

Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation: Summer Nutrition Status Report 2011

Executive Summary & Implications for Pennsylvania

The federally-funded Summer Nutrition Programs, which provide nutritious meals and snacks to low-income children during the summer, are falling increasingly short of meeting the need. Only one in seven low-income students who depended on the National School Lunch Program during the 2009-2010 school year accessed summer meals in 2010.

The continuing fallout of the Great Recession has not only had profound adverse effects on families; it has severely strained state and local budgets, resulting in major cuts in summer schools and youth programs throughout the country. The decrease in summer programs where food can be served makes it more difficult for the Summer Nutrition Programs to respond to the dramatic increase in need. Contrary to the recent trend in federal nutrition programs in general, in 2010 the Summer Nutrition Programs actually fed fewer children than in the previous year, extending the decline first seen in 2009.

It is not too late to have an impact this summer. Now is the time to redouble efforts at the federal, state, and local levels and within the public and private sectors to rebuild the Summer Nutrition Programs so that nutritious summer meals are getting to the children who need them. Now is the time for action.

Key Findings from the Report – July 2010 Data

National Data

- In July 2010, the Summer Nutrition Programs (i.e., the Summer Food Service Program and the National School Lunch Program combined) only served lunch to 2.812 million children on an average day. Since July 2008, participation has dropped by 90,000 children, or 3.1 percent.
- In July 2010, only 15 children received Summer Nutrition for every 100 low-income students who received lunch in the 2009-2010 school year.
- The 2010 ratio of 15.0:100 was a significant decrease when compared to a ratio of 16.1:100 children in July 2009. The number of children served during the summer fell slightly, while the number of low-income children receiving school lunch grew (by a record 1.1 million low-income children) during the 2009-2010 school year.
- At the same time that more children had to use the regular school year food programs, budget cuts in many states caused school districts to eliminate or reduce their summer programs, resulting in 83,000 fewer students being served by the National School Lunch Program in July 2010 than in the previous year. The losses in this program outstripped the gain of 65,000 children achieved by the Summer Food Service Program.

Pennsylvania Data

- In Pennsylvania, 128,946 low-income children received summer meals.
- In Pennsylvania, 23.7 children ate summer meals for every 100 children who ate lunch in school year 2009-2010. Pennsylvania ranked 7 out of 51 states.

- If Pennsylvania was able to boost participation to serve 40 percent of eligible low-income children, the state would feed an additional 88,903 children and gain \$5,964,933 in federal child nutrition funds.

Looking Forward – A Time for Action

- The U.S. Department of Agriculture is helping to lead the charge by: organizing a Summer Food Service Program Awareness Week; reducing administrative barriers that keep sponsors from participating; re-committing to increasing access to meals in the summer; and ensuring the full implementation of the provisions in the 2010 child nutrition reauthorization law—the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act—that can help support expansion and outreach.
- USDA's two Summer Food demonstration projects have shown a significant impact on participation and should be replicated. Federal funding was provided to encourage sponsors in Arkansas to operate Summer Food for more days and to provide activities at sites in Mississippi.
- More states need to make access to Summer Nutrition a top priority by taking aggressive steps to recruit sponsors and sites and to conduct outreach to families and by requiring certain schools (with high proportions of low income students or that operate summer school) to run Summer Nutrition.
- Schools need to re-commit to meeting the nutritional needs of their students during the summer, even if summer school is reduced. It is in their best interest to ensure that their students have adequate nutrition during the summer so they return to school in the fall healthy and ready to learn.