

CFPA study says more than 14,000 Valley kids fall into summer nutrition gap

By EDWIN DELGADO, Staff Writer | Posted: Saturday, June 18, 2016 1:20 am

Earlier this week California Food Policy Advocates released its annual report, which points out that 85 percent of children in the state who receive federally funded free or reduced-price lunch miss out on similar meals during the summer.

The report states that in Imperial County more than 14,000 children or 89 percent of those that receive reduced-price lunches don't have access to those meals during the summer.

“Statewide we have 1.7 million children in that summer nutritional gap that is a very substantial number. The problem has been persistent,” said Anna Colby, nutrition policy advocate for CFPA.

She added that research shows that rates of food insecurity, particularly among households with children, increase during summer break. At the same time, the number of sites serving federally funded meals to children dramatically decline. Those sites that do serve summer meals operate for fewer days each month and serve far fewer lunches than sites operating during the school year.

Also some of the sites that do offer the meals during the summer have other issues to overcome. Colby said that one of them is transportation to be able to get the children to the sites that do offer lunches during the summer break.

One of the possible solutions CFPA would like to see is the expansion of the USDA summer EBT for Children program, which is a federal nutrition assistance program that is used to purchase groceries when school is not in session and meals are not available.

“This is an existing demonstration program that began in 2011, which has worked well but is only working in eight states and currently not offered in California,” Colby said.

Although is not specifically targeting the children that lack access to meals during summer, chairman of the Imperial County Board of Supervisors Jack Terrazas made fighting hunger and reducing food insecurity primarily with children his main point of focus for 2016 during the state of the county address in February.



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During his address, he encouraged the attendees, and other interested members of the community, to support his mission by donating to the Imperial Valley Food Bank's Weekend Backpack Program, which focuses on the childhood hunger issue while the children are out of school during the weekends.

Imperial County Public Information Officer Rebecca Terrazas-Baxter said that as of the chairman's address, the Food Bank received almost \$5,000 in pledged donations specifically for the Weekend Backpack Program.

"Additionally, the chairman is working closely with a corporate sponsor to match the donations that the program received after his address," she said.

The Imperial Valley Food Bank's Weekend Backpack Program currently provides food for 637 students from 35 different schools across the Valley.

"These efforts are very important. I'm glad Imperial County is making it such a priority," Colby said.

The county is also considering supporting the program through a voluntary employee contribution program that will automatically deduct a certain amount if the employee chooses to participate. The proposal is part of the consent agenda for the June 21 Board of Supervisors meeting.

CFPA has released a report each year for the past decade and has seen modest improvements especially after 2012. The access to summer meals from 2014 to 2015 improved a modest two percent. Colby said the trend is moving in the right direction but there is a lot more work to be done.

"During the summer months the most vulnerable children don't get the food they need," Colby said.

"The need for meals doesn't end when school is over."

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