

School's Out... Who Ate?
A Report on Summer Nutrition in California

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Introduction

Since 1994, California Food Policy Advocates has released an annual report, *School's Out...Who Ate?*, to chart the yearly progress in expanding USDA-funded summer nutrition programs throughout California. Each year the report analyzes data from the previous summer to explain county-level trends. This year, due to the extraordinary budget-imposed reduction in summer school and the reduction in summer meals that is likely to result, CFPA is releasing a special, abbreviated version of *School's Out...Who Ate?*, with a focus on recent developments and critical action steps. Because we estimate that over 300,000 children who ate free meals at school last summer will not be at school this summer and will be without easy access to a nourishing lunch, we've focused this report on that crisis.

Summer School Cuts Endanger Nutrition for Low-Income Children in California

The loss of summer school programs in most California school districts has been widely reported; according to one survey conducted by the state PTA, perhaps 70 percent fewer students will attend summer school this year than in 2008. Less often reported is the fact that summer school losses will reverberate, causing thousands of low-income children who normally depend upon federally-funded meals at summer school sites to lose access to those meals.

With the school year ending and California's unemployment rate expected to exceed 12 percent this summer, officials must act fast. Children need access to healthy meals that combat hunger, improve nutritional intake, facilitate attention and learning, and help prevent obesity. Unfortunately, with the arrival of summer vacation, the school meals that low-income children depend on every school day come to an end. Parents, whose food budgets already are sorely stretched, are left searching for a way to fill this gap. During the past school year, 7 percent (or 145,000) more children in California participated in the free school lunch program compared to 2007-08. This increase means more children need free, healthy meals this summer.

State, local, and federal officials must take action to feed hungry children this summer and ensure that California communities do not forfeit much needed federal funds at this critical time. Officials must ensure that an adequate number of summer meal sites exist where children can eat federally funded lunches. Officials must also be sure that children and their families know where to find these lunch sites.

In addition to the summer nutrition programs at public summer schools, summer meals have historically been served at municipal Parks and Recreation sites and

community centers, such as Boys and Girls Clubs. Unfortunately, participation in summer nutrition programs at non-school sites has never been as robust as school-based programs. Furthermore, based on available data, commensurate numbers of new community sites have not opened in response to the decrease in school-based summer nutrition sites.

More than 500,000 low-income children ate lunch at free summer nutrition programs last July. Eighty-five percent of those kids got meals from the summer school programs that are now closed. Losing these summer school programs is a disaster. Losing the summer meals intensifies the damage.

Immediate, Local Action Steps

Unfortunately, there are only a few short-term action steps that can reduce the impending harm.

First, families need immediate referrals to nutrition programs operating in their communities. School officials need to make sure that flyers go home with all students on the last day of school. If school has already closed for the summer, schools should try to contact families through automatic phone call systems or by other means. Online information must be plentiful and easily accessible. A list of summer food sites across the state is available here:

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sh/sn/summersites09.asp>.

Public service announcements must run on local media. Community organizations, health clinics, WIC centers, food pantries, and neighborhood groups need to publicize the availability of lunch sites that are open to the community, either by distributing a list of sites, or by using a resource and referral system, such as 2-1-1.

Second, if possible, local officials still working to adopt 2009-2010 school district budgets should seek to preserve summer school programs. Education, enrichment, and recreation are proven components of a child's development – and these components are important year-round. If summer programs must be reduced, school districts should ensure that existing summer programs are operated at schools that offer USDA-funded nutrition programs. Moreover, those schools must open their gates to serve eligible children in the neighborhood as well as students.

Third, city and county officials need to help fill the void created by the elimination of school-based programs by increasing the number of students fed at recreation programs, parks, and other sites. This can be accomplished through neighborhood-

level outreach and by increasing the accessibility of sites. Accessibility can be improved, for example, by ensuring that gates are open, signs are posted, and drop-in community participants are welcomed by staff.

Action Steps to Plan for Next Summer

Even if all the immediate steps are taken by local communities, it is very likely that far fewer meals will be served in 2009 than previous years. In order to restore participation in the summer nutrition programs for summer 2010, significant changes are needed. These changes will help ensure that more children are served healthy, nourishing meals next summer.

National recommendations. Congress ought to make several key improvements in the summer nutrition programs, as part of the Child Nutrition Act scheduled for renewal in Congress this year.

- Increase reimbursement for NSLP¹ and SFSP².
- Ensure meals comply with Dietary Guidelines for Americans and strengthen the programs' appeal to kids, teens, parents and caretakers.
- Simplify administration and reduce monitoring burdens and costs.
- Provide flexibility to serve meals and snacks where and when children congregate.

State recommendations. State policymakers and education leaders can take several actions. In recognition of the budget crisis, these are listed in order of decreasing cost.

- Provide adequate resources for school districts to offer robust summer school.
- Provide sufficient resources for schools to offer enrichment, recreation, and supervised summer programs.
- Strengthen the current summer school meals mandate to ensure more summer school sites operate open nutrition programs, which serve the community.
- Encourage school districts to assume sponsorship of community meal sites.

¹ The National School Lunch Program is the country's oldest child nutrition program, usually operates during the school year. Schools can continue to operate NSLP in the summer months at year-round schools and during summer school.

² The Summer Food Service Program serves children 18 years and younger who are not participating in summer school during traditional summer months. SFSP sponsors, which generally include Parks and Recreation departments and Boys and Girls Clubs, can serve a federally reimbursable snack or meal to kids at approved sites in low-income areas where 50% or more children attending local schools are certified eligible for free or reduced price school meals.

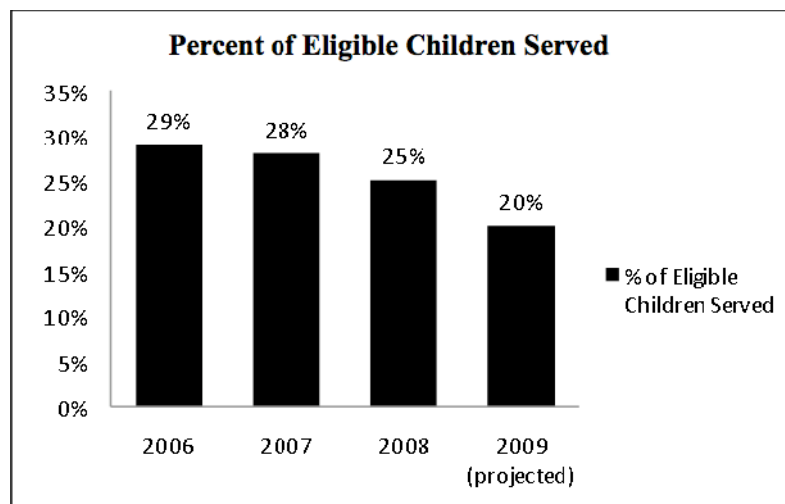
- Encourage school districts to plan summer school sites further in advance to facilitate more coordination of outreach and promotional activities.
- Encourage school districts to formalize summer nutrition marketing and referral practices to ensure that all families receive timely information about open sites.

Local recommendations. Local communities should devise plans to provide an adequate summer nutrition safety net. Activities to conduct before next summer include:

- Request an item on an upcoming school board hearing agenda to discuss summer school availability, recreation and enrichment options. School boards should open schools to serve meals to the community.
- Convene school food service, municipal recreation programs, food banks and community health advocates to identify gaps in site availability and marketing.
- Begin seeking vendors and sponsors for new sites.
- Contact local principals to secure their support for operating open summer school sites that serve the entire neighborhood.
- Briefly survey drop-in participants and their parents on the lunch program's appeal to identify potential adjustments in menus, service, and environment.
- Develop templates of local promotional materials.

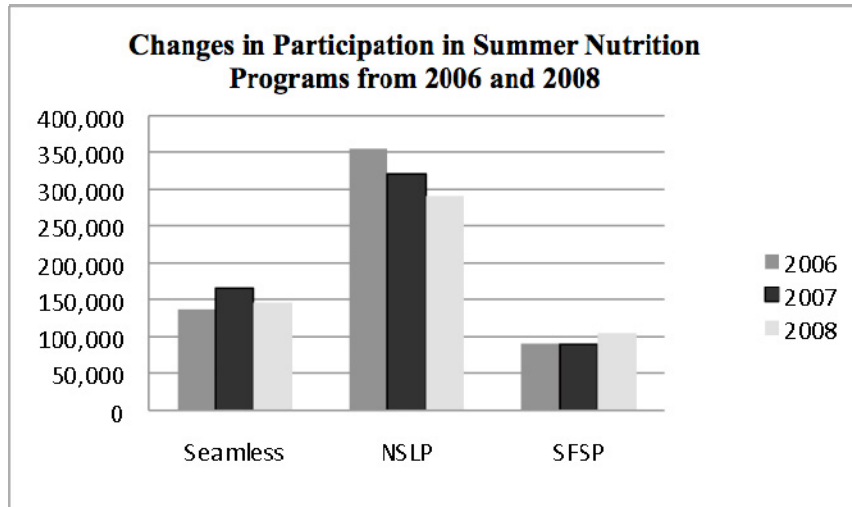
Data on Summer Lunch Participation in 2008

As in previous years, CFPA has assembled several figures to illustrate the changes across California from July 2007 to July 2008 in USDA-funded meals served. Also attached is a detailed table describing the trends in each of California's fifty-eight counties. We elected not to provide detailed analyses in this report of other important summer nutrition issues, such as water availability, food waste vs. food safety, nutrition standards, and the year-round snack pilot, in order to focus your attention on the decline of summer school and the necessary responses. (A report on California's year-round SFSP snack pilot will be released later this summer.)



Unfortunately, as the above chart shows, the gap between the need and availability of summer nutrition was already growing before the current budget cuts. In the summer of 2008 almost 75 percent of children who ate subsidized meals during the school year - or 1.6 million kids—did not access a summer meal.

Even if the growth rate of the unmet need in summer lunch does not increase - and it probably will - we can estimate that at least 2 million eligible children will not eat nourishing, USDA-funded meals during July 2009.



In addition, the data show that while participation in the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) increased by 17 percent, participation in the Seamless Summer Food Option ³(SSFO) and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) decreased 12 percent and 9 percent, respectively. This rise in SFSP participation may be because summer schools—which have historically fed a majority of children during the summer—are switching to SFSP because it offers higher reimbursement rates. Since food prices during the summer of 2008 rose by 7 percent, it is no surprise that schools opted for the higher reimbursement rate despite the additional administrative burden that comes with SFSP.

³ The Seamless Summer Food Option allows schools where more than 50 % of the children are certified eligible for free or reduced-price meals to use the exact same paperwork, recordkeeping, accounting and claiming procedures as NSLP at the free reimbursement rate for all meals. In return, schools must open the cafeteria to children from the surrounding community even if they are not enrolled in summer school.

2008 California Summer Nutrition Program Data

County	FRP ADP of NSLP during 2007-08 School Year	July 2008: Seamless ADP	FRP ADP of NSLP during July 2008	ADP of SFSP in July 2008	Total ADP of All Summer Foods in July 2007	Total ADP of All Summer Foods in July 2008	% Getting FRP Meals During School Year Who Also Get Summer Meals	% Change in Participation 2007-08	County Rank 1-58*
Alameda	52,517	8,508	2,840	2,992	12,578	14,340	27%	14%	9
Alpine	65	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%	55
Amador	1,008	0	11	0	114	11	1%	-90%	51
Butte	11,309	381	414	3,648	5,307	4,443	39%	-16%	5
Calaveras	1,752	0	857	0	735	857	49%	17%	3
Colusa	2,351	0	58	0	59	58	2%	-2%	48
Contra Costa	40,049	8,808	3,466	1,415	10,771	13,689	34%	27%	6
Del Norte	1,456	302	57	0	280	359	25%	28%	14
Eldorado	4,641	0	427	81	723	508	11%	-30%	38
Fresno	87,215	6,451	3,264	7,193	17,824	16,908	19%	-5%	24
Glenn	2,689	0	17	0	23	17	1%	-26%	52
Humboldt	5,934	0	178	705	762	883	15%	16%	35
Imperial	17,570	1,588	1,253	1,710	4,442	4,551	26%	2%	12
Inyo	807	0	119	43	113	162	20%	43%	23
Kern	83,366	6,190	1,928	86	13,226	8,204	10%	-38%	40
Kings	11,625	803	155	764	1,770	1,722	15%	-3%	36
Lake	4,344	0	310	0	309	310	7%	0%	44
Lassen	1,280	0	8	0	11	8	1%	-27%	53
Los Angeles	619,499	30,803	120,943	53,224	218,222	204,970	33%	-6%	7
Madera	14,895	330	792	0	1,119	1,122	8%	0%	43
Marin	4,510	672	171	0	922	843	19%	-9%	27
Mariposa	687	0	36	0	65	36	5%	-45%	45
Mendocino	5,544	798	277	54	1,054	1,129	20%	7%	20
Merced	29,317	4,879	3,897	0	7,286	8,776	30%	20%	8
Modoc	840	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%	55
Mono	450	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%	55

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Monterey	30,770	4,376	1,972	521	7,298	6,869	22%	-6%	17
Napa	5,692	179	88	0	226	267	5%	18%	46
Nevada	1,553	0	135	0	106	135	9%	27%	41
Orange	148,010	6,789	17,420	5,553	29,480	29,762	20%	1%	22
Placer	9,235	448	446	77	1,072	971	11%	-9%	39
Plumas	619	0	0	0	67	0	0%	-100%	55
Riverside	155,630	10,649	14,419	1,162	35,238	26,230	17%	-26%	31
Sacramento	80,187	1,999	10,160	9,557	23,559	21,716	27%	-8%	10
San Benito	3,751	641	52	0	727	693	18%	-5%	29
San Bernardino	150,249	1,132	26,193	600	39,194	27,925	19%	-29%	28
San Diego	145,175	9,475	21,553	2,338	44,911	33,366	23%	-26%	16
San Francisco	18,395	2,145	443	5,572	7,929	8,160	44%	3%	4
San Joaquin	50,696	4,972	34,322	232	20,693	39,526	78%	91%	1
San Luis Obispo	7,864	0	1,340	0	1,426	1,340	17%	-6%	30
San Mateo	23,157	1,978	2,350	363	3,335	4,691	20%	41%	21
Santa Barbara	24,198	710	1,970	1,249	3,582	3,929	16%	10%	33
Santa Clara	60,526	7,823	4,545	213	13,779	12,581	21%	-9%	18
Santa Cruz	11,351	5,202	540	690	6,414	6,432	57%	0%	2
Shasta	9,671	921	320	0	968	1,241	13%	28%	37
Sierra	106	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%	55
Siskiyou	2,181	0	19	22	46	41	2%	-11%	50
Solano	16,888	3,202	752	0	5,252	3,954	23%	-25%	15
Sonoma	18,710	1,176	794	1,167	3,923	3,137	17%	-20%	32
Stanislaus	36,545	2,003	4,117	1,446	9,457	7,566	21%	-20%	19
Sutter	7,370	0	13	0	16	13	0%	-19%	54
Tehama	5,222	0	118	0	85	118	2%	39%	49

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Trinity	756	187	14	0	210	201	27%	-4%	11
Tulare	47,380	4,533	1,086	1,531	7,092	7,150	15%	1%	34
Tuolumne	1,806	0	69	0	42	69	4%	64%	47
Ventura	38,082	3,317	3,657	270	8,769	7,244	19%	-17%	25
Yolo	9,700	1,058	425	350	2,238	1,833	19%	-18%	26
Yuba	7,028	146	363	53	570	562	8%	-1%	42
CA TOTAL	2,134,210	145,574	291,173	104,881	575,419	541,628	25%	-6%	N/A

FRP: Free and Reduced-Price Program

ADP: Average Daily Participation

NSLP: National School Lunch Program

SFSP: Summer Food Service Program