

# How 161,281 San Bernardino County kids can have access to free summer meals

*By Michel Nolan, The Sun*

Saturday, June 24, 2017



For most of us, summertime evokes happy images of sunny days, fun and relaxation.

But for many of California's low-income children, summer comes with a burden.

Hunger.

When school's out and summer begins, nearly 1.7 million children in California lose access to nutritious meals.

In San Bernardino County, 161,281 youth under age 18 miss out on their free or reduced-price lunches.

That number represents 96 percent of the 168,055 children and youth who normally have access to nutritious low-cost meals during the school year, according to a 2016 report from California Food Policy Advocates.

Only four other California counties — all of them more sparsely populated — had a higher rate of missing lunch — Alpine, Amador, Mariposa and Tuolumne counties had 100 percent of low-income children with no access to a nutritious meal when school was out.

For the state of California, 85 percent of low-income children risk hunger when summer rolls around.

But thanks to the community, there are options.

Sponsored by libraries, churches, community centers, and parks, more than 200 summer meal sites are accessible for children in San Bernardino County.

The free summer meals program is invaluable since nutrition and academic achievement are linked.

There's something about the words "hungry children" that tugs at our collective heartstrings.

The image of young kids watching others eat is a haunting one.

Lana Cal, public information officer for the San Bernardino County Department of Public Health, said that the number of low-income children missing out on lunch is “startling.”

“It’s so great that this program exists, but a lot of people don’t know about it. Not only is there food, but these sites make a lot of different activities available, too.”

Lana said that children having more alternatives and access to other programs, give them a lot of other benefits in addition to food.

Many of these summer meal sites also provide academic, physical or social activities that keep children active, engaged and learning.

Lunch at the library, for example, provides kids with a safe and welcoming space, while they enjoy activities like crafts, literacy sessions or nutrition lessons.

These sites have higher rates of participation throughout the summer.

There are barriers to the free summer meal programs, however, said Anna Colby, nutrition policy advocate, headquartered in Los Angeles.

“There are varied capacities at the different sites — some are open to the community in high need areas. Parents have to get their children to the site when it is open and serving.”

Other barriers include transportation and safety issues and working parents, she said.

“Many families don’t know this is an option and don’t know where the sites are.”

Thanks to technology, there is now a wonderful way for parents to find the closest meal site location by texting “FOOD” or “COMIDA” to 877-877 or dialing 2-1-1.

Here’s a look at a few of the California Department of Education summer meal sites in the San Bernardino Valley area:

#### **SAN BERNARDINO**

- Hernandez Community Center, 222 N. Lugo Ave. open through Aug. 4.
- Inland Behavioral and Health Services, 665 N. D St., open through July 28.
- Seccombe Lake Park, 160 E. Fifth St., open through Aug. 11.
- Perris Hill Park, 1135 E. Highland Ave., open through Aug. 11.
- The Landings at Arrowhead Springs, 200 E. 30th St., open through Aug. 11.
- Ninth Street Park, 2931 Garner Ave., open through Aug. 11.

- Ascot Apartments, 1422 E. Ninth St., open through Aug. 11.
- Delmann Heights Community Center, 2969 N. Flores St., open through Aug. 4.
- Anne Shirrells Park, 1376 N. California St., open through June 30.
- San Bernardino Warriors, 1850 N. E St., open through Aug. 30.
- Center for Individual Development (CID), 8088 Palm Lane, open through Aug. 4.

#### **COLTON**

- Luque Community Center, 292 E. O St., open through Aug. 4.
- Colton Public Library, 656 N. Ninth St., open through Aug. 4.
- Elizabeth Davis Park, 1055 W. Laurel Dr., open through July 1.
- Cooley Ranch, 1000 S. Cooley Dr., open through June 30.

#### **REDLANDS**

- Redlands Community Center, 111 W. Lugonia Ave., open through Aug. 4.

#### **RIALTO**

- Eisenhower High School, 1321 N. Lilac Ave., open through July 14.
- Rialto High School, 595 S. Eucalyptus Ave., open through July 15.

“A lot of people work very hard to help children and feed them their summer meals,” added policy advocate Anna Colby.

Thanks to free healthy meals from USDA, administered by the California Department of Education, no child needs to go hungry when school is not in session this summer.

Hunger doesn't take a vacation — a cliché but so true.

*Michel Nolan appears in The Sun on Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays. Reach her at [mnolan@scng.com](mailto:mnolan@scng.com) or on Twitter @MichelNolan.*