

# Deep Dive: How We Can End Child Summer Hunger through Child Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR)

Fact Sheet | April 2022



**Children consume up to 50 percent of their total daily calories at school during the school year. When school is out for the summer, millions of children who rely on school breakfast and lunch programs do not access meal assistance.**

Lawmakers must strengthen summer feeding programs to ensure every child has access to the food they need to grow and thrive when school ends and summer begins.

## What Happens When Children Go Hungry During the Summer?

- Children are more likely to consume empty but filling calories that **increase risk of childhood obesity**.
- Students who do not get enough nutrition over the summer months **are more likely to experience long-term health consequences** than their more affluent peers.
- Studies show students from families with low incomes **experience a greater “summer slide”** in academics than their peers, returning to school two months behind in reading.

## We Can End Child Summer Hunger by Investing in Summer Feeding Programs

Congress can ensure more children can get the meals they need to grow and thrive during the summer by pursuing a two-pronged strategy that will make it easier for communities to establish summer feeding sites in underserved areas and also give states the flexibility to feed kids in alternate ways.

## Strengthen Summer Feeding Sites

🔗 **Support the Summer Meals Act of 2021:** S.1170 from Senators Gillibrand (D-NY) and Murkowski (R-AK) and H.R.783 from the late Representative Young (R-AK) and Representative Larsen (D-WA)

## Streamline regulations for community-based providers so they can feed children year-round

**Why?** Right now, community-based organizations like food banks and other nonprofits have to switch between operating SFSP and the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) to provide meals during the summer and after school.

Congress can allow organizations to operate SFSP all year to eliminate duplicative administrative processes and ensure organizations are able to focus on feeding kids.



**Impact on the ground:** The Community FoodBank of New Jersey aims to reach children facing hunger – no matter the time of year. The food bank supports afterschool programs with nutritious balanced meals and snacks during the school year and serves some of those same institutions during the summer months. However, some sites are not able to continue year-round due to burdensome paperwork and associated costs with switching between programs, leaving families without consistent options.

## What Are Summer Feeding Programs?

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) provides summer meals through a strong public-private partnership that helps to feed children from families with low income during the summer months.

Reimbursable meals are provided through the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) by non-school providers, and the National School Lunch Program’s Seamless Summer Option by school providers. The summer meal programs leverage the staff and facilities of thousands of charitable organizations, including food banks, to offer summer feeding and enrichment programs such as cooking courses, physical activity, and academic enrichment. SFSP offers federal meal **reimbursement** for healthy meals served and consumed on site.

## Why Do Children Face Summer Hunger?

■ **Child nutrition programs provide a critical safeguard against hunger**, but they are only effective when they reach the children who need help.

■ While the summer meal programs are intended to provide free meals and snacks to eligible children during the summer months, **in 2019, before the pandemic, fewer than 17 percent of eligible children received a meal through SFSP**.

■ Nationwide, **fewer than 4 million children received food assistance through a summer feeding program in the summer of 2019, compared to nearly 22 million children who receive lunch assistance during the school year**, before the pandemic. The most striking access gap across federal nutrition programs is seen with summer feeding.

■ Black people are 3.2 times more likely, Native Americans are 3 times more likely, and Latinos are 2.5 times more likely to live in food insecure households than white people. Those disproportionate rates of likely facing hunger may be exacerbated during the summer.

## **Align the area eligibility requirement for summer feeding and educational programs to allow more learning programs to offer meals in the summer**

**Why?** The area eligibility test works best in population-dense areas. In suburban and rural areas where children travel greater distances to get to school or in areas with greater socioeconomic diversity, communities may fail to meet the area eligibility test, although they have a large number of children in need. Reducing the area eligibility threshold from 50 percent of area children eligible for free or reduced-price school meals to 40 percent would allow more community providers to offer meals in the summer. This change would reduce sponsors' paperwork, grow participation, and increase focus on site enrichment activities and nutritious meals. More programs offering meals in the summer means more children receiving meals closer to home.



**Impact on the ground:** Feeding Southwest Virginia noted that without additional waivers, their food bank would not be able to reach more than 80 percent of the children they serve. Without the area eligibility waiver, the food bank would miss out on numerous children whose parents commute to work in the food bank's area and leave their children in childcare programs but who are not eligible for food and more because of the location of the food bank's SFSP site.

## **Allow Alternate Strategies to Help Feed Children When Schools Are Closed**

✦ **Support the Hunger-Free Summer for Kids Act of 2021:** S.2005 from Senators Boozman (R-AR) and Leahy (D-VT)

✦ **Support the Stop Child Hunger Act of 2021:** S.1831 from Senator Murray (D-WA) and H.R.3519 from Representatives Levin (D-CA) and Hayes (D-CT)

## **Provide a Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) grocery card to families with children eligible for free and reduced-price school meals during the summer months and when schools are closed to supplement their household food budgets**

**Why?** Pandemic EBT (P-EBT), like previous Summer EBT pilots, provides families with funds on an EBT card to make up for meals missed at school due to disruptions. Evaluations of both programs prove they are effective at lowering food insecurity among children and lead to more nutritious meals. Making a program like those permanent will ensure children in need can access the healthy meals they need to thrive.



**Impact on the ground:** The Food Bank of Alaska hopes that with the extension of P-EBT they will be able to increase the overall number of eligible families that receive benefits and will be able to continue coordinating with their partners to support further education and outreach of the program.

## **Allow kids to consume meals off-site, which would enable communities to adopt innovative program models to reach children who lack access to a summer feeding site**

**Why?** Site-based models for food delivery to kids aren't always accessible, especially since children are dispersed during the summer. Some children are at day camps and enrichment programs, but others are at home – making them harder to reach through a single, site-based delivery model. During the pandemic, Congress allowed non-school food providers to use alternate delivery models to serve kids in hard-to-reach areas – a change we should keep.

**Impact on the ground:** The Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina began providing SFSP emergency meals in March of 2020 when schools closed. The food bank set up meal distribution sites at three restaurants where grab-and-go meals were available along with hot lunches. Through this creative partnership, the food bank provided over 13,000 meals to children that may not have been aware of their programs otherwise. Several other sites used the drive-thru model to minimize contact with families, providing a week's worth of cold or frozen meals at a time. Numerous rural sites offered home deliveries to families without transportation. Other sites provided curbside meal pick-up. Additionally, to serve children not supported through SFSP, the food bank purchased and distributed dry and flash-frozen meals and distributed over 150,000 additional breakfast and lunch meal kits.



### **Have questions or need more information?**

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