



CHILD NUTRITION REAUTHORIZATION 2021

NO KID HUNGRY IN SUMMER



SUMMER IS THE HUNGRIEST TIME OF THE YEAR

In the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, rates of child hunger remain alarmingly high as families struggle to recover financially. This is especially true for the communities of color disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. It is more critical than ever to address the biggest gaps and areas of need to ensure that children have access to nutritious food year-round. Among these, summer is the greatest: just one in seven low-income kids gets the meals they need.

Many kids in America are excited for the last day of school, but for many low-income children, summer is a time filled with worry and anxiety about hunger.

During the school year, many children receive meals through federal child nutrition programs, like school breakfast, school lunch, and afterschool meals. But when schools close for the summer, these programs are no longer available, putting a strain on family budgets. When kids don't get the consistent nutrition they need, it has a long-term impact on their health, development and ability to learn. For example, studies show that hunger is linked to the "summer slide," and nutritious meals protect against cognitive decline and summer learning loss.

As a result, during the summer, many families are forced to make difficult trade-offs between paying for groceries or paying rent and utility bills. This has long-term consequences for a child's health, education and well-being.

TOO MANY KIDS AREN'T GETTING THE SUMMER MEALS THEY NEED

The federal Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and National School Lunch Program's Seamless Summer Option (SSO) were designed to ensure that low-income children get the nutrition they need when school is not in session. Funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), administered by state agencies and hosted at thousands of local organizations like schools, churches and community centers, these meals are a lifeline for kids around the nation.

Unfortunately, these programs aren't reaching most of the kids who need them due to challenges like being required to visit meal sites daily. Of the 20 million low-income children participating in the National School Lunch Program, only 2.8 million are participating in the summer meals programs, meaning sites are only reaching about 14% of students in need. The most common barriers to accessing summer meals can only be solved with legislation.

CURRENT PROGRAM BARRIERS



Zip Code: Summer meals sites are open to all kids in areas where at least 50% of the enrolled students qualify for free and reduced-price meals. Something as simple as a zip code can mean the difference between a child receiving a summer meal or not.



Transportation: With school buses not operating and parents at work, many kids lack transportation to summer meal sites, especially in rural communities.



Weather: Extreme heat, thunderstorms and other severe weather can close sites, many of which operate out of doors.



Red Tape: Excessive administrative bureaucracy prevents many schools, faith-based organizations, and community groups from providing meals to kids in need.

IT'S TIME TO UPDATE THE SUMMER MEALS PROGRAMS

There are better ways to reach kids with the meals they need. The flexibilities provided to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic have shown us what's possible. Congress can enact common sense policy solutions to ensure the summer meals programs more effectively and efficiently reach kids with nutrition during the summer months. Through Child Nutrition Reauthorization, lawmakers have the chance to update and improve the summer meals program so it better meets the needs of children from low-income families, no matter where they live.



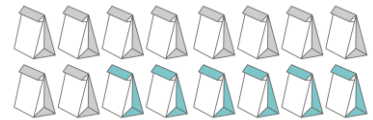
6 out of 7

kids who may have needed summer meals pre-pandemic were missing out



33%

is how much Summer EBT reduces very low food security among children, according to a Summer EBT evaluation



160%

is the increase in summer meals served in 2020, thanks to flexibilities provided during the pandemic, compared to 2019

SUMMER HUNGER SOLUTIONS AND PRIORITIES

Today's summer meals program operates under an inflexible policy approach that no longer meets the needs of low-income families and children, especially those living in rural and hard-to-reach communities.

We can do better. Below are recommendations for practical, effective policy solutions to maximize efficiencies by allowing flexibility in the program so summer meals can better reach hungry kids, no matter where they live.

Permanently authorize and expand Summer EBT nationwide.

Summer EBT provides a modest grocery benefit during the summer months to families with children eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Most states use an EBT system similar to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The USDA demonstration project started in 2010 showed this is an effective way to reach children, especially in rural communities. The prevalence of the most severe food insecurity among children decreased by a third and healthy eating habits increased. However, just five states and three Indian Tribal Organizations were able to offer Summer EBT in 2020. Since needed infrastructure was created to implement Pandemic EBT in response to COVID-19 related school closures, now is the time to permanently authorize and expand Summer EBT nationwide.

Permanently authorize Pandemic EBT.

The Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) Program created by the Families First Coronavirus Response Act has been an effective tool to address hunger during the COVID-19 pandemic, helping families with free or reduced-price eligible students to make up for missed meals during school closures. Pandemic EBT has been especially critical for families that face barriers to accessing school or community meal distribution sites. Pandemic EBT should be permanently available to support kids during natural or public health emergencies.

Authorize alternatives to the “congregate” requirement and other flexibilities.

The current summer meals programs operate under a “congregate” model, mandating that children consume meals onsite. This can be a major challenge due to limited transportation and extreme weather. Providing flexibility on this requirement and allowing sites to distribute more than one meal at a time would allow providers in specific areas to bring meals to children rather than requiring children to come to sites daily. This would be particularly helpful in rural and hard-to-reach communities. These flexibilities for COVID-19 response actually helped summer meals to reach significantly more children than usual during summer 2020: almost 150 million additional meals were served.

Expand access by lowering the area eligibility threshold.

In order to serve summer meals at no charge to all children, sites must be located in an area where at least 50 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. This does not align with federal funding for out-of-school-time enrichment, which is available to programs that serve students in schools that receive Title I funding. Lowering the area eligibility threshold to 40 percent would align with out-of-school-time funding and give communities more flexibility to select site locations that are accessible to the children who most need meals.

Streamline existing meal programs to reduce red tape and bureaucracy.

Currently, the federal afterschool meals program and summer meals programs are two separate programs with two sets of regulations, two sets of audits, and two sets of staff training. The paperwork, red tape and amount of time spent on doing all of this work twice can act as a deterrent, with fewer organizations able to act as summer meal sites. Streamlining these two programs, allowing them to operate under the summer rules and regulations, would reduce administrative burdens, foster greater efficiency and ultimately reach more kids with the food they need.

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Sources

- [No Kid Hungry Center for Best Practices: Summer Meals](#)
- [No Kid Hungry: Summer Hunger is Too Expensive to Ignore, 2015](#)
- [No Kid Hungry Blog: New Data Shows How Participation in Nutrition Programs Has Changed During the Pandemic, February 2021](#)
- [USDA Report Shows Monthly Summer EBT Benefit Reduces Food Insecurity in Children, Improves Nutrition](#)
- [FRAC Summer Nutrition Status Report, June 2020](#)



About No Kid Hungry

No child should go hungry in America. But in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, 1 in 4 kids could face hunger. No Kid Hungry is working to end childhood hunger by helping launch and improve programs that give all kids the healthy food they need to thrive. This is a problem we know how to solve. No Kid Hungry is a campaign of Share Our Strength, an organization committed to ending hunger and poverty.