



Leadership North Carolina Class XXIX

Case Study for Learning Teams 5 - 9 "Child Hunger in North Carolina"

During his North Carolina history presentations, Dr. Karl Campbell talks about issues and events that connect to each of the five LNC focus areas: government, education, health and human services, economic development, and the environment. Each LNC program session is organized around one of these five topics, but during every session you will learn about issues, challenges, and opportunities that connect to all of them.

Read both of the assigned case studies prior to Thursday morning. During Thursday's program, members of Learning Teams 5 - 9 will be given instructions for reflection and discussion around "Child Hunger in North Carolina."

Team 5

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Team 6

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Team 7

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Team 9

Brian Denisar
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The Impact of Child Hunger

Child hunger is an issue that cuts across many sectors and can be addressed from many angles. There are families and individuals across the state struggling to make ends meet. For many, this means uncertainty about where their next meal will come from. The impact of food insecurity and hunger is especially severe on young children, but it has broad consequences for all of us.

In 2020, an estimated 1 in 10 (10.5%) American households experienced food insecurity during at least some part of the year.¹ During tough economic times, young children can be most at risk of hunger and malnutrition because they don't yet have access to food programs through the school system. North Carolina has one of the highest percentages in the nation of children under 18 who are food insecure on a regular basis: Almost 1 in 5 (19.3%).²

“Child hunger is a health problem.

- Hungry children are sick more often, and more likely to have to be hospitalized (the costs of which are passed along to the business community as insurance and tax burdens);
- Hungry children suffer growth impairment that precludes their reaching their full physical potential;
- Hungry children incur developmental impairments that limit their physical, intellectual and emotional development.

Child hunger is an educational problem.

- Hungry children ages 0-3 years cannot learn as much, as fast, or as well, because chronic undernutrition and toxic stress harm their cognitive development during this critical period of rapid brain growth. This actually changes the fundamental neurological architecture of the brain and central nervous system;
- Hungry children do more poorly in school and have lower academic achievement because they are not well prepared for school and cannot concentrate;
- Hungry children have more social and behavioral problems because they feel bad, have less energy for complex social interactions, and cannot adapt as effectively to environmental stresses.

Child hunger is a workforce and job readiness problem.

- Workers who experienced hunger as children are not as well prepared physically, mentally, emotionally or socially to perform effectively in the contemporary workforce;
- Workers who experienced hunger as children create a workforce pool that is less competitive, with lower levels of educational and technical skills, and seriously constrained human capital.

Child hunger leads to greater health care costs for families and employers.

- Short-term: hungry children have greater odds of being hospitalized, and the average pediatric hospitalization costs approximately \$12,000.
- Long-term: the results of chronic undernutrition contribute to high health care costs throughout life.
- Child hunger leads to greater absenteeism, presenteeism (present but not fully productive) and turnover in the work environment, all of which are costly for employers. Child sick days are linked to parent employee absences, for instance.”³

¹ US Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service Report No. ERR-275, “Household Food Security in the United States in 2020.” <https://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details/?pubid=102075>

² Feeding America “Child Food Insecurity.” 2020 Fact Sheet. <https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/Map%20the%20Meal%20Gap%202020%20Child%20Food%20Insecurity%20Module.pdf>. North Carolina ranks 11th.

³ Cook, John, Ph.D., and Karen Jeng, AB. “Child Food Insecurity: The Economic Impact on Our Nation.” Feeding America: 2009. <https://www.nokidhungry.org/sites/default/files/child-economy-study.pdf>