



Resources in Brief



TOOLS TO STRENGTHEN YOUR PROGRAM

Federal Funding for Meals during the Summer



When school is in session, children are surrounded by a web of supports that includes caring adults, books to read, engaging learning opportunities, and healthy meals. When the final bell rings, while some children attend summer camp or enjoy enriching family vacations, many face a significant drop-off in the educational and nutritional supports they counted on during the school year. Skipping meals and poor nutrition should not be part of any child's summer plans.

According to the most recent data from the United States Department of Agriculture, only one in six children from low-income households who ate a free- or reduced-price school lunch during the year accessed those same meals during the summer.¹ Fortunately, summer programs can help turn the faucet of nutritional resources back on for young people. Federal dollars are available for schools and organizations sponsoring summer programs, to serve nutritious meals to children when school is not in session. From a fiscal perspective, since many summer programs already purchase meals or snacks, accessing federal food programs is wise stewardship and will free up program dollars for spending on other priorities.

Need for Federal Food Programs during the summer

Children gain weight up to three times faster during the summer months, gaining as much weight during the summer as they do during the entire school year, even though the summertime is three times shorter.² Recent research shows that federal food programs are more likely to be part of a solution to the childhood obesity epidemic than to serve as a source of the problem. School meals help low-income children maintain a healthy weight, as measured by body-mass index.³ Yet, so few children have access to federally funded summer meals. Research based on data from the United States Department of Agriculture finds that food insecurity rates for households with children increase in the summer, and the increase is greater for states with low Summer Nutrition participation rates.⁴ The twin challenges of hunger and obesity impacts our country's most at-risk children. During summer vacation, the same group of children stand to lose the most, both academically and developmentally.

Number of Children Accessing Summer Nutrition in 2009, per 100 in Free and Reduced-Price 2008-09 National School Lunch Program

Top 5 States

District of Columbia	79.7
New Mexico	34.3
Nevada	30.8
New York	30.1
Delaware	29.3

Bottom 5 States

Colorado	6.9
Louisiana	6.7
Kansas	6.4
Mississippi	5.0
Oklahoma	4.9

Source: Data from the Food Research and Action Center 2010.

Summer Food Service Program

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) provides funds to organizations sponsoring summer programs to serve nutritious meals to low-income children when school is out. In late 2007, Congress extended the Simplified Summer Food Program to include all states. The SFSP program eliminates complex accounting requirements, reduces paperwork, and ensures all sponsors receive the maximum federal reimbursement. Most eligible sites can serve a maximum of two meals per day or a meal and a snack. Summer food sponsors can feed children at numerous sites throughout the community, such as schools, Parks and Recreation programs, low-income housing complexes, or community parks and pools—essentially any place children gather during the summer months.

SFSP sites can operate as “open” or “enrolled” sites. An “open” site is one located in a low-income area where at least fifty percent of the children are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. The site is then open to all children in the community ages 18 and under. At an “enrolled” site, only children enrolled in the summer program can participate. The site qualifies if it is located in a low-income area or if 50 percent or more of the children enrolled in the program are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.

Summer camps (both residential and non-residential) and summer food sites that serve primarily migrant children can also participate in SFSP and can serve up to three meals a day. They operate similarly to other summer food sites but have slightly different rules. For more information about serving summer meals at a migrant program visit www.frac.org.

Unlike the requirements for the afterschool snack program, summer food sites are not required to provide enrichment or educational activities. Children can simply gather at a school, park, or other community site to eat their meal or snack without any type of programming taking place at the site. However, the ideal summer food sites combine the summer nutrition programs with summer programming for children.

The federal reimbursement rate for summer meals is adjusted annually to keep up with the cost of inflation. To find out how much summer programs can receive per meal this year, check out the current reimbursement rates for SFSP at <http://www.frac.org/afterschool/reimbursements.htm>.

Lunches served through the Summer Food Service Program must meet USDA nutritional guidelines and include all of the following:

1. 1 serving of milk
2. 2 servings of fruits and/or vegetables
3. 1 serving of grains
4. 1 serving of protein

A summer lunch can be as simple as a turkey sandwich with lettuce and tomato, an apple, and a carton of low-fat milk.

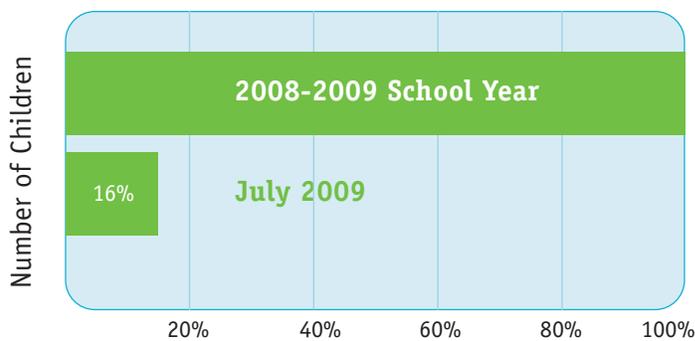
Breakfasts served through the Summer Food Service Program must meet USDA nutritional guidelines and include all of the following:

1. 1 serving of milk
2. 1 serving of fruit/vegetable
3. 1 serving of grains/bread

A summer breakfast can be as simple as cereal, a carton of low fat milk, and strawberries.

State child nutrition agencies can provide programs with additional information about the nutrition guidelines and help them plan menus that meet the USDA requirements. To begin serving summer meals, contact your state child nutrition agency that oversees SFSP. For more information, visit: www.summerlearning.org/wellness

Nutrition Program Participation by Season



Data from the Food Research and Action Center 2010.

National School Lunch Program

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) provides funds to schools and school sponsored organizations operating summer programs, to serve nutritious meals to low-income children when school is not in session. NSLP sites can serve a maximum of two meals per day or a meal and a snack. Serving summer meals through NSLP is often easier for schools and school sponsored organizations than using the Summer Food Service Program, because there is less paperwork, and fewer administrative requirements. Through the NSLP Seamless Summer Option, schools do not need to switch back and forth between the National School Lunch Program and the Summer Food Service Program, which makes operating meal programs year round much easier for school food service staff. Unfortunately, the reimbursement rate is lower for NSLP than it is for SFSP so schools need to decide if less paperwork or a higher reimbursement rate is a greater priority for them.

Unlike the requirements for the afterschool snack program, NSLP summer food sites do not need to provide enrichment or educational activities. Children can simply gather at a school, park, or other community site to eat their meal or snack without any type of programming taking place at the site. However, the ideal summer food sites combine the Summer Nutrition Programs with summer programming for children.

Lunches and breakfasts served through the NSLP must meet the same USDA guidelines as the Summer Food Service Program, detailed above. The reimbursement rate for NSLP is also updated annually. See above for the website link for current reimbursement rates. Learn more at www.summerlearning.org/wellness.

- 1 Food Research and Action Center, *Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation: Summer Nutrition Status Report 2010*. (Washington, DC: Food Research and Action Center, 2010), 1.
- 2 Paul T. von Hippel, Brian Powell, Douglas B. Downey, and Nicholas J. Rowland, "The effect of school on overweight in childhood: Gains in children's body mass index during the school year and during summer vacation," *American Journal of Public Health* 97 (March 2007): 796-802.
- 3 Rachel Tolbert Kimbro and Elizabeth Rigby, "Federal Food Policy And Childhood Obesity: A Solution or Part Of The Problem?" *Health Affairs* 29 (March 2010): 411-418.
- 4 Mark Nord and Kathleen Romig, "Hunger in the Summer: Seasonal Food Insecurity and the National School Lunch and Summer Food Service Programs," *Journal of Children and Poverty* 12 (September 2006): 141-158.

