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Snacks and Dinners Boost Summer Meals in East Orange

When school lets out, the City of East Orange kicks into high gear.

The city's Department of Recreation & Cultural Affairs leads a thriving summer meals program, with city leaders always exploring new ways to reach more children.

One of its most successful strategies is an aggressive outreach effort that spreads the word to parents and other caregivers in five ways -- social media, a kickoff event, banners placed in each city ward, postcards distributed to parents through the schools and word-of-mouth by student ambassadors who tell their peers about the program.

"We work with the East Orange School District, the East Orange Public Library and the East Orange Youth Coalition/Student Ambassadors to get the word out," says Ravi A. Boze-Adams, chief clerk, afterschool & summer food program director. "We reach the masses with technology, fun community events and good old-fashioned grassroots feet to the pavement."



City officials are also willing to embrace new approaches when the old ones do not appear to be working.

Last summer was a great example of this. After reviewing participation data and learning that the city parks were averaging only 15 children for breakfast and 25 for lunch, the city decided to try serving a snack at 3:30 p.m. and dinner at 5:30 p.m.

“Many parents were sending their children to supervised camps or to the school district’s summer enrichment programs, so there were less children in the parks in the morning and noon day,” Boze-Adams explains.

With the switch to snacks and dinner, participation skyrocketed, with the city serving almost 74,000 more meals last summer – a whopping 70 percent increase.

“We served the same amount of lunches as compared to the previous year, and we also served 36,000 dinners and 36,000 snacks,” Boze-Adams says. “We were very successful and very pleased with our decision to switch.”

She strongly recommends this approach to other summer meal sponsors.

“More children are in the parks in the afternoon and evening after camp, after summer school and after summer youth employment,” Boze-Adams explains. “If your goal is to help stop childhood hunger, this is a great way to achieve that goal.”

For more information, contact Adele LaTourette, director, Hunger Free New Jersey at alatourette@cfanj.org or Lisa Pitz, outreach director, at lpitz@cfanj.org. For more information about the New Jersey Food for Thought Campaign, visit njfoodforthought.org or contact Nancy Parello at nparello@cfanj.org. This document was prepared by Hunger Free New Jersey. Visit hungerfreenj.org to learn more.

