

# School's Out...Who Ate?

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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.

*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 annual publication—and expand on its content. 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](mailto:george@cfpa.net).

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## Acknowledgments

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The analysis for this report was conducted with data provided by the California Department of Education. We appreciate the Department's partnership on this report and other data-driven projects.

CFPA commends program administrators for their commitment to expanding summer nutrition programs 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](http://SummerMealCoalition.org).

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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 over 1.7 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 during 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 federal reimbursement for each meal served.<sup>a</sup> 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.<sup>b</sup>

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. Eligible sites include those that serve low-income children or youth or operate in low-income areas.<sup>b</sup> SFSP is often offered at community-based sites, such as Boys and Girls

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<sup>a</sup> With the exception of camps which are only reimbursed for children who qualify for free or reduced price meals

<sup>b</sup> "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 site types and eligibility requirements: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/sn/ssforeg.asp> (SSFO) and <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/sf/sfspinfo.asp> (SFSP)

Income guidelines for students eligible to receive free, reduced-price, and paid school meals are as follows:

- Free 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

More information about the income eligibility guidelines for free and reduced-price meals in California:

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/rs/#scales>

Clubs, YMCAs, and libraries. SFSP can also operate at school sites. SFSP meals are free of charge to participating children and youth.

## Statewide Statistics and Trends

### The 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 technical appendix for details.

Increasing participation in the summer meal programs would not only benefit California kids but would draw substantial federal funding into the state through meal reimbursements. Those reimbursements are used to cover costs associated with operating the meal programs, such as food, equipment, and labor. The limited reach of summer meal programs means that California currently misses out on tens of millions of dollars in federal meal reimbursements each year.<sup>1</sup>

### 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 technical appendix for 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.

### Upward Trend Continues

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)
<b>NSLP: National School Lunch Program</b>				
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%
<b>SSFO: Seamless Summer Food Option</b> (school sites & some community-based sites)	2,459,343	2,814,796	2,882,317	2%
<b>SFSP: Summer Food Service Program</b> (school and community-based sites)	2,352,684	2,424,777	2,635,891	9%
<b>TOTAL</b>	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 technical appendix for 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.<sup>2</sup>

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.

## Policy and Program Opportunities

### Expand Summer EBT for Children

Expanding Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children (SEBTC) 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.

SEBTC is nutrition assistance used to purchase groceries when school is out of session and school meals are not available. SEBTC would complement the federal summer meal programs 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.

SEBTC improves children's food security and nutrition. The program has been found to

- Reduce food insecurity among children and their families;
- Reduce consumption of added sugars including those from sugar-sweetened beverages; and
- Increase consumption of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.<sup>3</sup>

SEBTC is a well-tested, effective method to prevent childhood hunger. As of 2016, federal demonstration projects have launched SEBTC in eight states and two tribal nations, but not in California.

### *Opportunity*

Across California, two in every five low-income households with children cannot consistently afford enough food. That means children in at least 1.7 million California households live in food-insecure conditions.<sup>4</sup>

Many children in low-income households have limited access to federally funded summer meal programs. Summer meal sites require participants to travel to specific locations during specific times of the day in order to receive meals. When and where these sites are able to reach kids, they provide a tremendous service. However, there are a number of systemic barriers, such as distance, lack of transportation, extreme weather conditions, lack of walkable routes, and threats to neighborhood safety, that prevent many children from accessing summer meal sites. California needs multiple solutions to end child hunger—and SEBTC is one of those solutions.

### **Federal Action**

- ➔ Congress should extend and expand Summer EBT for Children through the 2016 Child Nutrition Reauthorization bill.

CFPA applauds California Representative Susan Davis for sponsoring the *Stop Child Summer Hunger Act of 2015* (H.R. 2715), and the many California members of Congress that co-sponsored this important legislation. H.R. 2715 proposed expanding the SEBTC program in order to increase access to nutritious meals during the summer for children and youth.

CFPA encourages California's members of Congress to continue to champion these efforts through the extension and expansion of SEBTC in the 2016 Child Nutrition Reauthorization bill. To allow for the most effective use of benefits, SEBTC should not be limited to implementation through WIC EBT systems.

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

While Congress considers action, USDA should expand existing SEBTC projects to California. Our state has the most children who are eligible for SEBTC (3.9 million).<sup>c,5</sup> California's summer nutrition gap is also the second largest in the nation.<sup>6</sup> Putting SEBTC to work in California would target this country's highest areas of need.

### **State Action**

- ➔ The California State Legislature and Governor Brown should enact AB 2054 (Thurmond).

AB 2054 would prepare California to effectively and efficiently implement federally funded SEBTC. The bill directs the State to (1) design a system for delivering SEBTC to eligible Californians and (2) pursue all available federal funding and authority to operate that system. AB 2054 will help ensure that our state—and our most vulnerable kids—don't miss out on SEBTC.

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<sup>c</sup> 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 free or 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>.

### **Local Action**

- ➔ Organizations and individuals can help AB 2054 move successfully through the legislative process.

There are a number of valuable ways to express support for AB 2054, including

- Contacting state legislators and the Governor through letters, emails, phone calls, and social media ; and
- Sharing your stories and educating others about summer hunger.

For more information about AB 2054, visit <http://cfpa.net/ab2054>. To receive legislative updates, including calls to action, subscribe to AB 2054 alerts at <http://cfpa.net/subscribe>.

### **Optimizing the Reach of Summer Meal Programs**

There are many strategies to increase the number and reach of summer meal sites. Administrators, meal sponsors, and other stakeholders work to expand, improve, and promote the summer meal programs by providing timely, easily accessible information; addressing transportation barriers; pairing meal service with recreation and enrichment opportunities; improving meal quality and appeal; and communicating existing flexibility in operating summer meal programs.

For more information on developing and promoting strategies for increasing the impact of summer meal sites, contact the California Summer Meal Coalition:

[SummerMealCoalition.org](http://SummerMealCoalition.org).

## Appendix A: County Data

This table includes a county-by-county summary of summer and school meal data from 2015.

**\*\*Please note that the following numbers should not be compared to findings from years prior due to a substantial change in methodology.\*\***

Average Daily Lunch Participation by County, School Year and Summer 2015

County	Average Daily Lunch Participation (Free & Reduced-Price)		Children & Youth Served During the School Year but NOT Summer	
	School Year 2015 (March & April)	Summer 2015 (July)	Total*	Percent
Alameda	42,034	11,952	30,082	72%
Alpine	56	0	56	100%
Amador	958	1	957	100%
Butte	9,938	1,028	8,910	90%
Calaveras	1,422	194	1,228	86%
Colusa	2,195	264	1,931	88%
Contra Costa	39,243	8,364	30,879	79%
Del Norte	1,246	219	1,027	82%
El Dorado	4,434	191	4,243	96%
Fresno	93,097	8,932	84,166	90%
Glenn	2,349	159	2,189	93%
Humboldt	4,764	604	4,160	87%
Imperial	16,172	1,846	14,326	89%
Inyo	813	89	724	89%
Kern	80,590	4,336	76,255	95%
Kings	11,027	535	10,492	95%
Lake	3,816	422	3,393	89%
Lassen	903	40	863	96%

County	Average Daily Lunch Participation (Free & Reduced-Price)		Children & Youth Served During the School Year but NOT Summer	
	School Year 2015 (March & April)	Summer 2015 (July)	Total*	Percent
Los Angeles	524,796	103,501	421,295	80%
Madera	14,421	891	13,530	94%
Marin	4,598	594	4,004	87%
Mariposa	476	2	474	100%
Mendocino	4,629	1,026	3,604	78%
Merced	29,162	3,393	25,769	88%
Modoc	594	90	504	85%
Mono	516	8	507	98%
Monterey	31,042	3,093	27,949	90%
Napa	4,412	435	3,977	90%
Nevada	1,564	158	1,406	90%
Orange	147,743	20,100	127,642	86%
Placer	10,307	1,079	9,228	90%
Plumas	488	126	362	74%
Riverside	164,547	18,304	146,243	89%
Sacramento	79,117	11,682	67,435	85%
San Benito	3,590	579	3,011	84%
San Bernardino	167,420	10,361	157,059	94%
San Diego	127,867	36,212	91,655	72%
San Francisco	15,585	7,153	8,432	54%
San Joaquin	50,327	3,194	47,133	94%
San Luis Obispo	7,227	906	6,321	87%
San Mateo	18,148	3,980	14,169	78%
Santa Barbara	24,612	4,497	20,115	82%

County	Average Daily Lunch Participation (Free & Reduced-Price)		Children & Youth Served During the School Year but NOT Summer	
	School Year 2015 (March & April)	Summer 2015 (July)	Total*	Percent
Santa Clara	52,923	8,423	44,501	84%
Santa Cruz	10,212	1,854	8,359	82%
Shasta	8,024	518	7,506	94%
Sierra	91	0	91	100%
Siskiyou	1,886	189	1,697	90%
Solano	16,284	2,056	14,229	87%
Sonoma	14,367	3,291	11,076	77%
Stanislaus	42,559	2,904	39,654	93%
Sutter	6,657	418	6,239	94%
Tehama	4,839	308	4,530	94%
Trinity	527	0	527	100%
Tulare	46,130	2,365	43,765	95%
Tuolumne	1,571	28	1,542	98%
Ventura	38,532	4,414	34,118	89%
Yolo	9,257	1,156	8,101	88%
Yuba	6,222	77	6,145	99%
<b>Statewide</b>	<b>2,008,326</b>	<b>298,543</b>	<b>1,709,783</b>	<b>85%</b>

\*The Total of the Children & Youth Served During the School Year but NOT Summer is the difference between the average daily lunch participation for the school year and summer.

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 technical appendix for details.

## Technical Appendix

This appendix provides details about the data sources and methodology used in this report.

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

### Data Sources

The California Department of Education provided data on the number of lunches served and the number of operating days (i.e., the number of days on which meals were served) for all sites operating the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), Seamless Summer Food Option (SSFO), or Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). These data were provided by month for March, April, and July.

### Methodology

Statistics comparing the school year and summer were calculated using data for all sites operating SSFO and SFSP, and for public, non-charter school sites operating NSLP. Summer statistics were calculated using data from July. School year statistics were calculated using data from March and April.

### Average Daily Lunch Participation

Estimates of the number of children and youth receiving free or reduced-price (FRP) lunches per day, statewide and by county, during the summer and school year were calculated using the steps below.

#### Summer: Average Daily Lunch Participation

Total FRP Lunches Served at All Sites in July	÷	Number of Week Days in July (23)	=	<b>Average Daily Lunch Participation, Summer</b>
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#### School Year: Average Daily Lunch Participation

Total FRP Lunches Served at All Sites in March & April	÷	Number of Week Days in March & April (44)	=	<b>Average Daily Lunch Participation, School Year</b>
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Note: FRP= free or reduced-price

The same equations were used to estimate average daily lunch participation for each county. For example, to estimate the average daily participation for Los Angeles County during the summer, the number of FRP lunches served in July in Los Angeles County was totaled and then divided by the number of week days in July (23).

The resulting estimate of average daily lunch participation is most accurately interpreted as the average number of children in California who would receive an FRP lunch on any given weekday if all of the lunches served during the month were provided on weekdays and no lunches were provided on weekends.

*Summer Nutrition Gap / Children & Youth Served During the School Year but NOT Summer*

The summer nutrition gap compares the “average daily lunch participation” in the school year and the summer. Specifically, the summer nutrition gap is the difference between (a) the average number of children and youth being served free or reduced-price school lunches each day in March & April and (b) the average number of children and youth being served free or reduced-price lunches each day in July. The same method was used to estimate the summer nutrition gap, or the children and youth served during the school year but NOT summer, for each county.

*Average Monthly FRP Lunches Served per Site*

The average number of lunches served per site per month was calculated using the following steps. Estimates include only those sites that served at least one FRP lunch during that month.

**Summer: Average Monthly FRP Lunches Served per Site**

Total FRP Lunches Served at All Sites in July	÷	Total Number of Sites that Served FRP Lunches in July	=	<b>Average Monthly Lunches Served per Site, Summer</b>
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**School Year: Average Monthly FRP Lunches Served per Site**

Total FRP Lunches Served at All Sites in March & April	÷	Total Number of Sites that Served FRP Lunches in March & April	=	<b>Average Lunches Served per Site, School Year</b>
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*Average Monthly Operating Days per Site*

The average number of operating days per site per month was calculated using the following steps. Estimates include only those sites that served at least one FRP lunch during that month.

**Summer: Average Monthly Operating Days per Site**

Sum of the Number of Days That Each Site Served FRP Lunches in July	÷	Total Number of Sites that Served FRP Lunches in July	=	<b>Average Monthly Operating Days per Site, Summer</b>
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## School Year: Average Operating Days per Month

Sum of the Number of Days That Each Site Served FRP Lunches in March & April	÷	Total Number of Sites that Served FRP Lunches in March & April	=	<b>Average Operating Days per Site, School Year</b>
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## 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.

### *Average Daily Lunch Participation*

The estimated “average daily lunch participation” is most accurately interpreted as the average number of children in California who would receive an FRP lunch on any given weekday if all of the lunches served during the month were provided on weekdays and no lunches were provided on weekends. With the data available for this analysis, we are unable to determine which days during the month lunches were served nor how participation varied from day to day, though such variation is likely. We do know that many sites did not serve lunches on all weekdays and that some sites served lunches on some weekend days during the month.

### *Trends over Time*

We strongly caution against comparing numbers from this report with those from previous years as the methodology for analyzing the data has changed (as described above). Such changes are to be expected as data sources and other factors evolve. For example, 2014 was the first year that all data from the Department of Education was provided at the site level. Prior to 2014, 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.

### *Free or Reduced Price Meals*

The statistics comparing the school year and summer in this report are calculated using data on FRP lunches for public, non-charter school sites for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and all sites for the Seamless Summer Food Option (SSFO) and Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). The intent of these analyses is to better understand the reach of meal programs with respect to low-income children and youth who are eligible for free and reduced-price school meals. However, while meals are provided free of charge to children and youth served by SFSP and SSFO meal sites, some participating children and youth may not meet individual eligibility criteria for FRP meals. SFSP and SSFO sites must be located in low-income areas or serve low-income participants. However, sites that meet these requirements serve all children in attendance for free whether or not they have been verified as income-eligible for free or reduced-price meals.<sup>d</sup>

### *Report Revisions*

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

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<sup>d</sup>With the exception of camps which are only reimbursed for children who qualify for free or reduced price meals. However, camp sponsors usually provide free meals to all children.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Food Research and Action Center. *Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation: Summer Nutrition Status Report*. June 2016. Available at: [http://frac.org/pdf/2016\\_summer\\_nutrition\\_report.pdf](http://frac.org/pdf/2016_summer_nutrition_report.pdf)
- <sup>2</sup> California Food Policy Advocates, *School's Out...Who Ate?* Available at: <http://cfpa.net/ChildNutrition/Summer/CFPAPublications/SOWA-FullReport-2014.pdf>
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