

Understanding Student Health

What is student health?

A student's nutrition, fitness, oral health, emotional wellness, and sleep may all contribute to a healthy lifestyle and overall well-being.¹ When these needs are met, children are able to thrive physically, emotionally, and socially.¹ Meeting their needs fosters lifelong habits that help them thrive into adulthood.¹

Why is measuring student health important?

If a child has poor nutrition, for example, it can cause problems with their development and overall well-being, such as²:

- Learning delays,
- Increased fatigue, and
- A weakened immune system, which may lead to the child missing school.

Making sure a child's needs are met during all stages of life helps with their development to ensure that they grow up into strong and healthy adults.¹

Who gets measured?

Per U.S. Department of Education guidelines, Ascend tracks trends in fruit and vegetable consumption on an annual basis for students in grades 6 through 12 at three of the five Promise Neighborhood schools: Milner and M.L. King, Jr. middle schools and Weaver High School.

How is student health measured?

Student health, for the purpose of this GPRA, is measured based on their daily consumption of fruits and vegetables. Currently, the best way to quantify this is through the Hartford Public School (HPS) School Climate and Culture Survey (SCCS). Students are asked how much they agree or disagree with the statement, "I eat healthy foods that

include fruits and vegetables daily.” The percentage of students who agree or strongly agree with the statement is reported.

The percentage is calculated by:

1. Counting how many students agree or strongly agree to the statement, “I eat healthy foods that include fruits and vegetables daily.”
2. Dividing by the total number of students who responded to the statement.
3. Multiplying by 100 to get a percentage.

Higher percentages are better, showing that more students are consuming fruits and vegetables daily.

Where does the data come from?

The information comes from the Hartford Public School (HPS) School Climate and Culture Survey (SCCS). The SCCS is administered **in the spring** to all students in 3rd – 12th grades enrolled in an HPS school. Per U.S. Department of Education guidelines, we only report survey results for students in 6th-12th grade.

How to Read the Graph

The graph below shows the percentage of 6th through 12th graders who reported that they eat healthy foods that include fruits and vegetables daily from fall 2022 to spring 2025.

The orange line in the graph shows the percentage of students in the Ascend Promise Neighborhood schools who reported eating fruits and vegetables, and the blue line shows the percentages for students attending other Hartford Public Schools. Because this data is collected by the HPS district, statewide data do not exist. Because this item was not included in the survey prior to the grant, Ascend target values are not currently established for this result.

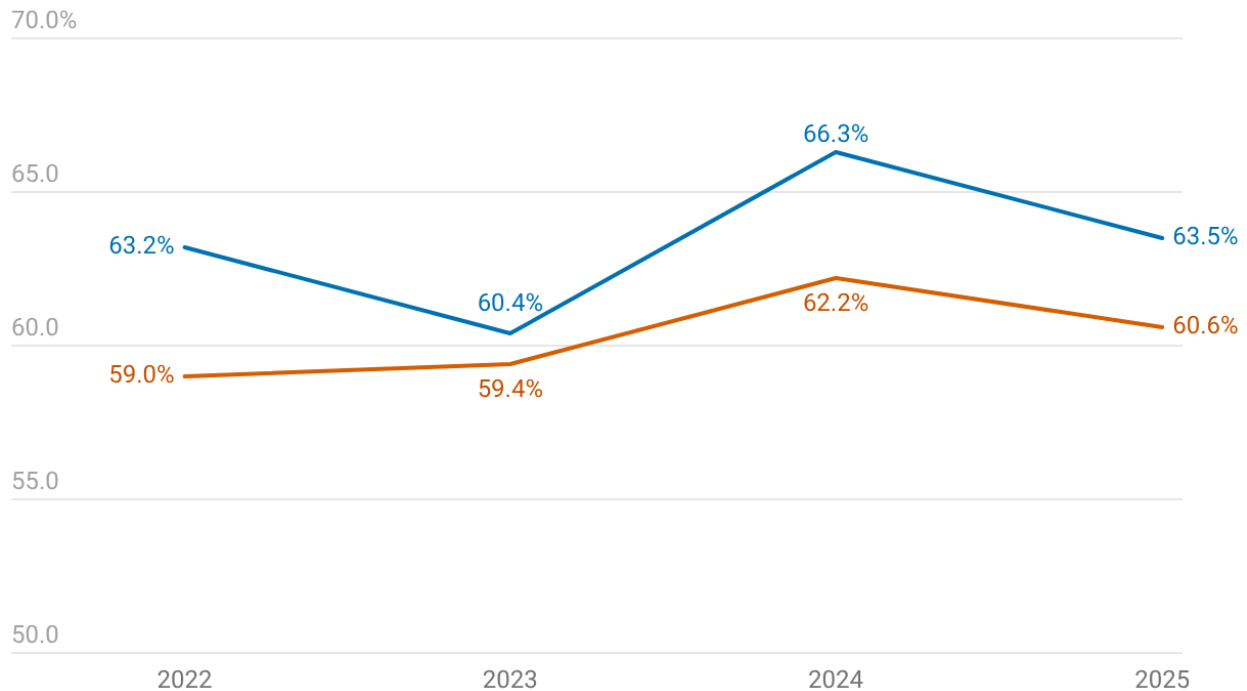
For fruit and vegetable consumption, higher numbers are better!

What do the results show?

Student Health

Percentage of Students* Who Report Eating Fruits and Vegetables Daily

— Promise Neighborhood — HPS District



Years refer to the year it was collected. For example, 2025 refers to results from the spring 2025 survey.

*Per U.S. Department of Education guidelines, only survey results from students in 6th-12th grade are reported.

Chart: Connecticut Data Collaborative • Source: Hartford Public School District Climate and Culture Survey • Created with Datawrapper

- In spring of 2025, 63.5% of 6th–12th grade students attending the Ascend Promise Neighborhood schools reported that they “eat healthy foods that include fruits and vegetables daily,” which was approximately three points higher than the rest of the district.
- Compared to the spring of 2024, healthy eating decreased by 2.8 points for the Ascend Promise Neighborhood schools in the spring of 2025.
 - Further inspection of the results by grade levels indicates that this decrease in fruit and vegetable consumption appears to be primarily due to a decline for high school students.

- Overall, students attending Ascend Promise Neighborhood schools have not achieved a net gain or loss in fruit and vegetable consumption since baseline.
- Students attending Ascend Promise Neighborhood schools have historically reported higher fruit and vegetable consumption than their peers attending other schools in the district, and that gap has not changed much since the start of Ascend.

Why is this happening?

While the data shows the current patterns of fruit and vegetable consumption, it is important to understand what is affecting them.

Several factors likely influence this indicator, such as the affordability of healthy food, access to supermarkets in the neighborhood, and education on nutrition.³ Although food pantries are a great option for families who may be facing food insecurity, they may not always have an adequate amount of fruits and vegetables available.⁴

According to data collected in 2019 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Hartford is considered a food desert.^{5,6} This means that there is limited access to sources of healthy and affordable food, such as supermarkets.⁷

This indicator requires ongoing support from existing programs within the community to ensure that students are getting the nutrition they need to support their development.

How can Ascend help improve student nutrition and health?

Several programs within Ascend support children in our neighborhood to be healthy:

[Ascend Family Navigators](#), from The Village for Families and Children, provide additional supports for the Ascend Promise Neighborhood schools. They:

- Hold regular hours within each school to work with students and families
- Collaborate with Family & Community Service Support Providers (FCSSPs) and other school-based staff to identify barriers to attendance
- Connect students and their families to services and resources within the community

[Child and Adult Care Food Program \(CACFP\)](#) within the City of Hartford help children receive nutritious meals and snacks while introducing them to a variety of foods.

[Hartford Public Schools](#) offers multiple programs, services, and supports to students and their families as part of the Full-Service Community School model implemented at each of the Promise Neighborhood schools. These services may be provided by either school staff (e.g., FCSSPs, School Social Workers) or community-based organization partner(s), or both working in conjunction with each other. They provide the following types of support to students and to other members of their families:

- [Integrated Student Supports](#) (at all schools) promote students' academic success by developing and coordinating supports that target academic and non-academic barriers to achievement, including providing resources and supports to meet basic needs.
- [Family Engagement](#) services (at all schools) involve outreach and engagement with family members, including providing direct assistance to family members of the student. A few examples include Parent Engagement Groups, home visits, back-to-school events, and parent-teacher conferences.
- [Referrals](#) to outside organizations (at all schools) address needs that require a higher level of care or access to resources available outside of the school, such as housing, employment, food, and energy assistance.
- [Family Resource Centers](#) (at S.A.N.D. and Wish elementary schools) provide access to a continuum of services that foster the optimal development and education of children beginning at birth. They provide early childhood education, child care, and family support services to meet the specific needs that are presented when engaging with families.
- [Career and Workforce Development](#) (at MLK and Milner middle schools and Weaver High School) includes programs and services that support post-secondary education and career development, in-school or out-of-school, such as those that link students to higher education, vocational training, or work-based learning opportunities, or connect classroom learning to career pathways. This area also includes efforts to engage parents and provide financial resources for continued learning and/or student transition assistance.

[Healthy Steps](#) within Wheeler Clinic serves children from birth to age 5 and address the physical, emotional, and cognitive growth and development of young children.

North Hartford Community Health and Wellness Fairs hosted by the City of Hartford educate families on nutrition, give away food bags and gift cards, provide COVID-19 testing, administer vaccinations, provide medical screenings, offer education on common health conditions, offer classes, and give away books to promote family literacy.

Parent Connection within Wheeler Clinic provides information, support, and guidance to families with young children, ages birth to 5, who have concerns about their young child's progress, growth, and development.

The **Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)** within the City of Hartford provides pregnant women, new mothers, and young children vouchers for nutritious foods, education on healthy eating, breastfeeding support, and referrals to healthcare and social services.

Start Childhood Off Right (SCOR) at Connecticut Children's Office for Community Child Health identifies families facing food insecurity through screenings done at doctor's appointments and offers produce vouchers to nearby grocery stores.

The data reveals an opportunity to continue engaging these programs to support child health and nutrition.

References

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