

Schools Can Help End Childhood Summer Hunger

Summer can be a difficult time for families with children, and that can impact the whole community. All too often, summer vacation is when children do not have enough nutritious food to eat. When school lets out in the summer, millions of low-income children lose access to the school breakfasts, lunches and afterschool snacks they receive during the regular school year. Many families with children will struggle to provide enough nutritious food for their children during the summer months, especially as more households feel the impact of the current recession.

Schools can help feed hungry children in the summer by participating in the Summer Food Program.

The Summer Food Program provides federal funding for public and private nonprofit schools (as well as local government agencies and private nonprofit organizations) to provide healthy meals and snacks to low-income children during the summer. For schools, summer programs have an added benefit since they combat “summer learning loss” by providing educational and enrichment activities. Many schools already participate and serve low-income children nutritious meals and snacks during the summer. However, too many communities still do not have access to summer food programs and need school districts to fill that gap by administering summer food programs.

Sponsor the Summer Food Program: Since they are used to operating meal programs (like school lunch and breakfast), schools are in a strong position to sponsor the Summer Food Program. The sponsor identifies sites such as schools, parks, camps, community centers, or faith-based communities that will distribute the food. School districts can receive Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) funding to reimburse the costs of providing food to the sites. They receive the maximum reimbursement rate per meal regardless of their costs and are responsible for less paperwork.

Summer food sites such as schools, community centers, parks, or camps provide nutritious meals to children. To qualify as a site, the facility must be located in a low-income neighborhood (at least 50 percent or more of the children in the area are eligible for free or reduced-price meals) or must serve primarily low-income children (at least 50 percent of the children must be eligible for free or reduced-price meals). Summer camps and sites serving primarily migrant children also can participate, but under slightly different rules.

Schools can also choose the Seamless Summer Option, which allows schools to feed children through the National School Lunch Program rather than switching to the Summer Food Program. It follows the same eligibility rules for sites as the Summer Food Program, and all the meals are reimbursed at the free school meal reimbursement rates.

Spread the Word about Summer Food: It is important to make sure that parents are aware of the program and available resources. Flyers, public service announcements (PSA), banners, and kick-off parties are all great ways to spread the word. Summer outreach materials developed by the Food Research and Action Center are available online at:

http://www.frac.org/afterschool/summer_toolkit.htm

Get Started Today! To learn more about how to get involved in the summer food program and help feed hungry children in your community, contact your state’s Child Nutrition Agency. A directory of agencies is provided online at

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Contacts/StateDirectory.htm>