

California's Summer Nutrition Gap

Summer is an especially vulnerable time for low-income children and youth. When school is out, kids lose access to essential resources like healthy, affordable school meals. In 2015, more than 1.7 million of California's low-income students fell into the summer nutrition gap. That is, 85 percent of the children and youth who benefitted from federally funded free or reduced-price (FRP) lunches during the school year missed out on such lunches during the summer.



The need for nutritious, affordable meals persists year-round, yet free and reduced-price lunches reach far fewer children and youth on average during the summer than the school year. (See Table 1.)

Table 1. Average Daily Participation of Children Receiving Free or Reduced-Price Lunches: School Year Compared to Summer, 2015.

	School Year 2015 (March & April)	Summer 2015 (July)	Difference
Average Daily Participation (FRP Lunches)	2,008,326	298,543	-1,709,783

Source: CFPA's analysis of NSLP (public, non-charter school), SFSP, and SSFO data from March, April and July 2015 provided by the California Department of Education. See full report for methodological details.

Fewer Meal Sites, Limited Operating Days, and Inadequate Reach

When school is out for the summer, the number of sites providing FRP lunches drops dramatically from 8,275 to 4,642 sites. While students need nutritious meals every day, summer lunch sites, on average, operate just 16 days out of the month. What's more, individual meal sites generally serve far fewer lunches in the summer. On average, each site that serves FRP meals during the summer serves around 3,800 fewer meals per month than sites that operate during the school year. (See Table 2.)

Table 2. Average Monthly Number of Sites, Operating Days and FRP Lunches Served, 2015

	School Year 2015 (March & April)	Summer 2015 (July)
Number of Lunch Sites*	8,275	4,642
Average Monthly Operating Days per Site	19	16
Average Monthly FRP Lunches Served per Site	5,339	1,479

*The number of lunch sites for School Year 2015 is the average for April and May. The number of lunch sites for Summer 2015 is the count for July.

Estimates include only those sites that served at least one FRP lunch during that month.

Source: CFPA's analysis of NSLP (public, non-charter school), SFSP, and SSFO data from March, April and July 2015 provided by the California Department of Education. See full report for methodological details.

Bottom line: There are fewer sites serving FRP lunches during the summer compared to the academic year. Those sites that do operate during the summer are generally open for fewer days each month--and serving fewer lunches.

Statewide Trends in the Number of Summer Lunches Served

While California's summer meal gap is substantial and persistent, when it comes to the number of FRP summer lunches served, progress continues to be made. From July 2014 to July 2015, more than 130,000 additional FRP lunches were served across all summer nutrition programs for an overall increase of 2 percent. Among the individual programs, FRP lunches served through NSLP declined while SFSP saw the largest gains, serving more than 210,000 additional FRP lunches (a 9 percent increase). (See Table 3.)

Table 3. Total Number of Free and Reduced-Price Lunches Served by Summer Meal Program and Year

Summer Meal Programs	July 2013	July 2014	July 2015	% Change (2014-15)
NSLP: National School Lunch Program				
K-12 public school sites (non-charter)	1,411,015	1,455,070	1,348,274	-7%
All other sites*	454,252	409,314	374,317	-9%
SSFO: Seamless Summer Food Option (school sites & some community-based sites)	2,459,343	2,814,796	2,882,317	2%
SFSP: Summer Food Service Program (school and community-based sites)	2,352,684	2,424,777	2,635,891	9%
TOTAL	6,677,294	7,103,957	7,240,799	2%

*All other sites includes non-public schools, private schools, charter schools (locally and direct funded), County Offices of Education, Group Home Residential Child Care Institutions (RCCI), juvenile detention centers, camps and other government entities.

Source: CFPA's analysis of NSLP, SFSP, and SSFO data from July 2015 provided by the California Department of Education. See full report for methodological details.

While overall gains are modest, they continue an upward trend in the number of FRP summer lunches served. Beginning in 2013, the number of FRP summer lunches served across California has steadily increased. From July 2012 to July 2015, the number of FRP lunches served during the summer increased by 11 percent. This is a clear change in course from years prior when the number of summer lunches plummeted: from July 2006 to July 2012, the number of FRP summer lunches served across California decreased by over 40 percent.

The growth in the number of summer lunches served reflects the hard work of administrators, sponsors, and other stakeholders to expand, improve, and promote the programs. While the increase is promising, we also look to new solutions that will help recover years of lost ground, close the summer nutrition gap, and ensure that all California kids are well nourished throughout the year.

Methodology

****Please note that this year's analysis includes a substantial change in methodology. Because of that change, we strongly caution against making comparisons between average daily participation estimates presented in this report and those published in years prior.****

See full report for methodological details.

Additional Resources

- For the full report and related materials, please visit cfpa.net/sowa-2016
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