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## Fewer Summer Meals Served Across California, New Strategies Needed

According to a new report released today, over 2 million (84 percent) of the children in California who benefitted from federally funded school meals during the academic year were not served by the federal summer meal programs in 2011. The report, *School's Out...Who Ate?*, authored by California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA), ties the elimination of summer school to the loss of affordable, nutritious meals for low-income children.

CFPA's analysis of data provided by the California Department of Education shows that participation in federal summer meal programs has decreased by over 50 percent in just under a decade. That downward trend is driven largely by a decline in meals served by summer schools. George Manalo-LeClair, CFPA's executive director, notes, "The widespread loss of summer school programs in California undermines student enrichment and academic achievement. That harm is intensified by the loss of summer school meals. Children need year-round access to nutritious meals that combat hunger, support learning, and help prevent obesity."

Beyond children's health and development, the loss of summer meals also impacts the bottom line. As reported by the Food Research and Action Center, in *Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation*, California missed out on an estimated \$34 million in federal funding due to low participation in summer nutrition programs during July of 2011.

*School's Out... Who Ate?* examines statewide trends in summer meal participation and provides county-level data. The report also offers federal, state, and local policy recommendations aimed at closing the summer nutrition gap, such as:

- A state convening to address deficits in summer nutrition and summer learning
- Required collection and tracking of basic data on summer school and summer programs
- Rigorous outreach to inform families of available summer meal sites
- Research to better understand the availability and impact of summer nutrition resources on children's diets.

Across the state, the federal summer meal programs reach fewer children each year and many families continue to struggle in this tough economy. Policymakers at all levels should take action to mend the widening summer nutrition gap faced by millions of low-income children in California.

For the full report and other resources, visit: <http://cfpa.net/sowa-2012>.

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California Food Policy Advocates is a statewide policy and advocacy organization dedicated to improving the health and well-being of low-income Californians by increasing their access to nutritious, affordable food.