

School's Out...Who Ate?

A Report on Summer Nutrition in California

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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.

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CFPA commends program administrators for their commitment to expanding summer nutrition in California. In addition, we 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. Specifically, we would like to thank our partners in the California Summer Meal Coalition. To learn more about the Coalition visit: SummerMealCoalition.org.

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.

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Introduction

For over a decade, California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA) has released an annual report examining issues of access and participation related to the federally funded summer nutrition programs in California.

This report focuses on the summer nutrition gap: the nearly 2 million low-income children and youth in California who benefit from free or reduced-price lunches during the school year and miss out on such meals during the summer. This report also identifies opportunities to strengthen the summer safety net for California's kids.

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. Many school districts sponsor the **Seamless Summer Food Option (SSFO)** to serve meals during summer school and/or at community-based sites, such as churches and parks. SSFO allows sponsors to receive the "free" (highest) rate of reimbursement for each meal served.^a In return, SSFO sites must serve all meals free of charge to children and youth (18 years old and under). SSFO sites must be located in low-income areas or serve low-income participants.^b

The **Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)** was originally designed for children who attend schools with a traditional summer break and 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, and libraries. SFSP can also operate at school sites. SFSP meals are free of charge to participating children and youth.

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

^b "Low income areas" are defined as geographic areas where at least 50% of the children that reside in that area qualify for free or reduced price school meals. More information about SSFO site types and eligibility requirements are available at: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/sn/ssforeq.asp>. Income guidelines for students eligible to receive free, reduced-price, and paid school meals are as follows:

- 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 2014, more than 1.9 million of California's low-income kids fell into the summer nutrition gap. That is, nearly 2 million (or 80 percent of) 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 year-round, yet free and reduced-price lunches reach far fewer children and youth during the summer than the school year. (See Table 1.)

Table 1: Daily Participation of Children Receiving Free or Reduced-Price Lunches: School Year Compared to Summer, 2014.

Free & Reduced-Price Lunches	School Year 2014	Summer 2014	Difference (Summer vs. School Year)
Daily Participation*	2,365,091	462,164	-1,902,927

*Daily participation is estimated using NSLP (public, non-charter school), SFSP, and SSFO data provided by the California Department of Education. See technical appendix for details.

Statewide Trends in the Number of Summer Lunches Served

From July 2006 to July 2012, the number of free and reduced-price summer lunches served across California decreased by over 40 percent.¹ A two percent growth was recorded in July 2013 and July 2014 saw more than a 6 percent increase compared to the previous summer. SSFO saw the largest gains between July 2013 and 2014, serving more than 355,000 additional lunches, a 14 percent increase. (See Table 2.) The overall growth in the summer meal programs is notable and reflects the hard work of administrators, sponsors, and other stakeholders to expand, improve, and promote the programs.

While we applaud the gains that have been made, we also look to new solutions that will help recover years of lost ground and ensure that all California kids are well nourished during the summer.

Table 2: Number of Free and Reduced-Price Lunches Served by Summer Meal Program and Year.

Summer Meal Programs	Free & Reduced-Price Lunches Served*			
	July 2012	July 2013	July 2014	% Change (2013-14)
NSLP: National School Lunch Program				
K-12 public school sites (non-charter)	1,464,115	1,411,015	1,455,070	3%
All other sites (e.g., juvenile detention, residential child care centers)	555,221	454,252	409,314	-10%
SSFO: Seamless Summer Food Option (school sites & some community-based sites)	2,359,423	2,459,343	2,814,796	14%
SFSP: Summer Food Service Program (school and community-based sites)	2,145,302	2,352,684	2,424,777	3%
TOTAL	6,524,061	6,677,294	7,103,957	6%

*Based on CFPA's analysis of NSLP, SFSP, and SSFO data from July 2014 provided by the California Department of Education.

Policy and Program Opportunities

Expand the Summer EBT for Children Program

Expanding the Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) for Children program is an opportunity for local, state, and federal decision makers to take action in support of California kids having year-round access to healthy, affordable meals.

Background

Many children in low-income households have limited access to free and reduced-price meals during the summer. Summer meal sites require participants to congregate at specific locations and during specific times of day in order to receive meals. When and where these sites are able to reach kids, they provide a tremendous service. However, the congregate feeding approach on its own is unlikely to meet the nutritional needs of all eligible children, particularly those who face transportation issues, extreme weather conditions, a lack of walkable routes, threats to neighborhood safety, or other barriers that impede their access to summer meal sites.

Providing a monthly benefit to low-income households with children to purchase groceries through funds on an EBT card is a well-tested, effective method to ensure that children continue to receive nutritious meals throughout the summer. A Summer EBT for Children program would complement the federal summer meal programs. As of 2015, ten states and tribal organizations have implemented Summer EBT for Children demonstration projects.

Summer EBT for Children has been found to:

- Reduce food insecurity among children² and their families,³
- Reduce consumption of sugars from sugar-sweetened beverages,⁴ and
- Increase consumption of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.⁵

Federal Action

- Congress should authorize a nationwide Summer EBT for Children program.

In June 2015, Representative Susan Davis (D- San Diego, CA-53) and Senator Murray (D- Washington) proposed a policy solution, the *Stop Child Summer Hunger Act* (H.R. 2715 / S. 1539), which would increase access to nutritious meals during the summertime by expanding the Summer EBT for Children program. CFPA encourages California's members of Congress to become co-sponsors of this important legislation and champion its inclusion in the 2015 Child Nutrition Reauthorization bill.

- The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) should expand the existing Summer EBT projects to include California.

While Congress considers action, USDA should not delay in expanding existing Summer EBT for Children projects to California. The potential to reduce food insecurity among children by expanding Summer EBT to California is immense. There are more children in California (over 4 million) living in households with incomes below 185 percent of the poverty threshold^c than in any other state.⁶ California's summer nutrition gap is also the second largest in the nation.^{d,7}

State Action

- The California State Legislature and the Governor should ensure that California prioritizes the implementation of Summer EBT for Children, establishing any necessary state authority and allocating all necessary resources.

^c Households with children that are certified for free or reduced-price school meals are eligible for current Summer EBT projects. Children in households with incomes below 185% of the federal poverty guidelines are eligible for reduced-price school meals. Note: the federal poverty measure used by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to determine income eligibility for school meals is a simplified version of the poverty threshold used by the Census Bureau for statistical purposes, which is the source of the data cited. For more information: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/15poverty.cfm>.

^d The “summer nutrition gap” is defined here as the difference between the average daily participation in free and reduced-price meals for NSLP during the 2013-14 school year and average daily participation in the summer meal programs (SFSP, SSFO, and free and reduced-price meals for NSLP) for July 2014.

- The California Departments of Education and Social Services should prepare to launch a Summer EBT for Children program/project as soon as federal authority allows.

California legislators and administrators should ensure that the state is prepared for an effective and timely launch of Summer EBT for Children. Sufficient planning, design, and resources are needed to successfully implement a Summer EBT for Children demonstration project and/or permanent program. Summer EBT for Children would complement the federal summer meal programs currently operating in California by providing much-needed nutrition benefits for the many children in our state who have limited access to summer meal sites or other summer nutrition resources.

Appendix A: County Data

This table includes a county-by-county summary of summer and school meal data from 2014.

County	Daily Lunch Participation (Free & Reduced-Price)*		Children & Youth Served During the School Year but NOT Summer	
	School Year 2014**	Summer 2014†	Total	Percent
ALAMEDA	51,572	14,665	36,907	72%
ALPINE	46	0	46	100%
AMADOR	1,294	3	1,291	100%
BUTTE	11,367	1,013	10,354	91%
CALAVERAS	1,794	914	881	49%
COLUSA	2,423	316	2,108	87%
CONTRA COSTA	46,695	12,670	34,024	73%
DEL NORTE	1,185	111	1,074	91%
EL DORADO	5,171	169	5,002	97%
FRESNO	104,090	18,764	85,326	82%
GLENN	2,752	419	2,333	85%
HUMBOLDT	5,441	682	4,759	87%
IMPERIAL	17,979	2,953	15,026	84%
INYO	954	96	858	90%
KERN	92,047	15,997	76,050	83%
KINGS	13,033	1,424	11,609	89%
LAKE	4,305	771	3,534	82%
LASSEN	1,076	75	1,001	93%
LOS ANGELES	624,244	137,036	487,208	78%
MADERA	16,654	1,274	15,380	92%
MARIN	5,368	751	4,617	86%
MARIPOSA	538	13	525	98%
MENDOCINO	5,472	1,094	4,378	80%
MERCED	33,254	6,047	27,207	82%
MODOC	664	110	554	83%
MONO	620	5	615	99%
MONTEREY	36,610	5,178	31,432	86%
NAPA	4,903	785	4,118	84%
NEVADA	1,739	173	1,566	90%

County	Daily Lunch Participation (Free & Reduced-Price)*		Children & Youth Served During the School Year but NOT Summer	
	School Year 2014**	Summer 2014†	Total	Percent
ORANGE	166,000	23,397	142,603	86%
PLACER	12,473	1,167	11,307	91%
PLUMAS	573	136	437	76%
RIVERSIDE	193,553	22,721	170,832	88%
SACRAMENTO	92,228	17,625	74,603	81%
SAN BENITO	3,917	358	3,559	91%
SAN BERNARDINO	194,291	18,634	175,657	90%
SAN DIEGO	165,996	68,519	97,477	59%
SAN FRANCISCO	18,684	10,823	7,861	42%
SAN JOAQUIN	60,945	19,547	41,397	68%
SAN LUIS OBISPO	8,677	1,046	7,631	88%
SAN MATEO	21,967	4,785	17,181	78%
SANTA BARBARA	28,301	5,484	22,817	81%
SANTA CLARA	62,927	12,221	50,706	81%
SANTA CRUZ	11,977	4,525	7,451	62%
SHASTA	9,543	808	8,735	92%
SIERRA	114	0	114	100%
SISKIYOU	2,189	182	2,007	92%
SOLANO	19,776	2,885	16,891	85%
SONOMA	17,180	4,022	13,158	77%
STANISLAUS	47,786	6,700	41,087	86%
SUTTER	7,775	1,148	6,627	85%
TEHAMA	5,539	605	4,934	89%
TRINITY	641	23	618	96%
TULARE	52,633	3,701	48,932	93%
TUOLUMNE	1,854	0	1,854	100%
VENTURA	46,763	5,705	41,058	88%
YOLO	10,232	1,738	8,494	83%
YUBA	7,271	156	7,115	98%
STATEWIDE	2,365,091	462,164	1,902,927	80%

*See technical appendix for details on the methodology used to estimate the daily lunch participation.

**School year statistics are calculated using March and April data from the National School Lunch Program (public, non-charter school sites only), Seamless Summer Food Option (all sites), and Summer Food Service Program (all sites).

†Summer statistics are calculated using July data for the National School Lunch Program (public, non-charter school sites only), Seamless Summer Food Option (all sites), and Summer Food Service Program (all sites).

Technical Appendix

This appendix provides details about the data sources and methodology used in this report. Specifically, this appendix describes the calculation of daily participation estimates as well as limitations of the data and analysis.

Data Sources

The California Department of Education provided data on the number of lunches served and operating days per month for March, April, and July for sites operating the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), the Seamless Summer Food Option (SSFO), and the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP).

Methodology

Estimates of the number of children and youth receiving free or reduced-price (FRP) lunches during the summer and school year are based on calculations of the average daily participation **for each individual site**, using the equations below:

A. Summer	Total FRP Lunches Served in July	\div	Number of Days in July that the Site Served Lunch	=	Average Daily Participation
B. School year	Total FRP Lunches Served in March & April	\div	Number of Days in March & April that the Site Served Lunch	=	Average Daily Participation

Note: FRP= free or reduced-price

The average daily participation rates of individual sites are summed in order to estimate the daily participation within a certain time period (summer or school year), geographic location (state or county), and/or program (NSLP, SSFO, or SFSP). For example, to estimate the daily participation for California during the summer:

1. Use equation A (above) to calculate the average daily participation rate for each individual site in California that served free and reduced-price lunches through NSLP, SSFO, and SFSP in July.
2. Sum the results from Step 1.

The resulting "daily participation" estimate is most accurately interpreted as the number of children in California who would have received a free or reduced-price lunch on any given day in July if all sites had been in operation.

Challenges and Limitations

Summer vs. School Year

The lunch statistics in this report attempt to compare lunches served during the extended summer break to those served while school is in session. Given that most

schools are on break during the month of July, data from this time period was used to estimate participation in “summer meal programs.” However, due to limits to the specificity of the data, the July lunch counts may also capture lunches served at schools that are in session, such as those that operate on a year-round calendar. Similarly, March and April data were chosen to estimate participation in lunch programs while school is in session. However, the March and April data may also include some meals served during extended breaks for some schools, such as those operating on a year-round schedule.

Operating Days

The estimated "daily participation" is most accurately interpreted as the number of children in California who would have received a free or reduced-price lunch on any given day if all sites had been in operation. With the data available for this analysis, we are unable to determine the number of days, if any, that all sites were in operation. We can determine that all sites did not operate every day of the month. Thus, this methodology may result in an overestimation of true daily participation. This effect may be larger for the summer (July), when there is greater variance in the number of operating days, than the school year (March and April).

Trends Over Time

We advise caution when comparing numbers from this report with those from previous years as the methodology for collecting and reporting data may differ. For example, 2014 was the first year that all data from the Department of Education was provided at the site level. Previous analyses relied on sponsor-level data or a mix of sponsor- and site-level data. Site-level data more accurately reflects the reach of summer meal programs per county, given that sponsors can operate multiple sites in and across counties.

Please be sure to download the most recent editions of reports from previous years as revisions may have been incorporated after the initial publication.

References

- ¹ California Food Policy Advocates, *School's Out...Who Ate?* Available at: <http://cfpa.net/ChildNutrition/Summer/CFPAPublications/SOWA-FullReport-2014.pdf>
- ² United States Department of Agriculture, *Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children (SEBTC) Demonstration: Evaluation Findings for the Full Implementation Year 2012 Final Report.* Available at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/SEBTC2012.pdf>
- ³ United States Department of Agriculture, *Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children (SEBTC) Demonstration: 2013 Final Report.* Available at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/ops/sebtc2013.pdf>
- ⁴ United States Department of Agriculture, *Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children (SEBTC) Demonstration: Evaluation Findings for the Full Implementation Year 2012 Final Report.* Available at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/SEBTC2012.pdf>
- ⁵ Ibid
- ⁶ Food Research and Action Center. *Poverty rate and less than 185% of FPL for children in 2013.* Available at: http://frac.org/pdf/poverty_children_2013.pdf
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