

“SOME OF THESE KIDS ARE GONNA BE MY NURSES, SOME OF THESE KIDS ARE
GONNA BE MY DOCTORS, BUT THEY CAN’T BE IF THEY’RE HUNGRY”: A
QUALITATIVE INQUIRY OF A SCHOOL-BASED WEEKEND FEEDING PROGRAM

BY

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THESIS

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Abstract

Food insecurity is defined as the access to all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. In 2009, 14.7 percent of households in the United States were food insecure, and that included 5.7 percent of households that had very low food security. In 10.6 percent of households with children (4.2 million), children were food insecure at some times during the year. Food insecurity in the U.S. has been shown to have a negative impact on academic, physical, mental, and behavior problems in school-aged children. A wide array of private and public food assistance programs (The National School Lunch Program, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), food banks, etc.) may help to appease food insecurity. Despite these programs, food insecurity persists as a major public health problem in the United States. The Backpack Program has been adopted by schools across the country and provides students with food-filled backpacks to carry home for weekend meals. Because the selection process for this program has been minimally explored, this study used twenty semi-structured qualitative interviews to explore school staff approaches to implementation. Staff members believed that both societal influences and aspects of family life may contribute to food insecurity. Identification strategies included both individual staff efforts and relational interactions between staff, students, and families. Three primary themes that emerged from this research: staff members philosophy and beliefs about food insecurity, the school as a context for addressing food insecurity, and the processes that make the program unique. Taken together, these findings suggest that successfully implementing the Backpack Program requires recognition of the multi-level influences on child food insecurity, and consideration for how relationships among those most proximal to the child influence how children access to sufficient food.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Food insecurity, the access by all people at all times, to enough food for an active, healthy lifestyle (Nord, Coleman-Jensen, Andrews, & Carlson, 2010), has increasingly become a public health problem in the United States. According to the United States Department of Agriculture as of 2009, food insecurity affects about 14.7 percent of the United States population (Nord et. al, 2010). Children were classified as food insecure in 4.2 million households (10.6 percent of households with children). Alarming, 469,000 adults and children (1.2 percent of households with children) experienced very low food security. This means that these households experienced lack of enough food for at least seven or eight months in the year for several days within each month. In addition to this duration of food shortage, child food insecurity in a household suggests that a family has five or more food-insecure conditions (as identified in the Current Population Survey food insecurity measure). These conditions include lack of enough money for food, eating less food than desired, skipping meals, and a number of other related indicators (Nord et. al, 2010).

Food insecurity has been cited to have significant effects on young school children's health. It has been shown to have a negative impact on academic, physical, mental, and behavior problems in school-aged children (Alaimo, Olson, & Frongillo, 2001; Cook & Frank, 2008; Jyoti, Frongillo, & Jones, 2005). For example, a review by Gundersen, Kreider, and Pepper (2011) suggest that households with children that suffer from food insecurity suffer from anemia, low nutrient intake, cognitive problems, and overall poorer health. A wide array of both private and public food assistance programs including the National School Lunch Program, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP – formerly known as the Food Stamp Program) food banks, food pantries, and soup kitchens aim to alleviate food insecurity. However, especially with the most current recession, these programs may not always reach those who need them. Eligibility for public programs is based on income and may not reach those whose income levels do not meet such requirements. In 2009, the people who were eligible for SNAP benefits rose by 15 percent, and the total number of people who actually participated in the program rose even higher, to 18 percent (Leftin, 2011). Further, Sell, Zlotnik, Noonan, and Rubin (2010) found that during the 2008 recession, a large increase in food stamp program participation is attributable to the growing number of eligible households, not a growth in the number of already eligible household participating. In addition, Gundersen, Kreider, and Pepper (2011) found that

people in poverty are not necessarily those that are food insecure, and vice versa, suggesting that there are other factors that may contribute to food insecurity not accounted for by accessing a family at one point in time. These two findings, taken together, suggest that over various time periods, for example, during the start and end of a recession, the face of food insecurity changes. Still, the efficacy of private programs has been minimally explored and evaluated. More specifically for understanding food insecurity among schoolchildren, it is important to acknowledge that most school food programs are only available during weekday breakfast and lunch hours. Thus, it is not possible that such programs are able to feed hungry children beyond the school walls during the times they may need additional help, on the weekends.

The Backpack Program, one of the programs of the National Council of Feeding America (<http://feedingamerica.org/our-network/network-programs/backpack-program.aspx>), has been adopted by schools across the country as a means for reducing hunger in school-aged children. The program provides elementary school children participants with food-filled backpacks to carry home as a supplement for weekend meals. The program was established to address food insecurity with elementary school children, particularly that which is not addressed by formal public assistance programs. Using a model of collaboration with area food banks near targeted schools, the program provides students identified as food insecure with food filled backpacks over the weekend in discreet book bags. Unlike formal food programs, selection into the program is ultimately the decision of school personnel, usually a designated Backpack Program coordinator. This program has been very minimally studied, and thus, the decisions regarding such distribution process and overall effectiveness is not well known.

The purpose of this study is to understand processes of program implementation used by staff members who help implement the Backpack Program. Unlike public programs, this program is distributed through the school environment where school coordinators are the gatekeepers to program implementation, and facilitate processes of identification of students eligible for the program by other school staff members. Through personal connection with students, school staff members use strategies that deviate from those typically used for access into national programs. For example, selection into the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is based solely on family income and therefore does not confront the entire scope of childhood food insecurity. This may present flaws in identification of food insecure children, and thus problems in delivering appropriate services.

It is important to understand how and why school staff target and select students to participate in the Backpack Program, and to learn how school personnel's perceptions may possibly influence decisions regarding backpack distribution, and potentially, food security status of students. Identifying procedures of program implementation can help in understanding the strategies used to address childhood food insecurity at the school level. This study utilized semi-structured, qualitative interviews to explore and understand three main questions: 1.) How do school Backpack Program staff members facilitate school-wide implementation of the Backpack Program within their school? 2.) How do school staff members identify and select students into the program? 3.) What implications do these processes have for the role of the Backpack Program in relieving childhood hunger?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Food Insecurity and School Children

The effects of food insecurity on child well-being are substantial. Generally, children who experience food insecurity have worse physical, psychological, socio-emotional, and academic problems than children who have adequate food supply, including being more likely to display externalizing behaviors, have problems in school, and have poor social- emotional and psychosocial development (Alaimo, Olson, & Frongillo, 2001; Jyoti, Frongillo, & Jones, 2005). In addition, children who are food insecure have been found to be more likely to have seen a psychologist, repeat a grade in school, and to have negative peer relationships (Alaimo, et. al, 2001). School children experiencing severe hunger have also been shown to have more internalizing problems, anxiety problems, and chronic illnesses, and to have growth impairments (Cook & Jeng, 2009; Slopen, 2010; Weinreb, Wehler, Perloff, Scott, Hosmer, Sagor, & Gundersen, 2002).

Child Food Insecurity and School Functioning

Food insecurity has been found to pose several threats to school functioning and academic achievement. For example, food insecurity has been associated with scores on achievement and intelligence tests, where students who are food insecure score lower on such measures (Alaimo, Olson, & Frongillo, 2001). Jyoti, Frongillo, and Jones (2005) found that children who were from food insecure households showed significantly lower increases in math and reading scores from kindergarten to third grade than those who were food secure, with these effects of food security on achievement being more severe for boys than for girls. They also found that among girls only, there were smaller increases in reading scores for those who were persistently food insecure than for those who were persistently food secure. Further, children who transitioned from food security to food insecurity showed smaller increases in reading scores in contrast with those who remained food secure over time. Food insecurity in schoolchildren has also been associated with lower levels of school engagement, impacting school engagement through its impact on health status and emotional well-being, where children who were less healthy were less likely to be engaged in school (Asiabi, 2005).

Child Food Insecurity and Social and Emotional Problems

Children who are food insecure also have been found to have more socio-emotional problems than children who have adequate food. Slack and Yoo (2005) found that regardless of other unfortunate economic circumstances, children who were food insecure were significantly more likely to experience internalizing and externalizing problems than were children who were not food insecure. Jyoti, Frongillo, and Jones (2005) reported that children who had transitioned from being food insecure to food secure had a greater increase in social skills for girls, and a smaller, yet significant increase in social skills for boys. It is important for those working with children in a school setting to be aware of children's circumstances in order to avoid inappropriate categorizing.

Economic and Social Context of Food Insecurity

Social and economic factors seem to account vastly for food insecurity. Due to the current economic recession in the U.S., it has been found that the number of children living in food insecure households increased by 5 percent from 2007 to 2008 (Nord et al, 2009; Sell, Zlotnik, Noonan, & Rubin, 2010). This increase was deemed the most dramatic since the USDA began to measure food insecurity in 1995 (Sell et.al, 2010). Previous research has found that food insecurity was significantly more likely among people who were aged 35-49, had a high school education or less, were unemployed, had a household income of \$20,000, or paid more than 30% of their income for housing (Nord et.al, 2009; DeMarco, Thornburn, & Hue, 2009). Further, Gundersen et. al (2011) found that being African American, Hispanic, a never married person, divorced or separated, and being less educated was more associated with being food insecure than their counterparts. In addition, Bartfield and Dunifon (2006) suggested that higher unemployment rates are linked to higher food insecurity, and the greater the state tax burden on families, the greater the risk of food insecurity, indicating that a \$100 increase in median rent is associated with a 17.5 percent increase in the odds of food insecurity. For many families who may be receiving food assistance, problems such as balancing work, home, health and prioritizing resources are all issues of living in poverty, (Roy, Tubbs, & Burton, 2004). In addition, several studies have brought light to the many reasons why low income individuals may experience food insecurity. Among these reasons include the cost of medical bills, unemployment and underemployment, family transitions, prioritizing other bills, and fear of

stigma including treatment of low income families by service providers (DeMarco, Thorburn, & Kue, 2009; Kempson, Keenan, Sadani, & Adler, 2003).

According to Dinour, Bergen, and Yeh (2007), food insecurity, like many other problems that plague needy families, has been viewed as primarily a problem of poor, undeserving single women. Dodson and Schmalzbauer (2005) found that poor mothers keep their socioeconomic status, especially with regard to welfare, as quiet as possible to avoid being stigmatized. For example, participants reported being accused by a case worker to be illegitimately utilizing welfare services, being perceived as lazy for needing to take care of a sick child and miss work, and reporting other resources used in order to retain necessary social services. Similarly, Reutter, Stewart, Veenstra, Love, Raphael, and Makwarimba (2009) found that low income participants in their study stated withdrawal or self-isolation as well as concealing poverty as ways to deal with poverty stigma. Such a stigma affects not only how people seek and utilize resources, but also can create tension between those perceived to be providing the resources and those receiving the resources. Taken together, these economic and social correlates to food insecurity suggest that the larger economic context as well as relationships between families and local institutions (e.g. food stamp providers and schools) contribute to a both real and perceived lack of accessibility of food resources.

National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, and Food Insecurity

The National School Lunch Program is a federally assisted meal program operating in over 100,000 public and non-profit private schools and residential child care institutions. It provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free lunches to approximately 30.5 million children each school day. The prices of meals varies depending on the family income level, with children from families whose incomes are at or below 130 percent of the poverty level eligible for free meals, between 130 percent and 185 percent, reduced-price, and 185 percent of poverty full price, though their meals are still subsidized to some extent. Frongillo, Jyoti, and Jones (2006) found that students who continuously participated in the National Food Stamp Program (now known as SNAP) had a substantial point increase in reading scores on a standardized measure than students from households that discontinued food stamp participation.

Still, these programs may not be substantial enough to reduce food insecurity among schoolchildren because they are not able to reach children during the times when they become more susceptible to hunger; during the summers and on weekends. Eligibility for such programs

is determined by family income, of which children have no control, but are directly affected at costs that are enormous to their life outcomes. Food programs that are filtered directly through the school system can offer more intimate solutions to addressing problems that result from childhood food insecurity, and can possibly mitigate the effects of food insecurity on child well-being directly. Nord and Roming (2006) found that for low income households with school aged children, the summer –to- April odds ratio of food insecurity with hunger was 25 percent larger in states that have a low summer lunch rate than in otherwise similar high summer lunch states. The study indicated that if schools provided fifty-three percent of the number of free and reduced priced lunches served in March to schools in the summer, the prevalence rate of hunger in the summer among low income households with food insecure children would be reduced to that of the month of April, which could be up to about twenty percent less. Bartfield and Dunifon (2006) found that households in states where there are more widely utilized summer meals programs have lower risk of food insecurity. Providing meals for schoolchildren during times when they do not have access to school are a way that hunger among schoolchildren can be addressed.

Supplemental Food Programs and Identification Difficulties

Although national programs are in place to serve both children and families, the means through which informal food assistance programs (food pantries, soup kitchens, etc.) address food insecurity is uncertain. Evaluating the success of these programs in reaching their target population has been quite difficult. Feeding America, the largest hunger relief charity in the U.S., support three types of emergency food programs: emergency food pantries, emergency soup kitchens, and emergency shelters. It is estimated that Feeding American served about 37 million people in 2009 (Mabli, Cohen, Potter, & Zhao, 2010). However, research on such programs have found that identifying the “profile” of a person who is truly food insecure may be difficult because of the difficulty in distinction between clients who use the services to supplement their home meals and emergency clients in such programs (Berner, Ozer, & Paynter, 2008; Lee, Frongillo, & Olson, 2005a; Lee, Frongillo, & Olson, 2005b). Mabli et. al (2010) suggest that across income levels, there were a myriad reasons why some clients who utilize emergency food programs do not apply for more public and formal programs such as SNAP including ineligibility, inconvenience, stigma, etc. This suggests that there are many individuals who are in need of additional food resources, but are difficult to track because they are not included in the count of those who receive publicly funded programs. One issue with this difficulty in

identification could be that the pool of clients who receive such services is less defined. Thus, strategies to identify food insecure individuals may be difficult due to a lack of personal knowledge of individual and family circumstances.

The Backpack Program

Although it is estimated that about 40 percent of the households that utilize emergency food pantries have children, such supplementary programs may have difficulty in accurately pinpointing their overall target population. The Backpack Program, a national initiative through Feeding America, (the largest hunger relief charity in the United State and a network of 202 food banks), was established to address food insecurity with elementary school children. This program was started when a school nurse in Arkansas began to notice students would become sick because they had not eaten. In 2009, more than 140 Feeding America members operated more than 3,600 Backpack Programs and served more than 190,000 children. Using a model of collaboration with area food banks near targeted schools, the program provides students who have been identified as food insecure with food filled backpacks over the weekend in discreet book bags. There are many school staff who serve as Backpack Program coordinators, with the majority being school social workers, counselors, and others in similar positions. The distribution of the Backpack Program across the country varies across geographic location, distribution sites, schools, and communities.

The structure of the Backpack Program involves multiple parties, and varies by location. Anecdotal evidence from the local Backpack Program distribution site used for this study suggests the following means of operation. Typically, a staff member at the school is either designated or volunteers to be the Backpack Program coordinator. From then on, the coordinator (as well as other staff in the building) identifies students that he or she believes would be in need of food over the weekend. Parents of those students are then provided with a permission slip for the option of their child participating in the program. The coordinators and staff members are provided with a checklist from the food bank or agency that distributes the backpacks to their schools. This checklist includes indicators of food insecurity that may help staff members to accurately target students. However, anecdotal evidence from this study suggests that coordinators and other staff members have their own unique ways for identifying students. This suggests that while there are certain correlates to food insecurity that have been consistent, there may be other family-dependent indicators that are only recognized through close relationships.

The eligibility criteria for national food programs are based on family income, but the process for student selection into the Backpack Program is more flexible in that it gives school staff members more authority to hand pick students who have demonstrated food insecure characteristics. This process of selection is particularly interesting in that it may offer insight on institutional and relational mechanisms through which school staff accurately reach students in true need of food at home. In addition, the variation that may exist in how individual schools identify these characteristics is not easily quantifiable, warranting exploratory research methods in order to understand the underlying mechanisms.

This Study

This study explores strategies used to address childhood food insecurity through an informal food assistance program within elementary schools. Specifically, this study will explore how staff members identify students eligible for the Backpack Program, and the perceptions that staff members hold that may shape the enactment of these strategies. In order to better understand ways to address food insecurity, a more close-up look at the process of selection, including accurate knowledge about those in need is warranted. The goal of this research was to understand school staff members' beliefs regarding food adequacy, their process of identifying and selecting students into the Backpack Program, and to determine how the Backpack Program functions within the school context. Using a constant comparison analysis, this data was examined for substantive areas (and therefore codes) that would provide insight on these topics. This study used a phenomenological approach, with the belief that school staff members are experts in the process of implementation. The results from this study were organized to reflect the following three interests:

- 1.) The first element that emerged was staff members' philosophical views and beliefs about childhood hunger. Specifically, this study will discuss staff members' explanation of the context of food insecurity in terms of societal influences, family life and child outcomes. In addition, I will discuss staff members' views regarding food insecurity and the role of national programs as a source of feeding children.
- 2.) The second element that will be discussed is the uniqueness of the Backpack Program in terms of participants' perception of its usefulness in implementation, as well as their perceived effect that the program has on families.

3.) The second elements that will be discussed are process oriented, and describe actions of staff members in operating the Backpack Program and evaluation components of the program. Within this element of the paper, I will discuss school climate and strategies used by staff members to identify and determine student eligibility.

Chapter 3: Methods

The Sample and Data Collection

Participants .Twenty school staff members -including teachers, secretaries, social workers, one retention officer, and one principal-from four elementary schools, respectively, (serving grades Kindergarten through 5th grade) participated in the study. All of the schools were in a small, micro-urban, Midwestern metropolitan area. During this study, no additional demographic information (race or SES) was obtained from participants. All participants were female (for all demographic information, see Table 1).

Table 1

Demographics of School Staff

School	School Staff Participant	Occupation at School
Dunham	Susan Marshall	Social Worker
Dunham	Jenny Johnson	Teacher, grade 5
Dunham	Kayla Kooler	Teacher, grade 3
Dunham	Katie Spore	Teacher, grade 1
Dunham	Samantha Sack	Teacher, grade 4
Blair	Patty Pickerson	Truancy, outreach officer
Blair	Mandy Mayflower	Secretary
Blair	Cindy Chuck	Parent liason/mentor volunteer coordinator
Blair	Carrie Chester	Teacher, grade 4
Blair	Laura Clay	Secretary
Blair	Shannon Smith	Teacher, grade 3
Journey	Dana Dooler	Truancy counselor
Journey	Lucy Lippy	Admin assistant
Journey	Casey Goss	Social Worker
Journey	Teresa Sanders	Principal
Ringley	Dotty Doodle	Teacher, grade 3
Ringley	Amye Lock	Social Work Intern
Ringley	April Fletcher	Social Worker
Ringley	Georgia Powly	Attendance Center Manager
Ringley	Monica Cabel	Office Manager

Study Sites. Participants in this study were recruited from four elementary schools drawn from two separate school districts. The schools varied in the families who are eligible for free and reduced lunches ranging from 40% to 83% (75% of the schools have a free and reduced lunch participation rate of greater than 70%). The mean low-income rate (percentage of students who receive free lunch) for the two school districts was 53 % (45.7 and 60.3 %, respectively).

The racial makeup of the two school districts were as follows: 45.4% White, 33.8 Black, 6.3 Hispanic, 6.2 Asian/Pacific Islander, 7.9 Multiracial, and 0.4% Native America for school district number one, and 46.8 White, 36.9 Black, 6.3 Hispanic, 9.6 Asian Pacific Islander, and 0.3 Native American for school district number two. All schools had participated in the Backpack Program for at least one year prior to the start of the current study (see Table 2 for study site demographic information).

Table 2

School Demographic Information

School District	Low Income Rate (District)	School	Low Income Rate (School)	Racial Makeup
District 1	60.3	Journey	81%	21.2% White 64.5% Black 2.2% Hispanic 0.6 % Asian 11.5% Multiracial
		Blair	83%	12.7% White 51.8% Black 2.3% Hispanic 28.1% Asian 5% Multiracial
District 2	45.7	Dunham	40%	57.6 % White 34.3% Black 1.8% Hispanic 4.9%Asian 1.4% Native American
		Ringley	72%	25.8% White 47.6% Black 8.2% Hispanic 17.6% Asian 0.5% Native American 0.3% Multiracial

Procedure. The primary targets for this study were designated Backpack coordinators at each school who also facilitate their school’s participation in a larger evaluation study being conducted by researchers at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Program coordinators at each school were approached through regular meetings with a local food bank sponsoring the Backpack Program. The designated school coordinators, food bank workers, and university researchers discussed implementation of the larger study. After agreeing to participate in the larger study, each Backpack Program coordinator from the four participating schools recommended four additional school staff members who work closely with them in implementing the Backpack Program to participate in this research study. Additional staff

members were then contacted through email and telephone and scheduled interviews. During the interview, the study purpose was explained and Informed Consent was obtained from each staff member.

Research Approach

This qualitative study utilized an exploratory research approach to understanding school Backpack coordinators perceptions about childhood food insecurity within society, within their particular school, and the process involved in making decisions about the selection of students into the Backpack Program. This study is phenomenological in nature, in that this area has been minimally explored, and the goal is to understand food insecurity and thus Backpack Program implementation as it pertains to schools' philosophical views, as expressed through school staff members (Creswell, 2009). This approach was chosen because of the flexibility that it provides in gaining insights about ways in which this informal program is operated directly from those who operate it, with the assumption that school staff members are the experts in Backpack Program implementation. Data was collected through open-ended interviews and analyzed using constant comparison analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; discussed below in data analysis).

The Interview Protocol

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with school staff members. Interview questions were developed through careful examination of the literature and following development of research aims of the overall study. The literature topics that proceeded question development were in the areas of food insecurity, formal and informal food programs, child development, and educational outcomes for children. As this research specifically sought to gain an understanding about staff members' philosophical views as well as actions, interview questions were designed in order to target three types of topic questions. These questions included opinion and value questions, sensory questions, and behavior questions about the literature topics mentioned above. This design of questions was chosen to gain an understanding of processes involved in the formation of views and actions among this understudied group, using previous literature about this topic as a focus area of which these views and actions would stem. Following the development of interview questions, the questions were examined by an expert panel of four seasoned researchers. The researchers' expertise included areas of child development, food insecurity, and qualitative data analysis. Following this revision process, the

questions then were conceptually focused on six main areas: school staff's role in the Backpack Program, attitudes towards national food programs and the Backpack Program, operation of the Backpack Program, perceptions of food insecurity (focusing on the student selection process), children's reactions to the program, and families' access to overall food resources. After determining these question topics, the interview protocol was organized into three sections. The first section of questions asked about staff members' roles in the Backpack Program, and general feelings about feeding programs (including Backpack). The second section of questions asked about staff members' perceptions of what it means to have adequate food, and the process of identification of students and distributing food. Finally, section 3 focused on questions about children and families characteristics, focusing on staff perceptions of food insecure family "profiles" and children's reactions to receiving food. Each section focused on philosophical views and actions, and was a combination of the six types of conceptual focus questions. Questions were ordered to fit a natural conversational flow, and organized by the extent to which they required staff to address more sensitive issues (interview protocol found in Appendix A).

Data Analysis

Coding. Interviews were transcribed verbatim by a graduate research assistant. Following transcription, interviews were read thoroughly to gain a conceptual understanding of the topic of interest. Following reading of transcripts, a qualitative content analysis was used to analyze the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Patton, 2003; Strauss & Corbin, 2008). The first step in this analysis was open coding of interview data by hand. This coding consisted of highlighted text that helped the researcher to capture data related to the six conceptual areas mentioned above: school staff's role in the Backpack Program, attitudes towards national food programs and the Backpack Program, operation of the Backpack Program, perceptions of food insecurity (focusing on the student selection process), children's reactions to the program, and families' access to overall food resources. In addition, codes that were emergent (not part of the six categories) were positioned accordingly. Emergent concepts generally were an extension of previously developed overarching conceptual ideas from the interview protocols, but the nature in which they were expressed by participants called for expansion of larger categories (Maxwell, 2005). Thus, emergent categories provided a more nuanced understanding of the major ideas represented in the data.

Codebook development. Following the organization of these categories, a coherent codebook was developed. Following the first solidification of the codebook, two coders, including a graduate student and a master's level research assistant, carefully reviewed interview transcripts, and coded interviews. Over the course of the initial coding, the decision was made by both coders to withdraw codes that either: 1.) were non representative of the majority of interviews, or; 2.) were, by name, less reflective of actual processes but by definition, were similar or almost identical to other codes. Areas in the transcript that were initially coded with the latter were categorized into the appropriate duplicate code categories, thus retaining the robustness of the coding density. These steps later facilitated interpretation.

Reliability. The final codebook consisted of twenty-two substantive categories, and 137 codes. The two coders met regularly over a period of five months to code all interviews. Inter-rater reliability was calculated using the method for calculating inter-rater reliability suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994). This method is a basic calculation of Cohen's kappa, which calculates the percentage of agreement on coding of a particular excerpt between two coders. In this method, coders determine their differences in coding the same data with regard to their individual beliefs about the extent to which the data fits the definition of a particular code. After coding an interview, the researchers calculate the percentage of agreement regarding an entire interview transcript. Here is an example of the equation used to calculate reliability using Cohen's kappa:

$$\%Reliability = \frac{\# \text{ of Code Agreements}}{\# \text{ Code Agreement} + \# \text{ Code Disagreement}}$$

The inter-rater reliability for the interview transcripts ranged between 49%-100%, with a mean reliability of 88.78%. Coder disagreements that were due to omission were not calculated into the final reliability. All disagreements were discussed and coders came to 100% agreements about which codes were appropriate. Following the calculation of inter-rater reliability, substantive categories were further grouped into larger conceptual categories.

Identifying overarching elements. The analysis and interpretation of interview data subsequently generated three major thematic areas in order to more precisely identify the major views expressed by participants. These three thematic areas include: 1.) *Beliefs about Childhood Hunger* 2.) *Uniqueness of the Backpack program* and 3.) *The School as an Environment for Addressing Child Food Insecurity: School Climate and Backpack Program Implementation*.

Chapter 4: Results

Part I: Beliefs about Childhood Hunger

Food insecurity as a societal problem. Several staff members addressed their problems with child food insecurity as being societal ones. For example, they believed that food programs were supposed to adequately demonstrate society's responsibility to keep children fed. In addition, participants felt that food was a human right for children, and that society needs to do more to ensure that such a right is fulfilled.

"I really, really, think that our government should put more into them. I think more money's needed to go into these programs, especially at school. For instance, if we're having the ISAT test, everybody talks about the ISAT for third graders, the ISAT for third graders, if these kids are not eating properly before, and during that time, my test scores are not going to be that high because they're thinking about food. OK? They're thinking about food. So, our government needs to continue and, and, even where we are in our community, we should continue giving, giving, giving to these kids. Don't look at it like you giving them a handout. Look at it as though this is your future cuz some of these kids are gonna be my nurses, some of these kids are gonna be my doctors, but they can't be if they hungry. Ok? That's all I got to say about that." (Teresa)¹

"I think they're (formal food programs) necessary. I think there're a lot of kids, and I think, you know, as a society, I think we owe it to our kids to give them food. I know a lot of times they don't have, some of the that kids I work with, don't have it at home to eat, and um, even when they come to school, they're still hungry a lot of times, and I have kids that, um, they haven't eaten. (Jenny)."

"And I feel that um, in a school setting, especially um, not so much in like in middle school and high school, I mean kids are older, they can kinda fend for themselves a little bit, but I feel that it, the government program, it should be for K through fifth grade, whatever, elementary school, that all kids are given something because this may be their only meal they get. (Georgia)

Hierarchy of needs. Results revealed that school personnel acknowledged a hierarchy of needs that was necessary to follow in order to expect food insecure children to function in a way that is appropriate for acceptable academic performance. Participants believed that it was unrealistic to expect children to perform in school without fulfilling their basic need for food first:

"Um, basically if you're not meeting the students basic needs, food, shelter, clothing, you can't, you can't, pile on education or anything else." (Teresa)

¹ (Teresa)-names in listed following participant quotations are pseudonyms. Actual names of participants have been preserved for the purposes of confidentiality.

“I think it’s imperative for student learning. They can’t learn if they’re hungry, just like we can’t learn if we’re hungry. And um, and they need food for their brains, and that nutrition is imperative for them, and I think it’s an excellent program for our kids.” (Dotty)

“Um, it really is essential for them, being able to get the nutrition they need, and be able to focus at school, obviously if they’re not eating enough at home, they’re not gonna be able to focus at school, so that’s very, very important.” (Dotty)

“...I understand when kids says they’re hungry, feed them. Don’t try to teach them. It’s not time to teach (laughs).” (Kayla)

Beliefs regarding formal food programs. Some staff members felt that food assistance programs (primarily the National Food Stamp Program and Supplementary Nutrition Assistance Program) received by families were essential to relieve childhood hunger, as these programs may provide one of the only meals the student may receive during the day.

“...there are so many of our kids that come to school, if they don’t have breakfast here, they won’t have breakfast at all.” (Casey)

“...I feel that um, in a school setting, especially um, not so much in like in middle school and high school, I mean kids are older, they can kinda fend for themselves a little bit, but I feel that it, the government program, it should be for K through fifth grade, whatever, elementary school, that all kids are given something because this may be their only meal they get.” (Georgia)

Although these programs were deemed necessary by participants, they also held negative opinions about such programs, mainly because they believed that with changing times, there needs to be a change in how food is distributed within the families. Generally, these staff members believed that such programs were progressively less helpful, and at times, insufficient. In addition, a few participants felt that the selection process for receiving such benefits were unfair. Participants believed that there are families that do not meet the poverty guidelines who still have a need for food are not accommodated appropriately:

“Um, I mean, I think it helps. I definitely don’t think it’s enough cuz it’s you know, and my grocery bill alone is[expensive], for me and my husband I’m sure is like double what they get in food stamps. And we, you know we don’t eat a ton, so I can’t even [imagine] especially if you’ve got teenage boys like supporting them on food stamps; it’s not gonna happen.” (Amye)

“And a lot of our kids they come in hungry, they go home hungry. So, breakfast and lunch are the most important things that those kids can have, and if we’re charging them or denying em, we’re not really helping them.”(Georgia)

Context of food insecurity. In describing their philosophy and beliefs, participants discussed what they thought to be the context of food insecurity that surrounds their families. This context included a general description of food insecure families' characteristics, namely, a food insecure family profile.

Beyond participants providing a descriptive profile of food insecure families, the context of families' food insecurity was also described by participants as family problems and challenges that contribute to a food insecure environment. These challenges included domestic problems, financial decision making, job loss, and a decline in community resources. Despite these challenges, though, participants also acknowledged that families are resilient in that they are able

Table 3

Food Insecure Family Profile

Category	Codes	Quotes from Staff Members
Home	Multiple family homes	"Most of the time, it's a family that's living with a family, or has a family there, like have two to three families living with each other, ok." (Shannon, third grade teacher)
	Extended family	"You know a grandmother raising her eight grandchildren. Um, you know historically these are families that we have reached out to and helped and so those people became part of the Backpack Program" (Susan, social worker)
	Multiple children	"The one with the 8 kids, the parents had 5 of their own, took in, um the mother of 2 died, took in her 2 godsons and the cousin as well (from another family). So they're all in the same house." (Teresa, Principal)
Family	Persistent Poverty	"...but you just know by you now, these kids start kindergarten, grow up, and you know a lot about them, and just the situation, you know, some older ones taking care of the younger ones, you know, just the way things are. (Monica, Office manager)
	Mobility	"Um, uh, a family that just moved, you know, they, they might need extra help just because now they have all these bills." (Casey, Social Worker)
	Homeless	"We've never had so many homeless families. Um, I think that contributes a lot to you know not having food." (April, social worker)
	Lack of multiple resources	"She (parent) needs help in many different ways, um, not only through food, but also like just furniture, um, we did a home visit and found out that the kids are sitting on the floor eating every day. And, um things like that, is what typically will happen." (Teresa, principal)
Parent	Single parenthood	"...with seeing a single mom there's obviously that kinda financial burden of only having one income" (Amye, social work intern)
	Racial Minorities	"Um, I guess racially ethnic, African-Americans and Hispanics are probably the two major racial groups that are recommended with the program." (Amye, social work intern)

* This table represents a food insecure family profile demographics

to prioritize family budgets in ways that favor their children.

The following excerpts describe these phenomena. Participants expressed domestic problems as maternal hardship, where the experience of domestic violence and abuse leads to split families, often leaving single women with less income available for providing food to their families.

“Um, in addition, things like domestic violence I think also affect, maybe not a bunch of our families, but definitely some um with the, you know, it’s the mothers most of the time in kind of an interesting situation, where she’s forced to go off and fend for herself, if you know, the husband is the one with the um, the better paying job. So, I think that that definitely has something to do with it...” (Amye)

“Um, I think that contributes a lot to you know not having food. Um, the women shelter, any of the women that are going into the sometimes our shelters because of the abuse and things like that, along comes with the food issue” (April)

In addition to domestic problems, staff members discussed family decision making as a possible gateway to food insecurity. Staff reported that families make various financial decisions that may lead or contribute to them being food insecure. These decisions were mostly discussed in terms of misappropriation of money meant for food in the family. This misappropriation was described in two ways. First, staff explained that families did not appropriately balance finances between food and luxuries that are not affordable. This mismanagement was also discussed in terms of food choice and allocation within the household, relative to quality and quantity control:

“...the kids come in top grade clothes, top grades shoes, but not—we’re not organizing our money. We’re not prioritizing what is important. You know, and then the rent’s due. I’m gonna get kicked out, can you guys help me again? Well we can only do that so many times, and you have to look at—we don’t need Playstation games. We don’t need X-box. You know, so a lot of it is they want their kids to have all these things, but they’re not prioritizing their lives.” (Lucy)

“Well, um, in, I know when kids in general, say hey, it’s the first of the month, mom just got her food stamps, we’ll go to the store. They get all this food, you know snacks, and all this food, but eh you know, some parents just let the kids just eat whatever, eat all day, walk and eat so to say, and then when we get to the middle of the month, everything is gone, so what do we do now. You know, I think, um, the parent needs to have, um, more

to say, control, more control over the food, but not in the way that you not, you depriving your child of, uh, something to eat or you know, things like that.” (Cindy)

On the other hand, participants expressed that even when families were provided with food assistance via food stamps, they often exchanged their food stamps for cash to buy other

items, which contributed to a shortage of money for food:

“Um, people sell their food stamps. You know, I see that a lot. You know, so then when it’s time to buy food, they use that cash for whatever reason they sold it for, for whatever they wanted, and it’s not going to the food. You know, and you know, I’ve walked into some of these houses and I can’t breathe it’s so hot, and I’m thinking who’s paying that power bill? You know, so I think a lot of times, when they get assistance, they don’t think as economical as us who have only about a thousand dollars to spend.” (Lucy)

“Um, I think, uh, well I know for sure that some parents sell their food stamps because they need money for other things.” (Patty)

It was also a common theme among participants that families who may be food insecure have experienced job loss as well as an overall decline in resources provided to them by community agencies:

“You do see you know, both parents working, you know, maybe only one child, but you know, with the cuts in the economy things are, you know, cut back and they struggle a little bit. So you see—you’re seeing everybody now.” (Lucy)

“I think economy’s bad. I think it’s people who for whatever reason, you know it’s hard to make a buck go. It’s hard to stretch your food budget.” (April)

“Um, you know, we used to have more assistance from the food pantry, but right now, the food pantry is running so low because of the economy...I think agencies, as a rule right now are struggling because there’s so many people needing it.” (Jenny)

Although participants felt that some families mismanaged finances, they acknowledged that families had ways of managing financial resources. This management or prioritization was thought by staff to be done in response to family financial hardship that may make the process of feeding their children difficult. Staff expressed that low income families have many familial needs to balance at once, and financial limitations make this process complicated. The following excerpts display this variation:

“I mean parents have to prioritize where they pay their bills. Sometimes that probably is, I mean it is a priority to parents I’m sure, but keeping the heat on and, you know, paying for the house and all those other things is important too, so they have to balance all those priorities.” (Samantha)

“Not having enough, they’re going to choose what they need most. If a parent needs, um pampers for a baby, then she’s not gonna get snacks for the other kids. You’re gonna get what you need most, and then, um, the kids just have to go with whatever you can afford to buy. But, um, a lot of times on the weekends, if, it especially if the parents are working two jobs, they’re don’t have time, if they’re gonna get some rest in there and do anything with their kids...” (Patty)

Part II: What Makes the Backpack Program Unique?

In section one, participants expressed their beliefs about contributors to food insecurity both in societal context and at the family level. Participants believed that families experienced overall financial hardship as a result of trying to navigate complicated ways to make ends stretch. This section will present some of the ways suggested by participants that the Backpack Program was unique in its functionality for reducing food insecurity. Section 3 will address how the school environment (via school staff members), played an active, purposeful, and deliberate role in alleviating hunger, thus making the program easier to administer.

This section will discuss the uniqueness of the Backpack Program in two main ways. First, staff members discussed the uniqueness in terms of their perception of its effectiveness. Particularly, participants described the Backpack Program's structure as being a time efficient means of providing food to students. Further, participants felt that the program's structure provided a means through which they could reach a more accurate target population, unlike national food programs. In addition, this section will address ways in which staff members were able to maintain confidentiality of the program through disguising the purpose of the program, for example. Secondly, this section will address uniqueness of the program in terms of its functionality for children and families. Specifically, staff members revealed that the Backpack Program was well received by students, relieved burden on families, and provided children with a sense of agency.

Program effectiveness. In discussing feasibility of the Backpack Program, staff members expressed favor towards the program because they could distribute backpacks in a timely fashion:

“You know, it's simple, and it, it does, it's not—you know, it takes up a little time to do, but it's so well worth it. You know, I really and I think it's wonderful, and I hope it something that we can continue, that will be able to be continued.”(Lucy)

Staff also expressed that the Backpack Program was particularly unique because of the population that it reached. Through staff members' personal relationships with students, and their ability to carefully observe, they were able to reach the students who were actually in need of the program:

“...she knows each and every family so personally. And they didn't all come at the beginning, you know, and, and I like that part for the teachers. That, they can tell a personal story about why they think that child needs to be in the program or would

benefit from the program, and so those I think are real individual, unique referrals, not that checklist form... There are no affluent people. Um, one of the things that really drew me to the program was this, only free and reduced lunches, so many strict criteria. This was more a judgment call, a professional judgment, which I thought was very nice. I think we get to service a lot of people that the teachers know that truly feel need the food.” (April)

In an effort to avoid stigma that may have been attached to a need based program, staff also expressed that they used creative ways to shield the true qualifications of the program from students in creative ways. Information regarding who received backpacks was maintained through shielding the program participation through creative marketing of the program. Staff also expressed that the actual distribution process of the Backpack Program was done discreetly.

Creative marketing was a strategy for maintaining confidentiality both among students and parents. For students, the program was pitched as a special program in which they hold responsibility and are privileged to be participants. For parents, staff members made an effort to market the program in ways that did not make them feel marginalized:

“Um I also had a meeting with all the kids and I said “Hey! You all won the lottery; you’ve been chosen for this program!” I said, “This is how you do it.” And when I give away stuff, that’s what I tell people. You’ve been chosen. Um, and what I explained to them was, “Now. Let me explain to you what you need to do. Don’t get on the bus, start handing it out, saying ‘Hey it’s my snack day,’ on the way home, you don’t start opening it up saying ‘Hey, here’s this!’” (Teresa)

“So families that we kinda had an idea, we didn’t put it out like oh we’ve chosen you. We put out, “Hey, we’re sending this home. If you’re interested fill it out.” It made it sound like it kinda went to a lot of people. You know, so that way, they’re not feeling like they’re targeting us, they’re watching us. You know, this is just something that’s being offered, and I could sign up for it. And that way I think parents were a little more comfortable doing it.” (Lucy)

The distribution of backpacks to students was done in a discreet manner as well. This is done both proactively and reactively, to both avoid revealing one’s participation in the program and to protect children who may be ashamed from embarrassment.

“...we do it discreetly. We pull the kids down here, or we pull em into the gym, tell them to come with their backpack, we put it in, it stays there. So a lot of kids don’t even know these kids are getting it. So we try to be very discreet here because we are a highly low-income school. We still try to keep discretion, you know.” (Lucy)

“Um, and if one of my kids is embarrassed or something, I just throw it behind my desk and I stick it in there when nobody’s even looking.” (April)

“It’s very um, discrete. You know, unless they want it to be known, but I mean, I think it’s very um, the way they do it, not embarrassing for em.” (Monica)

Functionality for families and children. Overall, staff expressed that children and families received the Backpack Program well. Likewise, it was expressed that the Backpack Program was not only appreciated by students, but was attractive to just about all students, even those who did not qualify. Thus, the program was thought to be free of stigma for students. For children, the program was believed to be an avenue through which students became more agentic, given that students did not need to rely on parents to prepare meals. Finally, staff believed that the program helped to relieve a time and resources burden on families.

As stated, the program was attractive to many students, so this indicated to staff members the low stigma associated with participation in the program. For example, staff expressed that although the school was proactive in protecting students from embarrassment, it may have not been necessary:

“Um, sorta similar to the free and reduced breakfast, they don’t—there’s not really any stigma at all. I would say actually the opposite. Even kids that maybe wouldn’t qualify for the program are like, “Oh, I wanna get the food too,” or, “I want it too.”(Colleen)

You know at first it was, ‘Don’t let anyone know who’s getting the bags and confidentiality and blah, blah that.’ Our kids love it. I mean, they really like it. Um, everybody wants to be on the Backpack Program.” (April)

“ I think they know but it’s like, they’re friends have a backpack so why are you laughing at, you know, that type of thing. Cuz everyone has a backpack in everyone’s class, so it’s not like an isolated person.” (Carrie)

Along with the program being well received by students, it was also functional in that it allowed students to feed themselves without the help of a parent. This sense of agency was thought to be much needed in families where financial resources are low, and time is limited due to other competing demands for stability:

“...it’s food that the kids can fix themselves, which is nice. Yea, and the kids like that because sometimes, and the families like it because they’re so busy, you know even if they’re not, don’t have a job, it’s a struggle. Even if you don’t have a job, it’s a struggle just to figure out ok how are we gonna all take a shower today, you know or, how are we gonna stay warm today?” (Dana)

“You know, and it’s not a lot of stuff, but the stuff is simple stuff that most kids, with a can opener can heat up for themselves. So for kids that are kinda latchkey kids or kids

thats parents don't get up and cook them a lot, and they're hungry, the stuff that comes in this backpack, they can make themselves. And, they can feed themselves, and that's what I think is really awesome about that is the kids can really help themselves. It's not something they've gotta get on the stove and cook. Most of it's microwaveable, and so the kids are safe. And they can feed themselves when nobody's there to feed em." (Lucy)

"We have some older kids whose parents are gone on weekends, or are working and all of that, and it's great for them to be able to take care of themselves. Let's face it, a lot of food parents buy to stretch a buck, aren't as user friendly as what comes in that bag. So we have some kids who that's kinda the focus. "(April)

"Um, it's, it's, it gives the kids a sense of responsibility too. Ok, we talk about being responsible, being respectful, and being ready. If you don't bring your backpack back on Monday, how are you gonna get it filled for Friday? So it's teaching the kids to be responsible too." (Shannon)

Staff also discussed the program as a means to appease family burdens. They discussed the hardships that families may have, and the role that the Backpack Program plays in reducing such:

"I think it takes a lot of the burden off of families that don't have a lot of money to begin with. It's something that can kinda, you know they know that they can send their kids to school, and they're gonna to be taken care of and going to be fed. So I think they're really very important to a huge portion of families here." (Amye)

"...when kids are hungry, it causes anger, and when parents can't feed their kids or can't give their kids anything, it causes the parents to be angry with the kids, ok? So there's a great big fight going on at home with a lot of arguing and saying things that you really don't mean. This program helps calm things on the weekend, I believe." (Shannon)

"It helps them a lot. I have several families that have three and four children and that really helps a lot. And they're the ones that give those backpacks back first thing on Monday morning for me to check in." (Patty)

Part III: The School as an Environment for Addressing Child Food Insecurity: School Climate and Backpack Program Implementation

Operation of the Backpack Program in the school setting. In section two, participants discussed the uniqueness of the Backpack Program in terms of its effectiveness and its role in the lives of children and families. This section will highlight ways that the school staff members implemented the program. This discussion included participants' general belief about their schools' ethos of child welfare. In discussing how staff members address food insecurity within their school, most staff members discussed the school's role in assisting families in need of food

and other resources. Specifically, staff members acknowledged the school climate as a means of providing the context that would make a program like Backpack run smoothly. Essentially, staff members believed that attitudes toward child welfare determined their actions surrounding providing children with resources. After discussing the school ethos that contributes to operating the program, this section will discuss strategies used by school staff members to implement the program.

The following excerpts display participants' perception of an ethos towards child welfare, not limited to food. This ethos made for a supportive environment to identify students who may potentially be in need for additional food. Participants expressed that through establishing a network of staff members committed to upholding this ethos they were able to have better control of providing resources:

"You know right away this kid hasn't had anything to eat. Ok, they might come to school late, had missed the breakfast program, so what we have to do, we go down to the office and say do you have a box of cereal and some milk? Feed the kid, the kid's right on, ok. We talk about which kids we know are going to be successful that day if they started off with a good breakfast. Sometimes they can't get in here, ok, to get that breakfast, so we're prepared for that. So and so's gonna be late because they're always late for school, so let's always keep a box of cereal and some milk somewhere around, so all we have to do is give it to them, and hey there day is, you know, right on. (Shannon)

In this exchange of resources and information, school staff members expressed that they established chains of spare food supports in order to address hunger within their school. This chain of support mostly consisted of staff members and administrators storing spare snack items in case a child becomes hungry during typical school mealtimes:

"...we have food in the office. If somebody comes up and tells me that they need food, I'll send them down to the office if I don't have any. And I usually have it, but if I don't have it, what they want, I can send them down to the office. And they keep extra food in the office too....We, we try to do it as " (Jenny)

Not only did staff members establish chains of support within the school, but served as resources for helping children and families gain access to many resources beyond the school. Thus, the school served as a "gateway" to additional support for families. These gateways included outside programs that were moved to the school to be "in-house," as well as staff members collaborating with social services outside of the school to secure an outlet for families to use. School staff members addressed food insecurity in their schools through establishing emergency budgets through which they could provide students with basic necessities.

“ You know alotta times, we’ll, throughout the year we’ll get food for some of our kids and try to get it out to the family, you know, or try to get em gift cards for food especially around the holidays...we do have the National Vegetable and Fruit Program going here, so the kids are getting fruits and vegetables every Tuesday and Thursday.” (Dana)

“But churches and schools donate non-perishable food to them, and then we distribute it to those families on certain days of the week.” (Dotty)

“And, and if they call on us, then we’ll give them the name of different churches and different places that give help with their power bills and stuff because we’ve had people get their water bills, water turned off, and their power turned off...” (Patty)

It was also clear that because of this ethos of welfare, participants felt that cultivating a sense of accountability among school staff was a reason for being able to adequately address the problem of child food security within their school.

“Because you know and a lot of them know me, I’m not gonna let you go hungry. You know, we give out extra milks at lunch, we give out extra food at lunch, I’m not gonna let you go hungry.” (Teresa)

Staff strategies: What did they do? Participants expressed that staff members used several strategies in identifying students who would be a good fit for Backpack Program Resources. However, before staff implemented these strategies, they expressed that their students displayed child characteristics and actions that signaled a need for food. In addition, participants expressed that parents engaged in actions that indicated a need for food at home. These characteristics and actions are shown below in table 4.

In addition to these characteristics and actions, participants highlighted that they are able to identify children because the impact that food insecurity has on then impact them emotionally, physically, academically, and behaviorally:

“Um, a lot of the kids’ll come in, in the morning, um, and uh ask, you know, they’ll come in and they’ll be sad or crying. Um, I pretty well know most of my kids, and I’ll say what’s the matter and they’ll say I didn’t get anything to eat for breakfast.... I’ve been picking up on kids with stomach aches early in the morning, and a lot of headaches, which is lack of something to eat too. Kids can’t focus if they have a headache if their stomachs empty.” (Georgia)

“Um, kids that are, um, struggling in reading because it all goes, it’s all hand in hand. So you’re gonna see that, you know see the kids that are struggling in their classes, those are the kids usually, that are within the Backpack Program... And those that are having those social issues, emotional issues, different stuff like that.” (Kayla)

Table 4

Indicators of Food Insecurity by Staff

Person	Characteristics	Quotes
Child	Student body or physique	<i>" [we are] ...looking... you know their body shape, if they're skinnier, or um you know, maybe if their skin is drier." (Katie)</i>
	Word of Mouth	<i>"...a lot of the kids sometimes open up more to me. In the office they kind of feel comfortable coming in here and telling me if they haven't had breakfast or if they're hungry, or things like that." (Georgia)</i>
	Skipping meals	<i>" I'll say 'what's the matter' and they'll say 'I didn't get anything to eat for breakfast.' " (Georgia)</i>
	Unequipped for school	<i>" ...the kids come to school very, not dressed well, don't have you know, on the field trip days, they don't bring a lunch or their lunch is atrocious." (Samantha)</i>
	Actions	
	Hoarding	<i>"...in the past, we do a breakfast thing, you know program in the morning, I would see kids hoarding food. They'd be tryna hide it in their backpacks, hide it in their pockets to eat later because they need that. They don't get those kind of things at home, and so they keep it so that they can have it later on because it's that important to em and they, they want it that badly." (Lucy)</i>
	Showing persistent hunger	<i>"...or breakfast and they eat really fast, and they'll ask for seconds, or they'll come in and say we didn't have food at home, but they look like everybody else." (Patty)</i>
	Stealing	<i>"...a big sign is having kids take food outside of the school, whether their taking it from breakfast or lunch or taking food out of the teacher's desk." (April)</i>
	Unyielding Pursuit for food consumption	<i>" I had a kid awhile back, he literally took the hamburger right off another kid—the kid already bit out of it, but he took it and he didn't care. It was like he was hungry, and that's probably not something he gets a lot of." (Lucy)</i>
Parent	Self-referral	<i>" The parents will come up here and ask if we have a...can my kids still be in the Backpack Program, what do I have to do?" (Shannon)</i>
	Unyielding pursuit for food consumption	<i>"If you're willing to walk up to school—I'm not talking about ride up here in your car, and—I'm talking about walk up here, get on the bus, and come and get it. I think that shows great need. " (April)</i>

"Um...sometimes, if a child hasn't had anything to eat, or anything, it tends to, um...it tends to have an effect on their behavior, their attention span, how they function in school. So, um, so that's where it becomes an issue in school..." (Cindy)

“...why are they mad in the morning? Because they got to school late; no it’s not really cuz most kids don’t get upset because they came to school late, it’s because they missed the eight o’clock bell, and now it’s too late for them to eat breakfast.”(Carrie)

The strategies used by staff to identify students who would be eligible involved both two different types of approaches: individual staff efforts as well as relational interactions. Furthermore, while some of these identification strategies were used intentionally for the purposes of identifying and selecting students for the Backpack Program, there were some other strategies that emerged as well. Intentional strategies were those that staff used to specifically identify students who may be food insecure. Emergent strategies are those that began as routine school procedures, but subsequently became strategies after coordinators recognized food insecure behaviors among children while following these routine procedures.

For example, individual staff efforts included asking questions (inquiring) about food insecurity among their students, referring students based on family familiarity (e.g. student having another sibling in the program), and monitoring students’ mealtimes. Of those efforts, all of them except for monitoring mealtimes were intentional strategies used to identify students who may be eligible for the program. Monitoring mealtimes emerged as an identification strategy, as this was often done purposefully within the school, but not specifically with regard to looking for indicators of child food security and thus, Backpack Program eligibility.

Individual staff approaches: Intentional. The types of inquiry that staff members engaged in involved asking questions about whether they had a meal before attending school. Staff also inquire about the nature of the food that families have in their household in order to understand more about the child’s access to food.

“... if they come in, and they’re always hungry at breakfast, or they’re trying to get extra, or they come down, you know, tell the teacher they don’t feel good. “Well did you eat?” “No.” Sometimes we’ll question, “What’d you have last night for supper?” And that’s where sometimes we’ll find out there’s not enough food at home. “Well, I didn’t eat last night,” or “This is all I had last night cuz there was nothing there.” So a lot of times, just a little on the side questioning kids will come out if they feel comfortable with you. (Lucy)

“I think it was a Thursday and I was talking to this student, and I said well what do you guys have in the-in your fridge? When you look in your fridge, what’s in there? (Casey)

Another strategy that staff members used was referring students based on their relation to another student. Specifically, staff members almost always referred or placed a student into the

Backpack Program individually based on their relation to another Backpack student:

“...what I would do is, well I update staff, you know, um twice a month on how many we have. The next thing is um, what I did also, I gave it to siblings. So, just because you and your sister here, I gave one to both. (Teresa)

“And, I know, if, if, say, if like siblings here, if one of the siblings qualifies, then all of the siblings will qualify.” (Cindy)

“...it’s been really great. The last year was hard for me to identify which kids needed it, and so I asked, um, you know teachers, how they identified kids, or if they had siblings that were part of the program...then that’s how I’d identify them too. ” (Katie)

Individual staff approaches (emergent). An emergent (unintentional) identification strategy used by staff members was to monitor students’ mealtimes. Staff explained that these were times when they identified actions of students that lead them to believe that a child was food insecure, and to further recommend the student or place them into the Backpack Program. Some actions identified by staff members included students asking for extra food or showing extreme hunger. Some staff members also observed the quality of food that students brought during regular mealtimes to determine whether students were provided adequate food:

“...and then just based on sort of what I’ve observed about how children eat and talk about food and watch them eat at lunch and what is offered provided them by their families. Uh, there’s a fairly high disproportionate amount of carbohydrates, you know, white flour, sugar, turned to fat carbohydrates. And I, I just don’t know about a balanced, nutritional diet for a lot of those families.” (Susan)

“I’ve always had good experiences, and I know a lot of the students that are hungry, because I also work in the breakfast room and the lunch room.” (Patty)

“Um, and a lot of teachers do like different activities that involves food or things like that and I think most of the teachers paid close attention to the students at those times, like you know, how was his, or his or her eating, I mean do they, when they, when you guys have pizza parties in your classroom, do they like hover over it, and ask for like two or three or four slices? You know, they just look at the behavior of the child, when it comes to, you know how they react to food.” (Cindy)

Relational staff approaches (intentional). With regard to relational interactions that helped staff members to identify students, staff members made an effort to have personal relationships with students and their families, a sense of relatedness. In addition, relationships among staff created a school network conducive to discussing and therefore accurately targeting students for the program. Here, this “word of mouth” among staff members was a more

intentional approach to identifying students for the program.

“When I put that letter out and the referral forms, it doesn’t just go to teachers and certified staff, it goes to every employee in the building: lunchroom supervisors, secretaries, aides, teachers, custodians, um, volunteers who maybe have been established here—we have a handful of volunteers who have been here for years and years and years. They have personal connections with kids, so anybody has the opportunity to refer. And I like that.” (April)

“I think that there’s, uh, a lot of sharing of information amongst professionals in this building when someone recognizes and unmet need...(Susan)”

“When teachers come and say, “Well so and so’s mom left their job, and they you know, they’re trying to make every end meet, you know would that be a criteria for the food program?” Sure. Yes we’re looking at [talking to] the cafeteria people, and Mr. Moke, our custodian who knows all the kids who’s eaten every bit of food...or who’s asking for seconds. Those are, those are easily to identify.” (April)

Whereas, having personal relationships with students were less intentional (for identifying), but led to better ways of recognizing need among students and families, which also created windows of opportunity to refer or place a child or family into the program:

“Not just secretary at work, but I really try to work with the parents and the kids. So I get to know the families and the kids better in that way so it can help them out...Since I interact with a lot of kids, and a lot of parents will confide in me, then I can that way get the forms to them, ...see if we can get them added on.”(Lucy)

“ I think because Nicky* and Ms. X* have been here, the kids know them so well, they feel comfortable and a lot of times will stay stuff to her when she’s doing it, and that’s how we can get more feedback on that. Um, they know the people. It’s nobody new or strange. You know, I’ve been here so long, the kids know, and if they feel safe with that person they will say stuff if something’s going on, so I think that really helps having the person distribute it be someone that the kids know well.” (Lucy)

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This study explored the process through which school staff members made decisions about Backpack Program implementation. Specifically, it examined the philosophical views and actions of school staff members involved in implementing the Backpack Program. In addition, it explored the uniqueness of the Backpack Program with regard to program implementation and child and family outcomes. This study informs current literature surrounding a nationwide informal feeding program for children, and is the only systematic study conducted with school staff members about their roles in Backpack Program implementation.

Summary of Backpack Program Implementation

School staff members implement the Backpack Program, and have control of the accuracy in identifying students to be selected. First, Backpack coordinators' knowledge of the program and its aims leads to the cultivation of an ethos of care among school staff members. This ethos of care is characterized by an atmosphere where staff stress that alleviating child hunger and being accountable should be a priority for staff members in the particular school. Such an ethos elicits use of subjective judgment (by all school staff members) in identifying students who may be good candidates for the program, a judgment that is very different than simply identifying those students who are eligible for free and reduced lunch (essentially those students whose parents are within a certain income level).

Staff perceived this judgment to be sharpened by an extended engagement by school staff members. These staff members uphold a sense of urgency and priority in program implementation through the use of strategies that involve individual staff efforts and relational strategies. Through this extended engagement, coordinators and school staff members may be able to more accurately target students who actually need additional food resources at home. Furthermore, the ability of school staff members to hold this ethos and use these strategies creates a pathway through which the Backpack Program can address food insecurity within the school setting. Through these processes, staff suggest that the Backpack Program can have effects on child outcomes (physical, emotional, social, individual, and academic), and is an avenue for providing direct attention to and alleviation of childhood hunger in comparison to more public, income based programs that base selection for food assistance on family income only. As stated earlier, there have been few studies that highlight consistent correlates of public programs and supplemental informal food programs on such outcomes. Being food secure has

been associated with overall better outcomes for schoolchildren (Alaimo, Olson, & Frongillo, 2001; Jyoti, Frongillo, & Jones, 2005). Access to adequate food for children using informal selection may lead to better outcomes for children. Thus, this study suggests that the Backpack Program provides a path through which such outcomes can be supported.

How do these Processes Manifest? Identification and Selection into the Backpack Program: Highlights from the Data

School staff facilitate the unique processes of program implementation that make the Backpack Program work. The selection processes require school staff cooperation, engagement in program operations, and a school ethos that aims to promote overall child health and academic well-being. Specifically, these processes are buttressed by an assertive ethos of care within the school environment. This ethos of care exists broadly within the domain of the importance of a collective concern for child welfare within the school setting. It is premised by staff beliefs about childhood hunger within the school setting and based on their knowledge of food insecure children in their schools. More importantly, knowledge about the program and experiences in implementing it leads to the unveiling of the magnitude of need within the school setting. In this study, most school staff members held these beliefs, and they were key to their assertiveness in creating an ethos of care around alleviating childhood hunger. These beliefs impacted the atmosphere that led to rigorous selection of students and the potential of the program in indirectly affecting positive child outcomes within the school setting.

One belief that staff held is that food for all children should be a human right, and that the school system should hold some accountability in alleviating child hunger. Thus, children should never be food insecure. To ensure that the school upheld this accountability, a sense of urgency for program implementation by coordinators trickled to other school staff members in several ways. This significantly influenced how school staff were able to identify and recommend students for selection into the program. School staff members were able to more accurately target students to be in the Backpack Program through ensuring that they make an extra effort to further develop personal relationships with students and their families. This sense of relatedness opened the door for children and parents to disclose the fact that they don't have enough food at home. Namely, this led to self-referrals into the program by students and their families.

Monitoring students more closely was another way that staff were able to identify students that may be eligible for Backpack Program participation. Watching the speed and

frequency with which students eat (indicating persistent hunger), asking for “seconds”, and engaging in behaviorally unacceptable means for food consumption during lunchroom hours were a few ways that staff members were able to recognize characteristics of food insecure children. A third strategy that staff used was simply inquiring about the availability of food to the child through use of deductive reasoning based on child characteristics that ignited staff intuitions about their lack of access to adequate food at home.

Another belief that staff held was that properly implementing the Backpack Program was related to child and family outcomes. These outcomes were perceived to be positive in five domains. The first domain through which the program impacted child outcomes was at the family level. Research has shown that low income families are highly strained by many demands and often have little time to balance essential daily familial needs (Roy, Tubbs, & Burton, 2004). Staff believed that relieving burden on families through providing children with food over the weekend would inevitably impact the child in positive ways, particularly reducing stress on parents and facilitating positive parent-child relationships. The second domain was that of physical/ somatic symptoms. Staff involved in Backpack Program implementation believed that providing students with food over the weekend relieved hunger and the impact that hunger has on the body (e.g. stomach aches). Thirdly, staff believed that food insecurity impacts students’ emotions, which ultimately influenced students’ behavior problems. Staff members suggested that students who were food insecure may behave in unacceptable ways due to their lack of access to adequate food. For example, one principal expressed that one of her Backpack students “blew up” in the school cafeteria following a lunchroom worker taking his food tray after the lunch period ended, although he was not finished eating. It has been cited that emotional, behavioral, and psychosocial correlates result from food insecurity and hunger, particularly for children (Kleinman, Murphy, Little, Pagano, Wehler, Regal, & Jellinek, 1998). As perceived by staff, this type of behavior is typical of students who may believe that they won’t have access to sufficient amount of food once leaving the school environment. Providing backpacks to such students could aid in reducing such behavioral issues. Fourth, the program creates a way for children to be more agentic. The food provided by the Backpack Program is child friendly, and does not require the help of a parent for preparation. Lastly, and perhaps a priority, is that food insecure students who receive backpacks are able to better focus on academics, and are perceived to perform better if they eat properly both in and outside of school. These perceptions, taken

together, suggest that the school is a direct means through which to identify and possibly address positive ways to alleviate the burdens that are associated with childhood food insecurity. Interestingly, these perceptions are aligned with findings that suggest that detrimental behaviors for children at school are linked to economic burden at the family level (Evans, 2004). Further, this study introduces an idea that has not yet been addressed by more recent literature, increasing child agency in the process of reducing food insecurity.

Uniqueness of the Backpack Program and Suggestions for Implementation

Through processes of program implementation as facilitated by school Backpack staff, the Backpack Program is unique in several ways. First, observational strategies used by school staff allow for a more precise recognition of child hunger within schools. Secondly, staff members believe that such strategies create avenues to a more expanded view of hunger that can enhance a basis for identification of students into the program. Thirdly, it helps to alleviate child hunger, and may influence child outcomes and family circumstances in general. This suggests that the expansion of the program may be vital in outcomes of child development.

As indicated, the flexibility in identifying and selecting students via child and family indicators is crucial when considering the effectiveness of the program. This relational aspect of the program is most effective when school staff have a collective knowledge of their families. In addition, school staff members need to have structural cooperation in order to make procedures work. However, the Backpack Program faces a more macro level issue in some areas, the lack of consistent funding. Providing funding for these programs to operate is an important first step. Equally important is the funding needed to document impact, cultivate institutionalization of such feeding programs in organizational context (i.e. schools), and consistently evaluate these programs in order to sustain a system that combats hunger in school- aged children. One way to create such an atmosphere is to involve stakeholders at every level. Because the problem of childhood food insecurity is multifaceted and impacts and involves people from every ecological level, providing a structure for sustainability is needed. Kolbe (2005) suggested that local schools and districts establish school health teams and councils that involve administrators, school health coordinators, interested parents, students, and organizations (food pantries and food banks, for example) that can help provide resources to schools. The purpose of such teams is to engage everyone affected in some way by health issues in schools. In this way, policies created that affect school health will not be top down decisions, but will be more appropriate in

that they will be rooted in participatory brainstorming. The findings from this study suggest that while the Backpack Program provides the material resources to aid food insecurity, the extent to which this objective is fulfilled is mediated by multiple positive, interconnected relationships between those more proximal to the child.

Limitations and Future Research

Although this study may inform research regarding community and school level approaches to reducing child food insecurity, it is not without limitations. Future research can address some of the limitations in this study. This study was conducted on twenty school staff members holding various positions within the school. While this number is suitable for qualitative research overall, the robustness and tone of the findings could increase with more variation in types of participants interviewed. With this variation, unique philosophies and ways of program implementation that may vary based on positionality within the school could be addressed more specifically. Multiple studies have suggested that the school location, size, racial composition, access to school and community resources, parent education, and an array of other factors contribute to influence of school variation on student health outcomes (Brown, Akintobi, Pitt, Berends, McDermott, Agron, & Purcell, 2004; Brener, Jones, Kann, & McManus, 2003; Kolbe, 2005). This study was conducted in a small, metropolitan city in the Midwest, thus, is not representative of larger cities, or smaller, more rural area. Future studies can examine the philosophy, beliefs, and actions of school staff members of the Backpack Programs in areas where resources are either severely limited, or plentiful. Lastly, a goal to this study was to gain an initial understanding of the school environment that drives implementation of the program via staff members approaches. Further research in this area could expand the knowledge base on the types of various school approaches, as well as personal characteristics of staff members that lead to different processes of relational strategies and program implementation tactics. This type of exploration could be informational in creative staff training and preparation for implementing this type of program. Such training could include accurate determination of which students receive food resources. This requires staff to be trained in iteratively evaluating one's decisions with the changing economic times, and changing family situations. This study found that family and thus, child needs changed with economic, employment, and family composition changes.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

My name is LaTasha Washington and I am here at _____ school. Today is (state date and time).

The purpose of this interview is to discuss the Backpack Program with you, as well your role as a school coordinator. In addition, we will discuss your thoughts about children in your school who may be experiencing nutritional difficulties. As you may know, this interview will be audio taped, but anything that you say to me will be completely confidential. No one besides myself and others on the University of Illinois research team will be able to listen to this recording. With that said, do I have your permission to proceed on with the interview?

OK, we can now begin. We're going to discuss things related to your experience in working with the Backpack Program, and working with children who are eligible for the program. I'm going to ask you some questions about these things. If you need me to clarify anything at any point, feel free to stop me and ask.

Demographics

1. Please tell me your name and your position in the school.
2. Tell me about your experience working with students? How long have you worked in a school setting? In this particular school? In your position?

Main Questions

Now I am going to ask you some questions about your role with the Backpack Program, and how you feel about the program.

1. How long have you been involved with your school's participation in the Backpack Program?
2. What has been your experience in working with the Backpack Program? (If school is new, ask what they think the experience will be like).
3. What do you think about feeding programs for hungry children (such as the National School Lunch and Breakfast Program)?
4. How did you get involved in your school's participation with the Backpack Program?
5. Do you have any personal experience with not having adequate food? Have you or anyone close to you ever had any problems in this area?

So far, we've talked about your role in helping students and the Backpack Program. With those things said, I think we should talk about some perceptions of what it means to have adequate food. (Lead into question 6).

6. Many people have different views on what it means to have adequate or inadequate food. To help us get a better understanding of the different meanings, can you tell me what it means to you to have adequate food?

7. How do discussions about having enough food apply to your school? Your school district?
8. What are some ways at your school for determining which students get to participate in the Backpack Program? What are your own unique ways (if necessary)?
9. How do you keep track of students who transition into and out of the program?
10. Can you tell me which families are recommended to the program, and how that decision is made? What do you do when more than one child is eligible?
11. Can you explain the process of distributing food to children?
12. In your opinion, how do you think the program is working?

Now we're going to go into questions about children's reactions to the program, and families' overall access to food resources.

13. How do children respond to receiving food? How do they respond to those who give it to them here at your school?
14. Based on your experience, describe the typical family or families who do not have adequate food.
15. What other types of public or private assistance are these families being given?
16. Are these types of assistance sufficient or insufficient? Do the families receive enough or not enough food? Why or why not?
17. What do you think are the main issues that contribute to not having adequate food?
18. If you were an advisor who recommends strategies for the program and could have as many backpacks as you pleased, how many would you want from the program?