

Serving Maryland's Children: Measuring Access to Summer Nutrition

Maryland Hunger Solutions | August 2011

Executive Summary

- Maryland did not make progress in meeting the nutrition needs of its low-income children and youth during the summer of 2010. In July 2010, the federally-funded Summer Nutrition Programs, which are designed to ensure that children have access to nutritious food during summer vacation, served lunch to 49,196 children in Maryland on an average day, a decrease of 2,670 children, or 5.1 percent, from July 2009.
- As demand grew dramatically and 19,485 additional low-income Maryland children ate school lunch each day, on average, during the regular school year, participation in the Summer Nutrition Programs dropped. As a result the Summer Nutrition Programs in July served 20.6 children for every 100 low-income children eating lunch during the regular school year, down from a ratio of 23.9:100 in 2009.
- Fewer sponsors and limited growth in the number of sites serving summer meals contributed to the decline. The number of sponsors dropped from 55 in 2009 to 51 in 2010, while the number of sites increased from 1,113 to 1,176 sites – an increase that was not enough to meet the higher need.
- Last summer's extreme weather also contributed to the decrease in participation in the Summer Nutrition Programs, highlighting the need to identify and develop alternative methods to serve children on extreme weather days. In Montgomery County alone, five days of closures due to extreme weather could have decreased the number of meals served in the county by as many as 35,000.
- Participation varied widely across the state, from a high of 47.4 low-income children being served in Baltimore City for every 100 in regular year school meals, to zero in Carroll County. Ten counties around the state served fewer than one in ten of their low-income children.
- Only Baltimore City reached the programmatic goal of serving 40 low-income children summer meals for every 100 receiving school lunch. In fact, Baltimore City's high participation rate had an outsized impact on Maryland's overall rate. Maryland ranked 10th nationally for reaching the most children with summer meals in 2010, but would fall to 37th if Baltimore City was removed from the calculation.
- Decreasing participation rates are not inevitable. The top five jurisdictions for reaching the most low-income children include a mix of rural, suburban, and urban communities, illustrating how the Summer Nutrition Programs can be successful with concentrated outreach and support.
- To ensure that Summer Nutrition Programs are available to low-income children, a multi-faceted approach, including direct outreach to organizations and families and policy changes favorable to increased participation, must be taken at both state and local levels.

Introduction

As the economy slowly recovers, the impact of the recession continues to reverberate through the federal nutrition programs. More parents rely on the National School Lunch Program to provide nutritious lunches to their children every day during the regular school year. For many low-income children, school breakfasts and lunches may be the only dependable source of nutritious food they receive all day. During the 2009–2010 school year, the number of Maryland children participating on the average day in the National School Lunch Program grew by 8.9 percent, or 19,485 children, compared to the 2008–2009 school year.

Similarly, the Summer Nutrition Programs are designed to ensure that low-income children have access to nutritious food when school is out. However, Maryland did not meet the increased need in the summer months. The number of Maryland children participating in Summer Nutrition Programs in July 2010 decreased by 5.1 percent, or 2,670 children on an average day, resulting in fewer children accessing healthy meals throughout the summer even as the need had grown.

The number of low-income children receiving free or reduced-price lunch during the school year is an excellent indicator of the extent of need for the Summer Nutrition Programs and Maryland Hunger Solutions uses it as a benchmark to measure summer participation. In July 2010, only 20.6 children in Maryland participated in the Summer Nutrition Programs for every 100 children participating in the National School Lunch Program during the 2009–2010 school year. Thus, only one in five eligible children benefitted from the Summer Nutrition Programs. In comparison, in summer 2009, 23.9 children participated in the Summer Nutrition Programs for every 100 children participating in the National School Lunch Program in the prior school year.

About 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 a 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, using the regular year (individually determined free or reduced-price meal) reimbursements.
- Public and private nonprofit schools, local governments, and private nonprofit organizations can participate in the SFSP and operate one or more sites. Only schools are eligible to participate in the NSLP (but they can use the NSLP to provide meals and snacks to both school and non-school sites over the summer).
- The United States Department of Agriculture provides the funding for both programs, which are administered in Maryland by the State Department of Education.
- Maryland Hunger Solutions (MDHS) focuses this report on July participation data because: July is typically the highest summer food participation month; and 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. MDHS focuses on lunch 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 good benchmark against which to measure participation in the Summer Nutrition Programs.

The number of children participating in the Summer Nutrition Programs fell, while the number of low-income children participating in the National School Lunch Program grew. As families continued to struggle with a sluggish economy and high unemployment and underemployment, even more children did not benefit from the Summer Nutrition Programs which can make a significant difference to their nutrition when school is out.

Wide Variation Around the State: Achievements and Missed Opportunities

Participation varied widely across the state, from a high of 47.4 low-income children participating in Summer Nutrition Programs for every 100 who participated in the National School Lunch Program in Baltimore City to a low of zero children participating in Carroll County. Ten counties (Allegany, Calvert, Caroline, Carroll, Cecil, Frederick, Garrett, Howard, Queen Anne’s and St. Mary’s) provided summer nutrition to fewer than one in ten of their low-income children. Talbot County served snacks, but did not serve lunch to children during July and therefore does not appear in this sample of summer lunch participation.

Maryland ranks 10th nationally for participation rate in the Summer Nutrition Programs according to *Hunger Doesn’t Take a Vacation* by the Food Research and Action Center, which ranks the 50 states and District of Columbia, but the state would rank approximately 37th if Baltimore City’s high participation rate were not included. Maryland’s participation ratio is 20.6:100 for all jurisdictions and falls to 11.7:100 without Baltimore City. The state needs to improve rates across all jurisdictions to ensure that low-income children living in urban, suburban and rural communities receive adequate nutrition during the summer months.

Even though Baltimore City continued to lead the state in children served (both the total number and the percentage), its drop in participation was greater than the total statewide decrease—3,233 in Baltimore City compared to 2,670 in Maryland. Fourteen counties grew participation, with ten experiencing double digit increases, but the size of these counties’ populations meant that the increases were not enough to offset Baltimore City’s drop.

Reaching Children in an Urban Community: Baltimore City

Although Baltimore City’s ratio fell in 2010, the city is still the most successful jurisdiction in Maryland when it comes to summer nutrition. Of 24 jurisdictions, only Baltimore City exceeded the goal of serving 40 children through the Summer Nutrition Program for every 100 who participate in the National School Lunch Program, reaching 47.4 children per 100 receiving free or reduced-priced lunch. Baltimore City’s success underscores the potential impact this program can have and emphasizes that the number of children receiving healthy, filling meals in the summer can increase dramatically in other jurisdictions with committed partners, targeted outreach, and community support.

Children in 2010 Summer Nutrition Programs per 100 Children in 2009–2010 Regular School Year Lunch Program	
Top Five Jurisdictions	
Baltimore City	47.4
Somerset	39.2
Montgomery	22.6
Worcester	21.2
Kent	20.2
Bottom Five Jurisdictions	
Carroll	0
Howard	2.4
Garrett	4.5
Calvert	5.0
St. Mary’s	5.5

Sponsors and Sites 2009-2010

July 2009 Summer Nutrition			July 2010 Summer Nutrition		
Jurisdictions	Number of Sponsors 2009	Number of Sites 2009	Number of Sponsors 2010	Number of Sites 2010	Percent Change in Children Served
Allegany	3	12	4	15	0.9
Anne Arundel	3	25	3	31	38.8
Baltimore	5	116	5	143	12.2
Calvert	2	2	2	2	16.3
Caroline	2	4	1	5	65.3
Carroll	0	0	0	0	0
Cecil	3	8	1	7	89.6
Charles	1	2	1	26	18.4
Dorchester	6	6	4	8	53.8
Frederick	2	20	1	10	-29.4
Garrett	1	9	1	6	-45.6
Harford	1	12	1	12	-2.7
Howard	1	5	1	3	-19.3
Kent	1	3	1	2	14.9
Montgomery	1	114	1	109	-12.4
Prince George's	4	218	4	184	2.6
Queen Anne's	1	4	1	4	-1.8
St. Mary's	3	3	3	4	-20.8
Somerset	4	5	3	9	8.7
Talbot*	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Washington	2	67	2	70	15.4
Wicomico	2	20	1	24	5.0
Worcester	1	9	1	10	28.4
Baltimore City	6	449	8	492	-13.1
State	55	1,113	51	1,176	-5.1

**Program did not serve lunch in 2009 or 2010, but did serve snacks*

In Baltimore City, two of the major sponsors of the Summer Nutrition Program tell the story of the City's achievements. The Archdiocese of Baltimore attributes its success in reaching more than 4,000 additional children in 2010 to a new emphasis on adding school sites and on conducting outreach to families to increase participation at its existing sites. The schools are well-known in the community, making outreach easier. The program added three new school sites in 2010.

The Housing Authority of Baltimore City's Office of Community Services applied a broad-based approach to site recruitment and achieved the highest participation rates in the city by meeting the needs of the children where they live, learn, and play. The agency operated 432 sites in city parks and recreation centers, churches, housing complexes, city agencies, public schools, and YouthWorks sites. This flexible and wide-reaching approach helped offset the impact of weather on site closures.

Reaching Children in Rural Communities

The success of the Summer Nutrition Programs in Somerset and Wicomico Counties illustrates the program’s potential in rural areas. The Maryland Food Bank, a large sponsor in the state, increased the number of children served in these counties in 2010. Somerset County, which ranked second in the state in its ratio, served almost nine percent more children daily, increasing the ratio of children eating summer lunch to 39.2 per 100 in the National School Lunch Program—nearly reaching the target of 40 children per 100. Wicomico County served five percent more children daily.

The Maryland Food Bank credits a state grant that enabled them to reach out to more providers. Rural areas typically face greater difficulty in achieving high rates of participation in the program due to a lack of public transportation and personal vehicles among residents and the inability of sponsors to transport food to sites far from distribution centers. The Maryland Food Bank was able to expand its reach deeper into both counties by recruiting new sites and reaching previously underserved areas, resulting in an increase in the number of summer programs that could receive food.

While rural areas have traditionally had less success increasing participation rates, more rural counties reported dramatic increases in average daily participation in July 2010. Cecil County served 90 percent more children daily; Caroline County served 65 percent more children; and Dorchester served 54 percent more children daily.

Cecil, Caroline, and Dorchester Counties’ success, along with the success of Somerset and Wicomico Counties, proves that rural counties can achieve growing participation rates despite geographic isolation and its associated barriers.

Impact of Severe Weather

Some sites serving summer meals are located in facilities that lack air conditioning, which adds a layer of unpredictability to program operations and makes food service vulnerable to changes in weather. Although weather plays a role in the number of children served every year, weather in 2010 was especially severe in Maryland. Fewer service days due to extreme weather negatively impacted average daily participation.

Summer Food Service Program Lunches Served			
Month	2009	2010	Percent Change
June	169,758	187,345	10%
July	1,126,369	1,027,724	-9%
August	138,827	168,381	21%

Baltimore City alone had five heat-related “Code Red” days that closed some sites for five days— out of a total of 21 serving days in July. Based on average daily attendance rates, it is estimated that this could have resulted in approximately 100,000 fewer meals served in July.

In addition to “Code Red” days, severe storms swept through Montgomery and Prince George’s Counties in July 2010, causing massive power outages that shut down sites in some areas for a full week. In Montgomery County alone, five days of closures, based on average daily attendance rates, could have lowered the county’s meals served by an estimated 35,000.

Compared to 2009, the number of lunches served statewide increased significantly in June and August 2010, when there were fewer Code Red days. Lunches served in June increased by 10.4 percent and lunches served in August increased by 21 percent, over the previous year.

Maryland needs to explore options to mitigate the impact of weather-related site closures. As one model, Charles County's mobile meals program serves meals regardless of weather, a point emphasized to parents at the beginning of each summer. The mobile meals program serves sites linked to community centers and outdoor pavilions and makes accommodations for Code Red heat days, providing additional bottles of water for the children to drink.

Slow Response to Growing Need in Maryland

More families are relying on the National School Lunch Program to provide meals for children during the school year. Maryland experienced a nine percent increase in the number of children participating in the National School Lunch Program during the 2009-2010 school year. As the National School Lunch Program grows to meet the needs of low-income children, it is clear that Summer Nutrition Programs are not keeping pace with the increased demand.

This failure to keep pace with rising needs is not limited to specific geographic areas, as it occurred in rural, suburban, and urban areas alike. Garrett County experienced the sharpest decrease, serving 46 percent fewer children in the summer (even while it served 11 percent more children through the National School Lunch Program during the regular school year). Frederick County served 29 percent fewer children in the summer (and served 10 percent more children through the National School Lunch Program during the regular school year). Howard County served 19 percent fewer children in the summer and served 15 percent more children through the National School Lunch Program during the regular school year.

Some of the decline can be attributed to a decrease in the number of sponsors and a limited increase in the number of sites available to serve children. In 2009, Maryland had 55 sponsors and 1,113 sites, and in 2010, the state had 51 sponsors operating 1,176 sites.

In many counties, there was a direct correlation between increases/decreases in sites and increases/decreases in summer meals served to children. For example, each of the three counties with a significant decrease in their participation ratios mentioned above—Garrett, Frederick and Howard—had fewer sites available to serve children in 2010. The decrease in programs where food can be served makes it more difficult for the Summer Nutrition Programs to respond to children's need.

Still, many counties managed to increase participation, showing that there are inherent programmatic strengths on which counties—and Maryland—can build.

Leaving Money on the Table

Although many counties increased participation, several counties saw their participation ratios decrease, meaning that they served fewer children and left significant amounts of federal money on the table. Some counties saw limited growth in participation, but failed to keep pace with the growing need, thus, not accessing available federal funds. For example, Prince George’s and Baltimore Counties missed out on the largest amounts of federal funding, based on their performance compared to their size and levels of need in their communities. Had both counties reached the ratio of 40 children in Summer Nutrition Programs per 100 children participating in school year National School Lunch Programs, they would have brought significantly more federal funds to their communities during these tough fiscal times for local governments. Prince George’s County reached 17.5 children per 100, forfeiting a possible additional \$802,259 in federal reimbursements. Baltimore County reached 11.6 children per 100, leaving \$591,591 on the table. Overall, Maryland missed out on more than \$3.3 million in federal child nutrition funding.

Moving Forward

Maryland served 49,196 children on an average day in July 2010 through the Summer Nutrition Programs, down from 51,866 children in 2009. A decrease in sponsors, limited growth in the number of sites serving children, and severe weather contributed to the decline. Maryland’s outreach efforts in 2010 focused on increasing child participation through backpack flyers, radio public service announcements, and automated phone calls to parents. This resulted in greater awareness, but did not result in participation growth.

Maryland can and must do more to reach children during the summer months. Based on our findings in 2010, Maryland Hunger Solutions concluded that state and community groups should collaborate to implement the following changes:

- Conduct direct outreach to potential sponsors and sites to increase the number of sponsors and sites participating across the state.
- Offer summer meals in all of Maryland’s schools where 50 percent or more of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals.

If Counties Reached a Ratio of 40 Children in Summer Nutrition Programs per 100 in School Year NSLP		
Jurisdiction	Additional Children Reached	Additional Federal Dollars County Would Receive
Allegany	1,122	\$75,293
Anne Arundel	3,356	\$225,139
Baltimore	8,817	\$591,591
Calvert	699	\$46,889
Caroline	765	\$51,332
Carroll	1,158	\$77,663
Cecil	1,338	\$89,773
Charles	1,588	\$106,528
Dorchester	429	\$28,768
Frederick	2,095	\$140,549
Garrett	586	\$39,339
Harford	2,134	\$143,175
Howard	2,235	\$149,942
Kent	160	\$10,719
Montgomery	5,353	\$359,192
Prince George’s	11,957	\$802,259
Queen Anne’s	355	\$23,809
St. Mary’s	1,171	\$78,540
Somerset	N/A	N/A
Talbot	457	\$30,676
Washington	2,042	\$136,989
Wicomico	1,469	\$98,579
Worcester	366	\$24,530
Baltimore City	N/A	N/A
State	49,650	\$3,331,274

- Utilize a multi-pronged approach for outreach to families, which includes the continuation of broad-based methods like backpack flyers and radio PSAs, but also engages local faith-based and community organizations to inform families about the Summer Nutrition Programs and how to participate.
- Identify and develop alternative methods to serve children on extreme weather days, including emergency locations for outdoor sites and mobile meals delivery.
- Provide grant money for outreach efforts and start-up and expansion costs in order to recruit more sponsors and sites and to serve more children.

Through the Governor’s Partnership to End Childhood Hunger, Maryland has expanded its outreach efforts using a multi-faceted approach to increase participation in Summer Nutrition Programs in 2011.

Through private foundation grant funding, Maryland Hunger Solutions has hired two Child Nutrition Program Associates to work on the ground in Baltimore City, meeting with community leaders, policymakers, and faith-based and community organizations to recruit more sponsors and sites and to reach more families in need. In addition, several core members of the Governor’s Partnership, including Maryland Hunger Solutions, planned and launched a mobile meals pilot project with the faith-based community in Baltimore City to address weather-related building closures and to reach more children. These efforts will supplement the outreach methods that were used successfully in 2010. These enhanced efforts should help Maryland increase participation, but they are just first steps toward a more adequate program.

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About The Partnership to End Childhood Hunger in Maryland

Led by the Governor’s Office for Children and Share Our Strength, the Partnership to End Childhood Hunger in Maryland is a strong and growing coalition of state and federal agencies, nonprofit organizations, advocacy groups and the private sector. The partnership includes the United States Department of Agriculture, the Maryland State Department of Education, the Maryland Department of Human Resources, the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Maryland Hunger Solutions, the Maryland Food Bank, Catholic Charities, and the Family League of Baltimore City.

The Partnership is working together to implement a five year plan for ending childhood hunger by increasing participation in federal nutrition programs. Increasing participation in the Summer Meals Program is a priority in the Partnership’s plan to end childhood hunger.

Summer Nutrition in Maryland's Jurisdictions

July 2009 Summer Nutrition

July 2010 Summer Nutrition

Jurisdictions	Summer Participants	School Year F&RP Lunch Students	F&RP Students in Summer per 100 in School Year Lunch	Jurisdiction Rank Summer	Summer Participants	School Year F&RP Lunch Students	F&RP Students in Summer per 100 in School Year Lunch	Jurisdiction Rank Summer	Percent Change in Children Served
Allegany	336	3,590	9.4	15	339	3,653	9.3	15	0.9
Anne Arundel	1,308	11,514	11.4	10	1,815	12,926	14.0	9	38.8
Baltimore	2,930	27,771	10.6	13	3,286	30,258	10.9	13	12.2
Calvert	86	1,801	4.8	19	100	1,998	5.0	20	16.3
Caroline	75	2,014	3.7	21	124	2,222	5.6	17	65.3
Carroll	0	2,604	0	23	0	2,894	0	23	0
Cecil	173	3,767	4.6	20	328	4,156	7.9	16	89.6
Charles	534	5,128	10.4	14	632	5,549	11.4	11	18.4
Dorchester	264	1,913	13.8	8	406	2,088	19.5	6	53.8
Frederick	476	5,511	8.6	17	336	6,077	5.5	18	-29.4
Garrett	136	1,483	9.1	16	74	1,651	4.5	21	-45.6
Harford	918	6,918	13.3	9	893	7,567	11.8	10	-2.7
Howard	176	5,173	3.4	22	142	5,942	2.4	22	-19.3
Kent	141	759	18.5	5	162	805	20.2	5	14.9
Montgomery	7,974	28,551	27.9	3	6,986	30,849	22.6	3	-12.4
Prince George's	9,062	48,373	18.7	4	9,302	53,148	17.5	7	2.6
Queen Anne's	112	1,036	10.8	11	110	1,163	9.5	14	-1.8
St. Mary's	236	3,023	7.8	18	187	3,393	5.5	19	-20.8
Somerset	458	1,236	37	2	498	1,270	39.2	2	8.7
Talbot*	N/A	1,060	N/A	N/A	N/A	1,143	N/A	N/A	N/A
Washington	684	6,460	10.6	12	789	7,078	11.2	12	15.4
Wicomico	856	5,583	14.6	7	856	5,812	14.7	8	5.0
Worcester	320	1,824	17.5	6	411	1,940	21.2	4	28.4
Baltimore City	24,652	41,792	59	1	21,419	45,162	47.4	1	-13.1
State	51,866	218,884	23.9	N/A	49,196	238,369	20.6	N/A	-5.1

*Program did not serve lunch in 2009 or 2010, but did serve snacks