



# CHILD NUTRITION REAUTHORIZATION 2019

NO KID HUNGRY IN SUMMER



## SUMMER IS THE HUNGRIEST TIME OF THE YEAR

Many kids in America are excited for the last day of school, but for many low-income children, summer is a time filled with worry and anxiety about hunger.

During the school year, many families participate in federal nutrition programs like school breakfast, school lunch or afterschool meals. But when schools close for the summer, these programs are no longer available, and this puts a strain on family budgets. When kids don't get the consistent nutrition they need, it has a long-term impact on their health, development and ability to learn. For example, studies show that hunger is linked to the "summer slide," while nutritious meals protect against cognitive decline and summer learning loss.

Many families are forced to make difficult trade-offs between paying for groceries or paying rent and utility bills. This has long-term consequences for a child's health, education and well-being.

## TOO MANY KIDS AREN'T GETTING THE SUMMER MEALS THEY NEED

Created in 1975, the federal Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) was designed to ensure that low-income children get the nutrition they need when school is not in session. Funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, administered by state agencies and hosted at thousands of local organizations like schools, churches and community centers, these meals are a lifeline for kids around the nation.

Too often, however, the traditional program, which requires kids get to and from a meal site every day, isn't reaching most of the kids who need it. Of the 21 million low-income children participating in the National School Lunch Program, only 3.4 million are participating in the summer meal program, meaning sites are only reaching about 16% of potential need. The most common barriers children and families face in accessing summer meals can only be solved through legislation.

## CURRENT PROGRAM BARRIERS



**Neighborhoods:** Summer meals sites are open to all kids in the area of a school where 50% of the enrolled students qualify for free and reduced-price meals. But a difference of a few blocks could mean the difference between a child receiving a summer meal or not.



**Transportation:** With school buses not operating and parents at work, many kids lack transportation to summer meal sites. Fuel costs and limited public transportation, especially in rural communities, can also prevent kids from getting to a meal site.



**Safety:** Sometimes, getting to a summer meal site may require children cross busy streets or walk through unsafe neighborhoods.



**Weather:** Extreme heat, thunderstorms and other severe weather can close sites, many of which operate out of doors.



**Red Tape:** Excessive administrative bureaucracy prevents many schools, faith-based organizations and community groups from providing meals to kids in need.

## IT'S TIME TO UPDATE THE SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM

There are better ways to reach kids with the meals they need. Congress can enact common sense policy solutions that could lead to a Summer Meals program that more effectively and efficiently reaches kids with nutrition during the summer months. Through the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Process, lawmakers have the chance to update and improve the summer meals program so it better meets the needs of children from low-income families, no matter where they live.



6 out of 7

Kids who may need summer meals but are missing out



33%

How much Summer EBT reduces very low food security among children, according to a USDA Summer EBT evaluation



\$300

Additional amount low-income families spend on monthly groceries during summer

## SUMMER HUNGER SOLUTIONS AND PRIORITIES

Today's summer meals program operates under an inflexible policy approach that does not fully meet the needs of low-income families and children, especially those living in rural and hard-to-reach communities. Where summer meal sites work well, they're a lifeline for families, offering enrichment and learning activities and a safe place for kids to be in the summer. But summer meals are only reaching a fraction of the kids in need.

We can do better.

Below are recommendations for practical, effective policy solutions to maximize efficiencies by allowing flexibility in the program so summer meals can better reach hungry kids, no matter where they live.

### Provide regulatory relief by allowing for flexibility in the program's "congregate feeding" requirement.

The current Summer Meals program operates under a "congregate" model, mandating that children consume meals onsite. Transportation and extreme weather can be major challenges to this requirement. Providing flexibility around this regulation would allow providers in specific areas to bring meals to children, effectively expanding their reach. This would be particularly helpful in rural and hard-to-reach communities.

### Permanently authorize the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (Summer EBT).

In 2010, the U.S. Department of Agriculture established a demonstration project called the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer in a small number of states to directly reach children with nutrition during the summer months. The project provides a modest additional grocery benefit to families during the summer months through an electronic benefit transfer system like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP.) The program was a success, showing this is an effective way to reach children, especially in rural communities. The prevalence of the most severe food insecurity among children decreased by a third, while healthy eating habits increased. The project today operates in 10 states and Indian Tribal Organizations but this will be reduced to just four in 2020.

### Streamline existing meal programs to reduce red tape and bureaucracy.

Currently, the federal afterschool meals program and the federal summer meals program operate as two separate programs with two sets of rules and regulations, two sets of audits and two sets of staff training. The paperwork, red tape and amount of time spent on doing all of this work twice can act as a deterrent, with fewer organizations able to act as summer meal sites. Streamlining these two programs and allowing them to operate under a single set of rules and regulations would reduce administrative burdens, foster greater efficiency and ultimately reach more kids with the food they need.

# No Kid Hungry Contacts

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## Sources

- [No Kid Hungry Center for Best Practices: Summer Meals](#)
- [No Kid Hungry: Summer Hunger is Too Expensive to Ignore, 2015](#)
- [No Kid Hungry National Summer Meals Survey Major Findings, 2013](#)
- [USDA Report Shows Monthly Summer EBT Benefit Reduces Food Insecurity in Children, Improves Nutrition](#)
- [FRAC Summer Nutrition Status Report, June 2018](#)



## About No Kid Hungry

No child should go hungry in America. But 1 in 6 kids will face hunger this year. No Kid Hungry is ending childhood hunger through effective programs that provide kids with the food they need. This is a problem we know how to solve. No Kid Hungry is a campaign of Share Our Strength, an organization working to end hunger and poverty.