

Call to Action: Time to Improve California's Summer Nutrition Programs

California is failing its children during the summer. A new report by the Food Research and Action Center shows that California served 65,000 fewer low-income children with its Summer Nutrition Programs in 2010 compared to 2009. Cuts to state and local funding for education are causing summer school to disappear in too many districts. County-specific data on summer meal participation will be released on June 15 by California Food Policy Advocates to give a more in-depth look at what is happening across the state.

As children lose access to summer learning and enrichment opportunities, they also lose access to meals served through summer school. And struggling families, who relied on the school nutrition programs to feed their children during the academic year, must fill the nutrition void.

This is a trend that California must reverse. Over the past eight years, California's participation in the Summer Nutrition Programs has spiraled downward despite increased need. In 2002, California led the nation in serving its low-income children nutritious summer meals, serving 827,000 low-income children during the summer—providing lunches to more than 40 percent of children who relied on free or reduced-price school lunches during the academic year. Today, only 440,000 low-income children in our state benefit from summer meals—that's less than 20 percent of students who depend on free or reduced-price meals during the academic year. This decline is alarming, especially given the 300,000 increase in the number of children participating in free and reduced-price lunches during the school year.

Federal dollars are available to pay for summer meals served through the Summer Nutrition Programs, but these federally funded programs are becoming yet another casualty of the state budget crisis. By failing to feed children during the summer, California is forgoing over \$33 million per year in federal funds.

As fewer and fewer meals are served through summer school programs, nonprofits are stepping in to fill the void. Participation in the Summer Food Service Program, which is not limited to schools, has grown by 27 percent. But the increase has not been enough to offset the loss in school participation.

There is a summer nutrition crisis in California. Action is needed. We urge state and local policy makers to reverse cuts to summer learning and enrichments—reinstating educational programs to revive the accompanying nutrition programs. We urge schools and nonprofit organizations to maintain or expand efforts to promote and operate the Summer Nutrition Programs.

It is not too late for Californians to take action this summer, and together we can build a stronger program for the future.

Signed by:

California Association of Food Banks
California Food Policy Advocates
CANFIT
Partnership for Children and Youth