

HEALTHY FOOD FOR DENVER'S KIDS



HFDK Year 4 Annual Report

Prepared December 2024





Acknowledgements

The HFDK Year 4 Evaluation Report was prepared in December 2024 by Cicatelli Associates Inc. (CAI). We would like to thank the Denver Department of Public Health & Environment (DDPHE) Healthy Food for Denver's Kids (HFDK) team and the HFDK Commission for their guidance and support throughout the last year in our transition as the new evaluation contractor and our efforts to strengthen and enhance reporting metrics and data collection systems. We would also like to acknowledge the work and continued dedication of the 42 HFDK grantees to address food insecurity and improve food-based education among Denver youth.

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HFDK Year 4 Executive Summary

Background

Through the 2018 Denver Ballot Measure 302, the Healthy Food for Denver's Kids (HFDK) Initiative increased taxes to establish a fund for healthy food and food-based education for Denver's youth. These funds are distributed through competitive grants by the Denver Department of Public Health & Environment (DDPHE) to local government agencies, public schools in Denver, including Denver Public Schools (DPS), and non-profit organizations, emphasizing low-income youth. This executive summary synthesizes key findings from HFDK's Year 4 evaluation (August 2023-July 2024).

CHANGE IN EVALUATOR

Change Matrix was the external evaluator at the beginning of the HFDK initiative, serving as the evaluator from March 2020 - December 2023. CAI, a non-profit organization working at local, state, national, and international levels to help organizations build their own capacity to improve health care and social services for marginalized communities, has since been contracted to continue the evaluation from 2023-2027. CAI transitioned into the evaluator role halfway through Year 4 to implement an evaluation that addresses persistent and emerging disparities, particularly affecting low-income and minority youth and families in Denver.

Methodology

HFDK's Year 4 evaluation measures, assesses, and describes the extent to which the HFDK funding portfolio has an impact on healthy food access and nutrition education for children, youth, and their families in Denver through:

1. Grantee-level data analysis to measure outcomes, identify best practices, and capture information on the range of activities each grantee is administering.
2. A citywide impact evaluation and landscape analysis to examine how population-level changes in food access, food assistance, food education, and food production have changed across Denver for children and families, and how HFDK grantees have contributed to those outcomes.



HFDK Year 4 Executive Summary

Key Findings

In Year 4 of HFDK, 42 grantees served **195,955 youth** and **149,185 families** throughout Denver.



Food Access & Distribution

- 37 grantees used HFDK funds to improve food access and distribution
- 16 grantees distributed **3,799,619 pounds of food** to partner organizations
- 30 grantees distributed **7,950,352 pounds of unprepared food** to 69,155 unique youth and families
- 23 grantees served **6,566,394 meals** to youth and families and 28 grantees served **2,430,245 snacks** to youth and families



Food & Nutrition Assistance

- 32 grantees directly enrolled participants or provided support for enrollment in food and nutrition assistance programs
- 3 grantees enrolled sites in Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), creating **14 new CACFP sites** and **23 new SFSP sites**



Food & Nutrition Education

- 20 grantees reported growing and producing foods in gardens, farms, and other grow sites, harvesting a total of **189,523 pounds of food**
- HFDK helped fund **413 gardens/farms/grow sites**, spanning 58,724 total acreages



Food Production

- 36 grantees provided food and nutrition education programming, totaling **4,785 education classes/sessions**
- **41,665 youth** and **21,408 adults** participated in education sessions



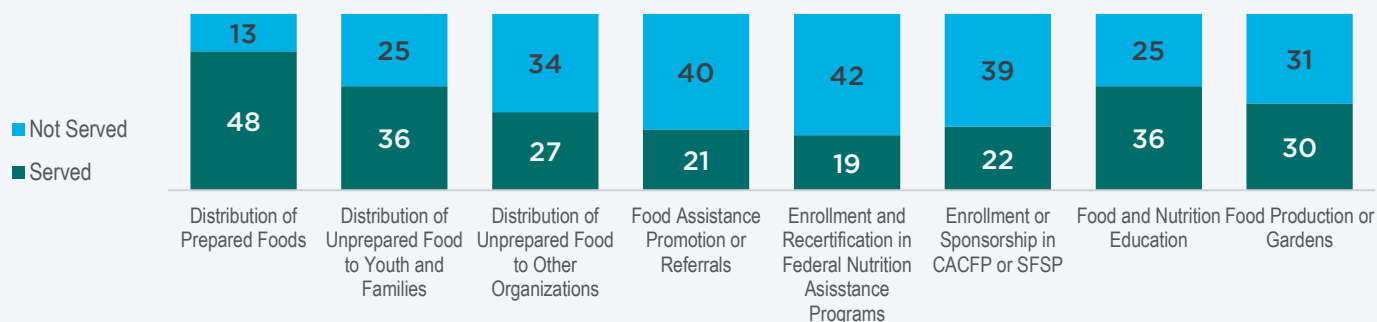
HFDK Year 4 Executive Summary

Citywide Impact

- The child food insecurity rate in Denver County rose to 16.4% in 2022, nearing the peak observed in 2020, surpassing Colorado's rate of 14.2% but remaining lower than the national rate (18.5%).
- Denver's West, Southwest, North, Northeast, and Southeast neighborhoods report lower average household income, lower English proficiency, and higher food insecurity.
- Fruit and vegetable consumption declined from 2015 to 2021 but has since rebounded to its highest level since 2015 among Denver's youth.
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participation in Denver County has steadily increased over the past five years while WIC enrollment has seen a modest increase of 2% since 2019. CACFP and SFSP participation have declined.
- HFDK grantees are primarily located in high priority neighborhoods, though gaps remain. Some neighborhoods report high food insecurity and high rates of residents being SNAP-eligible but low enrollment rates in food assistance services and benefits.
- The Southwest, North, Northeast and parts of the Southeast lack grantees supporting food production.
- The diverse network of HFDK grantees and partners span various organizational types including nonprofits, government agencies, community-based organizations, and private sector entities. HFDK grantees and partners collaborate with one another, amplifying impact through shared goals.

The figure below summarizes the distribution of grantee service provision across Denver's 61 high priority neighborhoods, identified as having very high food insecurity, analyzing a mix of geospatial and grantee data. It shows the number of high priority neighborhoods served and not served for each grantee activity.

Number of Priority Neighborhoods Served and Not Served by HFDK Grantees, by Activity





HFDK Year 4 Executive Summary

HFDK Successes/Strengths

- Served most high priority neighborhoods (52 of 61)
- Increased client knowledge of gardening, cooking, and healthy eating habits
- Increased grantee staff knowledge and skills
- Gathered positive community feedback regarding HFDK programming
- Enrolled new CACFP/SFSP sites
- Provided paid youth employment opportunities through HFDK
- Increased food and nutrition classes
- Expanded grow sites

HFDK Challenges/Gaps

- Limited staff capacity
- Systemic issues like stigma, rising food and labor costs, shortages of food/essential resources
- Infrastructure gaps for clients such as unreliable internet connection/transportation and for grantees such as lack of physical space for food storage
- High participant demand for expanded services
- Difficulty gathering client data and communicating effectively across multiple languages
- Difficulty tracking unduplicated youth served
- Gaps in SNAP enrollment/recertification services in high priority neighborhoods

Recommendations

- Work across the food systems funding landscape to align reporting metrics on food insecurity with other funders
- Create a centralized database to track unduplicated clients across all HFDK grantees
- Add [Hunger Vital Sign Validated 2-Question Food Insecurity Screening Questions](#) to Healthy Kids CO survey
- Continue to build motivation to collect client-level data from HFDK grantees
- Fund and support HFDK grantees to work in more high priority neighborhoods, particularly for food/nutrition assistance
- Support grantees or fund new grantees in adding SNAP enrollment to HFDK programming
- Provide programmatic technical assistance to help grantees utilize evidence-based curriculum in food education
- Continue to strengthen community partnerships
- Support grantees in distributing healthy unprepared food and meals/snacks to clients