

School's Out...Who Ate?

A Report on Summer Nutrition in California

Matthew Sharp

Tia Shimada

June 2013



California Food Policy Advocates

California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA) is a statewide public policy and advocacy organization dedicated to improving the health and well-being of low-income Californians by increasing their access to nutritious, affordable food.

For more information about this report, please contact:

- Tia Shimada at 510.433.1122 ext. 109 or tia@cfpa.net
- Matthew Sharp at 213.482.8200 ext. 201 or matt@cfpa.net

For more information about CFPA, please visit www.cfpa.net.

Acknowledgments

This *School's Out...Who Ate?* analysis was conducted with data provided by the California Department of Education. We appreciate the department's partnership on this and other data-driven projects.

CFPA applauds program administrators for their commitment to expanding summer nutrition in California. We also respectfully acknowledge the hundreds of agencies and thousands of site staff who tackle the difficult work of providing nutritious, affordable summer meals to children throughout our state.

School's Out...Who Ate? is the only analysis of state- and county-specific summer nutrition data in California. CFPA would like to continue producing this publication annually. If you would like to support this work, please contact George Manalo-LeClair, CFPA's Executive Director, at 510.433.1122 ext. 103 or george@cfpa.net.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
The Federal Summer Nutrition Programs	1
Statewide Statistics and Trends	2
California's Summer Nutrition Gap	2
Statewide Decline in the Number of Summer Lunches Served	2
The Summer Nutrition Gap and Loss of Summer Programming	3
Unprecedented Data Now Available	3
A New Way of Tracking Trends	3
New Federal and State Opportunities	4
Policy & Practice Recommendations	4
Federal Policy Recommendations	4
State Policy & Practice Recommendations.....	6
Appendix A: County Data.....	9

Introduction

For over two decades, California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA) has released an annual report examining issues of access and participation with respect to the federally funded summer nutrition programs in California. Each year the report assesses state- and county-level participation data to help determine the reach of summer meals.

This year's report focuses on the alarming loss of nutritious, affordable summer meals for low-income children. This report also identifies opportunities to strengthen the summer nutrition programs through changes in policy and practice at the state and federal levels.

The Federal Summer Nutrition Programs

The **National School Lunch Program (NSLP)**, the country's oldest child nutrition program, continues to operate in the summer months at year-round schools and summer school sites. In addition, many schools utilize the **Seamless Summer Food Option (SSFO)** to serve lunch during the summer. SSFO allows school districts to receive the highest rate of NSLP reimbursement for each meal served.^a In return, SSFO sites must serve children and youth (18 years old and under) from low-income communities.^b

The **Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)** was originally designed for children who attend schools with a traditional summer break but do not participate in summer school. SFSP sponsors receive federal reimbursements for serving nutritious meals and snacks to children and youth (18 years old and under) at approved sites in low-income areas.^b SFSP is often offered at community-based sites such as Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCAs, churches, and municipal parks and recreation locations. SFSP can also operate at school sites.

^a More information on reimbursement rates is available at: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/rs/>

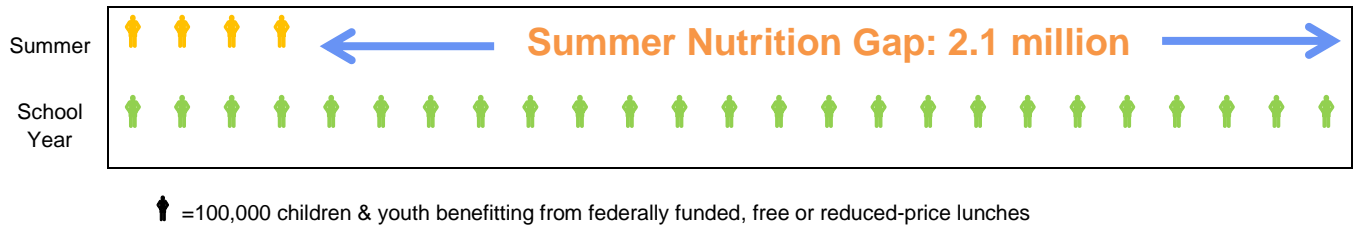
^b Areas where 50% or more of the children attending local schools are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals are classified as "low-income." Income guidelines for students eligible to receive free, reduced-price, and paid school meals:

- Free meal category: household income at or below 130% of the federal poverty guidelines (FPG)
- Reduced-Price category: household income between 130% and 185% of the FPG
- Paid category: household income above 185% of the FPG

Statewide Statistics and Trends

California's Summer Nutrition Gap

When school is out for the summer, children and youth across California are at risk of losing access to nutritious, affordable meals. In 2012, as many as 2.1 million (or 83 percent) of California's low-income children and youth who benefitted from federally funded, free or reduced-price lunches during the school year missed out on such lunches during the summer.



The need for nutritious, affordable meals persists throughout the year, but summer lunches reach far fewer children and youth than school lunches. Summer lunches are also served on fewer days per month than school lunches. (See Table 1)

Table 1

Free and Reduced-Price Lunches	School Year 2012*	Summer 2012*	Difference (School Year vs. Summer)
Average Daily Participation	2,519,350	423,462	-2,095,888
Average Number of Days per Month that Lunch is Served	21	18	-3

*School year statistics are calculated using March and April data. Summer statistics are calculated using July data.

Statewide Decline in the Number of Summer Lunches Served

In addition to the substantial gap between school and summer lunch participation, the number of free and reduced-price summer lunches served across California fell by over 330,000 in July 2012 compared to July 2011. (See Table 2)

Table 2

Summer Meal Programs	Number of Free and Reduced-Price Lunches Served July 2012 versus July 2011
National School Lunch Program (school sites)	-377,644
Seamless Summer Food Option (school sites & some community sites)	+128,269
Summer Food Service Program (school & community sites)	-82,652
Total	-332,047

This decline is part of a larger historical trend. Since July 2006, the number of free and reduced-price summer lunches served in California has decreased by over 40 percent.

The Summer Nutrition Gap and Loss of Summer Programming

The reduction of summer school programming in most California school districts has been widely reported. Summer school losses have a significant impact on thousands of low-income children and youth who normally benefit from federally funded meals at summer school sites. At the time of publication, statewide data on the scope and scale of summer learning and enrichment opportunities were not available. However, the number of lunches served through the summer nutrition programs that are largely operated at school sites (the National School Lunch Program and the Seamless Summer Food Option) fell by nearly 250,000 from July 2011 to July 2012.

Unprecedented Data Now Available

Summer meal sponsors can operate multiple sites within and across counties. As of 2012, the state requires many sponsors (i.e., NSLP and SSFO sponsors) to report (a) the monthly number of meals served at each site and (b) the number of days per month that each site serves meals. Previously, only sponsor-level reports were required. The unprecedented site-level data help better describe the reach of summer meal programs.

We applaud the state for implementing the new reporting criteria for many sponsors and we applaud those sponsors for providing such valuable information. By applying the same criteria to *all* sponsors, the state could help every community in California more accurately identify the number of children and youth who are falling into the summer nutrition gap.

A New Way of Tracking Trends

The availability of site-level data has changed our method of calculating average daily participation and allows for more accurate estimates. However, the new method means that comparing average daily summer lunch participation for 2012 with previous years is akin to comparing apples and oranges. (See Figure 1)

Figure 1

New Monthly Data (Required of Many Sponsors in 2012)	Lunches Served per Month by Any One Site ÷	Number of Days per Month the Site Serves Lunch	=	Average Daily Participation by Site
Old Monthly Data (Required of All Sponsors before 2012)	Lunches Served per Month by Multiple Sites Under One Sponsor ÷	Highest # of Days per Month Lunch is Served Among the Sponsor's Multiple Sites	=	Average Daily Participation by Sponsor

The number of summer lunches served statewide (Table 2) does allow for year-to-year comparisons while average daily participation in summer lunches does not.

New Federal and State Opportunities

To address persistently low uptake of summer meals nationally, Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack, launched a summer meals initiative in April 2012. The initiative aims to provide additional technical assistance to select states, including California, in an effort to boost summer meal participation. As part of this initiative, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has developed a summer meal action plan in partnership with the California Department of Education (CDE). The action plan identifies a variety of promotion and outreach activities to enroll new sponsors, establish new sites and partnerships, and encourage new participants to visit sites.

CFPA encourages USDA to work closely with CDE and provide the necessary support to implement these actions. CFPA appreciates the opportunity for advocates to support the action plan.

Policy and Practice Recommendations

Local, state, and federal decision makers can ensure that low-income children and youth in California have year-round access to healthy, affordable meals. These leaders should prioritize the funding and operation of summertime academic and enrichment programming (where most summer meals have historically been served).

Below, we offer our recommendations for additional federal and state actions to close the summer nutrition gap.

Federal Policy Recommendations

1. Renew and Expand Summer EBT Demonstration Projects

Background – Nearly all summer meal sites require participants to congregate at a specific location during specific times of day. This structure may not meet the nutritional needs of all low-income children and youth, particularly those who face transportation issues or other barriers.

Recent demonstration projects have assessed the effects of providing summer nutrition assistance to low-income households with children through a debit card-like system called Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT). Given the early success of the

demonstration projects in five states,^c this model of providing summer nutrition assistance (beyond congregate summer meals) is worthy of further exploration and investment.

Action - Congress should renew and expand the *Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children* demonstration projects.

2. Improve the Nutritional Quality of Summer Meals

Background – The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 required the establishment of new nutritional standards for the National School Lunch Program (and, in effect, the Seamless Summer Food Option). The new standards help ensure that meals served through these programs align with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, support health, and help prevent childhood obesity. Improving the nutritional quality of summer meals can also make them more attractive to parents and caregivers who are concerned about the healthfulness of their children’s diets.

Action – Congress and USDA should ensure that meals served through the Summer Food Service Program reflect the most recent Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

3. Understand the Reach of Summer Programming

Background – Emerging research shows alarming rates of summer learning loss^d and unhealthy summer weight gain,^e particularly among low-income children. Quality summer programming that includes enrichment, learning, and recreational activities as well as nutritious, affordable meals may help reverse both of these negative effects. Research is necessary to determine the extent of (and current participation in) such programming.

Action – Congress should commission a study to develop a state-by-state indicator of participation in summer learning, enrichment, and recreation programs that includes metrics assessing access to meals, whether federally or privately funded.

^c <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/menu/DemoProjects/SummerFood/Default.htm>

^d http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.summerlearning.org/resource/collection/CB94AEC5-9C97-496F-B230-1BECDFC2DF8B/Research_Brief_02_-_Alexander.pdf

^e http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.summerlearning.org/resource/collection/CB94AEC5-9C97-496F-B230-1BECDFC2DF8B/Research_Brief_01_-_von_Hippel.pdf

State Policy & Practice Recommendations

1. Leverage Schools as Trusted and Familiar Sites for Serving Meals

Background – The vast majority of summer meals in California are served on school campuses. Efforts to increase the number of children served at community-based sites are important and admirable, but have not closed California’s summer nutrition gap. While fewer schools may be operating district-sponsored summer programming, communities can optimize the use of school campuses as trusted sites for serving summer meals and as familiar points of congregation for children and youth.

Action – CDE should encourage all school districts to make summer meals available on all campuses offering summer programming (regardless of whether that programming is sponsored by the district or by community partners). The summer meals offered on school campuses should be available and easily accessible to all children and youth in the surrounding community (not just those enrolled in programming).

2. Employ Adequate and Effective Promotion

Background – The national anti-hunger organization, Share Our Strength (SOS), recently conducted a national survey^f of low-income families to better understand the need for summer meals as well as the barriers and drivers for summer meal participation.

The survey found that only 40% of respondents knew where summer meals were served in their respective communities. The survey also found that (a) safe, trusted site locations and (b) meal quality are the two most important factors that families would consider in deciding whether to take their children to participate in summer meals. Finally, the survey found that schools are the most trusted source of information about summer meals.

Action

- CDE should establish and communicate the expectation that summer meal sponsors incorporate lessons learned from research like the SOS survey into promotional and outreach materials.

^f <http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/summer-meals/summer-meals-survey-findings>

- CDE should intensify current efforts to communicate the expectation that all schools will inform students and families about nearby summer meal sites prior to the last day of school. This builds on requirements enacted via the 2010 Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act.⁹
- CDE should work with sponsors to ensure that sites offer a “welcome packet” to first-time visitors as a means of introducing new participants to the summer meal program and in an effort to retain those participants.

3. Provide Timely, Easily Accessible Information About Summer Meal Sites

Background – CDE has made information about summer meal sites substantially more accessible by utilizing a map application that is searchable by zip code. To make this tool useful for connecting California families with summer meal programs, site information must be uploaded and updated in a timely fashion.

Site information should be available before end-of-the-year outreach efforts commence. Site information should also be available before media outlets begin their coverage of summer nutrition, as such coverage rightfully leads potential participants to ask, “Where are summer meals being served in my community?”

Action

- Each spring, CDE should proactively solicit information about which sites will be operating, particularly among the largest summer meal sponsors.
- CDE should, to fullest possible extent, make information about summer meal sites that are open to all children and youth available through its online map each year before summer vacation begins.

4. Communicate Flexibility in Operating Summer Meal Programs

Background – Limited flexibility does exist to ease the operation and administration of summer meal programs. For example, USDA allows school-based sponsors to apply NSLP meal standards to SFSP meal service. This means that school-based staff who are already trained on the new NSLP standards do not have to revert back to SFSP standards for the summer. USDA also allows flexibility to school-based sponsors in applying age-group standards for meals served through SSFO.

⁹ http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/Policy-Memos/2011/SP15-2011_os.pdf

Action – CDE should strongly encourage sponsors to utilize existing flexibility and options within the summer meal programs, such as first week site visit waivers, congregate feeding (hot weather) waivers, mobile feeding options, and flexibility around meal patterns.

5. Regularly Solicit Feedback from Sponsors and Sites

To best understand the challenges and successes experienced by summer meal providers, CDE should regularly solicit input from sponsors and site staff. The feedback provided should serve as a basis for state administrators, advocates, and other stakeholders to improve the reach and operation of the summer meal programs.

Appendix A: County Data

Notes

The availability of site-level data from many summer meal sponsors has changed our method of calculating average daily participation and allows for more accurate estimates. However, the new method means that comparing average daily summer lunch participation for 2012 with previous years is akin to comparing apples and oranges. (See Figure 1)

For this reason, we strongly recommend that readers do not compare 2012 average daily participation data with data published in previous years.

Figure 1

New Monthly Data (Required of Many Sponsors in 2012)	Lunches Served per Month by Any One Site ÷	Number of Days per Month the Site Serves Lunch	=	Average Daily Participation by Site
Old Monthly Data (Required of All Sponsors Before 2012)	Lunches Served per Month by Multiple Sites Under One Sponsor ÷	Highest # of Days per Month Lunch is Served Among the Sponsor's Multiple Sites	=	Average Daily Participation by Sponsor

Values in the tables below are rounded to the nearest whole number. School year statistics are calculated using March and April data. Summer statistics are calculated using July data.

Some summer meals sponsors still provide sponsor-level data reports. Consequently, in some cases, meals associated with a sponsor's county may have been served in another county.

County	Average Daily Lunch Participation		Average Number of Days per Month that Lunch is Served		Children & Youth Served During the School Year but NOT Summer	
	School Year 2012	Summer 2012	School Year 2012	Summer 2012	Number	Percent
Alameda	58,610	18,039	20	18	40,571	69%
Alpine	63	0	19	0	63	100%
Amador	1,329	58	24	18	1,271	96%
Butte	12,645	764	20	23	11,880	94%
Calaveras	2,166	869	18	6	1,297	60%
Colusa	2,493	153	19	5	2,339	94%
Contra Costa	48,230	10,638	19	17	37,592	78%
Del Norte	1,515	146	20	19	1,370	90%
Eldorado	6,417	152	19	29	6,265	98%
Fresno	105,310	12,750	21	19	92,560	88%
Glenn	2,815	340	20	15	2,475	88%
Humboldt	6,001	632	19	20	5,370	89%
Imperial	18,571	1,394	20	18	17,176	92%
Inyo	1,009	98	18	19	912	90%
Kern	90,348	11,642	21	15	78,706	87%
Kings	13,213	1,687	20	17	11,526	87%
Lake	4,441	655	21	19	3,786	85%
Lassen	1,118	46	19	15	1,072	96%
Los Angeles	717,159	128,784	21	19	588,375	82%
Madera	16,792	1,681	20	23	15,111	90%
Marin	5,513	975	19	22	4,538	82%

County	Average Daily Lunch Participation		Average Number of Days per Month that Lunch is Served		Children & Youth Served During the School Year but NOT Summer	
	School Year 2012	Summer 2012	School Year 2012	Summer 2012	Number	Percent
Mariposa	689	18	18	14	671	97%
Mendocino	5,872	1,181	20	20	4,691	80%
Merced	34,667	6,415	20	19	28,253	81%
Modoc	763	128	19	18	635	83%
Mono	620	0	19	0	620	100%
Monterey	35,540	5,032	19	15	30,508	86%
Napa	6,626	452	20	15	6,174	93%
Nevada	2,123	267	18	19	1,856	87%
Orange	176,079	23,631	21	20	152,448	87%
Placer	13,104	818	19	19	12,286	94%
Plumas	628	0	19	0	628	100%
Riverside	196,509	15,314	21	21	181,195	92%
Sacramento	96,878	13,134	22	18	83,744	86%
San Benito	4,197	974	22	15	3,223	77%
San Bernardino	189,725	20,641	23	20	169,083	89%
San Diego	165,969	70,253	21	16	95,715	58%
San Francisco	20,139	5,873	26	21	14,265	71%
San Joaquin	66,537	18,309	23	15	48,228	72%
San Luis Obispo	9,701	861	19	16	8,841	91%
San Mateo	23,665	3,961	20	20	19,704	83%
Santa Barbara	28,239	5,081	20	18	23,158	82%

County	Average Daily Lunch Participation		Average Number of Days per Month that Lunch is Served		Children & Youth Served During the School Year but NOT Summer	
	School Year 2012	Summer 2012	School Year 2012	Summer 2012	Number	Percent
Santa Clara	75,714	9,170	21	19	66,544	88%
Santa Cruz	13,483	4,534	20	15	8,949	66%
Shasta	10,869	532	19	21	10,337	95%
Sierra	121	0	19	0	121	100%
Siskiyou	2,423	100	19	22	2,323	96%
Solano	20,162	3,602	20	16	16,560	82%
Sonoma	21,830	3,695	23	21	18,135	83%
Stanislaus	50,152	5,138	21	21	45,014	90%
Sutter	8,471	643	18	15	7,827	92%
Tehama	5,631	452	19	15	5,179	92%
Trinity	704	39	19	20	666	94%
Tulare	49,956	4,372	20	18	45,584	91%
Tuolumne	2,015	0	19	0	2,015	100%
Ventura	46,225	5,899	21	20	40,326	87%
Yolo	10,222	1,074	24	19	9,148	89%
Yuba	7,347	367	20	18	6,980	95%

School's Out...Who Ate?

A Report on Summer Nutrition in California

For more information about this report, please contact:
Tia Shimada at 510.433.1122 ext. 109 or tia@cfpa.net
Matthew Sharp at 213.482.8200 ext. 201 or matt@cfpa.net

California Food Policy Advocates

www.cfpa.net

Oakland Office

436 14th Street, Suite 1220

Oakland, California 94612

Los Angeles Office

205 S. Broadway Street, Suite 402

Los Angeles, CA 90012

