

## Household Food Insecurity in the School District of Philadelphia: An Analysis of District-Wide Survey Results, 2019-20

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### Key Findings

Beginning in 2019-20, the School District of Philadelphia District-Wide Survey for parents and guardians has included the USDA Six-Item Short Form questions that evaluate household food insecurity. The rate of food insecurity among responding SDP households was 19%, which was greater than city, state, and national averages.

In 2019-20, the District-Wide Survey for principals asked whether food insecurity was a challenge to student learning. Nearly half of responding principals identified food insecurity as a “great” or “moderate” challenge.

Beginning in 2019-20, the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) began collecting information about students’ household food insecurity using the Six-Item Short Form questionnaire developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).<sup>1</sup> The questionnaire items were included for parents and guardians on the District-Wide Survey (DWS) in order to gain a better understanding of the challenges that affect students’ wellbeing and success in school. Understanding and responding to food insecurity is of particular importance in Philadelphia due to the persistently high rate of poverty in the city.<sup>2</sup>

The purpose of this brief is to describe the prevalence of food insecurity among SDP households that responded to the DWS in 2019-20 and to examine the differences in food insecurity rates across different student subgroups and schools. Throughout this brief, we refer to the standard definition of food insecurity published by the USDA:

*Food insecurity is the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> The Office of Research and Evaluation revised the Six-Item Short Form questions for use on the District-Wide Survey by combining the fifth and sixth items into a single-question format. Table 1 in this brief shows the revised question text. The original questions developed by the USDA are available here: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/media/8282/short2012.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> The Pew Charitable Trusts. *The State of Philadelphians Living in Poverty, 2019*. 2019. [https://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/assets/2019/05/state\\_of\\_poverty.pdf](https://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/assets/2019/05/state_of_poverty.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> For more information about how the USDA evaluates food insecurity, see: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/measurement.aspx>.

## The importance of food insecurity for District students

Any severity of household food insecurity is associated with negative academic, behavioral, and emotional outcomes.<sup>4</sup> For instance, food insecurity that affects children can result in emotional stress and trauma.<sup>5,6</sup> Food insecurity is nearly twice as likely in households with children than in those without.<sup>7</sup> A national survey shows that by April 2020, “more than one in five households in the United States, and two in five households with mothers with children 12 and under, were food insecure.”<sup>8</sup> The most recent estimate of the rate of food insecurity among all Philadelphia households was 16.3%, well above the national average.<sup>9</sup> Although similar estimates for 2020 are not yet available, the food insecurity rate in Philadelphia was projected to reach over 20% in 2020 due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.<sup>10</sup>

Addressing food insecurity is an important consideration for schools in particular because the health inequities that arise from food insecurity have a significant effect on students’ academic achievement.<sup>11</sup> At schools where a large proportion of students are affected by barriers to food access, health and wellness initiatives and reforms are critical in order to address health inequities that arise from food insecurity.<sup>12</sup> Such barriers may take the form of economic, social, and environmental conditions that require systemic solutions in order to promote student health and wellbeing.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Shankar, Priya, Rainjade Chung, and Deborah A. Frank. "Association of Food Insecurity with Children's Behavioral, Emotional, and Academic Outcomes: A Systematic Review." *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics* 38, no. 2 (2017): 135-150.

<sup>5</sup> Council on Community Pediatrics, & Committee on Nutrition. "Promoting Food Security for All Children." *Pediatrics*, 136, no. 5 (2015): e1431-e1438.

<sup>6</sup> Chilton, Mariana, Molly Knowles, and Sandra L. Bloom. "The Intergenerational Circumstances of Household Food Insecurity and Adversity." *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition* 12, no. 2 (2017): 269-297.

<sup>7</sup> Council on Community Pediatrics, & Committee on Nutrition. "Promoting Food Security for All Children." *Pediatrics*, 136, no. 5 (2015): e1431-e1438.

<sup>8</sup> Bauer, L. "The COVID-19 crisis has already left too many children hungry in America." *Brookings* (2020). <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/05/06/the-covid-19-crisis-has-already-left-too-many-children-hungry-in-america/>.

<sup>9</sup> For more information about 2018 food insecurity rates, see: <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2018/overall/pennsylvania/county/philadelphia>.

<sup>10</sup> For more information about the impact of Coronavirus on food insecurity, see: <https://www.feedingamericaaction.org/the-impact-of-coronavirus-on-food-insecurity/>.

<sup>11</sup> Shankar, Priya, Rainjade Chung, and Deborah A. Frank. "Association of Food Insecurity with Children's Behavioral, Emotional, and Academic Outcomes: A Systematic Review." *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics* 38, no. 2 (2017): 135-150.

<sup>12</sup> Asada, Yuka, Alejandro Hughes, and Jamie Chriqui. "Insights on the Intersection of Health Equity and School Nutrition Policy Implementation: An Exploratory Qualitative Secondary Analysis." *Health Education & Behavior* 44, no. 5 (2017): 685-695.

<sup>13</sup> Amram, Ofer, Solmaz Amiri, Robert B. Lutz, Anna Crowley, and Pablo Monsivais. "The Association Between Obesity, Socio-economic Status, and Neighborhood Environment: A Multi-level Analysis of Spokane Public Schools." *Journal of Community Health* 45, no. 1 (2020): 41-47.

## Existing data sources to estimate food insecurity

Prior to 2019-20, the best source of information about the food insecurity status of District households was a District-Wide Survey (DWS) question that asked parents/guardians whether they had worried about having enough food for their family in the past 30 days.<sup>14</sup> In 2018-19, the last year this question was included on the survey, 13% of participating parents/guardians responded that they worried about having enough to eat.<sup>15</sup> Responses to this question provided a starting point for understanding the prevalence of hunger among District households, but were insufficient to fully determine food insecurity status according to USDA definitions. For example, the single question did not capture information about eating balanced meals or reduced food intake and was likely to underestimate the prevalence of food insecurity. In 2019-20, the validated food insecurity questions from the USDA Six-Item Short Form were incorporated into the DWS to evaluate household food insecurity status. This brief describes information from this new set of DWS questions.

Responses to the new 2019-20 food insecurity questions on the Parent/Guardian DWS complement other data that the District continues to collect, such as measures of economic disadvantage that are based on whether or not students qualify for government assistance programs. Although the District has utilized data on students' economic disadvantage status for many years, this indicator does not directly address the issue of food insecurity or food access. Households with incomes above the federal poverty level can still be food insecure.<sup>16,17</sup> In fact, 30% of food-insecure households have incomes above the federal poverty level.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, the District metric for economic disadvantage is based on participation in means-tested federal assistance programs, and not all households that qualify for such programs actually participate.

Another existing source for information about food insecurity comes from school principal responses to the District-Wide Survey. Principals are asked the extent to which they agree that food insecurity is a challenge to student learning at their school. The responses to this question do not measure food insecurity directly, but rather provide useful information about whether or not principals perceive food insecurity as a school-level challenge to learning.

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<sup>14</sup> This question was adapted from a Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) question about food insecurity ("In the past 30 days, have you been concerned about having enough food for you and your family?"). For more information about the YRBS, see <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/questionnaires.htm>

<sup>15</sup> Fornaro, Elisabeth., Soula Servello, Thomas Jackson, and Erin Cassar. *District-Wide Survey Results: Food Insecurity in the School District of Philadelphia*. (The School District of Philadelphia Office of Research and Evaluation, 2020). <https://www.philasd.org/research/2020/02/04/district-wide-survey-results-food-insecurity-in-the-school-district-of-philadelphia/>

<sup>16</sup> Council on Community Pediatrics, & Committee on Nutrition. "Promoting Food Security for All Children." *Pediatrics*, 136, no. 5 (2015): e1431-e1438.

<sup>17</sup> For more information on the impact of Coronavirus on food insecurity see: <https://www.feedingamericaaction.org/the-impact-of-coronavirus-on-food-insecurity/>.

<sup>18</sup> Council on Community Pediatrics, & Committee on Nutrition. "Promoting Food Security for All Children." *Pediatrics*, 136, no. 5 (2015): e1431-e1438.

## Measuring food insecurity in 2019-20

The Parent/Guardian District-Wide Survey (DWS) in 2019-20 included the USDA Six-Item Short Form questions for measuring household food insecurity (Table 1).<sup>19</sup> This validated measurement tool asks respondents a series of questions about their ability to afford enough food as well as whether members of their households skipped meals. Note that two of the six USDA items were combined into a single question on the DWS to reduce the length of the survey.

Table 1. 2019-20 Parent/Guardian District-Wide Survey questions about household food insecurity

Question Lead-In	Question Text	Response Options
In the past 12 months, how often were the following statements true about your household?	The food that I/we bought just didn't last and I/we didn't have money to get more.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Never</li> <li>● Sometimes</li> <li>● Often</li> <li>● Don't know/ Prefer not to answer</li> </ul>
In the past 12 months, how often were the following statements true about your household?	I/we couldn't afford to eat balanced meals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Never</li> <li>● Sometimes</li> <li>● Often</li> <li>● Don't know/ Prefer not to answer</li> </ul>
In the past 12 months...	did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Yes</li> <li>● No</li> <li>● Don't know/ Prefer not to answer</li> </ul>
In the past 12 months...	were you ever hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Yes</li> <li>● No</li> <li>● Don't know/ Prefer not to answer</li> </ul>
N/A	In the past 12 months, did you or other adults in your household ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● No</li> <li>● Yes, only 1 of 2 months</li> <li>● Yes, some months but not every month</li> <li>● Yes, almost every month</li> <li>● Don't know/ Prefer not to answer</li> </ul>

<sup>19</sup> The U.S. Household Food Security Module: Six-Item Short Form can be found here: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/media/8282/short2012.pdf>.

The responses to the questions shown in Table 1 were scored according to USDA guidance. The following response options were coded as affirmative (or yes):

- “often,”
- “sometimes,”
- “yes,”
- “almost every month,” and
- “some months but not every month.”

The sum of affirmative responses to these questions constitutes the household’s raw score. A raw score of 2-4 indicates “low food security” and a raw score of 5-6 indicates “very low food security.” For reporting purposes, the two categories “low food security” and “very low food security” in combination are referred to as “food insecure.”<sup>20</sup>

In 2019-20, the District response rate for the Parent/Guardian District-Wide Survey was 14.9%.<sup>21</sup> Due to the limitations of the survey response rate, there are data quality concerns about representativeness and selection bias. All parents/guardians of students enrolled in District schools were provided with information about how to take the survey but chose whether or not to participate. Moreover, part of the DWS was administration window occurred during COVID-related school closures, which may have affected the ability of some parents/guardians to take the survey. Therefore, responses may not provide a reliable estimate for the District as a whole or for individual schools. In particular, Black/African American households and households with students in high school grades were underrepresented among survey respondents. As described in this brief, these underrepresented groups reported food insecurity at rates higher than the average for the District as a whole. This suggests that our survey sample is likely to underestimate the extent of food insecurity in the District.<sup>22</sup>

This brief also reports principal responses to the District-Wide Survey question about food insecurity as a school-level challenge to learning (Table 2). The principal response rate for 2019-20 was 48.4%.

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<sup>20</sup> Information on scoring The U.S. Household Food Security Module: Six-Item Short Form can be found here: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/media/8282/short2012.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> This response rate (14.9%) represents only District households. Households with students enrolled in non-District schools, such as charter schools, also participated in the District-Wide Survey but are not included in this analysis.

<sup>22</sup> For more information about the representativeness of the Parent/Guardian District-Wide Survey, please refer to the Office of Research and Evaluation’s published brief on this topic: Reitano, Adrienne. *Representativeness of the 2019-20 District-Wide Student and Parent/Guardian Survey Results*. (School District of Philadelphia Office of Research and Evaluation, 2020). <https://www.philasd.org/research/2020/12/01/representativeness-of-the-2019-20-district-wide-student-and-parent-guardian-survey-results/>.

Table 2. 2019-20 Principal District-Wide Survey Questions about Student Food Insecurity

Question Lead-In	Question Text	Response Options
To what extent do you consider each of the following factors a challenge to student learning in your school?	Student food insecurity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Not a challenge</li> <li>● A slight challenge</li> <li>● A moderate challenge</li> <li>● A great challenge</li> </ul>

## Findings

Parent/guardian responses to the food insecurity questions included on the 2019-20 District-Wide Survey suggest that food insecurity is a major concern for student households. The rate of food insecurity among responding households was 19%, nearly double the state average. Certain subgroups of student households had even higher rates, including Hispanic or Latinx and Black or African American households, households with students in high school grades, households with a student receiving special education services, and households with a student learning English. Economically disadvantaged households also had higher rates.

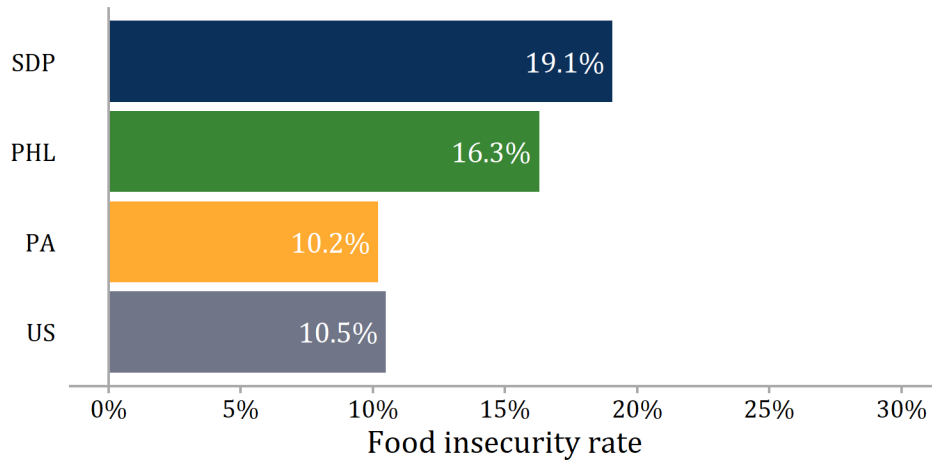
### **SDP households reported greater food insecurity compared to city, state, and national averages.**

In 2019-20, about one in five households that responded to the District-Wide Survey were classified as food insecure. This rate is higher than the most recent estimate for all Philadelphia households (16%)<sup>23</sup> and is nearly double the state and national averages (approximately 10%; Figure 1).<sup>24</sup> These results suggest that food insecurity is of particular importance within the City of Philadelphia and to the District.

<sup>23</sup> Feeding America. *Map the Meal Gap*. (2018). <https://map.feedingamerica.org/>.

<sup>24</sup> PA and US data is sourced from the 2019 Food Security Supplement to the Current Population Survey (CPS). <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-security-in-the-united-states/>

Figure 1. Estimated rates of food insecurity for the School District of Philadelphia (SDP), all Philadelphia households (PHL), Pennsylvania households (PA), and U.S. households (US)



**Note:** SDP data based on the 2019-20 Parent/Guardian District-Wide Survey (N = 14,163). Philadelphia food insecurity rate based on 2018 data from Feeding America available at: <https://map.feedingamerica.org/>. State and U.S. food insecurity rate based on data from the 2019 Food Security Supplement to the Current Population Survey (CPS) available at: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-security-in-the-united-states/>.

## Household food insecurity rates varied by student demographics.

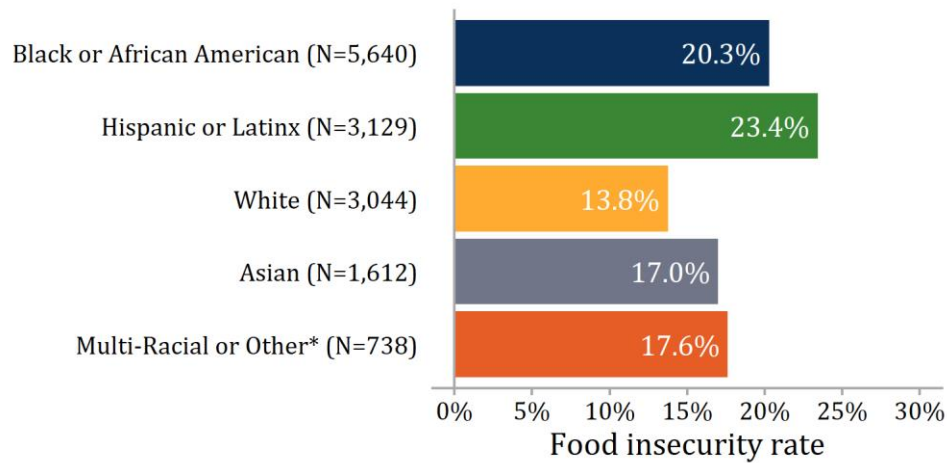
Household food insecurity rates varied by the characteristics of the students living in the household. Household food insecurity rates varied by race and ethnicity, grade-level, economic disadvantage, English learner status, and IEP status, which is explained in more depth in the sections below.

### Households with Hispanic or Latinx and Black or African American students reported higher rates of food insecurity compared to other households.

The rate of food insecurity among District households varied widely by students' racial and ethnic identity. Households with Hispanic or Latinx students had the highest rates of food insecurity (23%), followed by households with Black or African American students (20%; Figure 2). Households with white students had the lowest rates (14%). However, all racial/ethnic groups of SDP students had food insecurity rates higher than the national and state average.



Figure 2. Estimated rates of food insecurity for the School District of Philadelphia by race/ethnicity



**Source:** 2019-20 Parent/Guardian District-Wide Survey respondent-level data file (N = 14,163).

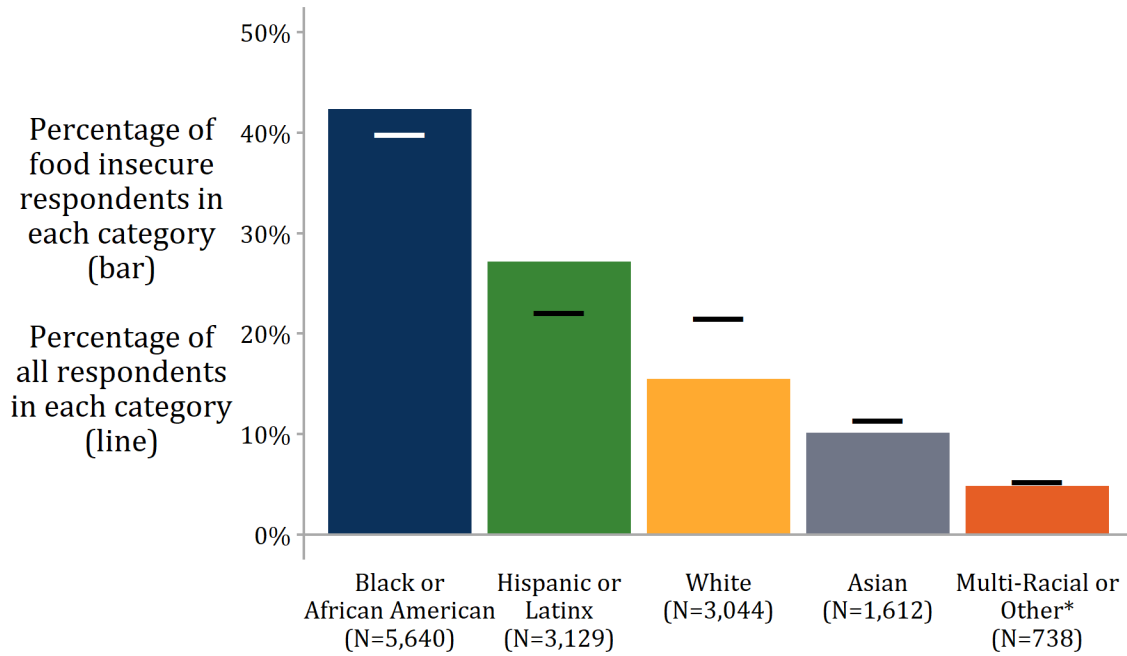
**Note:** \*The category “Multi-Racial or Other” includes “American Indian or Alaska Native” and “Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander.”

Hispanic or Latinx and Black or African American student households were overrepresented among the food insecure population compared to their share of the population of survey respondents as a whole (Figure 3). Hispanic or Latinx student households made up 22% of all respondents but 27% of respondents who were classified as food insecure. Black or African American student households made up 40% of all respondents but 42% of food insecure respondents.

White and Asian student households were underrepresented among the food insecure population compared to their share of the population as a whole. White student households made up 21% of all respondents but only 16% of food insecure respondents. Asian student households made up 11% of all respondents and 10% of food insecure households. Other racial/ethnic groups made up 5% of all respondents and approximately the same share of food insecure respondents.



Figure 3. Disproportionality of food insecurity status by race/ethnicity



**Source:** 2019-20 Parent/Guardian District-Wide Survey respondent-level data file (N = 14,163).

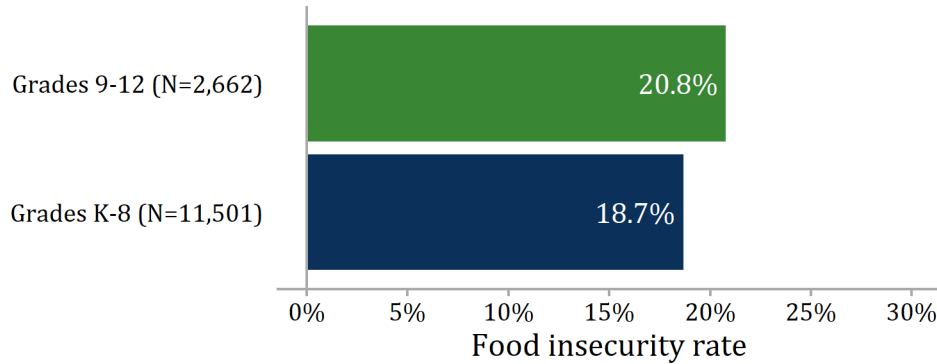
**Note:** \*The category “Multi-Racial or Other” includes “American Indian or Alaska Native” and “Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander.”

**How to read this chart:** Vertical bars show the percentage of *food insecure respondents* who belonged to each group. Horizontal lines show the percentage of *all respondents* who belonged to each group. The difference between the vertical bars and horizontal lines shows the disproportionality in food insecurity for each group.

## Households with students in high school reported slightly higher rates of food insecurity than those with students enrolled in lower grades.

The rate of food insecurity for households with students enrolled in high school grades (9-12) was slightly higher than the rate for households with students enrolled in lower grades (K-8). The rates were 21% and 19% respectively (Figure 4). Note that there were more responding households with students in grades K-8 (11,501) than in grades 9-12 (2,662).

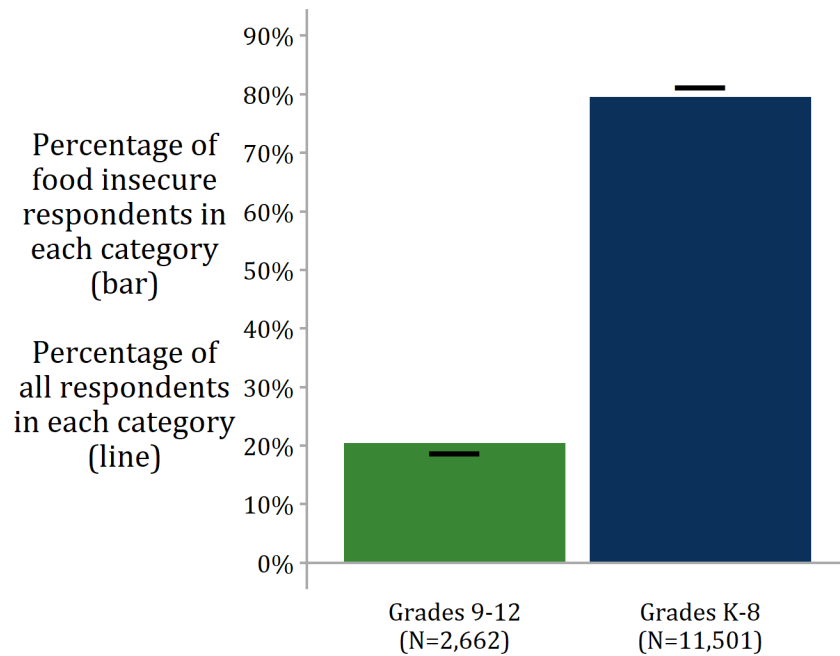
Figure 4. Estimated rates of food insecurity for the School District of Philadelphia by grade band



**Source:** 2019-20 Parent/Guardian District-Wide Survey respondent-level data file (N = 14,163).

Households with students in older grades (9-12) were slightly overrepresented among food insecure respondents (20%) compared to their share of all respondents (19%; Figure 5). Households with students in younger grades (K-8) were slightly underrepresented among food insecure respondents (80%) compared to their share of all respondents (81%). However, these differences were very small.

Figure 5. Disproportionality of food insecurity status by grade band



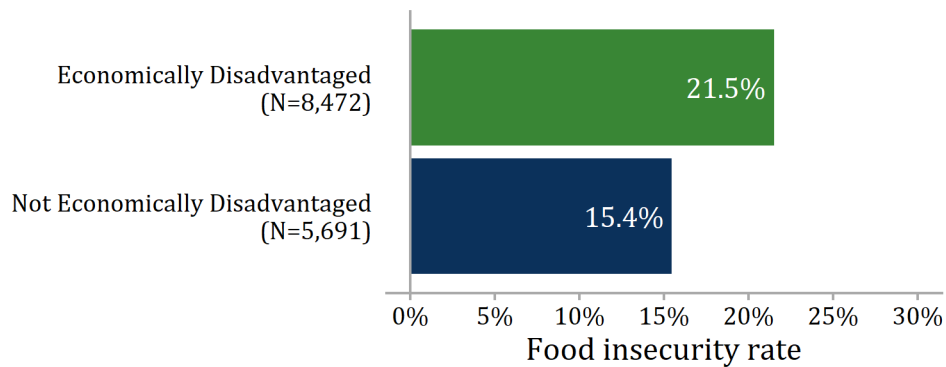
**Source:** 2019-20 Parent/Guardian District-Wide Survey respondent-level data file (N = 14,163).

**How to read this chart:** Vertical bars show the percentage of *food insecure respondents* who belonged to each group. Horizontal lines show the percentage of *all respondents* who belonged to each group. The difference between the vertical bars and horizontal lines shows the disproportionality in food insecurity for each group.

### **Economically disadvantaged households reported higher rates of food insecurity than non-economically disadvantaged households.**

The School District of Philadelphia classifies students as economically disadvantaged if their household receives certain types of government assistance (such as SNAP, TANF, and Medicaid). The rate of food insecurity among households classified as economically disadvantaged was substantially higher than the rate for non-economically disadvantaged households (22% vs. 15%; Figure 6). Note that not all eligible families participate in government assistance programs and that the rate for both households classified as economically disadvantaged and non-economically disadvantaged was higher than the state and national average (approximately 10%).

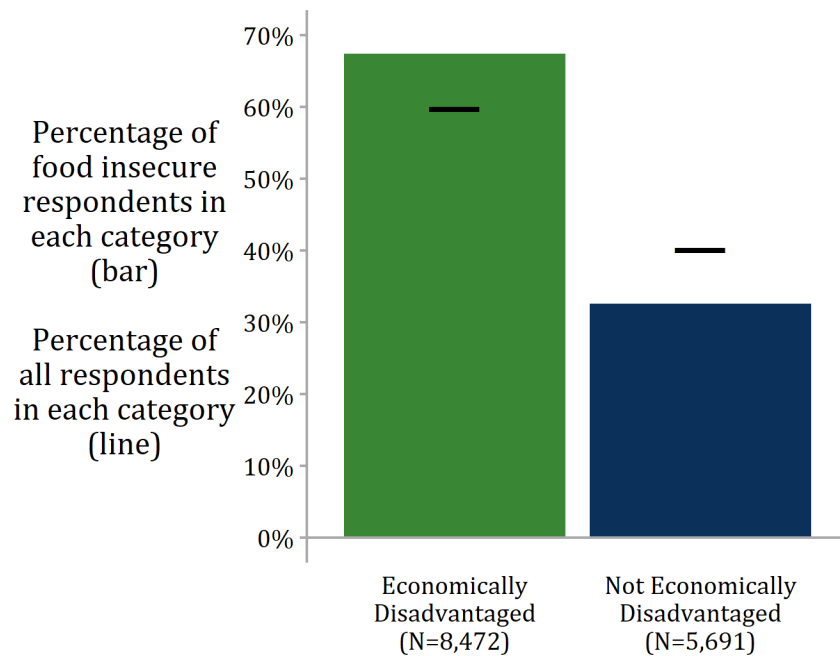
Figure 6. Estimated rates of food insecurity for the School District of Philadelphia, by economic disadvantage status



**Source:** 2019-20 Parent/Guardian District-Wide Survey respondent-level data file (N = 14,163).

Economically disadvantaged student households were overrepresented among food insecure respondents (67%) compared to their share of all respondents (60%; Figure 7). Non-economically disadvantaged households were underrepresented among food insecure respondents (33%) compared to their share of all respondents (40%).

Figure 7. Disproportionality of food insecurity status by economic disadvantage status



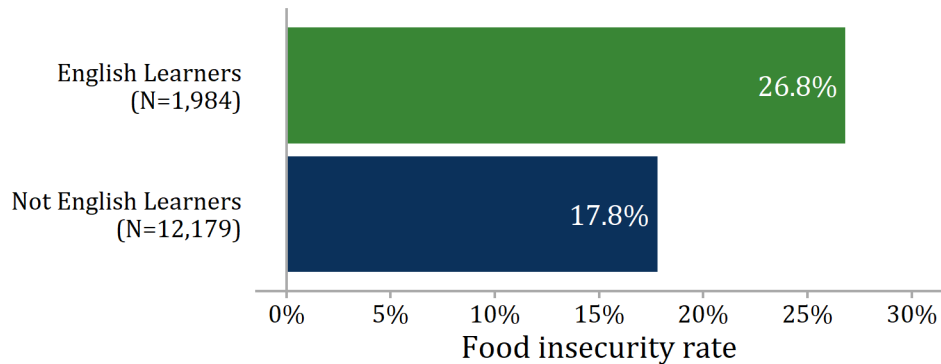
**Source:** 2019-20 Parent/Guardian District-Wide Survey respondent-level data file (N = 14,163).

**How to read this chart:** Vertical bars show the percentage of *food insecure respondents* who belonged to each group. Horizontal lines show the percentage of *all respondents* who belonged to each group. The difference between the vertical bars and horizontal lines shows the disproportionality in food insecurity for each group.

## Households with English Learner students reported the highest food insecurity rates of any subgroup.

Households with students learning English had higher food insecurity rates than households whose students were not English learners. Moreover, households with students learning English had the highest food insecurity rates of any subgroup (27%; figure 8). Note that there were more responding households with students who were not English Learners (12,179) than with students who were English Learners (1,984).

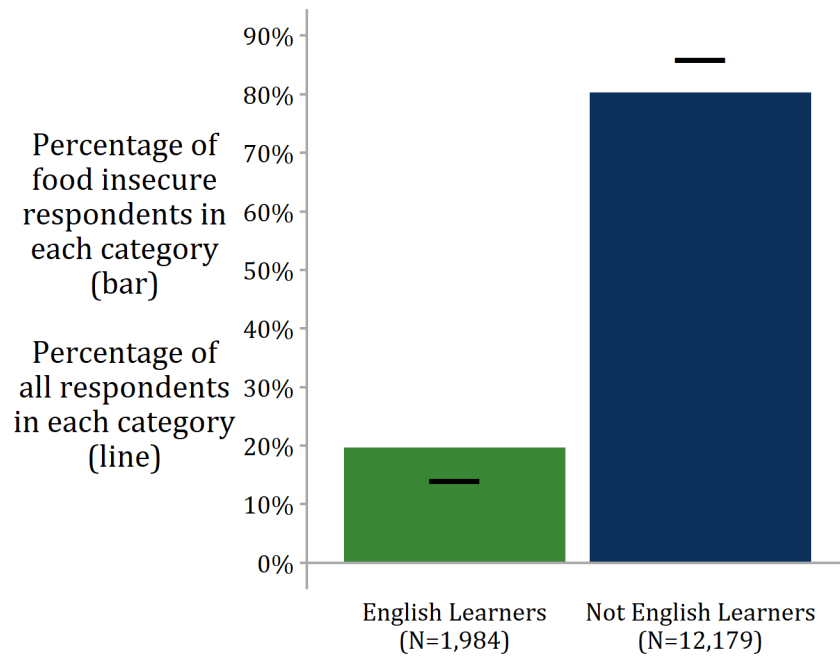
Figure 8. Estimated rates of food insecurity for the School District of Philadelphia, by English Learner status



**Source:** 2019-20 Parent/Guardian District-Wide Survey respondent-level data file (N = 14,163).

Households with students learning English were overrepresented among food insecure respondents (20%) compared to their share of all respondents (14%; Figure 9). Households without students learning English were underrepresented among food insecure respondents (80%) compared to their share of all respondents (86%).

Figure 9. Disproportionality of food insecurity status by English Learner status



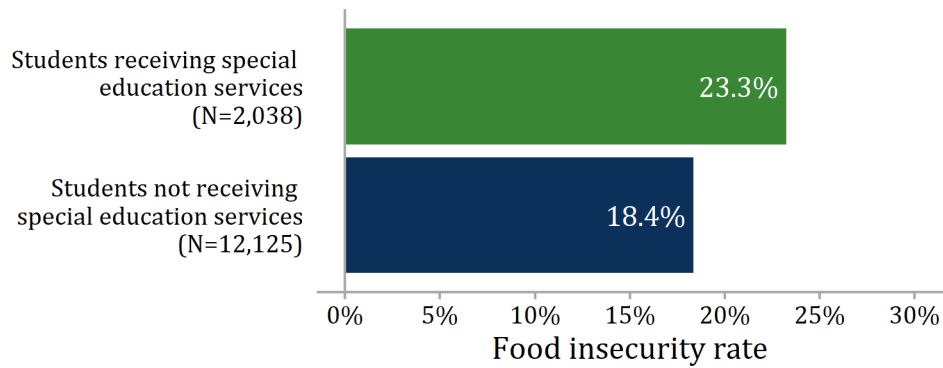
**Source:** 2019-20 Parent/Guardian District-Wide Survey respondent-level data file (N = 14,163).

**How to read this chart:** Vertical bars show the percentage of *food insecure respondents* who belonged to each group. Horizontal lines show the percentage of *all respondents* who belonged to each group. The difference between the vertical bars and horizontal lines shows the disproportionality in food insecurity for each group.

### **Households with students who received special education services reported higher rates of food insecurity than other households.**

Students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) receive special education services. Households that had a student receiving special education services reported experiencing food insecurity at higher rates compared to households where students did not receive special education services (23% vs. 18%; Figure 10). Note that there were more responding households with students who did not receive special education services (12,125) than with students who did receive special education services (2,038).

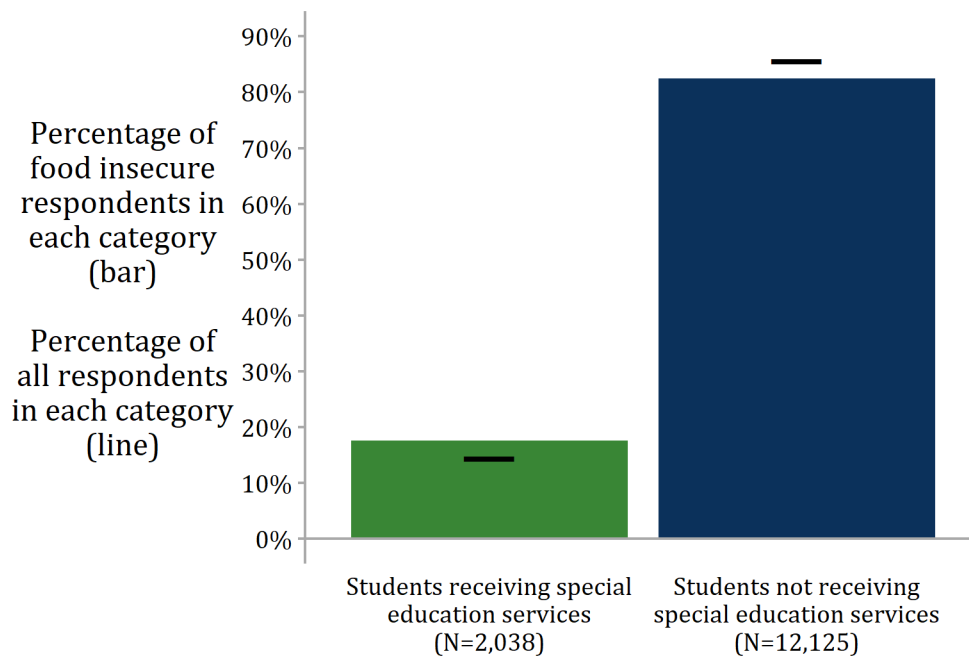
Figure 10. Estimated food insecurity rates for the School District of Philadelphia, by special education status



**Source:** 2019-20 Parent/Guardian District-Wide Survey respondent-level data file (N = 14,163).

Households with a student receiving special education services were overrepresented among food insecure respondents (18%) compared to their share of all respondents (14%; Figure 11). Households where students did not receive special education services were underrepresented among food insecure respondents (82%) compared to their share of all respondents (86%).

Figure 11. Disproportionality of food insecurity status by special education status



**Source:** 2019-20 Parent/Guardian District-Wide Survey respondent-level data file (N = 14,163).

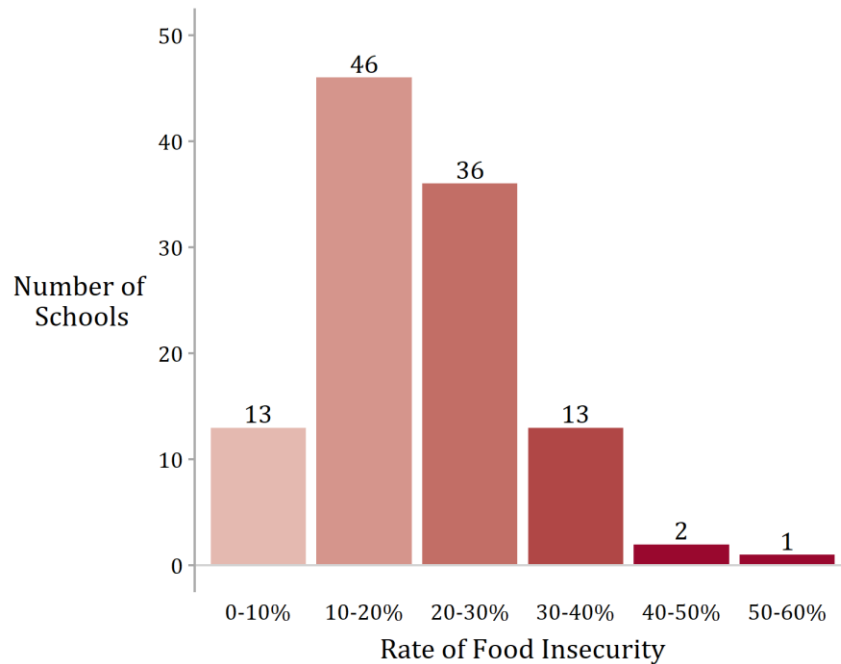
**How to read this chart:** Vertical bars show the percentage of *food insecure respondents* who belonged to each group. Horizontal lines show the percentage of *all respondents* who belonged to each group. The difference between the vertical bars and horizontal lines shows the disproportionality in food insecurity for each group.



## Rates of food insecurity varied widely across District schools

The average rate of food insecurity across all District schools was 19%. However, the rates at specific schools varied widely. Although most schools had rates near the average, a smaller number of schools had either very high or very low rates (Figure 12). There were 13 schools with rates below 10% and 16 schools with rates higher than 30%.<sup>25</sup>

Figure 12. The distribution of the food insecurity rate across District schools



**Source:** 2019-20 Parent/Guardian District-Wide Survey respondent-level data file (response N = 14,163).

**Note:** Data was aggregated, or grouped, at the school level and reported only for schools that met the minimum response rate of 10% (school N = 111).

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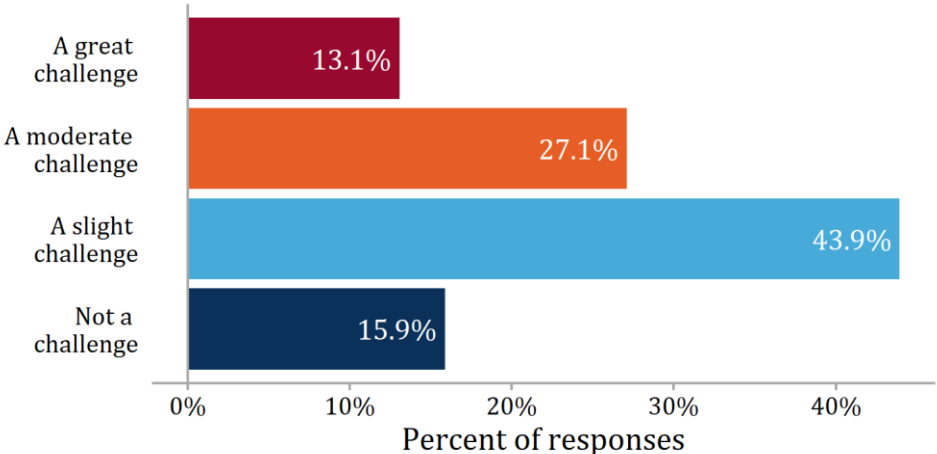
<sup>25</sup> School-level District-Wide Survey information for 2019-20, including food insecurity responses, is available through the District's Open Data portal here: <https://www.philasd.org/performance/programsservices/open-data/school-information/#district-wide-surveys>.

District-Wide Survey information for 2019-20 can also be viewed interactively here: <https://www.philasd.org/research/programsservices/district-wide-surveys/>

# Principals at 40% of District schools identified student food insecurity as a great or moderate challenge.

The 2019-20 District-Wide Survey asked principals whether food insecurity was a challenge to student learning. Nearly half of principals who responded identified food insecurity as a “great” or “moderate” challenge (40%; Figure 13). Only 16% of responding principals said that food insecurity was “not a challenge.”

Figure 13. Principal responses to the question, “To what extent is student food insecurity a challenge to student learning at your school?”



Source: 2019-20 Principal District-Wide Survey respondent-level data file (N = 107).

## Conclusions

Food insecurity among student households is a pressing issue in the School District of Philadelphia. In 2019-20, SDP households who responded to the District-Wide Survey reported greater food insecurity compared to city, state, and national averages. It is also important to note that **household food insecurity rates varied by the characteristics of the students living in the household and across District schools.** On average, the household groups with the highest food insecurity rates were Hispanic/Latinx and Black/African American households, households with high school students, economically disadvantaged households, households with students learning English, and households with students who received special education services.

The rate of food insecurity varied widely across schools. Sixteen schools had food insecurity rates greater than 30%. Additionally, principals at 43 District schools (40%) identified food insecurity as a “great” or “moderate” challenge to student learning.

The variation in food insecurity rates across households and schools suggests that SDP and other community partners may improve student outcomes by targeting resources to schools where a large proportion of students are affected by barriers to food access. The District has several existing programs focused on nutrition and food. For example, the Division of Food Services makes

breakfast and lunch available each school day to all District students at no cost through the USDA's Community Eligibility Provision.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, many District schools have opted to serve breakfast after the start of school so that students do not need to arrive early in order to participate.<sup>27</sup> During the COVID-related school closures in 2019-20,<sup>28</sup> the Division of Food Services adapted its free breakfast and lunch program by providing Grab-N-Go Meal Boxes to all District students for weekly pick up at 100 school locations throughout the city. Each box included seven breakfasts, seven lunches, milk, and fresh fruit. Meals were individually packaged and ready to heat and serve.<sup>29</sup>

Eat Right Philly (ERP), a partnership between the District and six other organizations funded by USDA SNAP-Ed, also provides nutrition education, food access, and other types of programming in District schools.<sup>30</sup> In 2019-20, ERP coordinated food pantries, pop-up produce stands, produce distributions, and food backpack distributions at more than 50 schools. After COVID-19 related school closures,<sup>31</sup> ERP disseminated information about the SDP Grab-N-Go Meal Boxes and other local food resources to schools and families.

However, food insecurity continues to be a pervasive challenge affecting SDP households. Any severity of food insecurity has been shown to have a negative effect on students' academic outcomes, behavioral health, and emotional wellbeing. Furthermore, the challenges that arise from food insecurity are disproportionality concentrated among the subgroups of SDP households identified in this brief. Continued efforts to address food insecurity are critical to addressing not only health inequities but also disparities in academic outcomes and related challenges.

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<sup>26</sup> The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) allows schools and school districts with high rates of poverty to offer breakfast and lunch at no cost to all students. For more information, see <https://www.fns.usda.gov/nsfp/community-eligibility-provision-resource-center>.

<sup>27</sup> For more information on breakfast service models that maximize breakfast participation in SDP see: <https://www.philasd.org/research/2020/10/07/maximizing-students-school-breakfast-participation/>.

<sup>28</sup> For more information on COVID-related school closures see: <https://www.philasd.org/coronavirus/schoolstart2020/>

<sup>29</sup> For more information on the School District of Philadelphia's Grab-N-Go Meal Boxes see: <https://www.philasd.org/coronavirus/grab-go-meals/>.

<sup>30</sup> For more information about SNAP-Ed, see the USDA website: <https://nifa.usda.gov/program/supplemental-nutrition-education-program-education-snap-ed>

<sup>31</sup> See: <https://www.philasd.org/coronavirus/schoolstart2020/>