

# 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.

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## 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 commends 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](mailto: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. In addition, many schools utilize the **Seamless Summer Food Option (SSFO)** to serve lunch during summer school. SSFO allows districts to receive the highest rate of NSLP reimbursement for each meal served.<sup>a</sup> In return, SSFO sites must serve children and youth (18 years old and under) in low-income communities.<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 in low-income areas.<sup>b</sup> 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.

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

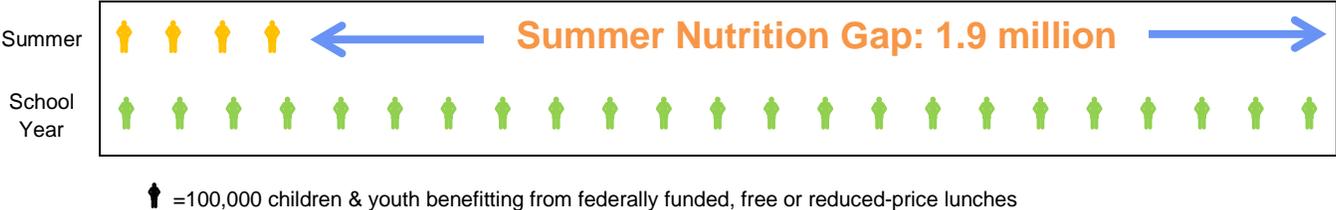
<sup>b</sup> Areas where 50% or more of the children attending local schools are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals are classified as "low-income." Income guidelines for students eligible to receive free, reduced-price, and paid school meals:

- 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 2013, more than 1.9 million (or 82 percent) of California’s low-income kids fell into the summer nutrition gap. That is, nearly 2 million 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 – and summer lunches reach far fewer children and youth than school lunches. (See Table 1)

Table 1

Free & Reduced-Price Lunches	School Year 2013*	Summer 2013*	Difference (Summer vs. School Year)
Average Daily Participation	2,335,891	411,214	-1,924,677

\*School year statistics are calculated using March and April NSLP data for public school district sites, excluding charter schools. Summer statistics are calculated using July data for NSLP at public school district sites; SFSP; and SSFO.

### 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. July 2013, however, saw a 2 percent increase from July 2012 (Table 2). This reversal of trend is notable and reflects the hard work of administrators, sponsors, and other stakeholders to expand, improve, and promote the summer meal programs.

For instance, in 2013, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) launched an initiative to boost summer meal participation via increased technical assistance for select states. As part of this initiative and a White House pledge to increase summer meals in California’s drought-stricken communities, USDA, the California Department of Education (CDE), the Summer Meals Coalition, and a host of summer meal partners have worked to enroll new sponsors, establish new sites, and draw new participants.

We applaud these efforts. 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

Summer Meal Programs	Free & Reduced-Price Lunches Served		
	July 2012	July 2013	% Change
<b>NSLP: National School Lunch Program</b>			
K-12 public schools sites (non-charter)	1,464,115	1,411,015	-4%
All other sites (e.g., juvenile detention, residential child care centers)	555,221	454,252	-18%
<b>SSFO: Seamless Summer Food Option</b> (school sites & some community-based sites)	2,359,423	2,459,343	4%
<b>SFSP: Summer Food Service Program</b> (school and community-based sites)	2,145,302	2,352,684	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,524,061</b>	<b>6,677,294</b>	<b>2%</b>

## Federal Opportunities

Local, state, and federal decision makers can ensure that California kids have year-round access to healthy, affordable meals. Below, we identify federal opportunities to close the summer nutrition gap.

### Expand Summer EBT

**Background** – Summer meal sites require participants to congregate at a specific location during specific times of day in order to receive meals. This structure may not meet the nutritional needs of all low-income children and youth, particularly those who face transportation issues or other barriers that impede their access to summer meal sites.

Recent demonstration projects have assessed the effects of providing summer nutrition assistance to low-income households with children through Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT). Given the success of the demonstration projects in five states,<sup>c</sup> this model of providing summer nutrition assistance (beyond congregate summer meals) is worthy of further investment.

**Action** - Congress should expand Summer EBT for Children. Senator Murray (D-Washington) has proposed this action with the 2014 Stop Child Summer Hunger Act.

<sup>c</sup> <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ops/summer-electronic-benefit-transfer-children-sebtc>

## Employ Science-Based Nutrition Standards for All Summer Meal Programs

**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 latest nutritional science, 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 the nutritional standards employed for the Summer Food Service Program are updated to reflect the latest nutritional science.

## Track the Reach of Summer Programming

**Background** – Emerging research shows alarming rates of summer learning loss<sup>d</sup> and unhealthy summer weight gain,<sup>e</sup> 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.

## State & Local Opportunities

There are many opportunities to expand the reach of the existing summer meal programs. Previous iterations of this report have focused on factors such as adequate and effective promotion; timely, easily accessible information about summer meal sites; and communicating existing flexibility in operating summer meal programs. While those factors are important to the effective implementation of summer meal programs, this year we focus on two opportunities intrinsically tied to schools.

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<sup>d</sup> [http://www.summerlearning.org/resource/collection/CB94AEC5-9C97-496F-B230-1BECDFC2DF8B/Research\\_Brief\\_04\\_-\\_Cooper.pdf](http://www.summerlearning.org/resource/collection/CB94AEC5-9C97-496F-B230-1BECDFC2DF8B/Research_Brief_04_-_Cooper.pdf)

<sup>e</sup> [http://www.summerlearning.org/resource/collection/CB94AEC5-9C97-496F-B230-1BECDFC2DF8B/Research\\_Brief\\_01\\_-\\_von\\_Hippel.pdf](http://www.summerlearning.org/resource/collection/CB94AEC5-9C97-496F-B230-1BECDFC2DF8B/Research_Brief_01_-_von_Hippel.pdf)

## Local Control Funding Formula: Revitalizing Summer Learning Programs

**Background** – The fall, and recent rise, of state revenues have impacted school district budgets over the past decade. One result of state and local budget shortfalls has been a drastic reduction in summer school and summer enrichment programming, which contributed to a dramatic decline in access to summer meals.

In 2012, voters adopted Proposition 30, which raised tax revenues to close persistent state budget deficits. In the 2013-14 state budget, the Governor and Legislature directed significant new resources to school districts through the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). This mechanism provides a large boost in per-pupil funding to schools serving low-income students, foster youth, and English language learners.

Local school boards are charged with engaging school communities to determine how LCFF dollars will be spent. Districts will capture these decisions in Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs). The LCFF-driven changes to education funding present an opportunity for school districts to revitalize summer school and summer learning opportunities in concert with summer meals.

**Action** – To establish LCAPs that help close the achievement and summer nutrition gaps, school district stakeholders and decision makers should consider investing in summer learning programs, ensuring that such programming includes access to nutritious, affordable meals.

## Leverage Schools as Trusted and Familiar Sites for Serving Meals

**Background** – Whether or not school districts fund summer programming, we 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, and school districts should consider, making summer meals available on all campuses that offer 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 to all children and youth in the surrounding community (not just those enrolled in formal academic, enrichment, or recreational programs). To make these meals truly accessible to all kids in the community, staff and administrators should strive to make school-based sites welcoming (e.g., through signage, informal activities, etc.).

## Appendix A: County Data

This table includes a county-by-county summary of summer and school meal data from 2013. Technical notes follow below.

County	Average Daily Lunch Participation (Free and Reduced-Price Meals)		Children & Youth Served During the School Year but NOT Summer	
	School Year 2013	Summer 2013	Number	Percent
Alameda	52,020	16,212	35,808	69%
Alpine	55	0	55	100%
Amador	1,256	12	1,244	99%
Butte	11,612	1,015	10,597	91%
Calaveras	1,936	833	1,103	57%
Colusa	2,480	297	2,184	88%
Contra Costa	46,057	12,613	33,444	73%
Del Norte	1,174	153	1,021	87%
Eldorado	5,353	146	5,207	97%
Fresno	101,510	17,675	83,835	83%
Glenn	2,684	462	2,221	83%
Humboldt	5,244	629	4,614	88%
Imperial	18,195	1,848	16,347	90%
Inyo	802	40	762	95%
Kern	89,552	14,457	75,095	84%
Kings	12,762	976	11,785	92%
Lake	4,168	573	3,594	86%
Lassen	1,101	84	1,018	92%
Los Angeles	601,051	115,392	485,659	81%
Madera	16,386	1,485	14,902	91%
Marin	5,205	743	4,463	86%
Mariposa	594	21	573	97%
Mendocino	5,353	1,121	4,232	79%
Merced	33,652	6,062	27,590	82%
Modoc	662	131	531	80%

County	Average Daily Lunch Participation (Free and Reduced-Price Meals)		Children & Youth Served During the School Year but NOT Summer	
	School Year 2013	Summer 2013	Number	Percent
Mono	600	3	597	100%
Monterey	35,194	4,449	30,745	87%
Napa	5,075	572	4,502	89%
Nevada	1,825	204	1,620	89%
Orange	167,050	22,929	144,121	86%
Placer	12,308	838	11,470	93%
Plumas	575	18	557	97%
Riverside	193,170	16,761	176,409	91%
Sacramento	92,084	13,230	78,854	86%
San Benito	4,002	918	3,084	77%
San Bernardino	193,959	9,712	184,247	95%
San Diego	165,822	71,860	93,962	57%
San Francisco	19,674	8,979	10,695	54%
San Joaquin	61,316	19,131	42,185	69%
San Luis Obispo	8,939	801	8,137	91%
San Mateo	22,873	4,450	18,423	81%
Santa Barbara	27,243	4,173	23,070	85%
Santa Clara	64,966	9,012	55,953	86%
Santa Cruz	11,910	2,978	8,932	75%
Shasta	9,809	670	9,139	93%
Sierra	101	0	101	100%
Siskiyou	2,202	163	2,039	93%
Solano	19,582	2,576	17,006	87%
Sonoma	17,951	4,066	13,885	77%
Stanislaus	47,114	6,286	40,828	87%
Sutter	7,872	1,240	6,633	84%
Tehama	5,345	541	4,804	90%
Trinity	699	37	661	95%
Tulare	51,152	4,052	47,100	92%

County	Average Daily Lunch Participation (Free and Reduced-Price Meals)		Children & Youth Served During the School Year but NOT Summer	
	School Year 2013	Summer 2013	Number	Percent
Tuolumne	1,850	0	1,850	100%
Ventura	45,563	5,686	39,877	88%
Yolo	10,307	1,585	8,722	85%
Yuba	6,898	313	6,584	95%
Statewide	2,335,891	411,214	1,924,677	82%

**Notes**

Values in the table above (and throughout the report) are rounded to the nearest whole number.

**Data Sources**

- School year statistics are calculated using March and April data from the National School Lunch Program (public school district sites only, excluding charter schools).
- Summer statistics are calculated using July data for the National School Lunch Program (public school district sites only, excluding charter schools); the Seamless Summer Food Option (all sites), and the Summer Food Service Program (all sites).

**Site-Level Data**

Summer meal sponsors can operate multiple sites within and across counties. As of 2012, the State requires most 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 data reports were required.

With all but one sponsor reporting at the site-level for July 2013, we are able to better identify the counties in which meals are actually being served. For example, if a sponsor in County A operates meal sites in County B (and reports site-level data), we can now determine that the meals are being served in County B.

This unprecedented site-level data helps to better describe the reach of summer meal programs. We thank the state for implementing the new reporting criteria and sponsors for providing such valuable information.

<b>Site-Level Data</b>	Lunches Served per Month by Any One Site	÷	Number of Days per Month the Site Serves Lunch	=	Average Daily Participation by <b>Site</b>
<b>Sponsor-Level Data</b>	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 <b>Sponsor</b>

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