

Strategies to Reduce Hunger on MA Campuses: SNAP EBT Access on Public College Campuses

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Background:

1/2 of MA community college students said they could not afford to eat balanced meals and another 1/3 of four-year public MA college students indicated similar concerns. In January 2019, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) [released a report](#) finding nearly 2 million low-income students eligible for SNAP but not participating, as well as widespread confusion about how the SNAP program works.

Massachusetts has been a leadership state, implementing a policy option in 2010 to expand SNAP for low-income students at community colleges, and expanding access in 2017 for certain low-income students with state financial aid.

Yet many low-income students still do not participate in SNAP, nor have ready access to food. Students lack the time and resources to purchase and prepare food while also studying, commuting and often working part- or full-time jobs. College campuses are often “food deserts” – lacking affordable grocery stores for SNAP eligible students to purchase healthy foods.

Efforts to Reduce Hunger on Campus Gain Momentum:

Massachusetts college campuses are recognizing food insecurity as a growing phenomenon and taking important steps to address the problem. Virtually all public Massachusetts colleges (2-year and 4 year) have on-campus **food pantries** or mobile emergency food sources. Many campuses promote SNAP for students and a few have

become “**SNAP Outreach Partners**”, receiving federal reimbursement for SNAP application assistance. Four state colleges have **Meal SWIPE donation programs**, although the number of donated swipes is limited. All Mass colleges now have Single Point of Contact (SPOC) to help student’s access core services. SPOCs are now in a cross-campus network sharing resources to reduce hunger and homelessness on-campus.

SNAP EBT Vendors On-Campus?

Massachusetts has NO on-campus grocers on any public college campuses that accept SNAP EBT as a form of payment for food:

Although MA has expanded SNAP eligibility for students; low-income students are unable to use their SNAP benefits on-campus.

States with EBT vendor’s on-campus include:

California, Ohio, Oregon, Minnesota, Montana, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. Over 14 EBT vendors are established on California public colleges, allowing SNAP recipients to use their benefits for food while on-campus.

Policy Options

The MA Department of Higher Education (DHE) can take steps to require all Massachusetts public colleges to ensure at least one on-campus EBT vendor to provide on-campus “grab and go” healthy food items for all students, including SNAP recipient students. This would also help boost SNAP enrollment among eligible students.

The Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) can provide guidance to campus grocery or convenience market managers on how to apply to become a SNAP EBT retailer. DTA can also explore the SNAP “restaurant meal” options that would allow homeless, elder and disabled students to purchase hot meals at campus dining halls.

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