

Food Insecurity in the School District of Philadelphia

What does the District-wide survey tell us?

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The USDA defines **food insecurity** as a lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life.¹ Up to **21% of Philadelphians** are food insecure, compared to 12.5% of Pennsylvanians.² ORE examined parent, teacher, and principal responses to the 2017-18 District-wide survey in order to answer the question: *How many SDP families face food insecurity?*

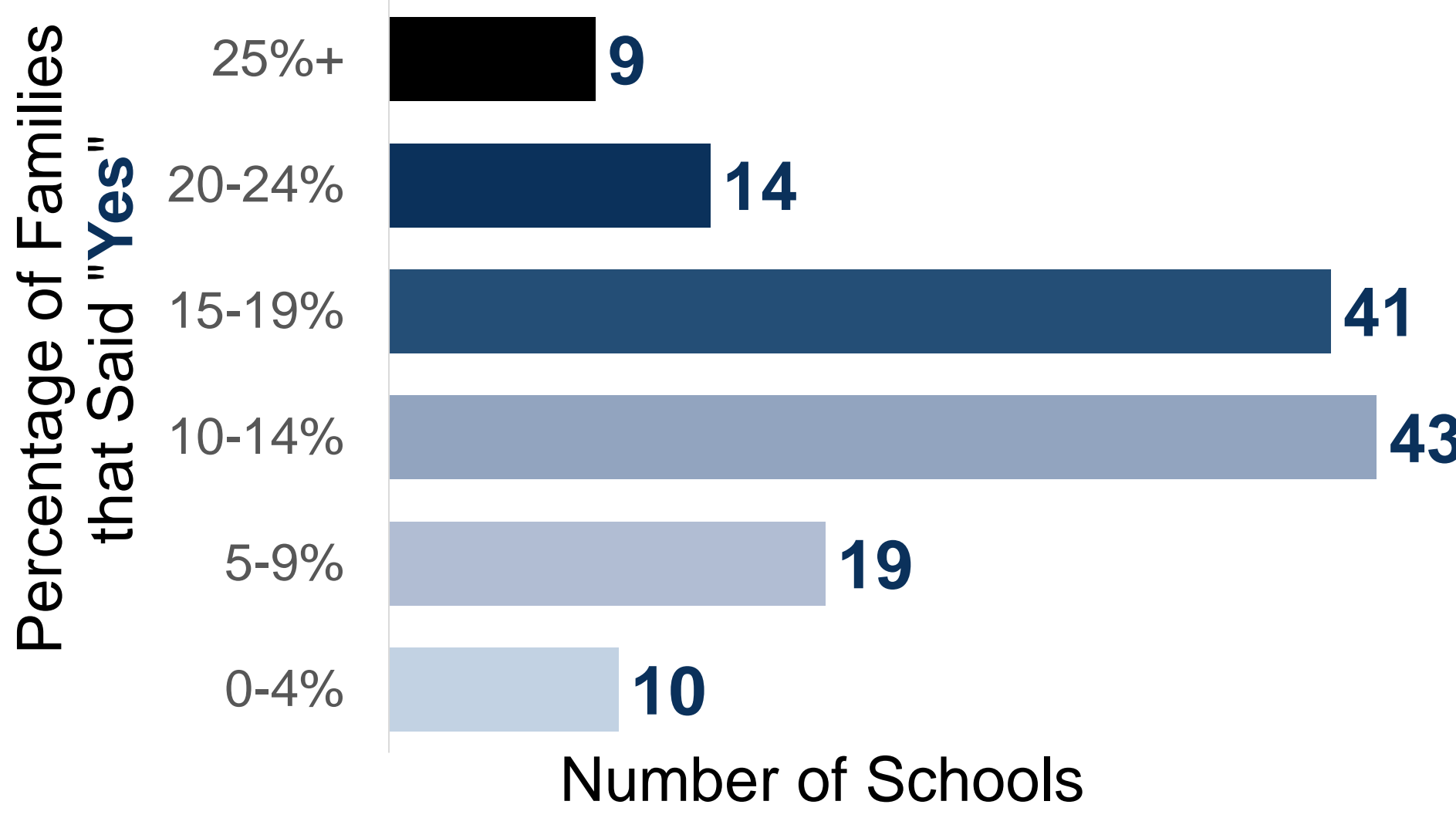
In 2017-18, 17% of parents, 64% of teachers, and 69% of principals in District and Alternative schools took the District-wide survey. School-level results for the parent survey (Figure 1) only include schools that met a reporting threshold of at least 10% of a school's enrollment (n=136).

RESULTS

Parent Survey Question: **In the past 30 days, have you worried about having enough food for you or your family?**

- 14% of parents (n=2766) responded “Yes”

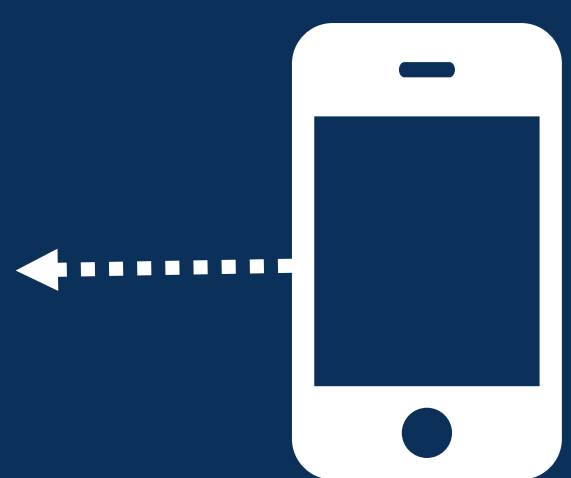
Figure 1: Food insecurity levels vary by school (n=136 schools that met the reporting threshold)



DISCUSSION

Research shows that poor nutrition and hunger are associated with worse academic performance as well as higher absenteeism and tardiness.³ While the highest food insecurity levels are concentrated in a subset of schools, virtually every school has some families affected.

Some families in the School District of Philadelphia do not have consistent access to enough food.

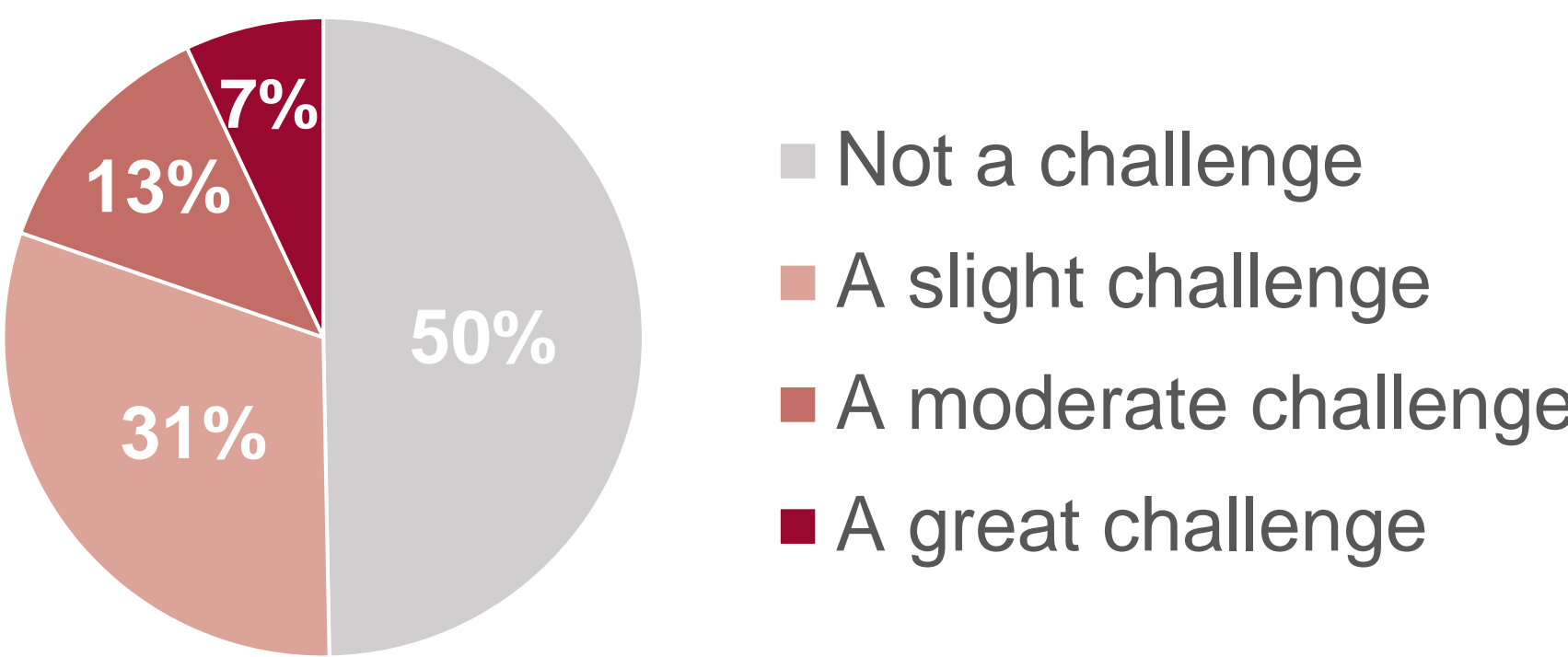


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ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

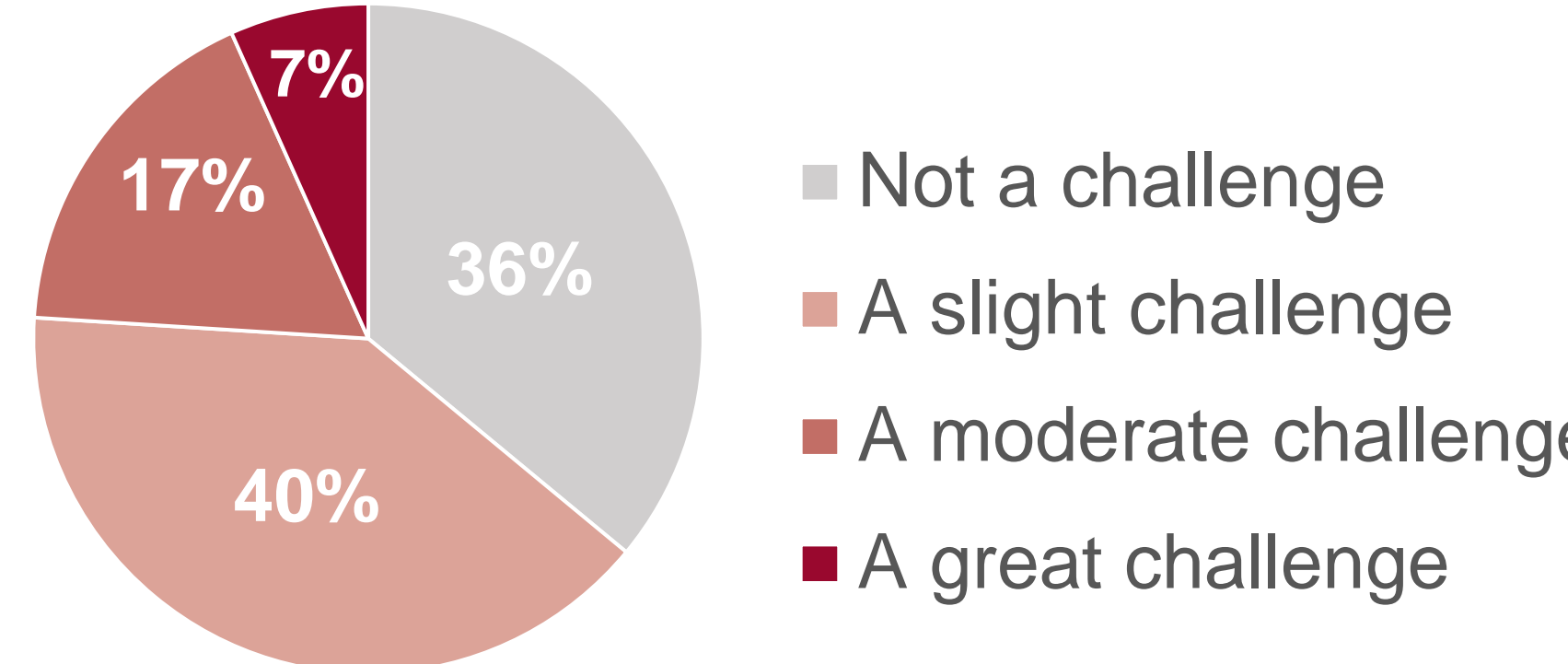
Teacher Survey Question: **To what extent do you consider students report being hungry a challenge to student learning in your classroom?**

Figure 2: About half of teachers see student hunger as a challenge (n=4808 teachers)



Principal Survey Question: **To what extent do you consider student food insecurity a challenge to student learning in your school?**

Figure 3: About two-thirds of principals see student food insecurity as a challenge (n=150 principals)



NOTES

- School-level food insecurity rates range from 0% to 50% of families.
- The District-wide survey may underestimate actual food insecurity. The parent response rate is low and not all schools met the reporting threshold. Parents struggling with food insecurity may be less likely to take the survey. African American families are underrepresented in the parent survey sample.⁴

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1. Coleman-Jensen, A., Rabbitt, M., Gregory, C., and Singh, A. (2018). *Household Food Security in the United States in 2017*, ERR-256. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service.
2. Gundersen, C. Dewey, A. Crumbaugh, A. Kato, M. & Engelhard, E. *Map the Meal Gap 2018: A Report on County and Congressional District Food Insecurity and County Food Cost in the United States in 2016*. Feeding America, 2018.
3. National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Division of Population Health. (2014). *Health and Academic Achievement*. https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/health_and_academics/pdf/health-academic-achievement.pdf.
4. Reitano, A. and Tan, A. (2019). *Representativeness of the 2017-18 District-wide student and parent/guardian survey results*. School District of Philadelphia Office of Research and Evaluation. <https://www.philasd.org/research/wp-content/uploads/sites/90/2019/02/DWS-Representativeness-Focus-Brief-February-2019.pdf>.