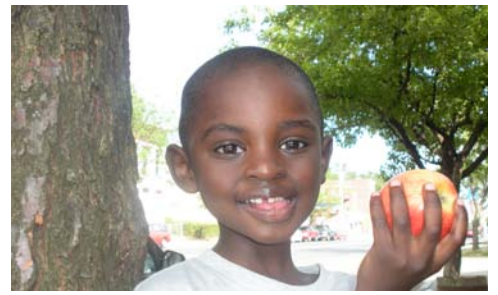


# Bridging the Summer Nutrition Gap: The Summer Food Service Program in NYS 2009, Executive Summary



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**Hunger doesn't take a vacation!  
Children need access to good nutrition all year long.**

During the school year, children across NYS rely on school meals. However, summer break often creates a nutritional gap for too many low-income children. The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) is a federally and NYS state-funded program that helps ensure children do not go hungry.

Summer meals provide many benefits to children: they are free and nutritious; they may help curb obesity in children; they support adequate vitamins and minerals for upcoming school year academic-readiness; and they promote increased positive peer interactions.

In addition, the SFSP benefits communities: free meals help parents/adult caregivers stretch food dollars; meal preparation creates summer employment opportunities; free meals augment camp and other summer program services; and since meals are federally and state funded, millions of dollars are infused into our local economies because each summer meal served and claimed for reimbursement draws down federal funding.

**June 2010**

Despite the numerous benefits of eating and serving summer meals, not many children and teens in NYS are participating in the SFSP. Reasons for low participation include: lack of program sponsors; lack of meal sites; inaccessible or inconvenient meal site locations; lack of activities at sites to attract children to meal sites; and lack of awareness about availability of free meals.

To overcome these barriers, federal and state government as well as communities can take action. Conducting outreach and promotion of available meal sites can boost participation and reach more children. In addition, organizing volunteers and activities at sites to engage children around the meal service time can attract children to sites. Further, federal and state authorities can do more to increase program access by expanding program eligibility for sponsors and sites, increase per-meal reimbursements, and offer start-up grants to organizations new to the SFSP.

Non-profits, school districts, food banks, local government entities, and other community-based organizations can be involved in the SFSP. Qualifying entities can be program sponsors and/or meal sites. SFSP sponsors handle program operations, menu planning, and paperwork. SFSP sites are where children eat. Examples include parks, camps, schools, playgrounds, churches, low-income housing sites, and other neighborhood locations. Since the SFSP is intended to help low-income children, meal sites are usually located in areas of high-need or areas where many low-income children are congregated.

During July 2009, nearly 265,000 children ate summer lunch in NYS at nearly 2,400 meal sites operated by over 280 sponsors (NYSED, 2010).

It is important for communities and individuals to recognize the benefits of the SFSP and help low-income children bridge the summer nutrition gap.

## Key Findings about the SFSP in NYS Summer 2009

### **Lunch and Breakfast are the Most Common Meals Served:**

Most summer food programs are given the option of serving a certain combination of the following meals each day: breakfast, lunch, snack, and/or supper. Overwhelmingly throughout NYS, sponsors/sites offer breakfast and lunch. During July 2009, nearly 3.5 million breakfasts and over 5.7 million lunches were served to children. On average, nearly 155,000 children ate summer breakfast daily and nearly 265,000 children ate summer lunch daily in July. Approximately half of all breakfasts and lunches served were to children in upstate New York and the other half to those in New York City.

### **Many Upstate Counties Have Very Few Summer Food**

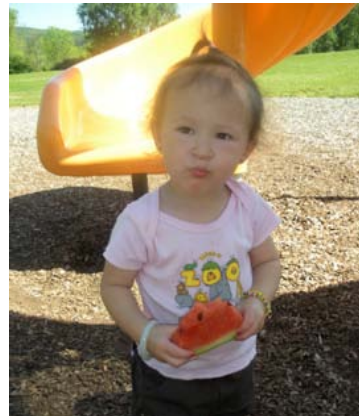
**Sites:** During July 2009, there were a total of nearly 2,400 summer meal sites. Twenty two upstate counties throughout NYS had five or fewer summer meal sites for children in operation. Six upstate counties had one or zero summer food sites for children.

### **Participation in the Summer Food Service Program is Significantly Lower than in the National School Lunch**

**Program:** School lunch participation remains high amongst low-income children. However, just because the traditional school year ends doesn't mean the need for affordable, good nutrition for low-income children also ends. Children who eat free (or reduced-price) lunch at school also benefit from free lunch during the summer. In NYS, too many low-income children are missing out on summer lunch. During July 2009, less than 30% of all low-income children eating school lunch also ate summer lunch.

**NYS is Missing Out on Millions of Federal Dollars:** For each meal served, summer food sponsors receive a per-meal reimbursement, primarily from the federal government, to pay for meal-related costs. Since serving more meals means more reimbursement, it is financially advantageous for NYS to increase participation in the SFSP. If 40% of the low-income children eating school lunch with the National School Lunch Program also ate summer lunch with the SFSP, NYS would receive \$10.4 million additional federal reimbursement dollars annually.

*Data based on information provided by NYSED*



## Recommendations for the SFSP in NYS

### **Federal Recommendations:**

- Expand the eligibility criteria for open sites so more communities can serve meals.
- Increase access to summer meals in rural areas via grants to address higher fuel costs and longer distances to reach children in more remote locations.
- Increase the per-meal reimbursement rates.

### **NYS Recommendations:**

- Require schools with 50% or more students eligible for free and reduced-price school meals to operate the SFSP (if no local SFSP is already in existence).
- Integrate more technology into program administration and operation.
- Provide incentive for new sponsors and/or sites to operate the program in the form of start-up grants for meal-related equipment.

### **Local Recommendations:**

- Encourage individual engagement to help out and support local meal sites.
- Encourage communities where the SFSP is in operation to collaboratively promote and increase access to meal sites.
- Encourage sponsors to serve meals that are nutritious and culturally appropriate as possible.

To access the full report online, please visit:  
[www.nutritionconsortium.org](http://www.nutritionconsortium.org)  
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