

Food for Thought: The State of Summer Meals in New Jersey



A PROGRAM OF THE
CENTER FOR FOOD ACTION

**Hunger Free
New Jersey**

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Adele LaTourette, Director

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NEW JERSEY FOOD FOR THOUGHT CAMPAIGN

Healthy Food. Strong Kids.

New Jersey Food for Thought Campaign Coalition Members

- Advocates for Children of New Jersey
- American Dairy Association North East
- American Heart Association
- AtlantiCare
- Better Education for Kids
- Boys and Girls Club in New Jersey
- Empower Somerset
- Evangelical Lutheran Church America
- Food Research and Action Center
- Healthy Schools Now Coalition
- Joint Committee on Public Schools
– NJ Legislature
- NJ Action for Healthy Kids
- Hunger Free New Jersey (formerly the New Jersey Anti-Hunger Coalition, chair)
- NJ Association of School Administrators
- NJ Catholic Conference
- NJ Department of Agriculture
- NJ Department of Education
- NJ Department of Health
- NJ Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
- NJ Education Association
- The NJ Federation of Food Banks
- NJ League of Municipalities
- NJ Parks and Recreation Association
- NJ Partnership for Healthy Kids/YMCA
- NJ Principal and Supervisors Association
- NJ PTA
- NJSACC, the Statewide Network for NJ's Afterschool Communities
- NJ School Boards Association
- NJ State School Nurses Association
- NJ School Nutrition Association
- NJ State Library
- NJ Urban Mayor's Association

About the New Jersey Food for Thought Campaign

The New Jersey Food for Thought Campaign is a coalition of education, health and anti-hunger organizations, child advocates, local and state agencies and national organizations working to end childhood hunger in New Jersey. The campaign has helped to grow child participation in the federal School Breakfast Program and Summer Food Service Program.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the Food Research & Action Center and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation for their generous support of our efforts to expand summer meals across New Jersey, including providing funding for this report. We'd also like to thank Advocates for Children of New Jersey for its leadership in developing the first summer meals reports and for their continued partnership on this initiative.



A special thanks to the New Jersey Department of Agriculture for providing the data used in this report and for its leadership in ensuring New Jersey children have healthy food to eat, all year long.

For more information, visit njfoodforthought.org.

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More New Jersey Children Receiving Summer Meals



A growing number of New Jersey children are receiving the summertime nutrition they need to return to school in September ready to learn — but many still lack access.

As more communities step up to fill the nutrition gap in summer, when children do not have access to school meals, the number of New Jersey youth served has been on a steady rise since 2015. On an average day in July 2018, more than 103,000 children received a meal — a 9 percent increase over July 2017 and a 38 percent jump since 2015.¹

The statewide participation rate increased to 26 percent of students who received free or low-cost school lunch during the academic year — up from 24 percent in 2017 and 19 percent in 2015.

That translates to an increase of more 28,000 children on any given July day participating in one of two federal summer meals programs – the Summer Food Service Program and the National School Lunch Program.

This strong progress means New Jersey communities are collecting millions more in federal funds to feed hungry kids in the summer. In 2018, communities received \$12.7 million in federal dollars — money New Jersey taxpayers have already sent to Washington D.C. — up an encouraging 71 percent since 2015, according to the

United State Department of Agriculture (USDA), which administers the program on the federal level.

This is important for all children, but especially for those who rely on school meals during the academic year. For these children, when school is out, hunger sets in, as families struggle to stretch tight budgets, pay additional child care expenses and meet their children’s nutritional needs.

In July 2018, nearly 3.1 million summer meals were served by 127 sponsors at 1,357 New Jersey sites, including schools, parks, playgrounds, libraries, community pools, housing authorities and other places where children congregate in the summer, according to the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, which administers the program on the state level.

The number of summer meals served in 2018 dipped slightly, primarily because some summer meals sponsors scaled back breakfast service, which typically has lower attendance, according to New Jersey Department of Agriculture officials. Still, the total number of meals served was up 12 percent since 2015.

At a Glance: Summer Meals Participation

	Average Daily Participation, July of Each Year	Meals Served, July Each Year	Participation rate as a percent of students receiving free/reduced price school lunch
2015	74,808	2,740,340	19
2016	90,752	2,715,614	23
2017	94,803	3,173,617	24
2018	103,194	3,081,331	26
Percent Change 15-18	38	12	37

Summer Food Service Program Growing

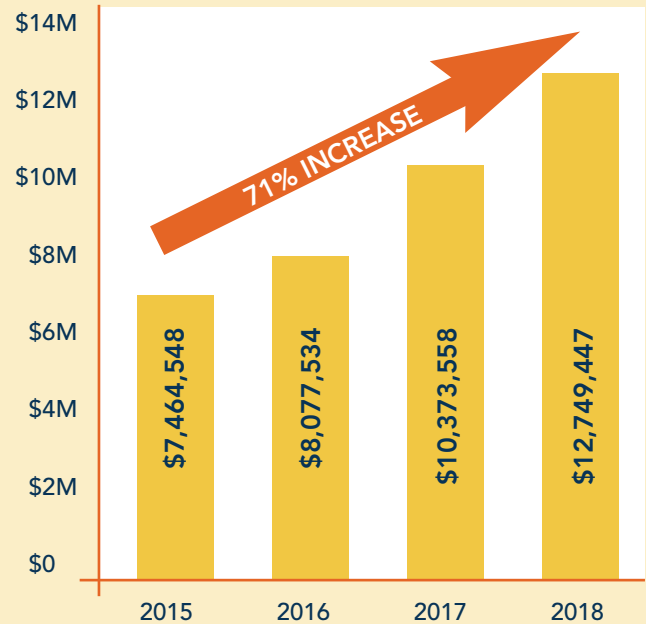
The most prominent growth in summer meals service has been through the federal Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), which saw participation rise 15 percent from 2017 to 2018 and 48 percent since 2015 — the year the New Jersey Food for Thought Campaign began tracking summer meals participation.

Over the past two years, National School Lunch Program participation has declined, as more schools switched to SFSP, which provides higher reimbursements and allows districts to feed all children in a qualified community, even if they are not enrolled in a summer academic or enrichment program.

This progress has been fueled by a concerted effort by the New Jersey Department of Agriculture and the New Jersey Food for Thought Campaign to recruit more summer meal sponsors and sites and to spread the word about summer meals. Many New Jersey communities, in turn, have responded to this need to feed more children during the summer months. The campaign, led by Hunger Free New Jersey, is a coalition of state agencies, health, wellness and education organizations, municipal government, child advocates and others.

While this is great progress, the national Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) recommends that states reach 40 percent of low-income children who eat lunch at school, compared to New Jersey's 26 percent participation rate. If New Jersey achieved that goal, communities would collect an estimated \$5.2 million **more** in federal dollars each year to feed hungry children during the summer, based on 2017 participation, according to FRAC's *Hunger Doesn't Take A Vacation: Summer Meals Status Report, 2018*.

At a Glance: Summer Meals Federal Funding



Summer Meals Combat Childhood Hunger

Without free- or reduced-priced school meals, children often face hunger during the summer, especially those who rely on school meals during the academic year. Many New Jersey food pantries report that more families turn to them for food in the summer months to replace the meals provided by schools.

To fight summer hunger, the United States Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service provides funding to local governments, school districts and community organizations to serve summer meals to children through the Summer Food Service Program.



School districts can opt to participate in the National School Lunch Academic Summer Program. Under this program, districts only feed children who are enrolled in summer academic or enrichment programs. Per-meal reimbursements are lower for this program than for SFSP.

At SFSP sites that are open to the public, parents typically are not required to fill out an application, pre-enroll their children, nor provide identification for their children to receive meals, under federal rules. Children can simply

show up at an open site and receive a meal, which must meet federal nutrition standards, including being low-fat, low-sugar and whole-grain foods.

In addition to providing free, healthy meals, these programs also offer an opportunity for children 18 years and younger to play together, engage in enrichment activities, hone their academic skills and be better prepared when they return to school in September.



Breakdown of Summer Meals Participation, by Program

	Avg. Daily Participation, July 2015	Avg. Daily Participation, July 2016	Avg. Daily Participation, July 2017	Avg. Daily Participation, July 2018	Percent Change 17-18	Percent Change, 15-18	# Change 15-18
National School Lunch Program	26,292	32,444	32,734	31,510	-0.04	20	5,218
Summer Food Service Program	48,516	58,308	62,069	71,684	15	48	23,168
	74,808	90,752	94,803	103,194	9	38	28,386

Summer Food Service Program, Sponsors and Sites

	2015	2016	2017	2018	Percent Change 15 to 18
Sponsors	108	111	116	127	18
Sites	1,112	1,351	1,372	1,357	22

New Sponsors, Expansion of Existing Sponsors Fuel Increase

New Jersey added 17 new sponsors in 2018. These sponsors fed 7,507 children on an average day in July 2018, helping to boost the statewide participation rate. Also adding to this increase were 63 returning sponsors that served 6,466 more children on average. The top 15 returning sponsors achieved increases ranging from 150 percent at Team Resurrection, Inc. in Irvington to 38 percent for the Newark School District.

This adds up to a total increase of 13,973.

This increase, however, was offset by the loss of six small sponsors, accounting for a total average daily participation of 317 in 2017, and a drop in participation of 4,041 among 46 other existing sponsors, resulting in a net gain of 9,615 children on an average day in July 2018.



Top 15 Existing Sponsors, ADP Increase, 2017 to 2018

Sponsor	2017 July ADP	2018 July ADP	Percent Change
Team Resurrection, Inc.	36	90	150%
Fairleigh Dickinson University	53	128	142%
Islamic Center of Passaic County	84	188	124%
YMCA of Trenton	94	177	88%
Newark YMCA-Linwood MacDonald Camp	11	19	73%
Mercer Street Friends Food Bank	229	392	71%
Essex County College	93	159	71%
Mount Holly Township	58	92	59%
Rahway Community Action Organization	271	406	50%
Bayonne School District	536	801	49%
Orange City	862	1,281	49%
Trenton City	844	1,234	46%
Greater Egg Harbor Regional School District	69	97	41%
Dover Town	89	123	38%
Newark School District	3,082	4,252	38%

Source: New Jersey Department of Agriculture

NOTE: Participation data for all summer meals sponsors for 2017 and 2018, along with number of sites operated and communities served, can be found at njfoodforthought.org.

Most districts applied for summer meals waiver

A new law requires school districts where at least half of students qualify for free or reduced-price meals to participate in the Summer Meal Food Service Program.

Under the law, districts were allowed to request a waiver for this summer if the district lacked the staff, facilities or equipment to become a sponsor. Waivers could also be granted for one year to districts in communities where a summer meal sponsor is already operating, such as the local recreation department or a community organization.

By 2020, all districts affected by the law must participate as either a site or a sponsor.

The New Jersey Department of Agriculture notified 127 school districts that they are subject to the new legal requirement. Of those, 104 districts applied for waivers; all but four waivers were granted, according to agriculture department officials.

Three school districts — Jamesburg, Clifton and Stem Civic Charter School — opted to become new sponsors, while 20 others will team with an existing sponsor to operate a site at one or more schools in their districts this summer, state officials said.

The four districts denied a waiver — Orange School District, Camden Freedom Academy Charter School, Red Bank School District and Community Charter School in Passaic — were denied because they did not respond to NJDA's notification, according to state officials.

Summer Meals Law School District Waivers Summary

	Number districts
Number districts required to participate in SFSP, under new law	127
Number requesting waivers for 2019	104
Number waivers granted	100
Number becoming summer meal sponsor	3
Number becoming summer meals sites	20

Staffing, security top barriers to summer meals participation

The vast majority of districts requesting waivers cited budgetary and operational barriers to starting a program this summer. Reasons cited included:

- Lack of staff. This was the most frequently cited concern from both the food service and security perspectives.
- Lack of funds to support the program.
- Security issues.
- Lack of kitchen facilities and other equipment (i.e. refrigeration) needed to operate the program.
- Buildings closed or undergoing maintenance and repairs



To find summer meals sites, visit summerfoodrocks.org/sitefinder, text "food" to 97779 or call the National Hunger Hotline at 1-866-3-HUNGRY or for Spanish 1-877-8-HAMBRE.

Lack of understanding of program

Many of the comments submitted with the waivers revealed a lack of understanding of SFSP and how it operates.

For example, some district officials did not seem to understand they can become a site, rather than a sponsor. Operating as a site is much less onerous, as the sponsor takes responsibility for program administration and provides meals directly to its sites. This eliminates the need for sites to purchase and prepare meals, although sites are responsible for recording the number of meals served and providing staff to oversee meal service.

The comments also reveal a lack of understanding of the reimbursement structure. The USDA reimburses summer meals sponsors for every qualified meal served to a child. Most summer meals sponsors can cover the cost of operating the program with these reimbursements.

Start-up costs can also be covered through grants and other supports from various organizations, including the recently-established New Jersey Child Nutrition Fund, which accepts grant and loan applications on a rolling basis. (Visit reinvestment.com/childnutrition-sourcecenter to learn more).



Concerns need to be addressed

While solutions do exist to make it possible for most districts to participate in the Summer Food Service Program, district officials raised legitimate issues that may make it difficult for some to comply with the law, as currently written.

Lack of staff was an overarching concern for many districts, especially charter schools that frequently have very little, if any, summertime staff. This lack of staffing was also linked to security concerns.

Under federal rules, schools that participate in SFSP must open meal sites to all children in their districts, not just those enrolled in summer academic or enrichment programs. District officials said they worried about the safety of children enrolled in these programs and about allowing any child or teen to enter schools without identification. This is the practice at “open” SFSP sites where any child can receive a meal without being enrolled in a program.

Charter schools, especially smaller ones, face particular barriers, as many operate on very tight budgets or are closed in the summer months. In addition, in cities like Newark, with a large number of charters, schools may be clustered close together, making it counterproductive to have all operate as meal sites.

While Hunger Free New Jersey strongly supports the intent of the law to strengthen school districts’ participation in this critical child nutrition program, the Summer Meal Food Service Program is most successful when implemented on the community level, with all members, including schools, playing an appropriate role.

School districts can — and should — be strong supporters of the program and, in many cases, they should serve as sponsors or sites. This role, however, can vary from community to community. In some communities, for example, it may make more sense for a school district to act as a vendor and serve sites in the community. This is not an option under the current law.



Strategies to Help School Districts Serve Summer Meals

- **Expand Understanding.** Hunger Free New Jersey will work with the New Jersey Department of Agriculture and other partners to conduct outreach to school districts, especially charter schools, to educate them about SFSP and strategies for successful participation.
- **Provide Funds.** The state should allow districts, including charter schools, to tap into dollars from the Nourishing Young Minds Fund to pay for ongoing staffing and security costs associated with SFSP participation. This fund was established through legislation in 2017 and provides state dollars to support school breakfast and summer meals programs. Rules are currently being written to regulate the fund and should allow for this flexibility.
- **Publicize Resources.** The New Jersey Department of Agriculture should provide school districts that requested waivers with a list of grant opportunities and other resources to help them meet start-up and other costs of operating the program.

Join in Feeding Children this Summer!

In an effort to continue to grow the availability of summer meals for children, the New Jersey Department of Agriculture is currently recruiting new sites to participate in the Summer Food Service Program.

Through this program, the USDA funds organizations to “sponsor” summer meals sites. Sponsors can be school districts, government entities, such as recreation departments, and non-profit organizations, such as food banks, camps, houses of worship and others.

Sponsors typically provide food to sites where children gather, including recreation centers, libraries, parks, playgrounds, housing developments and summer camps.

Site operators sign on with a sponsor in their area. Site operators must track the number of meals they serve and meet health and safety requirements, but they do not have to pay for the meals they provide to children coming to their locations. They also have fewer administrative responsibilities and do not have to prepare or vend meals. The sponsor delivers food to participating sites.

This is a great way to get started in the summer meals program, especially for organizations that cannot take on the operational challenges of being a sponsor.

To learn more about operating a summer meals site, contact the New Jersey Department of Agriculture at 609-292-4498.



Become a summer meals site!

Contact the New Jersey Department of Agriculture at 609-292-4498 to learn how.

Healthcare Provider Serves Up Summer Meals

Last summer, the AtlantiCare Foundation teamed up with the Community Food Bank of New Jersey — Southern Branch to become one of the first New Jersey healthcare providers to serve summer meals.

At “Lunch and Learn,” which will continue this summer, families with children of all ages gathered at the William L. Gormley AtlantiCare HealthPlex in Atlantic City for nutritious meals and a little fun and learning.

Using its own funds, the foundation also provided meals to parents — something that cannot be done under the federal Summer Food Service Program. Activities for children were also offered — everything from yoga to jumping rope and artistic activities — along with the distribution of health information.

Laura Engelmann, community health & wellness manager, said the program served 2,000 meals over a two-month period.

“AtlantiCare is able to offer this opportunity to our community through support from generous donors and a commitment from our leadership team,” Engelmann said. “Many families are struggling in Atlantic City. Providing resources including nutritious meals during the summer months and other nutritional resources is important to the health and well-being of families and individuals.”

According to the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC), a growing number of hospitals across the United States are helping fill the summertime nutrition gap by offering meals through the Summer Food Service Program, helping to improve child health and combat childhood hunger.

Like other community organizations, hospitals located in areas where at least 50 percent of children are eligible for free and reduced-priced school meals can operate an open site, meaning any child in the community can come to the hospital for a healthy, nutritious meal.

Hospitals can serve meals in a conference room, the cafeteria or anywhere there is space for kids to congregate and eat a meal. Placing the site near the entrance to the hospital or clinic is a great way to attract families as they enter and make the site easily accessible, according to FRAC.

Offering free summer meals at hospitals represents a powerful opportunity for healthcare institutions to address food insecurity, a social determinant of health. Just a few years ago, only a handful of healthcare institutions participated in summer meals. This model is now expanding to locations across the country, according to FRAC and other national sources.

To learn more, visit <http://bit.ly/2SJaBPY>.



Outreach Key to Successful Summer Meals Operations

A critical piece of successful summer meal service is ensuring that parents and other caregivers know where to find meals. Timely, effective marketing and promotion can significantly increase children's participation in summer meals programs, ensuring all children have the summertime nutrition they need to be healthy.

To achieve that goal, summer meal sponsors should partner with other community organizations to spread the word through schools, child care centers, libraries and other organizations serving children in a community.

Advocates for Children of New Jersey, a member of the New Jersey Food for Thought Campaign, has created an easy-to-use summer meals outreach kit, with ideas about how communities can partner to spread the word about summer meals.

Key strategies include:

- School outreach
- Kick-off events
- A summer meals "blitz"
- Community engagement
- Media outreach
- Social media

Download the toolkit at njfoodforthought.org/summermeals.



■ Technical Notes Summer Meals Data Sources

Number of meals served. NJ Department of Agriculture, FNS-418, July of each year. Includes breakfast, lunch, dinner and snack.

Average daily participation, Summer Food Service Program, NJ Department of Agriculture, Summer Meals Sponsor Report, July of each year.

Average daily participation, National School Lunch Program, United States Department of Agriculture, National Data Bank Version 8/2 Public Use, supplied by the Food Research & Action Center, July of each year.

Number of Summer Meals Sponsors, NJ Department of Agriculture, Summer Meals Sponsor Report, July of each year.

Number of Summer Meals Sites, NJ Department of Agriculture

Federal Reimbursements, Summer Food Service Program, USDA Summer Food Service Program, Cash Payments, June-Sept. each year.
<https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/02sfcash.pdf>

ⁱ New Jersey Department of Agriculture, Summer Average Daily Attendance with Sponsor Type, July 2015, 2017 and 2018.



Find data, resources, outreach tools and more information about summer meals at njfoodforthought.org/summermeals.



Meet Up & Eat Up! Friends, Food & Fun!

Summer meals served free to children and teens 18 and under in communities across New Jersey.
No enrollment, no I.D. required.

To find a site near you:

- ☀ Text "food" to 97779
- ☀ Visit summerfoodrocks.org/sitefinder
- ☀ Call 1-866-3-HUNGRY or for Spanish 1-877-8-HAMBRE

Need more info?
Visit njfoodforthought.org/summermeals
or call the New Jersey Department of Agriculture at (609) 292-4498.



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Amigos, Comida y Diversión

Comidas de verano gratis para niños y adolescentes menores de 18 años. En comunidades a través de Nueva Jersey.
No hay inscripción, no I.D. necesario.

Para encontrar un sitio cerca de usted:

- ☀ Texto "comida" al 97779
- ☀ Visite summerfoodrocks.org/sitefinder
- ☀ Llame al 1-866-3-HUNGRY o al español 1-877-8-HAMBRE

¿Necesitas más información?
Visite njfoodforthought.org/summermeals
o llame al Departamento de Agricultura de Nueva Jersey al (609) 292-4498.



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