



# An Evaluation of the Backpack Program in East Central Illinois

**Millions of school age children in the United States are in households experiencing food insecurity (i.e., households without access to enough food to maintain a healthy, active life). In response, the U.S. government has funded large-scale food assistance programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and the National School Lunch and Breakfast Program.**

Despite these efforts, a gap still exists between need and available services. The Backpack Program was designed to meet the needs of hungry children at times when other resources are not available, such as weekends and school vacations. Food banks partner with local schools, who help identify children at-risk for hunger. Those children are then provided with child-friendly, easy-to-prepare meals which are discreetly distributed to them on Friday afternoons.

While programs like the Backpack Program represent an important component of the nation’s efforts to alleviate food insecurity, little is known about the potential impact of the program on children’s hunger relief and associated factors such as school performance and family climate. This project answered these three key questions: (1) What is the impact of the Backpack Program on household levels of food insecurity? (2) Does participation in the program increase school attendance on days of distribution? (3) What is the impact of the program on family mealtimes?



## RESEARCH TEAM

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