



FAQ:

School Food Pantries!

1. What is food insecurity?

“Food insecurity” refers to [USDA’s measure](#) of lack of access, at times, to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members and limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods, according to Feeding America.

Scarcity of food results in hunger, a personal, physical sensation of discomfort.

Hunger can be exhibited in students who have food insecurity and students growing rapidly to where they need to consume more food due to their growth.

There are two forms of hunger:

- Students who may be food insecure and don’t know where their next meal may come from.
- Students who are not food insecure but still may be hungry due to growth and development.



2. Who is affected by food insecurity?

The U.S. food insecurity rate is [12.9%](#). More than 41 million U.S. people are food insecure.

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In Texas, the food insecurity rate is [15.4%](#).

In Texas and the U.S., the lack of food availability is typically seen in low-income households and with families who are affected by multiple, overlapping issues like affordable housing, social isolation, health problems, and medical cost. [1 in 6 children](#) may not know where they will get their next meal.

3. Is my community affected by food insecurity?

Yes, to varying levels compared to others.

To see the food insecurity rate in your own county, visit this helpful map from Feeding America: <http://map.feedingamerica.org/>

4. Is my school (or school district) affected by food insecurity?

Yes, to varying levels compared to others.

You can start by identifying the number or percentage of families who qualify for the free and reduced meal program, which provides breakfast, lunch and a snack.

You also can have conversations with teachers, cafeteria workers, and other personnel to gain anecdotes that may signal student issues with food insecurity. Also, observations of students may signal issues with food insecurity and hunger (overly tired or exhausted students, lagging effort and attention toward the end of the day, behavioral issues, etc.).

5. What is the school's role in addressing food insecurity?

Schools are often the main food source for many children living in poverty.

Schools often host food drives to donate to the local community food pantry. However, a recent change in Texas law allows schools to start their own School Food Pantry.

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6. What is a “School Food Pantry”?

A “School Food Pantry” can accept, store, and distribute donated and leftover food to students.

In Texas, a state law took effect in September 2017 that allows a school to create its own School Food Pantry and donate certain leftover food to itself, and allow for storage and redistribution.

[Read more about this law change.](#)

A school can name a campus designee, such as a teacher, counselor or PTA member, as the designee of a third-party nonprofit, allowing the school to donate, receive, store, and redistribute the leftover food on campus at any time, under Texas law. Most foods are prepackaged drinks or foods, and uncut fruits and vegetables, allowing schools to meet local and state health codes.



7. What are the benefits of a School Food Pantry?

A School Food Pantry is an emerging tool in the effort to fight hunger and food insecurity among students who are the most in need of such assistance.

This, in turn, can help students become more successful in school and extracurricular activities. A pantry also can help [decrease food waste](#).

8. How much does a School Food Pantry cost?

\$0! Starting a School Food Pantry doesn't require any budget.

It relies on students adding unopened or untouched leftover food on one or more shared tables. This essentially saves food from being wasted and provides other students with a nutritious food for free.

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9. What are the main types of School Food Pantry in Texas?

Administrators have a lot of freedom when implementing a School Food Pantry.

There are two main types of pantries:

Create “shared tables.” Students can add non-perishable leftover food on one or more shared tables in the cafeteria and/or classroom. Hungry students can access the food on these tables during meal time.

Add food storage to a classroom or other site. For example, a classroom used by academic counselors also can serve as a place for food storage. A designated campus representative can distribute food from the pantry to students in need.

10. Can a School Food Pantry really work?

Yes! Many districts across the nation have implemented a food pantry into schools.

In San Antonio ISD, school nutrition leader [Jenny Arredondo](#) has overseen the establishment of 10 School Food Pantries in campuses across the district.

Also check out this [handbook](#) of a school that has implemented a food pantry.

11. What are the main things needed to implement a School Food Pantry in Texas?

Identify who will serve as your official non-profit representative (a non-profit can be a PTA, an ISD Foundation, a food bank, a church, etc.).

Receive food collected on campus, which may include unopened, uneaten surplus food, from breakfast, lunch, snack and dinner programs, as well as food drives. To reduce the amount of food being wasted, this food is then given to students in need.

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Secure a specific location where the donated food will be stored on campus (all food safety standards apply).

Determine the time and process of distribution for donated food on your campus.

12. What are some good strategies to help me implement a School Food Pantry?

Starting a School Food Pantry requires support, planning, promotion, and sustainability.

Before starting, you should contact your school district's superintendent (if you're a food/nutrition leader) or your food/nutrition leader (if you're a principal, teacher, parent, etc.), to get their support.

You will need to build additional support for a School Food Pantry. It may be helpful to use communications, presentations, and social media messaging to demonstrate support for such a measure at your school or district.

You also should consider creating a steering committee or task force who can serve as the backbone of your food pantry. The committee or task force can help you in efforts to build support, plan, promote, and sustain the pantry. Committee members could be: principal, assistant principal, cafeteria manager, nurse, teacher, members of your local School Health Advisory Council (SHAC), custodians, and community nonprofit leaders, or local food pantry leaders. This team also can ensure buy-in, continuity, and sustainability of the program should someone leave during the school year. Use this committee to then determine any restrictions, food distribution methods and food handling requirements or training.

13. What if my district needs to monitor several School Food Pantries on different campuses?

San Antonio ISD nutrition leader Jenny Arredondo and her team created a [registration form](#) for campuses to register their School Food Pantries in terms of their personnel, logistics, and more.

This ensures multiple pantries can be adequately monitored and evaluated.

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14. What types of foods can be included in a School Food Pantry?

Most items are unopened, shelf-stable, nutritious items. Some pantries expand this to provide fresh food and more items.

Some staples that can be made available are:

- Crackers
- Cereal packs
- Applesauce cups
- Fruit cups
- Granola bars, fruit bars, dried fruit, etc.
- Uncut fresh fruit



15. How much food can a student take? What about special diets?

Students are not policed in the amount of food that is selected from the pantry. They are allowed to take food items to consume during the day while in school or for later.

Regarding special diets, it can depend. At San Antonio ISD, students who are on a special diet are discouraged from participating in a food pantry. Items specified for a special diet are not to be donated to the campus food pantry.

16. Do I need a food handler's license?

Yes. Many times, the leader of a School Food Pantry is someone who already has a food handler's license, such as a cafeteria manager.

Those who do not have food handling experience may want to take an online [ServSafe](#) or similar food handler training course listed on the [Texas Education Agency website](#). These courses can be found online. Courses are typically 60-90 minutes in length and cost around \$15. There is typically an exam at the end. Documentation that the course was taken can be sent to the campus administrator or designee. You can also contact your school nutrition program staff for more info.

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17. Once the School Food Pantry is open, how can I inform students it exists?

Once the pantry is open and operating, it is important to use a variety of tactics to publicize the pantry.

Contact your on-campus media outlets (newspaper, radio, e-newsletters, social media, etc.) and schedule meetings with them to promote the pantry. Ask if they will provide coverage about the pantry in their news sections and/or offer free ads for the pantry.

Create graphics or short video PSAs that can play on TVs and kiosks around campus.

Hang posters in high-traffic areas on campus, such as the student union, multicultural center, health center, library, dormitories, dining halls, and computer centers.

18. What are some future additional actions a school could take in this arena?

Other potential ways to distribute food include:

Pop-up pantry events on a school campus. Food for the pop-up pantry can come from a school food drive held during a school calendar event (Thanksgiving, Christmas, football game, wellness event, etc.). Food is meant for students of the school who may be in need. Food can be received Monday-Thursday then re-distributed on Friday before the weekend.

Backpack survival kits. Backpacks are a good way to re-distribute food to hungry students or food insecure students especially before the weekend. Work with your school nurse, counselor, or social worker to pre-identify food insecure students.

19. What if I have more questions?

For any additional assistance, please email us at *Salud America!* at saludamerica@uthscsa.edu.

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