

Snapshot: Summer Hunger in CA

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The Issue

Nearly two million children across California live in poverty: their families struggle meet basic needs such as food, housing, and healthcare.¹ When school is out, many children lose access to a critical source of nutritious, affordable meals. The loss of school meals, especially for children living in poverty, can increase the risk of hunger and food insecurity. The federal summer meal programs exist to nourish children during breaks from school. This analysis examines how well those programs meet the needs of children across California.



The Numbers



Statewide, 86 percent of children who benefit from free or reduced-price lunches during the school year **miss out on summer lunches.**

478,000 fewer summer lunches were served in 2017, with the biggest decline (12%) in the Summer Food Service Program.²



If summer meal programs reached half of the low-income children across California, the state would receive an additional **\$41.6 million dollars in federal funding.**³

One in five low-income schools have **no open summer meal site within 1 mile.** More than 800 public schools have **no open meal site within 5 miles.**⁴



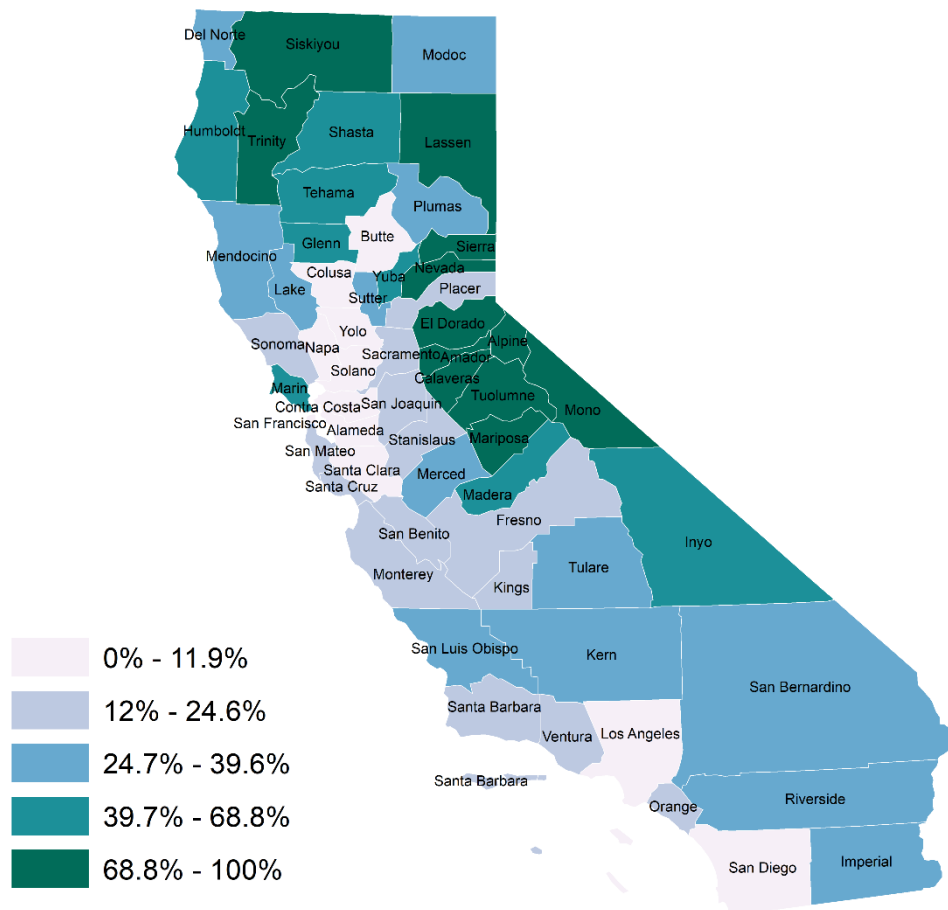
Our goal is to fight hunger and provide nutrition education. Our program has gotten better every year. The kids have fun! But there are still changes that would be helpful. It's hard to tell parents they have to throw away food, especially when they come with young kids who are always going to leave something on the plate. We appreciate area eligibility: it makes things easier for summer meal programs. We know families who don't qualify for help but really need it. California is an expensive place to live & that should be factored in.

– Jose Ocadiz, Library Branch Manager & Summer Meal Provider, San Diego County, CA

The Map

A child's ability to access summer meal programs is affected by many factors including the geographic location of summer meal sites. A spatial analysis helps to measure this aspect of access. This analysis used the locations of low-income schools⁵ as an indicator of communities that might benefit most from the availability of summer meal programs.

This map shows, by county, the percent of low-income schools for which there is no open summer meal site within a one-mile radius.



Methods & Additional Findings

Technical notes and additional findings, including county findings, for this analysis are available at: <https://cfpa.net/ChildNutrition/Summer/CFPAPublications/SOWA-DataTables-TechnicalNotes-2019.pdf>

Acknowledgements

CFPA thanks No Kid Hungry, a campaign of the national anti-hunger organization Share Our Strength, for their support of this analysis. The analysis was conducted with data provided by the California Department of Education (CDE). We appreciate the Department's partnership on this and other data-driven projects. CFPA commends the administrators, organizations, and program staff who tackle the hard work of providing nutritious, affordable meals summer meals in communities across the state. Thank for protecting the health and well-being of children.

References and Notes

¹ Bohn, Danielson, and Thurman, Public Policy Institute of California, Child Poverty in California, July 2018, <https://www.ppica.org/publication/child-poverty-in-california/>

² The National School Lunch Program (NSLP), often associated with meals served during the school year, continues to operate during the summer months at year-round schools and summer school sites.

Many school districts utilize the Seamless Summer Food Option (SSFO) to serve meals during summer school and/or at community-based sites. SSFO allows sponsors to receive the “free” (highest) rate of federal reimbursement for each meal served. In return, SSFO sites must serve all meals free of charge to children and youth. SSFO sites must be located in low-income areas or serve low-income participants.

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 at approved sites. Eligible sites include those that serve low-income children or youth or operate in low-income areas. SFSP is often offered at community-based sites, such as Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCAs, and libraries.

More information about site types and eligibility requirements: www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/sn/ssforeq.asp (SSFO) and www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/sf/sfspinfo.asp (SFSP).

³ For this estimate, “low-income” is defined as being eligible for free or reduced-price meals.

⁴ An “open summer meal site” is a summer meal site where meal service is open to all children and not limited to those enrolled in a specific program or activity (e.g. summer school, recreational program).

⁵ For this analysis, a “low-income school” is defined as a school where 50 percent or more of the enrolled K-12 students are deemed eligible for free or reduced-price meals

California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA) is a statewide non-profit organization dedicated to improving the health and well-being of low-income Californians by increasing their access to nutritious, affordable food. Advancing equity through public policy is the cornerstone of our work.



We fight the root causes of hunger and poverty to fight for the promise and potential of all Californians.