

Maryland Hunger Solutions

Policy Brief: Summer Nutrition in the Counties

May 2009

Summer Nutrition 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 five eligible low-income children. Only 21 percent of Maryland's low-income children participated in the Summer Nutrition Programs in July 2008.
- Participation in the Summer Nutrition Programs varied widely across the state, ranging from a high of 55.2 percent in Baltimore City to 0 percent in Carroll County. Thirteen counties around the state served less than one-tenth of their low-income children.
- All counties face obstacles to operating Summer Nutrition Programs, but some counties face them to a greater degree. Urban areas with dense population often have an easier time running the Summer Nutrition Programs, but rural and suburban areas with more disperse communities have a more difficult time, especially with transportation.
- Hunger doesn't take a vacation, and all counties in Maryland must make it a priority to increase the number of sponsors and sites. The coming Child Nutrition Reauthorization, which Congress will take up this year, also affords opportunities to improve the program by lowering area eligibility thresholds, increasing reimbursements, and boosting funds for transportation and outreach.

Introduction

Summer vacation is meant to be a time of safe, fun, physical activity and growth and development, but for tens of thousands of families in Maryland, it means the threat of hunger as children lose access to the nutritious meals and snacks that they receive during the regular school year. In fact, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) research finds that hunger spikes for households with children during the summer months.

The Summer Nutrition Programs are important in the fight against hunger, but they also provide other benefits to Maryland's children.

- **They combat 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 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.

Participation in Summer Nutrition: Five Best Performing and Bottom Worst Performing Counties in Reaching Low-Income Children	
County	Ratio
TOP FIVE	
Baltimore City	55.2
Montgomery	25.5
Somerset	21.0
Worcester	20.3
Kent	16.4
BOTTOM FIVE	
Howard	2.2
Caroline	1.9
Queen Anne's	0.5
Cecil	0.3
Carroll	0

- **They combat summer learning loss.** Studies find that low-income children have higher rates of summer learning loss (where children typically lose two months of knowledge) than their higher income peers, but 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.

The Summer Nutrition Programs can fill the “summer hunger gap,” but they are woefully underutilized. In Maryland, they reach just one out of every five eligible low-income children. In a time when families are struggling with a weakened economy, expanding the reach of the Summer Nutrition Programs in Maryland can reduce hunger and boost learning among low-income children, help struggling families, and allow the state to access more federal dollars.

Key Findings

On weekdays in July 2008, an average of 43,551 children received lunch through the Summer Nutrition Programs in Maryland. When compared to the number of low-income children who ate school lunch in Maryland during the 2007-2008 school year, however, summer nutrition participation fell short. Only 21 low-income children received a lunch in July for every 100 that received free or reduced-price school lunch during the school year.

Because there is very 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.

Low participation means that children miss out on summer meals, and counties miss out on federal funds. Increasing participation in the Summer Nutrition Programs from its current 21 percent to at least 40 percent would improve the nutritional status of 39,256 low-income children in Maryland, as well as bring in more than \$2.5 million dollars in federal reimbursements to the state.

Costs of Low Participation: Five Counties that Missed the Most Federal Dollars <i>Additional Federal Funding if Counties Reached 40 Low-Income Children with Summer Meals for Every 100 Receiving School Lunch</i>		
County	Additional Students	Dollars Lost
Prince George's	12,300	\$808,440
Baltimore	8,321	\$546,912
Montgomery	3,844	\$252,631
Anne Arundel	2,947	\$193,698
Harford	1,903	\$125,046

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, with a rate of 55.2 low-income children participating in Summer Nutrition Programs for every 100 that ate lunch during the school year.

Only three other counties – Montgomery County, Somerset County, and Worcester County – were able to reach at least one-fifth of eligible low-income children. These top counties represent very different regions of the state – urban, suburban, and rural areas, showing that any county can perform better. In Montgomery, Somerset, and Worcester the dominant sponsor was the county school district; the school district was the only sponsor in Montgomery and Worcester counties.

Thirteen counties (Allegany, Baltimore, Calvert, Caroline, Carroll, Cecil, Charles, Dorchester, Frederick, Garrett, Howard, Queen Anne's, and St. Mary's) around the state served less than one-tenth of their low-income children through their Summer Nutrition Programs. Carroll County had no summer nutrition sponsors or sites in the county and served zero children. But, since the county does not have any schools with more than 50 percent of enrolled students eligible for free and reduced-priced meals, it is slightly more difficult for the county to establish qualified

The Summer Nutrition Programs

The two federally-funded 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 of the children in the geographic area are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals (“area eligible”); at sites in which at least half 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.

Public and private nonprofit schools, local government agencies, National Youth Sports Programs, and private nonprofit organizations can participate in the SFSP and operate one or multiple sites. Only schools are eligible to participate in the NSLP but they can provide meals and snacks to school and non-school sites over the summer. The federal government also reimburses schools for feeding children that attend summer school, using the regular year NSLP and School Breakfast Program rules for free and reduced-price meals.

The Maryland Department of Education is responsible for administering both programs.

Participation in the Summer Nutrition Programs in Maryland's Counties: School Year 2007-2008 and Summer 2008

District	Number of Summer Agencies	Number of Summer Sites	Summer 2008 Participants	School Year 2007-2008 F&RP Lunch Students	F & RP Students in Summer 2008 per 100 in School Year 2007-2008 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 County	3	9	282	3,614	7.8	13	1,446	1,164	\$76,496
Anne Arundel County	3	26	1,277	10,561	12.1	8	4,224	2,947	\$193,698
Baltimore County	4	97	2,221	26,355	8.4	12	10,542	8,321	\$546,912
Calvert County	2	2	62	1,677	3.7	18	671	609	\$40,011
Caroline County	1	3	36	1,875	1.9	20	750	714	\$46,921
Carroll County	0	0	0	2,396	0.0	23	958	958	\$62,994
Cecil County	2	1	11	3,289	0.3	22	1,315	1,304	\$85,731
Charles County	1	12	211	4,604	4.6	17	1,842	1,631	\$107,197
Dorchester County	2	2	152	1,772	8.6	11	709	557	\$36,599
Frederick County	3	19	292	5,146	5.7	15	2,059	1,767	\$116,137
Garrett County	2	6	83	1,463	5.7	16	585	503	\$33,034
Harford County	1	12	666	6,422	10.4	10	2,569	1,903	\$125,046
Howard County	1	3	103	4,710	2.2	19	1,884	1,781	\$117,055
Kent County	1	3	118	721	16.4	5	288	170	\$11,172
Montgomery County	1	99	6,771	26,536	25.5	2	10,615	3,844	\$252,631
Prince George's County	4	91	6,648	47,370	14.0	7	18,948	12,300	\$808,440
Queen Anne's County	1	2	5	918	0.5	21	367	363	\$23,833
St. Mary's County	3	30	173	2,822	6.1	14	1,129	956	\$62,811
Somerset County	3	4	253	1,206	21.0	3	482	229	\$15,054
Talbot County	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Washington County	2	17	644	5,954	10.8	9	2,382	1,738	\$114,201
Wicomico County	1	17	755	5,258	14.4	6	2,103	1,348	\$88,605
Worcester County	1	8	346	1,702	20.3	4	681	335	\$21,991
Baltimore City	6	466	22,443	40,648	55.2	1	--	--	--
Maryland State	48	929	43,551	207,018	21.0		82,807	39,256	\$2,580,128

Data sources include: Meal counts and the numbers of summer sponsors and sites supplied by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and MSDE 2007-2008 school year data, September – May lunch meal counts. Calculations by Maryland Hunger Solutions. Residential Child Care Institutes (RCCIs) and non-public schools are not included in this sample.

* Talbot County was not included in this survey. Summer nutrition programs in the county provided breakfasts and snacks, but did not serve lunches.

summer sites that can participate in the Summer Nutrition Programs and serve summer meals to 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.

With more than half the counties in Maryland missing at least 90 percent of low-income children, there is significant room for improvement.

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. As the jobless rate increases and families struggle to put food on the table, it is important that counties and the state focus on ways to ensure that the children who use the school meals programs during the year do not face empty stomachs

during the summer. But, there are several challenges to address:

Qualifying sites for area eligibility. Summer sites can be more easily qualified to participate in the Summer Nutrition Programs and serve low-income children by being located in areas where there are 50 percent or more students enrolled in the free and reduced-priced school meal programs. (Reaching this 50 percent threshold means the site is “area eligible.”) Urban areas, such as Baltimore City, often have an easier time running the Summer Nutrition Programs because it is easier to qualify sites and the communities tend to be more densely populated. Conversely, rural and suburban areas with more disperse low-income populations have a more difficult time qualifying sites for the Summer Nutrition Programs.

Transporting students to the sites. Transportation during the summer is a challenge when school is out of

session. In urban areas, such as Baltimore City, where many schools and sites are within walking distance or where public transportation is available for older children, transportation is not as difficult as in suburban and rural areas. Some suburban and rural communities have used additional funding to provide transportation to students or provide the summer meals through mobile summer feeding 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 Summer Nutrition 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

How is area eligibility determined?

Area eligibility makes it easier for sites to qualify and establish summer food programs. If more than 50 percent of the children who live in the community are eligible for free and reduced-price meals, then the program site is considered to be in a low-income neighborhood and it is area eligible.

What does it mean if a site is “open” or “enrolled”?

Summer food sites can either operate as “open” or “enrolled” sites. An “open” site is one located in a low-income area where at least fifty percent of the children are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. The site is then open to all children in the community ages 18 and under. At an “enrolled” site, only children enrolled in the summer program can participate. The site qualifies if it is located in a low-income area or if 50 percent or more of the children enrolled in the program are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.

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 should partner 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. Informing families about Summer Nutrition sites

Summer Nutrition Programs in Rural Counties

The Summer Nutrition Programs are an important support for low-income children and families in every community, but they can be more challenging to operate in rural areas. For example, transportation becomes a greater challenge in rural areas as sites find that transporting children and getting food to the sites can be difficult and expensive.

It also is harder for rural areas to qualify summer sites to operate the Summer Nutrition Programs under area eligibility rules, because there may not be the same concentration of low-income children as in more densely populated urban areas. Rural counties have many low-income children that would benefit from the Summer Nutrition Programs, but communities are widely spread out. This makes it more difficult for schools to reach that 50 percent threshold of free and reduced-price students and therefore qualify for area eligibility. Still, many rural communities include numerous low-income children who need access to healthy summer meals, even if 50 percent of the children in any particular area are not eligible for free or reduced-priced meals.

A number of rural communities have been able to overcome these barriers and make the Summer Nutrition Programs work well. Strategies include tapping into existing resources within the community and identifying existing or creating new summer enrichment programs for children can provide a platform for summer food. For example, in many rural communities, faith-based organizations run vacation Bible school or other summer programming for children that can provide meals with federal dollars. The community could identify programs that are designed to give low-income children an educational boost during the summer and qualify the sites by showing that at least half of the children participating are eligible for free meals, which allows the program to receive summer nutrition funding to serve meals to all the children present.

Federal legislative improvements can be made to help rural communities. In particular, as noted in this report, reducing the area eligibility test from 50 percent free and reduced-price student enrollment to 40 percent could create more areas that will more easily qualify for summer sites and particularly increase access to summer meals in rural communities.

before the school year ends helps to ensure that children and parents know about the program.

County School Districts should use local authority to ensure that more students are participating in the Summer Nutrition Programs.

- 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. They also should work to ensure that the program is broadly available in the community. The leadership and resources of a school district can make a substantial difference in Summer Nutrition participation.
- 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. 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. 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. Congress is expected to reauthorize the Summer Nutrition Programs (and all the federal child nutrition programs) this year as part of Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization. There are a number of changes that could be made to increase participation.

- Congress should lower the area eligibility requirement from 50 percent to 40 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 (prior to 1981, the threshold for an area participating was 33 percent), more low-income children will have access to the program, especially in rural areas. As of October 31, 2008, Maryland had 538 sites that met the 50 percent threshold. But, if area eligibility was set at 40 percent, an additional 146 sites (for a total of 684) would qualify.

Baltimore City: Serving Summer Meals in the Park

From the time that school let out for the summer in June 2008 until school began again in August, students in and around Collington Square in Baltimore City knew that they could get a lunch every weekday during the summer.

Sponsored by the Maryland Food Bank, this Summer Nutrition Site quickly became the place for many young people to get a healthy and nutritious meal every day. The food bank identified this park as an area eligible for the Summer Nutrition Program, and had strong community leaders and a sense of community to ensure the program's success. The food bank worked with volunteers from Israel Baptist Church who committed to run the program every day for the youth in the community. Bagged meals were dropped off in coolers at the site, accompanied by several volunteers from the church who were trained to distribute and account for the meals.

Within a few days, as word got out, what started as an estimated 150 daily meals rose quickly to approximately 220 meals served every day to students in the area. This success shows that Summer Nutrition Programs can thrive in open sites (like parks and other recreation areas), especially when it has the support of the community. Children, in fact, are looking forward to this upcoming summer and returning to the site.

- Congress should increase the Summer Food reimbursement rates by 10 percent. The current rates are too low and make it difficult for many Maryland sponsors to feed children during the summer without losing money.
- Congress should provide funding for transportation grants and outreach. Transportation and a lack of knowledge about the program are frequently cited as primary barriers to participation.

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) based upon the nutrition quality and appeal of the food provided at the site, the environment, and outreach efforts. They can be used to 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/.

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 since that is the meal most commonly served in summer nutrition programs; 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.

Montgomery County: A Summer Food Workgroup Dedicated to Expanding Access

Bringing communities together to expand access to Summer Nutrition Programs is a key factor in increasing participation. In Montgomery County, the School District realized that the way to increase participation was to ensure that all the stakeholders in the county were aware of the programs and had a stake in the outcomes. The county pulled together a summer food workgroup that began meeting in January 2008.

The workgroup is led by the Montgomery County Public Schools, the only summer food sponsor in the county, and consists of key stakeholders: elected officials, county and state agencies, and faith- and community-based organizations. The workgroup starts meeting in the fall, and continues to meet throughout the winter and spring to identify areas in the county without existing sites and to strategize on how to recruit sites in underserved communities. The workgroup uses county maps with school system data to guide its efforts in identifying these communities. Their efforts resulted in a 30 percent increase in the number of sites during the summer of 2008.

Throughout the summer, the Montgomery County Public Schools helps to increase children's access by providing meals to school and community-based sites – from the day after school ends to the day before the following school year begins. Any eligible site, regardless of the number of children in the program, can receive breakfasts and lunches that are delivered daily.

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