 (Ranked by Total Number of Eligible Students)**

	Total eligibility 2006-07	Suburban eligibility 2006-07	Total eligibility 2010-11	Suburban eligibility 2010-11	Overall eligibility change (pct. points)	Suburban eligibility change (pct. points)
New York-Newark-Edison NY-NJ-PA	43.2%	24.5%	46.6%	29.2%	3.4	4.7
Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana CA	55.9%	49.3%	55.3%	52.3%	-0.6	3.0
Chicago-Naperville-Joliet IL-IN-WI	41.3%	28.7%	48.1%	38.0%	6.8	9.3
Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington TX	46.8%	36.1%	53.5%	45.0%	6.7	9.0
Houston-Baytown-Sugar Land TX	48.0%	43.6%	50.4%	47.9%	2.5	4.3
Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Marietta GA	44.5%	46.1%	53.5%	55.7%	9.1	9.6
Washington-Arlington-Alexandria DC-VA-MD-WV	28.1%	29.2%	35.1%	36.9%	7.1	7.7
Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington PA-NJ-DE-MD	30.9%	19.1%	38.5%	26.5%	7.6	7.4
Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario CA	52.1%	52.6%	60.4%	62.6%	8.2	10.0
Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Miami Beach FL	49.3%	48.5%	60.8%	60.7%	11.6	12.2
Detroit-Warren-Livonia MI	32.3%	24.2%	44.5%	37.0%	12.2	12.9
Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale AZ	40.3%	24.8%	43.8%	34.3%	3.6	9.5
Boston-Cambridge-Quincy MA-NH	27.4%	23.6%	32.2%	28.4%	4.8	4.8
San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont CA	34.9%	31.1%	39.4%	36.3%	4.6	5.2
Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington MN-WI	27.3%	23.6%	34.1%	31.6%	6.8	8.0
Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue WA	29.8%	27.3%	32.8%	30.3%	3.0	3.1
San Diego-Carlsbad-San Marcos CA	42.9%	39.7%	48.6%	47.6%	5.7	7.9
Denver-Aurora CO	33.0%	25.9%	40.6%	33.2%	7.6	7.3
St. Louis MO-IL	32.9%	32.0%	38.7%	37.0%	5.8	5.1
Baltimore-Towson MD	31.8%	25.2%	41.1%	33.7%	9.3	8.4
San Antonio TX	40.1%	44.4%	46.9%	48.4%	6.8	4.1
Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater FL	44.9%	42.1%	54.0%	52.5%	9.1	10.3

*Continued on page 12*

**Table 8 (continued from page 11). Eligibility for Free and Reduced-price Lunch in 50 Largest CBSAs by Total Enrollment, 2010-11 (Ranked by Total Number of Eligible Students)**

	Total eligibility 2006-07	Suburban eligibility 2006-07	Total eligibility 2010-11	Suburban eligibility 2010-11	Overall eligibility change (pct. points)	Suburban eligibility change (pct. points)
Portland-Vancouver-Beaverton OR-WA	36.2%	31.7%	44.5%	41.7%	8.3	10.0
Cincinnati-Middletown OH-KY-IN	28.9%	25.4%	38.5%	35.3%	9.6	9.9
Orlando FL	44.4%	41.9%	55.1%	53.5%	10.7	11.6
Kansas City MO-KS	31.1%	23.2%	40.1%	32.6%	9.0	9.4
Sacramento-Arden-Arcade-Roseville CA	36.8%	34.1%	44.7%	42.6%	7.9	8.5
Cleveland-Elyria-Mentor OH	33.9%	26.1%	43.1%	36.8%	9.2	10.7
Columbus OH	29.6%	22.9%	39.7%	31.8%	10.1	8.9
Pittsburgh PA	27.7%	24.0%	32.6%	29.3%	4.9	5.3
Indianapolis IN	35.4%	20.8%	44.6%	30.0%	9.1	9.2
San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara CA	34.3%	24.9%	37.5%	30.3%	3.2	5.5
Austin-Round Rock TX	43.4%	23.7%	48.8%	5.2%	5.4	-18.4
Virginia Beach-Norfolk-Newport News VA-NC	35.8%	24.5%	40.2%	31.7%	4.5	7.2
Charlotte-Gastonia-Concord NC-SC	39.5%	36.5%	49.0%	47.7%	9.5	11.2
Nashville-Davidson-Murfreesboro TN	39.3%	29.1%	46.9%	37.1%	7.6	8.0
Milwaukee-Waukesha-West Allis WI	35.4%	11.5%	41.4%	17.9%	6.0	6.4
Providence-New Bedford-Fall River RI-MA	31.9%	25.4%	41.1%	32.3%	9.3	7.0
Memphis TN-MS-AR	59.3%	39.9%	66.6%	49.4%	7.3	9.5
Oklahoma City OK	49.6%	38.8%	56.4%	46.2%	6.8	7.4
Jacksonville FL	34.9%	24.4%	46.7%	34.0%	11.8	9.6
Hartford-West Hartford-East Hartford CT	25.0%	20.8%	31.9%	26.6%	6.8	5.7
Fresno CA	63.2%	40.3%	69.1%	49.9%	5.9	9.6
McAllen-Edinburg-Pharr TX	22.1%	20.9%	11.2%	9.2%	-10.9	-11.7
Louisville KY-IN	47.7%	38.6%	54.7%	46.8%	6.9	8.2
Honolulu HI	41.0%	39.1%	47.2%	43.4%	6.2	4.3
Salt Lake City UT	30.1%	23.5%	43.9%	41.7%	13.9	18.2
El Paso TX	63.9%	84.1%	69.6%	73.3%	5.8	-10.8
Raleigh-Cary NC	30.9%	24.7%	36.4%	29.6%	5.5	4.9
Birmingham-Hoover AL	41.7%	34.1%	46.2%	40.5%	4.5	6.3



**Table 9. Greatest Increases in Suburban Eligibility for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch as Compared with Non-suburban Eligibility, 2006-07 to 2010-11 (Among top 100 CBSAs for total public school enrollment 2010-11)**

	Change in eligibility, suburban schools, 2006-07 to 2010-11	Change in eligibility, rest of region, 2006-07 to 2010-11	Difference in increase in eligibility suburbs vs. rest of region (percentage points)
Salt Lake City UT	18.2%	3.8%	14.4
Corpus Christi TX	9.4%	2.0%	7.4
Phoenix-Mesa- Scottsdale AZ	9.5%	2.2%	7.4
Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana CA	3.0%	-3.5%	6.5
New Haven-Milford CT	8.9%	2.6%	6.3
Modesto CA	17.2%	11.2%	6.1
Greenville SC	12.7%	7.5%	5.2
Chicago-Naperville- Joliet IL-IN-WI	9.3%	4.2%	5.1
Columbia SC	5.9%	1.0%	4.9

# Conclusion

Childhood hunger in America has changed. Unfortunately, the way we think about childhood hunger in America hasn't. We have a mental image of hungry schoolchildren in urban settings or in "poor" states like Mississippi or West Virginia. We don't think of childhood hunger in suburban America.

That has to change. Our perceptions have to change. And, with our perceptions, our policies.

America's suburbs are increasingly home to poor families struggling with food insecurity. From 2006-2007 to 2010-2011, the suburbs saw a disproportionate increase in the number of public school students eligible for free or reduced price lunches, as our nation was ravaged by the Great Recession.

Childhood hunger is a solvable problem. We already have the tools we need to fight childhood hunger; we must make the most of all of them.

What are those tools? Here are four examples, with annual participation and cost figures:

- **The National School Lunch Program.**<sup>13</sup> This program provides a nutritionally balanced lunch to qualified children each school day.
  - Children participating: 30.7 million
  - Lunches served: 5.1 billion
  - Afternoon snacks served: 220 million
  - Total cost: \$12.2 billion
- **The School Breakfast Program.**<sup>14</sup> This program provides a nutritionally balanced break-

fast to qualified children each school day.

- Children participating: 13.2 million
  - Breakfasts served: 2.2 billion
  - Total cost: \$3.5 billion
- **The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).**<sup>15</sup> This program provides timely, targeted and temporary benefits to low-income Americans to buy groceries. It is the largest national anti-hunger program.
    - People participating: 47.6 million
    - Households participating: 23.1 million
    - Total cost: \$79.9 billion
  - **The Summer Food Service Program.**<sup>16</sup> This program provides free meals and snacks to low-income children during the summer months and long school vacations.
    - Average daily attendance: 2.4 million
    - Meals served: 151 million
    - Total cost: \$428 million

Hunger is a solvable problem, with a history of bipartisan support to address it. Former Senators and Majority Leaders Tom Daschle, a Democrat, and Bob Dole, a Republican, last year penned a joint op-ed in the *Los Angeles Times*. The bipartisan duo argued, "In a country struggling to emerge from the worst economic recession since the Depression, this is no time to play politics with hunger."<sup>17</sup>

Fair Share Education Fund could not agree more.



For me the idea that we have so much food, and great farmers and cannot feed everyone is ridiculous"

—Candace Gray, Arlington, Virginia, parent and former food stamp recipient

# Methodology

## Cautions and Caveats

Schools were excluded in whole from this analysis if they did not report total enrollment or total free and reduced-price lunch eligibility for either year under examination. Without that information, making comparisons is impossible.

This resulted in the exclusion not just of individual schools around the country, but also every public school in Nevada, because none of them reported the number of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch in 2006-07.

Schools were excluded from locale-specific parts of this analysis if they did not report their locale in 2006-07 or 2010-11, or if their reported locale changed between those two reports.

In 2004, Congress phased in a requirement that school districts directly certify children who live in households receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits for free school meals, which contributed to more eligible children being certified in later years.<sup>18</sup> But experts emphasize that most of the growth that took place between 2006-07 and 2010-11 was driven by the Great Recession.<sup>19</sup>

## Data Source

School information was obtained from the U.S. Department of Education, via the National Center for Education Statistics' Elementary/Secondary Information System, 27 March 2014.

Data was collected only for public schools.

## Data Analysis

Percentage eligibility was calculated based on schools' reported free and reduced-price lunch eligibility and reported total enrollment.

In locale-specific analyses, the U.S. Department of Education's Urban-Centric Locale classifications were used. (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data Urban-Centric Locale Code definitions, downloaded from [http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/rural\\_locales.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/rural_locales.asp), 27 March 2014.)

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