

**Testimony**

**of**

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on

**Texas Hunger Initiative and Public-Private Partnerships in Texas**

before the

**National Commission on Hunger**

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Thank you, members of the commission for the opportunity to share about the work of the Texas Hunger Initiative. My goal today is to share with you about three areas: public and private partnerships, community engagement, and the results of collaborative efforts in Texas.

My name is Kathy Krey. I am the Director of Research at the Texas Hunger Initiative at Baylor University where I oversee a diverse portfolio of research and evaluation projects on food security topics, including evaluation of child nutrition programs in Texas. The Texas Hunger Initiative (THI) is a collaborative, capacity-building project focused on ensuring that every Texan has access to three nutritious meals a day, seven days a week. THI develops and implements strategies to end hunger through research, policy, and community engagement. Headquartered at Baylor University with 12 regional offices across the state, THI convenes federal, state and local government stakeholders with nonprofits, faith communities and business leaders to create an efficient system of accountability that increases food security in Texas.

In Texas, it is estimated that 27% of children live in food-insecure households, which is higher than the national average (21%) (Feeding America, 2014), meaning they had difficulty meeting basic food needs at least some time during the year (Coleman-Jensen, Gregory, & Singh, 2014). We believe the prevalence of food insecurity is too large and complex to be addressed by sectors working independently from one another. THI and its partners across the state have fostered public-private partnerships to maximize the reach and efficiency of federal nutrition programs and to develop innovative local solutions to address hunger. Public-private partnerships decrease food access barriers, build local and state networks, and increase community empowerment. First, I will share the purpose and value of public-private partnerships. Next, I'll share how THI is shaping a public-private infrastructure and highlight the types of partnerships we facilitate across the state.

### **Public-Private Partnerships**

Texas administers fourteen federally-funded nutrition programs that provide healthy food to children and families and help reduce food insecurity and its negative consequences. These programs are administered by different state agencies, and in Texas the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) administers child nutrition programs including National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, and the Summer Food Service Program. The Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) administers the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance

Program (SNAP). And the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS), which operates under the umbrella of HHSC, administers the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program. These federal nutrition programs are vital in helping local communities meet their needs because they are scalable and provide access to resources. However, effectively distributing public services, so that all needs are met, can be difficult especially when administered with a centralized, top-down approach. This is where private non-profits and faith-based organizations can help. They are familiar with the communities in which they operate and have established relationships with the people they serve. Thus, public programs can utilize existing access channels established by private organizations to reach eligible participants. Even though public-private partnerships benefit both the public and private sectors, it can be difficult to coordinate operations between government agencies and numerous community-based organizations. Thus, a third party can help ensure communication and strategic collaboration. THI plays this role by facilitating work with local and state governments and its many private community partners.

### **Early Stages**

This public-private collaboration has framed the work of the Texas Hunger Initiative from the very beginning. We began our work by creating the infrastructure to support these public-private partnerships. Creating a space where government agencies could dialogue and strategize around program delivery and how to maximize efficiency with federal dollars. Five years ago, THI helped bring together the three commissioners in Texas, whose state agencies administer nutrition programs, so they could work together on strategic program implementation. In addition, with the support and buy-in of a key USDA official, a series of meetings, proposals, and conversations were launched to maximize program efficiency. This worked included reducing bureaucratic red tape, streamlining services, and strategically addressing gaps in program administration. These preliminary conversations engendered a state operations team, which was composed of officials from the USDA, the TDA, and the TX HHSC. The state operations team provided a conceptual framework for cross-agency collaboration. For example, the HHSC now advertises summer meals programs, and HHSC and USDA paid for SNAP- and WIC-accessible terminals to be put in TDA-approved farmers' markets to support local produce in low-income communities. The development of this infrastructure was key in sustaining crucial partnerships across programs, sectors, and government agencies.

Now, I will provide an overview of the various capacities in which we facilitate public-private partnerships.

### **Increasing Access Points**

The first is the Community Partner Recruitment Initiative (CPRI). In an effort to make it easier and more efficient for Texans to apply for and manage public benefits, the TX HHSC is partnering with community-based organizations to help eligible Texans utilize HHSC's benefits application and management website. THI and its subcontracting partners have engaged the help of nearly 1,200 local organizations including faith-based organizations, childhood intervention programs, libraries, hospitals, schools and colleges, and domestic violence shelters, which all serve as access points.

Local community organizations can partner at two levels. At Self Service sites, a computer is made available to the public and the online portal is readily accessible. For those that need additional support, there are Application Assistance sites, where citizens can work with a staff member or volunteer who has been trained to assist in the application process which often further facilitates the mission of the organization. For example, a citizen can call a minister at a local congregation to express the need for help. They schedule a time that doesn't interfere with the applicant's job, and the minister can share the myriad ways the church can help. If the individual chooses to apply for public benefits, the minister is trained to assist.

THI performs three key roles in this partnership: implementation, translation, and evaluation. THI has helped implement this program through 12 regional offices that recruit, train, and support these partners, and because we have relationships with these organizations, we are able to interact on a level unattainable for a state agency. Subsequently, we translate the language of government programs to the nonprofit world and, conversely, translate nonprofit language to government agencies. Finally, using data from the state and field, we evaluate these public-private partnerships to develop effective practices.

Because of this state level partnership, approximately 66% of SNAP-eligible Texans can reach out to a partner in their ZIP code to apply, recertify, and (when things improve) withdraw from SNAP with the help of the community members (THI, Feeding Texas). This reduces errors in applications, saving time and money, while also providing resources to the

Texans who need them, and it utilizes existing charitable structures to decrease the need for physical government offices.

### **Summer and Afterschool Meals**

In addition to integration of application assistance into existing organizational networks in communities, child nutrition programs are crucial in curbing the effects of food insecurity. The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), administered by the United States Department of Agriculture's Department of Food and Nutrition Service (USDA-FNS), is one way to ensure that children receive healthy meals during the summer. The National School Lunch Program Seamless Summer Option (SSO) was created as an alternative to SFSP for schools that already participate in school meal programs and wish to continue meal service into the summer. Schools, nonprofit organizations, and local municipalities serve as summer meal sponsors and have meal sites within their regions. Summer meals programs also often provide education and/or recreational activities in addition to serving meals.

In Texas, about 300,000 children a day participate in the summer meals program (TDA, 2014 Summer Meals Data). Regular access to healthy meals in the summer months is important, not just for health but for students' academic well-being. We know that health issues and inadequate nutrition can intensify the learning loss that occurs over the summer. This particularly affects low-income students "who lose up to twice the ground of other students" in reading and language during the summer months (Kerry & Davies, 1998, p. 119). THI and its partners work at the state and local level to coordinate and support summer meals programs and to assist local organizations in addressing logistical barriers to ensure that the children who need the program have access to it. There has been a steady increase in the number of summer meals sponsors and meal sites in Texas over the last five years (nearly 3,000 additional sites) which will help the program reach more low-income students and reach previously underserved areas, while also building on the capacity of organizations.

Additionally, children can be served meals through the At-Risk Afterschool Meal Program, which is part of the USDA's Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). This program reimburses certain afterschool providers for snacks or meals served to participating children. The snacks and meals are served after the regular school day ends. The afterschool meals program helps to relieve the financial burden of working parents and "provides financial

support for schools and community centers that run afterschool programs, so they can provide healthy meals and additional programming” (CPPP, 2015, p. 18). An average of 51,000 meals per day were served in Texas through afterschool programs in 2014 (Afterschool Alliance, 2014).

Following are two examples of public-private partnerships in Texas that supplement and maximize federal funding and state administration of child nutrition programs. In the Rio Grande Valley, Catholic Charities utilizes the Summer Food Service Program to sponsor 75 summer meals sites and they collaborate with churches and nonprofits to support the meals sites. In addition, the local nonprofit, ARISE, provides classes for adults during the summer, and the national nonprofit FirstBook, provides books for educational programming at summer meal sites. The churches and nonprofits coordinate their efforts by sharing volunteers, serving meals, and providing activities for the children and their families. In East Texas, THI partners with The East Texas Community Food Coalition and local farmers to redistribute excess food from a local farmer’s market to summer meals sites. The program includes educating families on healthy eating habits and cooking lessons. These partnerships link families with existing services in the community to improve quality of life.

### **School Breakfast**

In addition to summer and after school meals, school breakfast is an important component to a successful school day, especially for low-income children who might not have access to breakfast at home due to things like: two working parents with limited time, the early start to the school day, and limited food resources at home. In Texas, more than 1.8 million students start their day with school breakfast, including 1.5 million low-income students (TDA, 2013-2014 NSLP Lunch & Breakfast Data). Research studies demonstrate that eating breakfast is associated with positive student outcomes, including improved attention and memory and decreased disciplinary action (Ingwersen et al., 2007; Mahoney et al., 2005; Wesnes et al., 2003, Murphy et al., 1998, Terry & Kerry, 2000). School meals offer students better opportunities to succeed in school, especially children at risk of missing meals at home.

THI is partnering with other advocacy organizations to develop relationships with school personnel to support them in integrating breakfast during the school day and to provide tips, tools, and success stories of logistically efficient and cost-effective breakfast programs. In the

last five years, THI and its partners together have increased the number of breakfast meals served by 65 million.

### **Food Planning Associations**

Lastly, our locally-owned coalitions are fostering innovative partnerships across the state. For over five years, THI has been a leader in the movement to create and support local Food Planning Associations (FPAs): collaborations of organizations and individuals who are committed to making their communities food secure through improved communication and coordination. FPAs are comprised of government and civic leaders, food security stakeholders, corporate representatives, people experiencing food insecurity, and volunteers from the community. THI developed the FPA model as a mechanism for local communities to assess the structure and procedures of food delivery systems, identify resources and gaps, make decisions for change, and implement action plans in order to provide healthy and nutritious food to an increased number of people. THI currently staffs and/or supports 12 FPAs across the state of Texas, each of which incorporates the reduction of child food insecurity as a major – if not primary – goal of their collective work. While these efforts often operate within the context of a larger FPA, sometimes they are free-standing initiatives that use cross-sector collaboration to focus specific topics relating to food insecurity, including child nutrition program expansion, local and state policy initiatives, and community development.

One example of THI's organizing work is in San Angelo, Texas, where the Kids Eat Free program is comprised largely of local churches and community volunteers came together to develop and coordinate a summer meals program in the area. The congregations provided volunteers, space, and food by coordinating the lunch program based on each congregation's resources and capacity, neighborhood location, and established relationships and networks. They now operate meal sites at area churches and an apartment complex during July and August and a variety of churches provide out of their own resources doing what they are able to do, whether its providing food and supplies, coordinating and leading activities at sites, distributing flyers about meal sites, or having Sunday school Classes and Youth Groups serve meals. Other FPAs situated in large cities, such as the Dallas Coalition for Hunger Solutions take a multi-faceted approach where they simultaneously focus on numerous local initiatives, including grassroots organizing, summer meals and afterschool meals support and coordination, and faith-based outreach. In fact,

the coalition's faith community hunger solutions action team developed the Hunger Solutions Guide for the Faith Community that is comprised of six solutions including becoming a site to assist Texans with applying for benefits, becoming a summer meals site, partnering with urban outreach ministries, participating in nutrition education, assisting organizations such as Meals on Wheels and more. Nine interfaith organizations and congregations piloted the 20 Family Garden Demonstration Project to address food insecurity among members in the community. One hundred and forty-eight GardenSoxx garden kits were distributed to 120 low-income families throughout the greater Dallas area.

## **Summary**

In all of this work, THI facilitates public-private partnerships to address the multifaceted nature of food insecurity. We engage in three key areas: research, community engagement, and policy. By working in all three of these areas simultaneously, we are to address hunger holistically, uniting sectors at the local, state, and federal levels resulting in more food-secure households.

The administration and coordination of nutrition programs present unique opportunities for public-private partnerships to take shape. Through actors such as state agencies, schools, nonprofits, congregations, and foundations, community-based resources are pooled and maximized. By stretching these resources, including funding, volunteers, space, food, and educational activities, local communities are able to accomplish more through collaboration.

Independently, the public and private sectors can do a great deal for economically vulnerable Americans, but when they are working together, like they are in Texas, there's a greater impact. We see increased efficiency in service delivery, enhanced community capacity to address local issues, and—most importantly—the citizens who most need benefits and holistic services have access to them.

In order to systematically build on this public-private infrastructure, we believe Congress can play a crucial role. Congress passed a resolution to strengthen public and private partnerships through a line item in the Farm Bill called Hunger Free Communities. We believe strengthening allocation to Hunger Free Communities will expand the capacity of state-based public and private partnerships resulting in greater coordination in the local level, strengthening social networks for low-income Americans, and thus reducing the need for long term federal nutrition



assistance. If we choose to work across partisan lines and religious boundaries, ending food insecurity is a solvable problem.

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## **About the Texas Hunger Initiative at Baylor University**

### **Who We Are**

The Texas Hunger Initiative (THI) is a collaborative, capacity-building project focused on ensuring that every Texan has access to three nutritious meals a day, seven days a week. THI develops and implements strategies to end hunger through research, policy, and community engagement. Headquartered at Baylor University with 12 regional offices across the state, THI convenes federal, state and local government stakeholders with nonprofits, faith communities and business leaders to create an efficient system of accountability that increases food security in Texas.

### **What We Do**

#### **Developing Public-Private Partnerships**

In the context of THI's work, public-private partnerships (PPPs) are collaborations between state agencies and community-based organizations that maximize nutrition program access by increasing scalability and local community empowerment. PPPs bridge local, state, and federal resources to maximize the efficiency and reach of these programs. PPPs can be arranged at both the state and local levels, and can operate as formal or informal collaborations.

#### **Increasing Access to Nutrition Programs**

THI increases access to nutrition programs by partnering with schools and their districts, nonprofits, and congregations to maximize efficiency and reach of service delivery.

#### **CHILD HUNGER OUTREACH**

##### **Summer Meals**

*Since summer 2009*

- 200+ more Summer Meals sponsors were added
- 1,300+ more Summer Meal sites were added
- 48,000+ more kids per day receive Summer Meals
- 5 million more Summer Meals served<sup>4</sup>

##### **School Breakfast**

*Since 2009-2009 school year*

- 65 million more school breakfasts served
- 337,000 more kids per day eat school breakfast<sup>5</sup>

#### **FOOD PLANNING ASSOCIATIONS**

Food Planning Associations (FPAs) are collaborations of organizations and individuals who are committed to making their communities food secure through strategic planning and program coordination. FPAs are comprised of individuals representing a variety of sectors including nonprofit, business, health, schools, government, and more.

- THI supports 12 FPAs across the state.

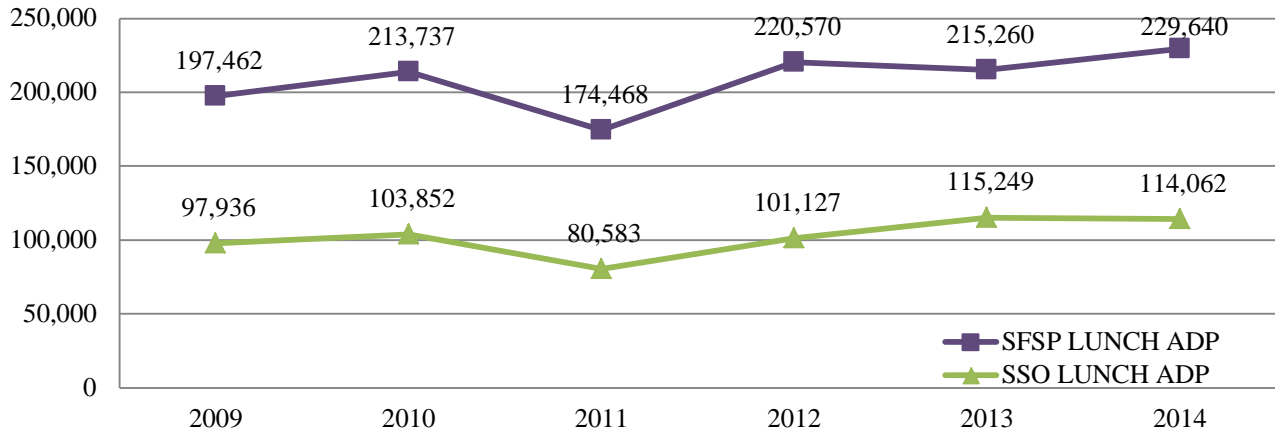
## COMMUNITY PARTNER PROGRAM

THI and its subcontractors are partnering with Texas Health and Human Services Commission to recruit a network of community-based organizations to assist eligible Texans in utilizing public benefits through an online application system.

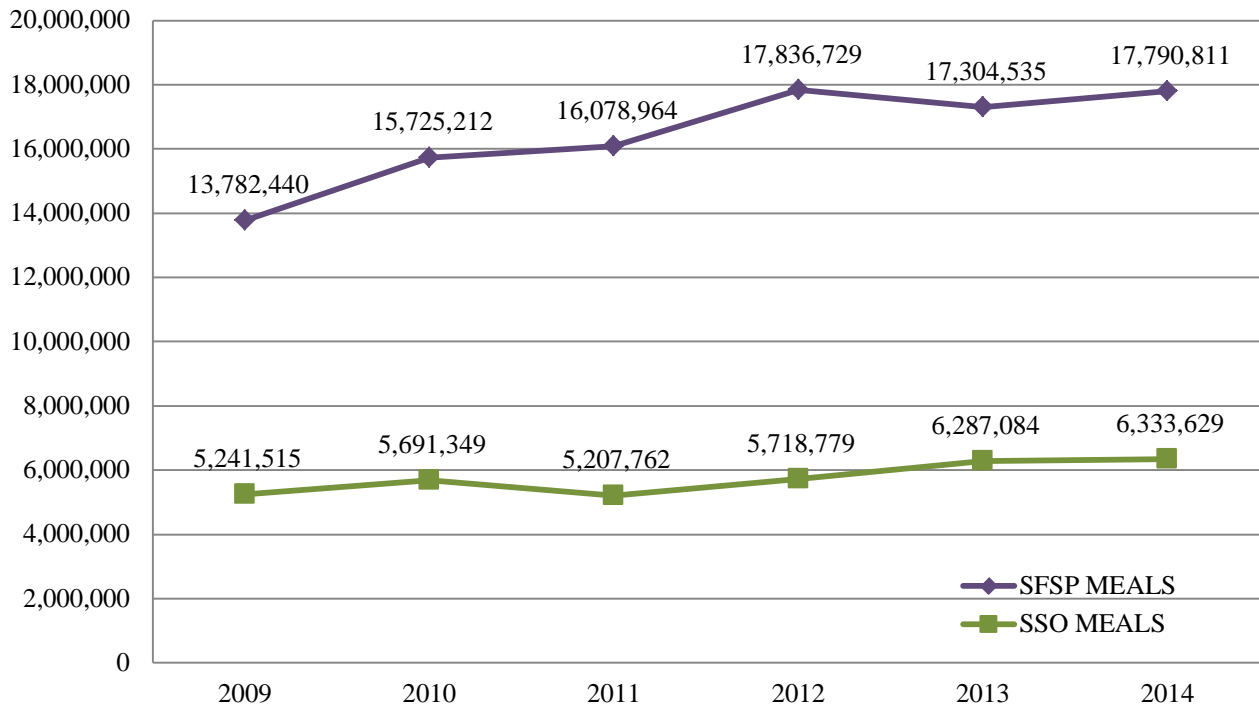
- Total Community Partners: 1,200+
- Community Partners represent the following sectors:
  - Health & Disability: 395
  - Early Childhood Intervention & Afterschool Enrichment: 264
  - Protective & Rehabilitative: 61
  - Employment & Skill Training: 51
  - Education: 40
  - Family Services: 17
  - Community Development: 12
  - Government: 9
  - Community Center: 7
  - Other: 281

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5. Source: Texas Hunger Initiative analysis of Texas Department of Agriculture 2008-2009, 2009-2010, 2010-2011, 2011-2012, 2012-2013, 2013-2014 NSLP & SBP Program Data

### Average Daily Participation per Summer for Texas Summer Meals Program

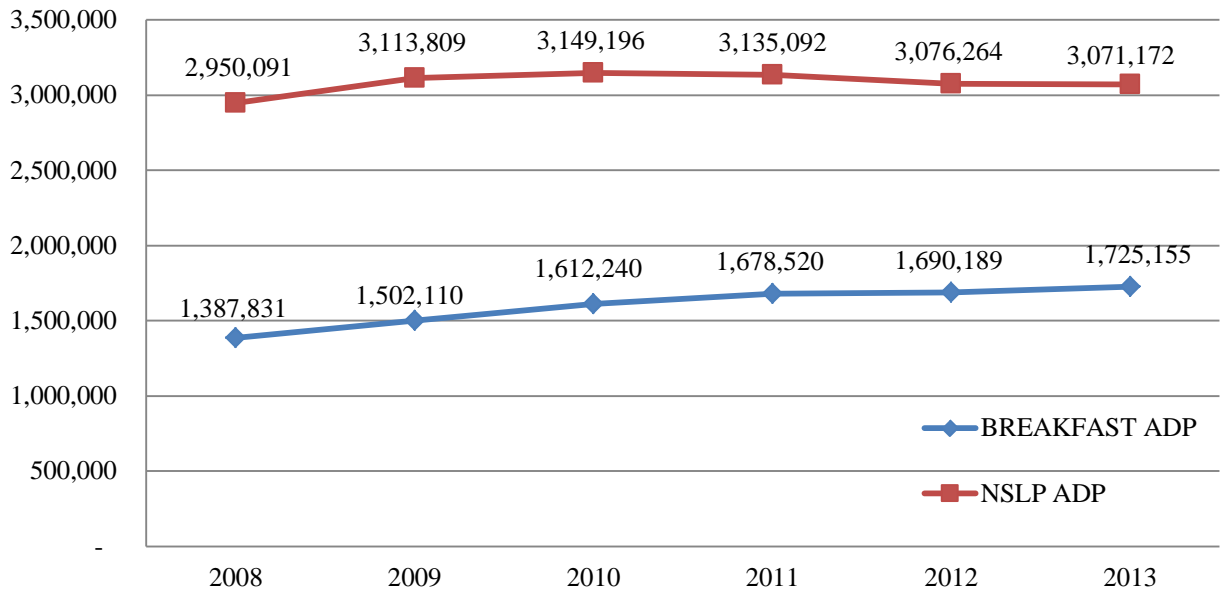


### Total Meals Served per Summer for Texas Summer Meals Program

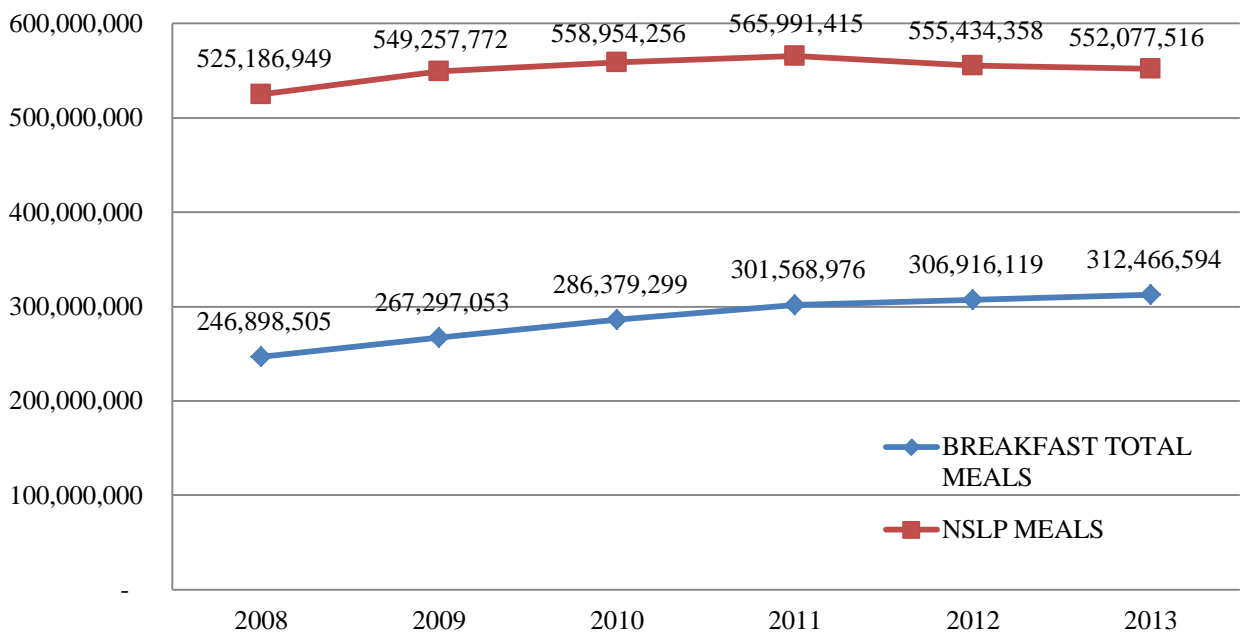


Source: Texas Hunger Initiative analysis of Texas Department of Agriculture 2008-2009, 2009-2010, 2010-2011, 2011-2012, 2012-2013, 2013-2014 SSO & SFSP Program Data

### Average Daily Participation per School Year for Texas School Meals



### Total Meals Served per School Year for Texas School Meals



Source: Texas Hunger Initiative analysis of Texas Department of Agriculture 2008-2009, 2009-2010, 2010-2011, 2011-2012, 2012-2013, 2013-2014 NSLP & SBP Program Data