



Role of School & College Food Pantries

*Providing Resources, Empowering Students, and Improving
Success*

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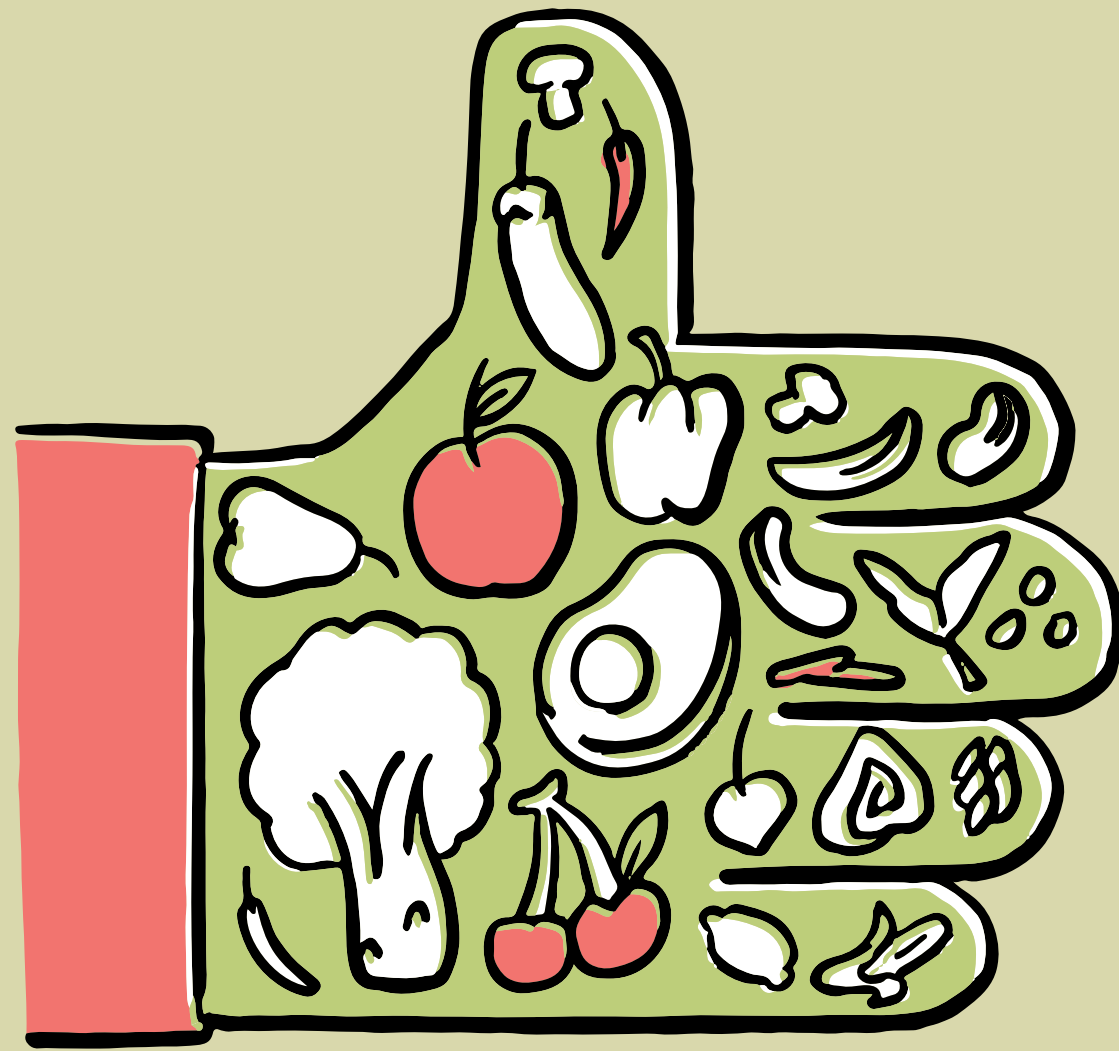
Introduction

School and college food pantries are vital resources in addressing food insecurity, providing essential food and support to students and families. These pantries help alleviate hunger, enabling students to focus on their education and overall well-being.

Impact:

Food insecurity negatively affects academic performance, mental health, and retention rates. Without reliable access to nutritious food, students face higher stress levels, reduced focus, and increased dropout rates. These pantries play a crucial role in improving student outcomes by reducing these barriers.

Scope of Food Insecurity

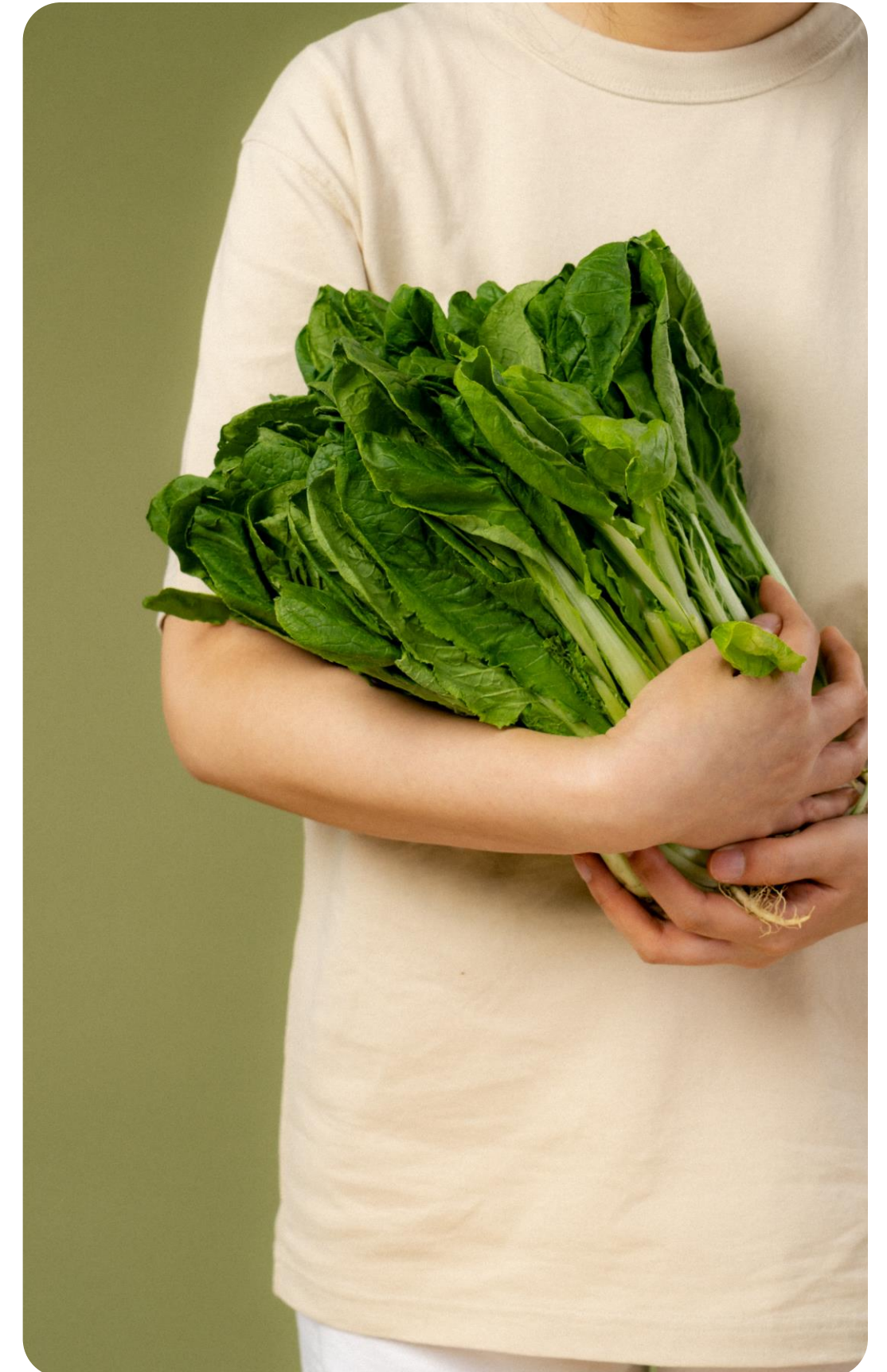


Key Statistics:

- As of 2020, 34% of college students experience food insecurity annually ([Hope Center](#))
- 1 in 6 children in the U.S. live in food-insecure households (USDA)

Populations at Risk:

- Low-income families, first-generation college students, and students from historically underserved communities.





Functions of School Food Pantries



A **school food pantry** is..

- a resource located in or near a school that provides free food to students, their families, and sometimes the wider community.
- Partnering with food banks and school administrators, these pantries distribute fresh produce, grains, proteins, canned goods, and pantry staples through methods like pre-packed boxes, drive-thru pickups, or in-person shopping.
- They serve families needing help with groceries, not limited to those receiving free or reduced lunch, and may welcome all district students or community members.
- Most pantries operate on specific days, at least monthly, and may also stay open during the summer.



Functions of College Food Pantries



College food pantries are...

- on-campus initiatives that provide a lifeline for students who may be struggling to make ends meet, ensuring they have access to nutritious food and can focus on their studies without the added stress of hunger.
- These pantries are stocked with non-perishable items like canned goods, pasta, and cereal, as well as fresh produce and other perishable items when available. Some schools also offer meal swipes or vouchers for use at campus dining halls.

Context Matters: Challenges Faced



Biggest Challenges and Wins

Challenges

A look at the internal and systematic challenges unique to college food pantries reveals that the common challenges included funding, staffing/volunteers, meeting students' needs, receiving donations/ sustaining inventory, having a lack of university support, and limited space.

Theme	n of transcript excerpts	Sample quote
Difficulties obtaining and maintaining grant funding	66	“Biggest challenges have been funding limitations. Our pantry utilization has increased tremendously and our usage often exceeds our monthly funding allocation.” - <i>Faculty in Nevada</i>
Issues acquiring donations and sustaining inventory	43	“We saw a significant increase in the total number of visits to the campus pantry and with that maintaining adequate inventory became a challenge.” - <i>Food Pantry Director in Florida</i>
Issues maintaining staff and volunteers	34	“Staffing has been a challenge - increased students on campus has led to us all being busier, hard to keep the pantry open as many hours as we like.” - <i>Dean of Students in Tennessee</i>
Difficulties meeting students’ growing needs	32	“The biggest challenge has been spreading awareness of the program and meeting student needs. Students would like for the pantry to be open longer and more frequently, which we would also like to see.” - <i>Food Pantry Director in California</i>
Limited space	30	“Biggest challenge is we need to expand our physical space to be able to offer more services.” - <i>Faculty in Illinois</i>
Lack of university/ administrative support	21	“Our biggest challenges have been the lack of institutional support/access to institutional resources. We are required to operate almost exclusively on donated resources [...]” - <i>Faculty in Idaho</i>

Campus Food Pantries:

Key Challenges:

- **Funding:** Securing and maintaining consistent funding remains a major obstacle.
- **Inventory:** Acquiring donations and maintaining sufficient stock is a constant struggle.
- **Staffing:** Recruiting and retaining volunteers and staff is crucial for effective operation.
- **Student Awareness**
- **Lack of Administrative Support**

Wins

Despite these challenges, there have been notable achievements and wins among campus pantries, serving as encouraging reminders of their dedication to championing student food security. These successes highlight the resilience and innovation of college food pantries, showcasing their ability to adapt and make a meaningful impact in supporting students facing food insecurity on campus.

Theme	n of transcript excerpts	Sample quote
Expanding and growing pantry and services	36	“ Our biggest win is our new refrigerator and freezer so we can offer dairy and meat products to our students.” - <i>Food Pantry Director in Montana</i>
Receiving support from the surrounding community	30	“The biggest challenge has been advertising and finding community support, the biggest win was finding the community support and the willingness of the community to offer help.” - <i>Food Pantry Director in New Mexico</i>
Supporting more students and contributing to community betterment	28	“Knowing we're helping and making a difference.” - <i>Food Pantry Director in Oklahoma</i>
Navigating financial challenges with grants and funding support	26	“With the Swipe Grant we received, we were able to focus on trying to build some sort of stable resources and we got enough momentum this year to be able to be included in our campus Giving Day campaign, and get enough donations (some cash, some in-kind from stores) to get to a point where we have enough resources in reserve for at least 3 months, which gives us breathing room to seek strategic, healthy donations.” - <i>Faculty in Idaho</i>

Campus Food Pantries:

Successes: (pg.24)

- **Expanding services** (e.g., increased food variety, SNAP/Cal Fresh assistance)
- **Growing community support and partnerships**
- **Securing grants and funding** to improve resources

SCHOOL FOOD

PANTRIES

Limited Funding

Storage Issues

Awareness

Inconsistent

Donations

Volunteer

Availability

Child-Specific Nutritional
Needs

COLLEGE FOOD

PANTRIES

High Demand

Student-
Engagement/Awareness

Inconvenient hours of
operation/locations

Resource Constraints

Volunteer Turnover/Staffing

Short Shelf Life

Balancing Dietary Needs

- School
Schedule
- Alignment
- Funding
- Storage/Space
- Stigma
- Volunteer
Management
- Food Waste
- Nutritional
Need Balance

Solutions



Solutions for Schools

- Embed pantries into after-school programs to normalize access.
- Use teachers and counselors to identify students in need discreetly.
- Get school district buy-in for community-wide support and approval if needed.

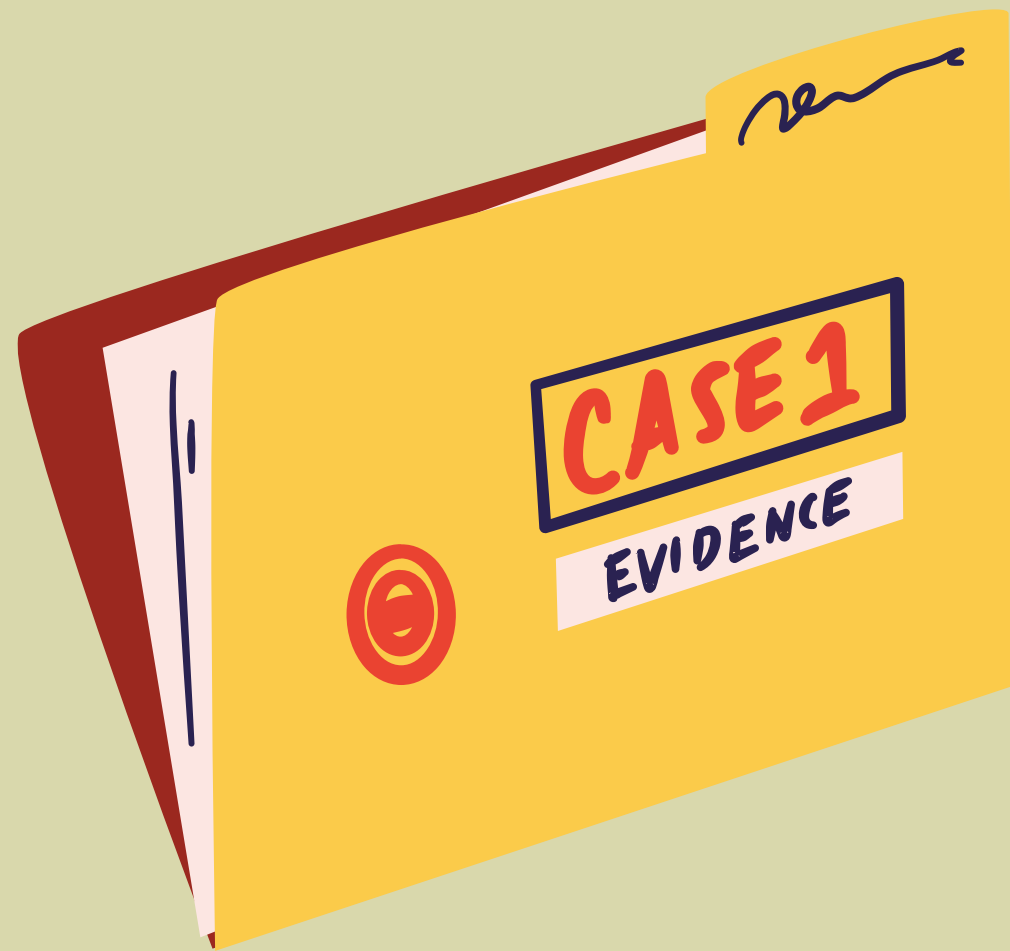
Solutions for Colleges

- Implement meal swipe donation programs for dining hall access.
- Offer hygiene products alongside food items.
- Increasing awareness (campus wide campaigns, social media outreach, student ambassador programs)
- Improve accessibility: offer extended hours, online ordering, satellite pantry locations
- Enhance food quality (providing wider variety of fresh produce)
- Cooking Demonstrations
- Address Transportation barriers (partner with campus transportation services, provide food delivery options, offer incentives for using alternative transportation methods)

Example:

- Mobile distributions at libraries and dorms during finals to increase engagement

College/University Food Pantry Cases



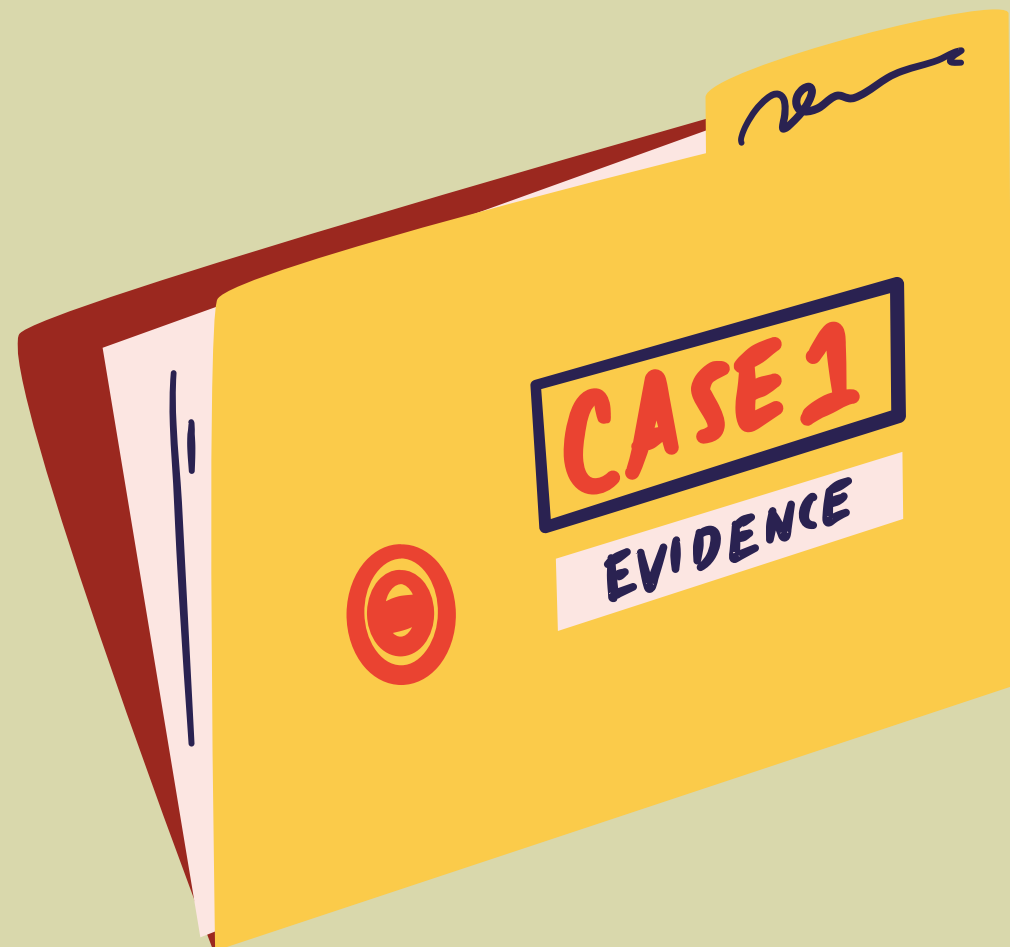
Rutgers University-Newark - RUN+ Pantry

- **Strategy:** pantryRUN provides free, on-campus food access for all Rutgers-Newark community members (students, staff, faculty) to support their nutritional needs and academic success. The pantry offers a variety of groceries, including dairy, grains, produce, and additional items like period products and condoms. It is open to all students, with no limits on frequency of visits (up to once per week or a few times per semester).
- **Distribution Method:** pantryRUN offers in-person visits and online ordering with scheduled pickup. If unable to visit during hours, students can access refrigerated lockers nearly 24/7 by placing an order in advance. Monthly farmers market distributions are available for all Rutgers members.
- **Partnerships:** The pantry partners with the MEND Coalition of pantries, Community FoodBank of NJ, Newark Beth Israel Medical CENTER(Inclusive Healthy Communities Grant Program) and the Rutgers Foundation, and occasionally local farms.

Union College of Union County - College Pantry (partnered with [swipe out hunger](#))

- Strategy: [UCNJ](#) has made food security a strategic priority, focusing on expanding food access to low-income students to support their academic and career goals. The [Nourish the Future Campaign](#) provides free meals to low-income students that started in Fall 2024, alongside expanded pantry access.
- Distribution Method: UCNJ provides food through Hoot's Market, an on-campus pantry available to all students. The Nourish the Future Campaign will also provide free on-campus meals to low-income students.
- Partnerships: UCNJ collaborates with the Union County College Foundation to fund and support the campaign. It also encourages donations from the community and alumni to sustain food programs.

School Food Pantry Cases

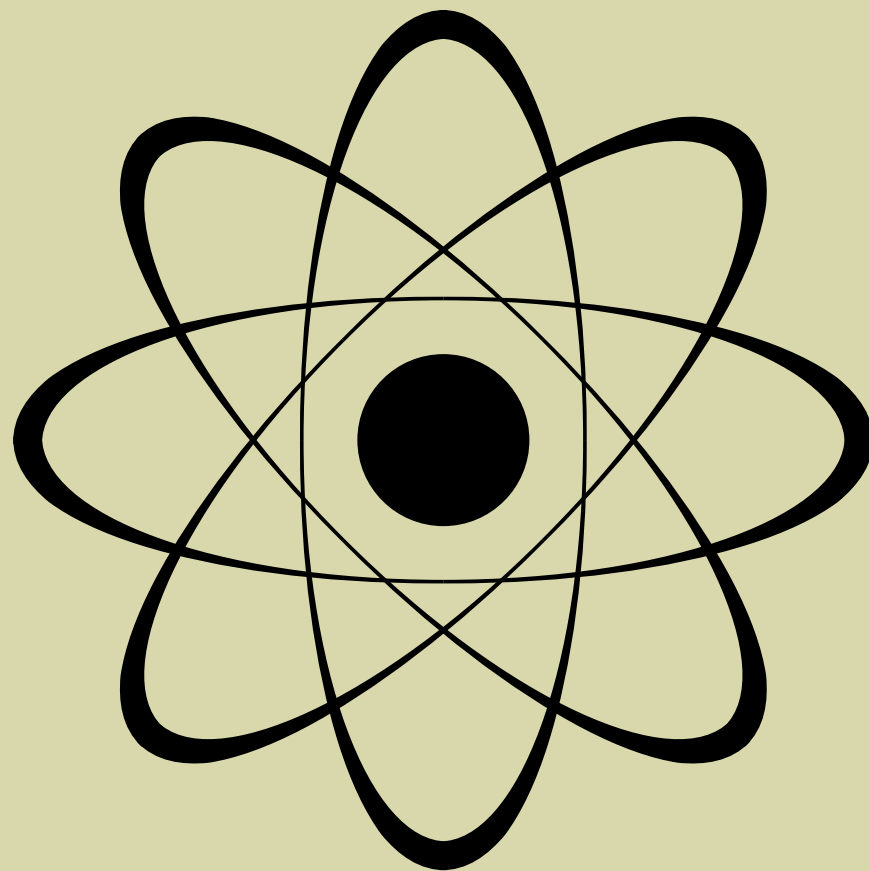


[Hammonton High School Pantry](#) (Trenton, NJ):

- **Strategy:** The pantry provides food, clothing, hygiene products, and school supplies to students in need with dignity, creating a “boutique” environment to encourage students to use the pantry and offering both emotional and material support for those facing home life challenges.
- **Partnerships:** The pantry is funded through grants from the Hammonton Education Foundation, with support from local businesses and organizations, including the Puerto Rican Civic Association, Kiwanis Club, and Victory Bible Church. It collaborates with the Counseling Department, Child Study Team, and teachers to ensure effective distribution.
- **Distribution Method:** The pantry stocks food for on-campus consumption, along with clothing, personal hygiene items, and school supplies. When funding allows, it provides gift cards to families for purchasing food and necessities. The pantry operates year-round and remains available during the summer, with access provided through a "checks and balances" system to ensure accountability.

- **Mercer Street Friends Opened 2nd School-Based Food Pantry in Trenton District**
 - **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School (Trenton):** Opened a Choice Food Pantry in December 2023, providing food and additional resources to students and their families.
 - **Benjamin C. Gregory Elementary School (Trenton):** Launched a school-based pantry earlier in 2023, offering food assistance to students and their families.
- **Mercer Street Friends Community Schools (Trenton):**
 - Operates Family Resource Center Food Pantries at multiple schools, including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School and Benjamin C. Gregory Elementary School, providing food and various support services to the school community.

Pantry Models



Client Choice Model

Miniature pantry model - de-centralized method

On-Campus Pantries

Mobile Pantries

Pop-Up Pantries

Community-Based Pantries

Pantry Reccomendations



- **Build Partnerships:** Collaborate with local farms, food banks, grocery stores, businesses, and community organizations to secure fresh produce and a steady food supply.
- **Enhance Access & Awareness:** Leverage programs like the Feeding America School Food Pantry Program and CFBNJ's College Food Pantries Initiative to connect students with nutrition education and SNAP benefits.
- **Use Technology:** Streamline operations with administrative tools and online donation platforms.
- **Secure Resources:** Organize food drives, fundraising events, and virtual campaigns to gather financial and food support.
- **Engage Volunteers:** Involve students, faculty, and the community for direct service, advocacy, and sustainability.
- **Maximize Space:** Repurpose unused classrooms or building rooms to house the pantry.



***Thank
You***

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