

Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation: Summer Nutrition Status Report 2009

Executive Summary & Implications for Arizona

Even in good economic times, millions of families struggle to feed their children healthy, filling meals when schools close for the summer and they lose access to the free and reduced-price school meals on which they depend. These are not good economic times. Millions of parents are now unemployed or have had their wages cut, and their families' budgets are overwhelmed. As summer begins, parents of the nearly 16.8 million children who relied on the National School Lunch Program for free or reduced-price meals every day during the 2007-2008 school year must now figure out how to prevent their children from going hungry.

Two federal programs—the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP)—are designed to fill this food gap and provide children from low-income families the kind of nutritious meals and snacks in the summer that they receive during the school year. Congress is preparing to take up the reauthorization of these programs; this is an opportunity to make necessary improvements that will expand the reach of the child nutrition programs.

This annual Summer Nutrition Status Report is published by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC).

Key findings from the report

National Data

- Nationally in July 2008, an average of 2.9 million children participated in the Summer Nutrition Programs each day (i.e., the Summer Food Service Program and the National School Lunch Program combined).
- In July 2008, 17.3 children received Summer Nutrition for every 100 low-income students who received lunch in the 2007-2008 school year, compared to a ratio of 17.5:100 children in July 2007.
- From July 2007 to July 2008 participation in Summer Nutrition grew by 1.7 percent.
- In July 2008 if every state had reached the goal of serving 40 children summer meals for every 100 receiving free and reduced-price lunches during the 2007-2008 school year, an additional 3.8 million children would have been served each day, and states would have collected an additional \$250 million in federal child nutrition funding.

Arizona Data

- In Arizona, 41,617 low-income children received summer meals in July 2008.
- In Arizona, 10.6 children ate summer meals for every 100 children who ate lunch in school year 2007-2008. Arizona ranked 39 out of 51 states.
- If Arizona was able to boost participation to serve 40 percent of eligible low-income children, the

state would feed an additional 116,097 children and gain \$7,630,456 in federal child nutrition funds.

Child Nutrition Reauthorization and Summer Nutrition – Recommendations for Congress

- **Improve the area eligibility test from its current 50 percent to 40 percent.** The current threshold is higher than it was in the programs' earlier stages and keeps many communities with significant numbers of low-income children from qualifying, depriving millions of children of the nutritious meals and snacks that they need.
- **Restore the reimbursement rates, indexed to inflation.** The SFSP reimbursement rates were cut by 10 percent in 1996, making it extremely difficult for SFSP sponsors to participate without losing money.
- **Provide start-up and expansion grants.** Without these dollars, it is extremely difficult to recruit new sponsors and to encourage current sponsors to serve additional sites, both of which are necessary in order to grow participation.
- **Provide funding for transportation costs.** In rural areas, transportation is one of the biggest barriers to Summer Nutrition participation. Providing funding to get children to Summer Nutrition Programs that offer high quality educational and enrichment activities is a vital way to support access in rural areas.