



Top Ten Summer Lunch Fixes

The summer nutrition safety net in California reaches only 29% of the low-income students served by the National School Lunch Program during the school year. Recent research indicates that youngsters gain more weight during summer months. At least ten major changes are needed to strengthen this important program.

10. ***Consolidate the community nutrition programs.*** Agencies operating the Summer Food Service Program and the CACFP At-Risk Afterschool Snack Program should use the same reimbursement, monitoring, claiming and recordkeeping procedures for summer meals and afterschool snacks. California's YR pilot has demonstrated the ease of implementing consolidated programs.
9. ***Extend eligibility to more neighborhoods.*** 275,000 low-income students in California live in neighborhoods just below the threshold for operating an open SFSP site, so they don't benefit from year-round nutrition. Extending eligibility to 40-49% FRP neighborhoods will open new sites for needy children.
8. ***Create a seamless, year-round safety net.*** Summer lunch sponsors are only reimbursed for meals served during extended summer breaks of 15 days or longer, when students attending year-round schools and those on winter and spring breaks need nutrition too. California's YR pilot has allowed 365 day access to reimbursable meals.
7. ***Use 21st century technology to simplify administration.*** Require all state agencies to establish online transactions with sponsors, beginning with application and renewal documents, claiming procedures, site change forms and all other paper correspondence. Technology grants might be necessary to ensure state agencies and sponsors are adequately wired.
6. ***Re-direct funds away from red tape and toward the food.*** Reduce the frequency of site monitoring requirements for sponsoring agencies. Currently, agencies must conduct numerous site visits during meal service, adding enormous, unfunded costs to the sponsoring agency, particularly for sponsors with rural and small sites.



5. ***Focus on nutritional quality.*** Too many youngsters and their parents attend sites only once or twice, discouraged by mediocre meal quality. Additionally, SFSP meal patterns and requirements have not been updated in decades. Several steps might improve nutrition:
 - Reduce frequency of juice service; increase frequency that fresh vegetables and fruit are provided.
 - Restrict milk to 1% or nonfat.
 - Require that whole wheat bread and other whole grains are served.
 - Limit the amount of cheese that is served.
 - Eliminate added trans fats.
 - Reduce sweetened foods and snacks.
 - Require vendors to offer substitutions to sponsors, in order to more quickly adjust menus to reflect children's preferences.
4. ***Add nutrition education to the equation.*** Sponsors should be provided with adequate support and funds to incorporate nutrition education activities into their summer enrichment programs.
3. ***Suppers too.*** Many community programs operate late afternoon and evening enrichment programs, but are only eligible for funds to serve snacks. USDA's successful supper pilot should be extended to California and folded into a consolidated, community nutrition program that combines features of SFSP and CACFP.
2. ***Require smarter outreach.*** Summer lunch programs are only expected to advertise their sites through an annual media release, this is outdated and ineffective in large media markets. Sponsors should develop a locally-appropriate outreach checklist to capture a wider variety of activities to reach additional children with summer meals.
1. ***Raise the reimbursement rate.*** Purchasing, preparing and serving more nourishing lunches and snacks require more funds.