

Maryland Hunger Solutions

Policy Brief: Summer Nutrition in Maryland's Counties

2010

SUMMER IN MARYLAND'S COUNTIES: SUMMARY

- *The Summer Nutrition Programs are designed to ensure that children have access to nutritious food when school is out, but they reach only one out of every four eligible low-income children in Maryland.*
- *While the programs serve too few children, participation is moving in the right direction. Participation increased to 24 percent of Maryland's low-income children receiving summer meals in 2009 from 21 percent in 2008.*
- *County participation varied widely, from a high of 59 percent in Baltimore City to a low of zero children in Carroll County. Nine counties around the state served less than one-tenth of their low-income children.*
- *To varying degrees, all counties face challenges in terms of finding enough sites that are eligible, transportation to get children and food to the sites, and funding that must be overcome in order to operate the Summer Nutrition Programs. These barriers stand in the way of reaching the expanding number of children who would be eligible for the meals.*
- *Hunger doesn't take a vacation, and all counties in Maryland must continue to make it a priority to increase the number of sponsors and sites. The Child Nutrition Act, being reauthorized this year, provides a number of opportunities for improvement that would expand the number of children reached, such as lowering area eligibility tests so that more children from low-income communities can participate and providing grants to sponsors for start-up, expansion and transportation so that more children can be served.*

INTRODUCTION

As the Great Recession devastated the finances of Marylanders in 2009, too many families struggled to put a meal on the table. In Maryland, one in five households with children said they couldn't afford enough food for their families last year, according to data collected by Gallup and analyzed by the Food Research and Action Center.

In light of these challenging economic times, the child nutrition programs are even more important. During the school year, more than one in four of Maryland's low-income public school children, almost 219,000 students, depended on the National School Lunch Program for free or reduced-price meals every day. But for the majority of those children, the end of the school year also meant the end of the healthy, filling meals they counted on and a summer of struggling to avoid going hungry.

The Summer Nutrition Programs can fill that hunger gap, but they also provide other benefits to Maryland's children.

- **They reduce childhood obesity.** Research finds that children gain more weight during the summer. Summer Nutrition Programs provide meals that meet federal nutrition standards, thus providing many children well-balanced

Participation in Summer Nutrition: Five Best Performing and Bottom Worst Performing Counties in Reaching Low-Income Children

Top Five	
Baltimore City	59.0
Somerset	37.0
Montgomery	27.9
Prince George's	18.7
Kent	18.5
Bottom Five	
Calvert	4.8
Cecil	4.6
Caroline	3.7
Howard	3.4
Carroll	0.0

meals that are nutritionally superior to the meals they would consume on their own. This, combined with fun exercise, supports children's health and well-being.

- **They combat summer learning loss.** Summer learning loss, in which children typically lose two months of knowledge, has been shown to affect low-income children at a higher rate than their higher-income peers. Fortunately, studies find that high quality summer programs can ameliorate the loss. The meals and snacks provided through the Summer Nutrition Programs attract children to quality summer programs and provide the nutrition necessary for them to be fully engaged. The federal nutrition dollars provide financial help to programs so they can improve services or reach more children.

Expanding the reach of the Summer Nutrition Programs in Maryland would not only reduce hunger and boost learning among low-income children, it also would help struggling families and allow the state to access more federal dollars.

KEY FINDINGS FOR SUMMER 2009

State Findings

On weekdays in 2009, an average of 51,866 children received lunch through the Summer Nutrition Programs in Maryland. Approximately 24 low-income children received a lunch in July for every 100 that received a free or reduced-price public school lunch during the school year. This is an increase from summer 2008 when only 21 low-income children received lunch in July for every 100 that received a free or reduced-price meal.

Because there has been broad participation in the National School Lunch Program, Maryland Hunger Solutions uses it as a benchmark against which to measure participation in the Summer Nutrition Programs. It uses data from July, which is the month that most summer programs in the state are fully operational.

District	Summer to NSLP Ratio 2008	District Rank Summer 2008	Summer to NSLP Ratio 2009	District Rank Summer 2009
Allegany	7.8	15	9.4	13
Anne Arundel	12.1	10	11.4	8
Baltimore	8.4	13	10.6	12
Calvert	3.7	19	4.8	18
Caroline	1.9	21	3.7	20
Carroll	0	23	0.0	23
Cecil	0.3	20	4.6	22
Charles	4.6	14	10.4	17
Dorchester	8.6	8	13.8	11
Frederick	5.7	17	8.6	15
Garrett	5.7	16	9.1	16
Harford	10.4	9	13.3	10
Howard	2.2	22	3.4	19
Kent	16.4	5	18.5	5
Montgomery	25.5	3	27.9	2
Prince George's	14	4	18.7	7
Queen Anne's	0.5	11	10.8	21
St. Mary's	6.1	18	7.8	14
Somerset	21	2	37.0	3
Talbot	NA	NA	NA	NA
Washington	10.8	12	10.6	9
Wicomico	14.4	7	14.6	6
Worcester	20.3	6	17.5	4
Baltimore City	55.2	1	59.0	1
Maryland State	23.5		21.0	

The Summer Nutrition Programs

The two federal Summer Nutrition Programs—the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)—provide funding to serve meals and snacks to children: at sites where at least half the children in the geographic area are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals; at sites in which at least 50 percent of the children participating in the program are individually determined eligible for free or reduced-price school meals; and at sites that serve primarily migrant children. Once the site is eligible, all of the children can eat for free. Some summer camps also can participate.

The NSLP also reimburses schools for feeding children that attend summer school. Only schools are eligible to participate in the NSLP (but they can use the NSLP to provide meals and snacks to non-school as well as school sites over the summer). Public and private nonprofit schools, local governments, National Youth Sports Programs, and private nonprofit organizations can participate in the SFSP and operate one or multiple sites.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) provides the funding through a state agency in each state—usually the state department of education.

Although participation in Maryland has increased, there are still many children that miss out on summer meals and counties that miss out on federal funds. Increasing participation in the Summer Nutrition Programs from its current 24 percent to at least 40 percent would improve the nutritional status of more than 43,000 additional low-income children in Maryland, as well as bring in almost \$3 million dollars in federal reimbursements.

County Findings

In counties across the state, the rate of participation in the Summer Nutrition Programs varied widely. The highest rate of participation was in Baltimore City where 59 low-income children participated in Summer Nutrition for every 100 that ate lunch during the school year. Despite the wide range of participation rates, almost every county in the state increased participation. Only three counties – Anne Arundel, Washington and Worcester – saw a decrease in the ratio of participating students from summer 2008 to summer 2009. Carroll County remained at the bottom, having no summer nutrition sponsors or sites in the county and serving zero children. The county, however, does not have any schools with more than 50 percent of enrolled students eligible for free and reduced- price meals, so it is slightly more difficult for the county to establish qualified sites that can participate in the Summer Nutrition Programs and serve meals to children.

Only two other counties – Montgomery and Somerset counties – were able to reach at least one-fifth of eligible low-income children. The top five counties (Baltimore City, Somerset, Montgomery, Prince George's and Kent) represent very different regions of the state – urban, suburban and rural areas – showing that any county can perform better.

Nine counties (Allegany, Calvert, Caroline, Carroll, Cecil, Frederick, Garrett, Howard and St. Mary's) around the state served less than one-tenth of their low-income children. Talbot County served breakfasts and snacks, but did not serve lunch to children during July and so did not show up on this sample of summer meals.

Although more counties are serving more than 10 percent of their eligible students and the ratio and number of students being served has increased from summer 2008 to summer 2009, there is still more work that can be done to increase awareness and participation in the program.

MAKING SUMMER NUTRITION WORK

The Summer Nutrition Programs are an important answer to hunger in the summer, but they are underutilized across the country and in Maryland. It is important that the state focus on ways to ensure that the children who use the school meal programs during the year do not face empty stomachs during the summer. The fact that Maryland managed to increase participation in the middle of a deep recession shows that there are inherent strengths in the program on which administrators and policymakers can build. Still, only one in four low-income children in Maryland receives summer meals. This highlights the need for federal and state action to improve and strengthen the Summer Nutrition

Charles County Serving Young and Old

The Nanjemoy Community Center in Charles County provides summer meals to old and young alike. The Center initially provided meals just to seniors by serving as a congregate meal site and as a Meals on Wheels central drop off site. Meals for both programs were provided by Charles County Public Schools Nutrition Department. Nanjemoy staff started to notice that some seniors were missing meals during the summer because they were caring for grandchildren at home. During summer 2009, Nanjemoy Community Center and Patrick Tague, the Director of Nutrition for Charles County Public Schools decided to address the issue by using the Summer Nutrition Programs to serve meals to students during the summer and bring the grandparents back to the center.

Everything lined up perfectly for the center, which was already in the process in starting up a summer camp, to start serving summer meals. It was located in an area that made it eligible to participate in the Summer Nutrition Programs; the school system was already catering and delivering meals to the site; and it was a natural place for grandchildren to gather. The community center used their existing staff to provide basic activities, such as Wii and coloring pages for students who came to their site. In addition, the three-week summer camp provided more structured daily activities for children who may not have otherwise been able to enjoy the safe, fun experiences of "summer camp."

With all this programming in place, Nanjemoy Community Center, with the Charles County Public Schools catering and delivering meals, created an intergenerational summer meal model that works. They were able to serve 259 breakfasts, 664 lunches and 246 snacks (approximately 130 young people in all) through all their programming for young people. The Center planned to continue the program through the rest of the summer and will be open for all children in the community to attend. In a rural and somewhat isolated community, the Nanjemoy Community Center has become an important resource for meals and programming for seniors and young people during the summer.

Programs so they can fully respond to the economic crisis by removing the ongoing barriers to reaching hungry children in the summer. But, there are several challenges to address:

Qualifying sites for area eligibility. The best, easiest, and most frequently used way that sites qualify for the Summer Nutrition Programs is through “area eligibility.” If a program is located in a low-income area (as defined by school data or Census data), then the site can participate and receive federal reimbursement for all the children who eat at the site. The current definition for low-income requires that 50 percent of the children in the area be eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. Urban areas, such as Baltimore City, often have an easier time running the Summer Nutrition Programs because these communities tend to be more densely populated and it is easier to qualify sites. Conversely, rural and suburban areas with more disperse low-income populations have a more difficult time qualifying sites for the programs.

Transporting students to the sites. Transportation during the summer is a challenge when school is out of session, especially in suburban and rural areas. In urban areas, such as Baltimore City, many schools and sites are within walking distance or have public transportation options for older children. Some suburban and rural communities have used additional funding to provide transportation to students or provide the summer meals through mobile summer food sites.

Marketing the program to children and families. Many families are unaware that they can take advantage of the benefits of the Summer Nutrition Programs. Successful programs have created partnerships with government agencies, community based organizations, faith-based organizations, and businesses to create marketing campaigns to reach out to the community and inform parents and children about the programs. Flyers, posters, public service announcements and media events (such as kick-off parties) are all great ways to increase awareness of the program in the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Maryland should support growth in the Summer Nutrition Programs through state legislation and by easing administrative barriers:

- The state should work to support the expansion of Summer Nutrition Programs to cover the entire summer recess. Many sites are only open for a limited period, curtailing their ability to fully reach children in need. Programs should be designed so that they are a reliable source for meals throughout the summer.
- The state has started to and should expand even further its partnership with schools, advocates, and public officials to conduct a broad and timely outreach campaign to recruit new sponsors and sites, as well as to let parents and children know where and when programs are available in their community. Promoting the program before the school year ends helps to ensure that children and parents are informed about the program.

Costs of Low Participation: Five Counties that Missed the Most Federal Dollars Additional Federal Funding if Counties Reached 40 Low-Income Children with Summer Meals for Every 100 Receiving School Lunch		
County	Additional Students	Dollars Lost
Prince George’s	10,287	\$708,367
Baltimore	8,178	\$563,136
Montgomery	3,446	\$237,299
Anne Arundel	3,298	\$227,075
Washington	1,900	\$130,861

The Governor’s Partnership to End Childhood Hunger partners with the Maryland State Department of Education, and others to help raise awareness about summer meals

During summer 2009, the Partnership sent out almost 187,000 postcards to Cecil, Frederick and Prince George’s counties. Every principal in those counties received a letter from the governor letting them know about the Summer Nutrition Programs and postcards that should go out to every student in their schools. The Governor’s Office for Children also began taking calls on the Summer Nutrition hotline last summer, receiving over 600 calls – the vast majority of those who called found out about the program through the backpack mailers. Although the calls came from over 90 different zip codes, Prince George’s County represented the most calls to the hotline. All three counties showed an increase in the ratio of students participating from summer 2008. This year, the Partnership expanded its outreach efforts. In fact, calls to the summer meals hotline this summer already surpassed last year’s total. Last year, the hotline received a total of 620 calls. As of June 29, 2010, the hotline already received more than 800 calls.

County School Districts should use local authority to ensure that more students are participating:

- Every school district should offer summer meals in all of its schools where 50 percent or more of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. The leadership and resources of a school district can make a substantial difference in Summer Nutrition participation. In addition to sponsoring the programs, school districts can work with other agencies or summer programs to ensure that the program is broadly available in the community.
- Local communities – under the leadership of elected officials, schools, park and recreation departments, Local Management Boards, or other local government entities – need to assess the extent to which children can access the Summer Nutrition Programs and develop strategies to address the barriers preventing children from getting to the sites, such as lack of transportation. They should also develop strategies to increase the number of sites in the community and the length of time that the sites operate each summer.
- Sponsors should offer nutritious, appealing meals that include fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat milk. USDA sets guidelines to ensure that all meals served to children are balanced and nutritious, but sponsors can make meals even more appealing to children by offering fresh, appetizing meals that exceed these minimal guidelines. Combined with fun exercise, the Summer Nutrition Programs are an important resource for providing children with the healthy diet and physical activity they need.

Congress should improve the Summer Nutrition Programs so that more of Maryland's children are able to participate. The current Child Nutrition Reauthorization process gives Congress the opportunity to fix problems in the Summer Nutrition Programs (some of them created by previous congressional budget cuts), and to make targeted new investments that will increase the number of children who have access to nutritious meals during the summer. Needed changes include:

- Lowering the area eligibility requirement from 50 percent to 40 percent. In doing so, Congress would be reversing previous increases to the eligibility level; prior to 1981, the threshold for an area participating was 33 percent. The 50 percent threshold keeps too many of Maryland's communities with many low-income children from participating. By lowering the threshold to 40 percent more low-income children will have access to the program, especially in rural areas. As of October 31, 2008, Maryland had 593 sites that met the 50 percent threshold. But, if area eligibility was set at 40 percent, an additional 143 sites (for a total of 763) would qualify;
- Providing grants to sponsors for start-up and expansion costs and transportation of children in order to bring new sponsors into the program and allow existing sponsors to serve more children;
- Expanding to all states the Year-Round Summer Food Pilot (currently only in effect in California), which reduces paperwork and eases administrative requirements for community-based sponsors that serve children during both the summer and after school during the school year; and
- Restoring reimbursement rates, which were cut in 1996 by 10 percent, to prior levels so that schools, local government agencies, and private nonprofit organizations are able to operate the program without losing money and can provide healthier food.

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Summer Nutrition in Maryland's Counties

District	Number of Summer Agencies	Number of Summer Sites	Summer 2009 Participants	School Year 2008-2009 F&RP Lunch Students	F & RP Students in Summer 2009 per 100 in School Year 2008-2009 Lunch	Rank	If State Reached a Ratio of 40 Children in Summer Nutrition Per 100 in School Year NSLP		
							Total Children Who Would Be in July Summer Nutrition	Additional Children Reached	Additional Federal Reimbursement State Would Receive
Allegany	3	12	336	3,590	9.4	15	1,436	1,100	\$75,731
Anne Arundel	3	25	1,308	11,514	11.4	10	4,606	3,298	\$227,075
Baltimore	5	116	2,930	27,771	10.6	13	11,108	8,178	\$563,136
Calvert	2	2	86	1,801	4.8	19	720	634	\$43,667
Caroline	2	4	75	2,014	3.7	21	806	731	\$50,313
Carroll	0	0	0	2,604	0.0	23	1,042	1,042	\$71,713
Cecil	3	8	173	3,767	4.6	20	1,507	1,334	\$91,870
Charles	1	2	534	5,128	10.4	14	2,051	1,517	\$104,488
Dorchester	6	6	264	1,913	13.8	8	765	501	\$34,537
Frederick	2	20	476	5,511	8.6	17	2,204	1,728	\$119,005
Garrett	1	9	136	1,483	9.1	16	593	457	\$31,507
Harford	1	12	918	6,918	13.3	9	2,767	1,849	\$127,321
Howard	1	5	176	5,173	3.4	22	2,069	1,893	\$130,361
Kent	1	3	141	759	18.5	5	304	163	\$11,218
Montgomery	1	114	7,974	28,551	27.9	3	11,420	3,446	\$237,299
Prince George's	4	218	9,062	48,373	18.7	4	19,349	10,287	\$708,367
Queen Anne's	1	4	112	1,036	10.8	11	414	302	\$20,788
St. Mary's	3	3	236	3,023	7.8	18	1,209	973	\$66,996
Somerset	4	5	458	1,236	37.0	2	494	36	\$2,520
Talbot	NA	NA	NA	1,060	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Washington	2	67	684	6,460	10.6	12	2,584	1,900	\$130,861
Wicomico	2	20	815	5,583	14.6	7	2,233	1,418	\$97,686
Worcester	1	9	320	1,824	17.5	6	730	410	\$28,219
Baltimore City	6	449	24,652	41,792	59.0	1	--	--	--
State	55	1,113	51,866	218,884	23.9		87,554	43,199	\$2,974,678

TECHNICAL NOTES

The Maryland Department of Education provided Maryland Hunger Solutions (MDHS) with the number of: summer nutrition lunches served in each county; sites; and sponsors. Sites may represent more than one summer program. MDHS calculated each state's July average daily lunch attendance by dividing the total number of lunches served by the total number of weekdays (excluding the Independence Day holiday) in July. MDHS focuses on July data to give a clear picture of participation in the program. Calculating average daily lunch attendance in June or August is complicated by the fact that many schools are still in session in June, or begin the new school year in August. This makes it difficult to compare average daily attendance in June or August from county to county, or even from district to district. MDHS focuses on lunches because that is the meal most commonly served in summer nutrition programs, and there is broad participation during the school year in the National School Lunch Program, which offers a strong benchmark to measure participation in the Summer Nutrition Programs.

RESOURCES

Maryland Hunger Solutions is dedicated to ending hunger in Maryland by raising awareness of the hunger problem among the public, media and policymakers; changing policy and practice to connect struggling families to the Summer Nutrition Programs and other federal nutrition programs; and improving the quality of the nutrition in low-income communities and sites serving children. Maryland Hunger Solutions is an initiative of the Food Research and Action Center. www.mdhungersolutions.org

The **Food Research and Action Center** (FRAC), a national anti-hunger nonprofit organization, has information and resources on the Summer Nutrition Programs and other federal nutrition programs, including state-by-state data and an outreach center. www.frac.org/summer To identify and promote quality summer food sites, FRAC created the Summer Food Standards of Excellence. These standards give a framework to rank Summer Food sites (gold, silver, or bronze), evaluate what works and what does not, identify areas of improvement, and encourage sites to reach the next level of program excellence. www.frac.org/afterschool/pdf/sfstandards.pdf

The **Maryland State Department of Education's** (MSDE) Eat Smart Maryland Web site has an overview of the child nutrition programs available to state residents, including summer food. www.marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/programs/schoolnutrition/ MSDE also provides a Web site and toll-free number that is devoted to listing the summer sites available by county. www.mdsummermeals.org or (877) 731-9300.

The **USDA's Food and Nutrition Service** has a Web site with more information about the Summer Nutrition Programs. www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Summer/.