



ENHANCING THE SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM IN LOUISIANA

SUMMER MEALS FOR HEALTHY KIDS

2020

LOUISIANA MUST ADDRESS SUMMER NUTRITION

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) is a federally funded nutrition program that provides free meals to children in low-income areas when school isn't in session, typically from late May through early August. The program helps ensure that kids who benefit from free and reduced-price lunch during the school year have enough to eat while school is out of session. But in Louisiana, where one in four children lives in a food-insecure household, fewer kids have received meals through the program each year since 2014. In 2018, the Summer Food Service Program reached only an estimated 11.9% of Louisiana children who receive free and reduced lunch during the school year. That puts Louisiana near the bottom of the national rankings—below 41 other states (including Washington D.C.).

Not only are a declining number of children receiving summer meals in Louisiana, but a declining number of sites in the state participate in the program, leaving Louisiana kids with fewer places to find free summer meals now than they did five years ago. Between the summer of 2015 and the summer of 2019, the number of sites serving summer meals in the state fell by 16.4%. In summer 2019, eight Louisiana parishes lacked any summer meal sites, while others had far fewer sites than needed to serve children living in poverty. For Louisiana families, this translates to real hardship: Studies consistently show that low-income households with children experience spikes in food insecurity during the summer months.

Louisiana's children cannot thrive if they don't have enough nutritious food to eat when school is out of session. That's why the state should make a concerted effort to increase the scale and reach of Louisiana's summer meals program.

To better serve Louisiana's children, all year round, we recommend that Louisiana's Department of Education:

- » Strengthen efforts to recruit additional program sponsors and sites
- » Coordinate a robust statewide network of program sponsors and sites to share best practices for program administration, and to strengthen recruitment and retention efforts across the state
- » Follow best practices to market the program effectively and without stigma to families and kids
- » Make the program easier for sponsors and sites to administer by simplifying program rules through federal waivers and existing state flexibilities
- » Support sponsors in using creative best practices to reach kids in high-need, hard-to-reach areas

We also recommend that the state legislature appropriate funds to support outreach and marketing for the program, and that the federal government codify improvements to the program at the national level in the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act.



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SUMMER MEALS HELP LOUISIANA FAMILIES

Louisiana is rich in natural resources and the state's economy is about as productive as that of the average American state.¹ But despite this, Louisiana suffers from some of the worst rates of child poverty and food insecurity in the nation. Before COVID-19, nearly one in four Louisiana children lived in households that couldn't afford consistent access to nutritious meals, and more than 25% live in families earning wages below the poverty line (\$25,750 for a family of four in 2019).² Food insecurity has only increased in the state since the pandemic.

For those children, free and reduced-price school meals are a key source of nutritious food. School meals also help families stretch limited financial resources. School lunch alone kept an estimated 1.4 million people out of poverty nationwide in 2018. In that same year, the National School Lunch Program served a total of 86,276,840 subsidized lunches to 548,082 Louisiana children.¹

When school is out of session, the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP, or Summer Feeding) exists to fill in the gap, providing free meals to children from families earning low or no incomes, and often supporting important summer programming that keeps kids engaged during the break from school. But while school lunch provides Louisiana's children with a reliable and free or low-cost source of nutrition throughout the school year, the state's Summer Feeding program serves only a small fraction of the children who eat free and reduced-price lunch at school, at rates significantly below what other states have achieved.³

Families earning low incomes often have little to no margin to make up for the nutritional supplement that goes away when school is out.⁴ But studies show that the Summer Food Service Program can moderate summer spikes in food insecurity, and that other methods of supporting families with children in the summer can substantially improve the ability of families with school-aged children to access food when school is out of session.⁵

This report outlines Louisiana's approach to summer feeding before the pandemic, and points a way forward to a Louisiana where more children have year-round access to nutritious food, regardless of their family's finances.

¹ This figure includes students who received lunch for free or at a reduced price and students who paid full price for lunch. The federal government also offsets the cost students pay for "full price" or "paid" lunches, though the reimbursement to schools for paid lunches is considerably lower than the reimbursement for free or reduced-price lunches. The maximum federal reimbursement rate is \$0.40 for paid lunch, and \$3.58 for free lunch.

AUTHORS' NOTE

This report was researched and written prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. Since then, the pandemic has substantially changed the options for Louisiana children looking for healthy meals over the summer. Social distancing requirements have limited or closed many of the summer camp, library, and public recreation programs that serve thousands of kids. In their place, kids have benefited from a combination of meal delivery services and grab-and-go meal service options. These efforts were helped by state and federal efforts to relax the rules for the Summer Food Service Program in order to feed more kids while maintaining social distancing. For some children living in rural parishes, this has meant increased access to summer food help, thanks to meal delivery services that reach families where they live. Kids in previously better-served urban areas, however, may now have fewer options for meals than in previous summers.

Amid these changes, Louisiana's children face an unprecedented crisis. A recent report by Feeding America estimated that more than one in three Louisiana children are facing food insecurity during the pandemic, including a staggering half of all children in East Carroll Parish.

THE SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM

FIGURE 1



America’s child nutrition programs are a key part of the nation’s efforts to make sure that children have healthy food to eat, regardless of their family’s economic resources. During the school year, the National School Lunch Program, the School Breakfast Program, and the After School Meals Program serve millions of meals to the nation’s children. In 2018, nearly 30 million children a day ate school lunch, the majority of them (74%) qualifying for free or reduced price meals.⁶

On the national level, the Summer Food Service Program is considerably smaller than the National School Lunch Program. An average of 2,689,000 children nationwide received federally funded summer meals in 2018, roughly 9% of the average number of students who ate school lunch that year.⁷ The difficulties of serving children who are dispersed during the summer break, as compared with serving children attending school in the same location every day, may account for some of this disparity. Below, we offer recommendations that state governments, the state agencies that administer the program, and local communities can use to make sure that the programs’ resources are widely available and readily accessible for children during the summer.

Children receive food through the Summer Food Service Program at community sites such as schools, libraries, parks, camps, and places of worship. But getting food to those sites requires a coordinated effort (*Figure 1*). Funding for the Summer Food Service Program is authorized by Congress and is distributed to states by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), which provides funding and administrative support to state agencies. The USDA also regulates the program by setting rules, according to guidelines laid down by Congress, and in some cases making exceptions (or ‘waivers’) to those rules. In Louisiana, the state Department of Education oversees the program, recruiting sponsors, distributing funding for the program, and ensuring that sponsors comply with regulations. The sponsors oversee the sites where children eat summer meals—making sure they comply with the program’s rules and reporting their sites’ activities to the Louisiana Department of Education. In Louisiana, sponsors may operate at very different scales. In 2019, 42 program sponsors supervised only a single site, while one sponsor, the East Baton Rouge Parish School System, supervised 107 sites.

Figure 1: Layers of administration in the Summer Feeding program

SUMMER FOOD PROGRAM TRENDS

In July 2018, Louisiana ranked 50th in summer feeding program participation, with a smaller proportion of students who received free or reduced lunch during the school year participating in the summer food service program in Louisiana than in any other state.^{ii, 8}

Louisiana's low ranking caps years of decline that saw average July program participation dropping by 31% between 2015 and 2018 (Figure 2). It also reflects year-over-year drops in the number of sites offering summer meals, representing a 16% decline between 2015 and 2019, from 991 to 828 sites statewide (See Appendix C for parish-level data). In 2018, the total number of Louisiana children receiving summer meals through SFSP in an average week in June (the month of highest participation in Louisiana) was only 11.9% of the total who received free and reduced lunch (see Appendix B).

These declines are particularly troubling because the gap between the number of children living in poverty in Louisiana and the number of children regularly receiving meals through the Summer Feeding program remains significant. An estimated 96,000 Louisiana children lived in households with no earned income in 2017 (the

ⁱⁱ Nationally, July is the month of greatest average daily participation (ADP) in the federal Summer Feeding program, however Louisiana, along with several other Southern states with school year end dates in May, have higher participation in June than in July. No national data source exists for Summer Feeding ADP for the month of June. Additionally, USDA reporting rules allow states to aggregate up to 10 program days of preceding month participation with the first full calendar month of a state's participation in the program, which may inflate June participation statistics for states like Louisiana with significant late-May participation. Even when we estimate ADP for June and compare states using each state's highest month of participation, however, Louisiana fares poorly, ranking 42nd in Summer Feeding participation (see Appendix B for adjusted 2018 state rankings and a note on methodology).

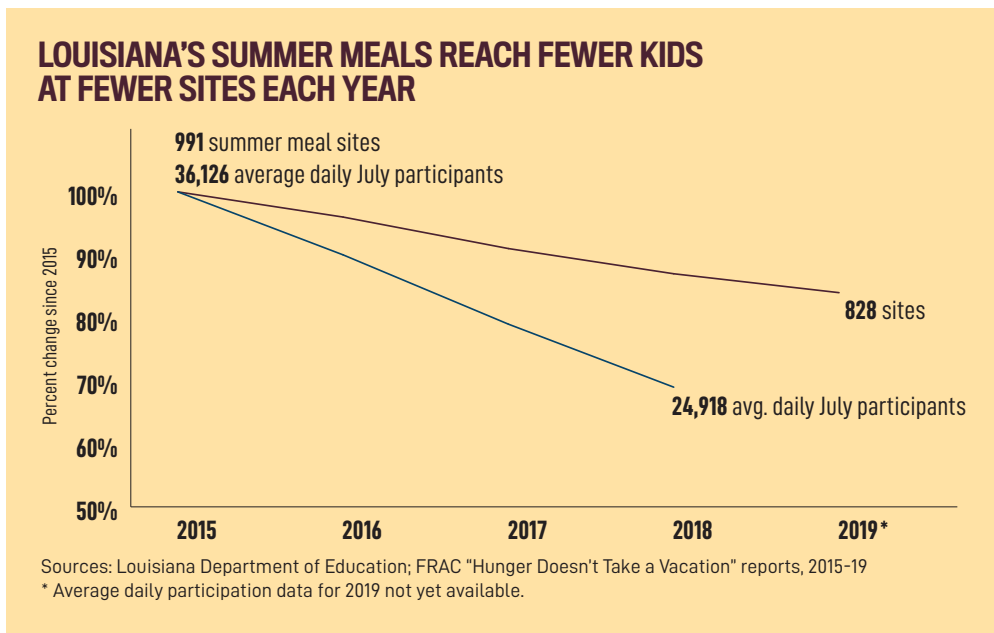


FIGURE 2

REDUCING SUMMER HUNGER

most recent year for which data is available), and many thousands more live in households earning below 150% of the poverty line (429,000 children in 2018, when 150% of the poverty line was \$31,170 for a family of three).⁹ Meanwhile, in June 2018, Louisiana served roughly 51,000 children through SFSP—45,000 fewer than the total number of children whose families lacked any form of earned income (*see Appendix B*).ⁱⁱⁱ

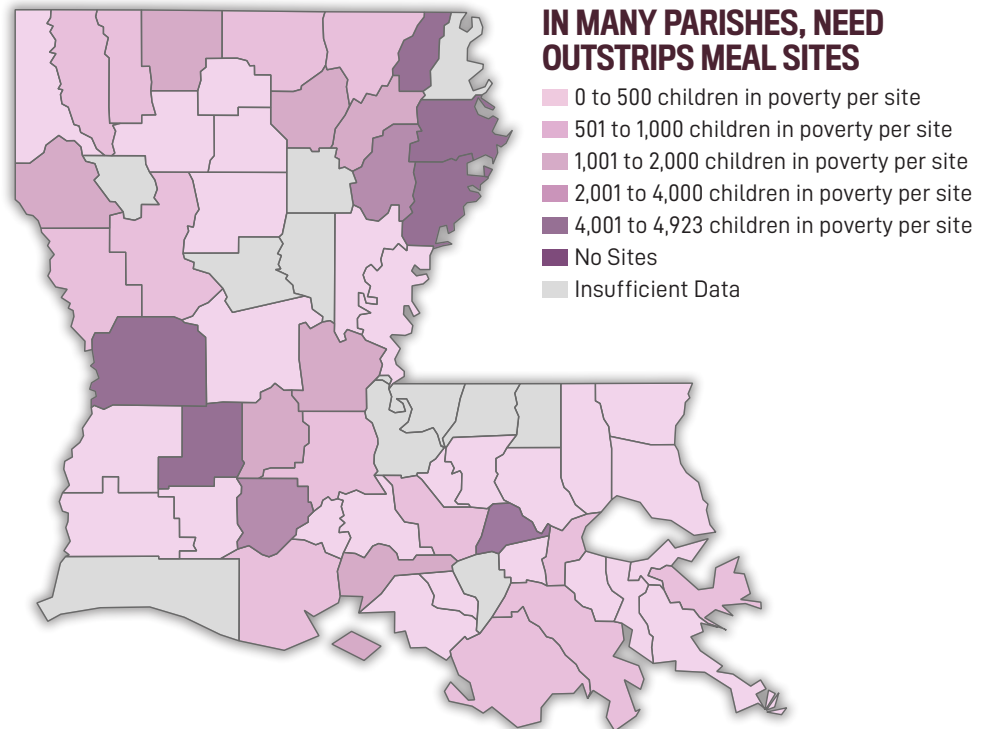
While overall statewide participation in the Summer Food Service Program is low, there is also considerable variation in the availability of summer meal sites across the state. Orleans Parish and East Baton Rouge Parish host the largest number of Summer Feeding Sites in the state, with 154 and 129 sites, respectively. In that year both parishes had roughly one Summer Feeding site for every 200 children in poverty. Ascension Parish, by contrast, had only one Summer Feeding site to serve the nearly 5,000 children living in poverty in the parish. (*See Appendix D for list of the number of children living in poverty for each Summer Feeding site, by parish.*)

Louisiana has more than its share of children who don't always know where their next meal is coming from. In the summer months, when school is out of session, many of those children have to get by without the support of the nutritious and dependable school meals they receive during the school year. But through coordinated action at the state level, Louisiana can reduce recent declines in the state's Summer Food Service Program, ensuring that fewer of our state's children experience summer as a time of hunger.

OPPORTUNITIES & RECOMMENDATIONS

Louisiana suffers under the nation's third-highest rate of child food insecurity, and East Carroll parish faces the highest rate of child food insecurity of any parish (or county) in the country, according to a 2019 report from Feeding America.¹⁰ As it is operating now, Louisiana's Summer Feeding program fails to meet this expansive need in an efficient, effective, and equitable manner. However, there are opportunities to address these challenges through regulatory changes, statewide organizing, best-practice sharing, and legislative action, that can ultimately bring more meals to more children who struggle with hunger over the summer months.

ⁱⁱⁱ Children are eligible for free when their family's income is below 130% of the federal poverty level (FPL) for a family of their size, and for reduced-price when their family's income is below 185% of the FPL.



REGULATORY & ADMINISTRATIVE IMPROVEMENTS

The child nutrition reauthorization process in Congress sets the major rules and funding levels for SFSP, while the USDA establishes most of the program's procedures and regulations. State agencies then administer and supervise the program locally. The regulations give state agencies some flexibility to administer the program in ways that are most appropriate for their communities. This flexibility provides a major opportunity to evaluate regulations and adjust those that put an unnecessary burden on sites and sponsors and ultimately result in fewer meals reaching children.

INSTITUTING A MORE PROACTIVE ROLE FOR THE STATE

While state-level agencies administer the Summer Feeding program, the way state agencies approach this task varies widely by state. Agencies in some states have strengthened their summer programs by facilitating program outreach, expansion and best-practice sharing, and streamlining the application process for sites that operate multiple child-feeding programs, such as the Summer Food Service Program and the Child and Adult Care Food Program, CACFP, which serves children during the school year with after-school meals.

In Kentucky, for example, the Department of Education issues an annual statewide media release on behalf of all sponsors, encouraging local organizations to get involved. Kentucky's release also calls attention to specific counties with high need and low participation rates to help attract new sites and sponsors in target regions. The agency also reaches out to all school districts and school child nutrition directors to encourage them to participate in the program, and works with site-level child nutrition staff to plan for staffing, transportation, and other barriers that limit participation among school food service providers specifically.

State agencies in Kansas and Kentucky play a major role as program consultants for prospective and returning sponsors by sharing best practices and troubleshooting problems so that sites meet compliance standards and increase attendance. Since many summer sites and sponsors also participate in the after-school meals program, state agencies can elect to streamline their operations into one office.

In Alabama, regular communication between summer-feeding and after-school program staff helps to encourage strong, reliable sponsors to participate in both programs. And in Arizona, efforts to streamline the requirements for school food authorities who participate in both programs have garnered bipartisan support and have decreased barriers for school districts to host after-school and summer meals.

Louisiana should take lessons from these states by becoming more proactive in outreach and technical assistance, with the goal of feeding more children over the summer months.

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v The waivers are as follows

[Please Note: the USDA simplified waivers 1-3 into one waiver application]:

1. Returning SFSP sites in good standing do not need to be visited in the first week.

1. First week visits would be required.

2. School Food Authorities (SFAs) in good standing do not need to be visited in the first week.

1. First week visits would be required.

3. CACFP (Kids Café) sites in good standing that wish to continue operating as SFSP sites (aka Seamless Summer) do not need to be visited in the first week.

1. First week visits would be required.

4. Any site can choose to follow an "Offer-vs.-Serve" model.

1. Only school sites in good standing can operate the "Offer-vs-Serve" model.

5. Sites must report their meal & snack times to their state agency and serve meals/snacks only during these times; there is not federal time requirement between when meals and snacks may be served.

1. Meals and/or snacks must be served at least 3 hours apart.

6. 'Closed' sites with enrolled participants can utilize area eligibility data to qualify as an 'at-risk' SFSP site.

1. Closed & enrolled sites must individually qualify each enrolled participant by income OR choose to become an open site.

UTILIZING STATEWIDE WAIVERS

In fall 2018, the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) rescinded six nationwide SFSP waivers, due to procedural errors in their initial implementation. These waivers intended to reduce the administrative burden on sponsors and increase program flexibility by waiving certain federal regulations.^{iv} The changes allowed sponsors to focus their limited staff time on new or struggling sites, minimize food waste, and serve more children. Although the nationwide waivers were rescinded, states still have the right to apply to the USDA for individual waivers on behalf of all summer feeding sponsors in the state.^v

In 2019, Louisiana applied for only one statewide waiver—the ability for sponsors to follow an “offer vs. serve” model, a meal service that reduces food waste. The state’s choice to not apply for the remaining waivers resulted in many sponsors applying on their own for additional individual waivers. This created more paperwork for the sponsors, the USDA regional office, and the USDA national office. It also left many sites unsure of which rules they would need to follow until just before summer began. At the state agency level, the increase in sponsor-level waivers complicates the monitoring process, with different sites held to different regulations depending on the waiver status.

This year, before the pandemic, Louisiana approached waivers a bit differently. For 2020, the state again applied for a waiver allowing all sites to use the offer vs. serve model. The Department of Education also submitted waivers requests for every waiver a sponsor received last year, both for the sponsors who requested each specific waiver, and for other sponsors who have opted in this year. The Department of Education’s decision to proactively re-apply for sponsor-level waivers for those sponsors who used the waivers last year is an important step toward easing program administration.

In the future, the Department could go further to expand the reach of those waivers to additional sites that would benefit from the flexibilities they grant. Louisiana’s application to waive a requirement that sponsors visit each of their sites within the first week of program operation, for example, names six sponsors for whom this requirement would be waived in 2020.^{vi} This waiver is particularly valuable for large sponsors that may face difficulty visiting all of their sites within a single week, particularly if those sites are spread over a large geographic area. In 2019, Louisiana had 21 sponsors overseeing more than 10 sites, however only two of those sponsors were included in the 2020 waiver request.

By doing away with a handful of stringent regulations, the waivers present an important opportunity for Louisiana to minimize the administrative burden on sponsors to operate the program and maximize the resources available to get meals to children.

REDUCING TECHNICAL BARRIERS

Federal regulations require sponsors and food service management companies (also known as ‘vendors’) to meet “applicable state and local health, safety, and sanitation standards.”^{7,12} These standards can vary greatly from state to state and region to region. Louisiana requires each Summer Feeding site to be inspected and certified by their local health departments, regardless of whether they prepare their own meals, receive hot or cold meals, or receive shelf-stable meals. Sites that also participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) throughout the school year cannot carry-over their current health inspection into summer; a regulation that has formally codified in Nevada, Idaho, and California.¹³ These inspection standards, which exceed those of many other states, can significantly increase the difficulty of participating in the Summer Feeding program.

Summer Feeding sites that do not prepare their own meals are still held to food

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retail-level health standards that require infrastructure—such as grease traps and three-compartment sinks—that many traditional sites lack. This problem can be especially acute in rural areas, where there may already be a limited number of community spaces that meet these arbitrary requirements. A lack of cohesion between parish health departments further complicates the process, as sites in different parishes are held to different standards. In certain regions, competing events—such as Jazz Fest in New Orleans—can limit the window of time health inspectors have available to visit SFSP sites and ultimately delay the start of summer meal service.

This health and safety certification process is greatly abbreviated in other states. In Arizona, Summer Feeding sites that receive meals produced off-site are not required to have a health or fire inspection at all; only sponsors and vendors who prepare meals must meet these standards. In Texas and Kentucky, individual sites are similarly not required to obtain health permits. Instead, sponsors send a list of all regional sites to their local health inspectors, who may contact those sites for further evaluation as they see fit. Louisiana could take a similar approach by evaluating which types of sites or sponsors

^{iv} *Summer Food Service Program Memoranda Rescission*, "U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service, October 11, 2018, www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/summer-food-service-program-memoranda-rescission.



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require an in-person health inspection, creating a single universal form applicable to child nutrition sites in all parishes, and allowing sites that participate in CACFP to continue to use the same health permit throughout the summer months.

EMPLOYING FLEXIBILITIES TO REDUCE SPONSOR BURDEN

While the USDA defines most Summer Feeding regulations at the national level, the program also allows states or sponsors to opt out of certain requirements if they can demonstrate local needs or challenges. This flexibility can come in the form of waivers from federal regulations or through local regulatory decisions, but both options require action by the state agency.

For example, the USDA offers heat waivers for summer sites without indoor or shaded spaces and on days with high temperatures, allowing children to take their meals home rather than consuming them on-site.¹⁴ In steamy Louisiana, a heat waiver would allow sponsors to provide meals at a park or housing complex that may not otherwise have adequate infrastructure for the hot weather. Similarly, the USDA offers a different waiver, known as a “non-congregate pilot waiver,” that allows sites to provide individual meal service or to-go meals to reach a population or region where lack of transportation or the absence of a safe communal gathering space would make it difficult to serve meals only to groups of children on site. Both of these options could significantly help sponsors in Louisiana to reach rural and under-served areas throughout the summer months.

State agencies also have the option to allow certain smaller flexibilities that reduce sponsor burden, curb food waste, increase participation, or otherwise benefit Summer Feeding sites and sponsors. Non-congregate feeding waivers have played an essential role in getting food to kids during the pandemic.

BEING MORE FLEXIBLE

Small flexibilities such as these can reduce the barriers sponsors and sites face in getting summer meals to all communities in Louisiana.

- » A “share table” option which allows children trade meal components they do not wish to eat for a component they will eat
- » Allowing sites to set up folding tables and chairs in an outdoor space rather than build permanent picnic tables

STRENGTHENING THE STATEWIDE NETWORK

While partners around the state work on Summer Feeding programs within their regions, industries or networks, there also is a significant opportunity for leadership on the statewide level. Statewide organizing has the potential to bring partners together, disseminate best practices, address challenges, increase visibility, and advocate for program improvements, all while ultimately increasing the number of summer meals reaching Louisiana children.

PROVIDING FUNDING

Cost is the most significant barrier many potential program sponsors face in starting or expanding a Summer Feeding program. Statewide coalitions and nonprofit partners have an important role to play in sourcing and providing funds to lower-resourced sites and sponsors. In Kentucky and elsewhere, nonprofit partners source funding from local healthcare providers, agriculture partners, and national anti-hunger organizations to provide mini-grants to programs through an annual application process. Successful grant-funded projects included buying equipment to store and distribute meals, updating site infrastructure, creating marketing materials, and other projects that resulted in more meals being distributed or more families participating. Conversations with sponsors in states where this kind of funding is available, suggest that the availability of this grant funding has a very substantial impact on addressing their day-to-day barriers to administering the program effectively.

BUILDING COMMUNITY

In Louisiana, sites and sponsors have minimal opportunities to communicate with each other. But the experience of other states show that Summer Feeding programs are strengthened when sites and sponsors are able to share best practices, troubleshoot problems, and reflect together on the summer's work. In many states, nonprofit organizations, statewide task-forces and coalitions or state agencies host workshops, celebratory events, kick-off festivals, etc., to bring sites and sponsors together.

For example, Kansas Appleseed hosts regional summits and workshops that aim to cultivate community among Summer Feeding organizations and to attract new sites and sponsors to the program. Kansas Appleseed initially targeted communities that had low participation in the program and/or a high potential for growth.

The Kentucky Department of Education convenes state partners twice a year - once in the fall, to celebrate and reflect on the previous summer; and again in the spring to kick off the upcoming summer program. Kentucky's education department also holds workshops and calls throughout the year to disseminate best practices and keep summer meals front of mind for their partners. This year, for example, Kentucky used these calls in part to develop a recipe book of reimbursable, kid-friendly meals, submitted by existing sponsors, to be shared with new and struggling sponsors.

Whether led by the state agency or community partners, Louisiana should better



Cost is the most significant barrier many potential program sponsors face in starting or expanding a Summer Feeding program. Statewide coalitions and nonprofit partners have an important role to play in sourcing and providing funds to lower-resourced sites and sponsors.

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leverage the expertise of veteran sites and sponsors in order to strengthen new partnerships and cultivate effective programs through the creation of in-person and virtual spaces for partner-to-partner sharing.

A statewide brand for summer meals increases opportunities for school systems, government entities, and nonprofits to advertise the whole program rather than focusing on a specific site or sponsor. In Oregon, the Department of Education, working with anti-hunger organizations, spearheads an annual ‘Summer Meals’ campaign that provides digital and print materials for all Summer Feeding sites along with one central website.¹⁵ Oregon’s website also contains a ‘meal finder’ tool for families and children looking for meal sites.

Effective marketing is essential to improving the reach of summer meals. Unfortunately, individual sites and sponsors often have limited capacity to do so.



Whether led by the state agency or community partners, Louisiana should better leverage the expertise of veteran sites and sponsors in order to strengthen new partnerships and cultivate effective programs through the creation of in-person and virtual spaces for partner-to-partner sharing.



Oregon's promotional materials for the Summer Food Service Program promote summer meals in ways that reduce stigma.

Creating a statewide brand for summer meals can be an effective way to increase awareness of the program among caregivers, children, and potential sites or sponsors without increasing the burden on local sites and sponsors.

Similarly, in Massachusetts, a state funded organization known as the Child Nutrition Outreach Program, leads a “Summer Eats” campaign with downloadable graphics, print materials, and outreach information available online in 13 languages.¹⁶

In other states, anti-hunger coalitions have developed statewide campaigns on targeted themes or issues. For example, the “Lunch Across Kansas” campaign aims to prevent a drop-off in summer meal participation during July, a problem seen in Louisiana as well.¹⁷ Kansas’s month-long campaign encourages sponsors and sites to host special events, operate longer programs, or change their day-to-day operations in ways which drive more meals to children throughout July. The coordinated effort helps attract media coverage, which in turn publicizes free summer meal programs at no

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additional cost to sites or sponsors. A unified statewide marketing plan for Louisiana's summer meals program has the potential to leverage existing support from public agencies and nonprofits while also simplifying the recruitment process for sites and potential participants.

STRENGTHENING STATEWIDE LEADERSHIP

Building statewide support for a summer meals program requires state agencies, advocacy organizations and community stakeholders to align their work under a formal structure and common goals. In Virginia, former Gov. Terry McAuliffe established the "Council on Bridging the Nutritional Divide" through executive order, which focused on increasing participation in the child nutrition programs.¹⁸

In Kentucky, partners formed a statewide task force which meets quarterly to discuss challenges related to Summer Feeding and to build participation in the program. This task force also hosts brainstorming sessions with community organizations in areas where there are high rates of food insecurity and low participation in the program. While coalitions such as these could take many forms, Louisiana would certainly benefit from the creation of a centralized body to lead statewide initiatives around summer meals.

UNIFYING STATEWIDE MARKETING

Examples of statewide summer meals branding campaigns from Massachusetts and



CREATIVE BEST PRACTICES

Louisiana faces many challenges in providing summer meals, such as high rates of food insecurity, a large rural population and poor public transportation. Despite these challenges, opportunities exist for Louisiana to greatly improve its Summer Food Service Program by drawing on best practices from other states to better serve rural communities, market the program to increase awareness and build capacity throughout the state.

FORMING CREATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Engaging the right partners in program promotion and implementation can be the key to reaching high-need, under-served communities. Mobile libraries, public transit systems, package delivery services and school bus companies have all been tapped in various states to transport children and/or meals in communities where the site or sponsor lacks capacity. Community organizations in Kentucky have formed 'walking buses' that up kids along a walkable route and taking them to a nearby meal site when transportation is not available. Any organization that acts as a pillar in their community, an information provider, and/or already regularly interacts with food insecure families can be an effective Summer Feeding partner.

REACHING RURAL COMMUNITIES

The Summer Food Service Program works closely with parents, schools, community organizations, and day camps to provide safe spaces for children to play, learn, and get enough to eat over the summer months. In many rural areas, parents and children often have limited access to these valuable summer enrichment programs. A 2016 report from the After-school Alliance estimates that for every child enrolled in an enrichment program in a rural community, three children are waiting to get in.¹⁹ Only 28% of rural children nationwide attended a summer program in 2014, despite nearly half of all rural parents reporting that they would like their children to participate. But rural schools are less likely than schools in urban areas to operate summer schools or camps, leaving fewer opportunities for summer meals to reach children through existing programs.

To establish new sites in rural areas, sponsors across the country have engaged non-traditional organizations to host summer meals such as police or fire departments, health clinics, or USDA Rural-Development sponsored housing units. But the ability of children to reach these sites once their families know about them is often a barrier. In rural Kentucky and Arkansas, mobile routes address transportation limitations by bringing meals to multiple non-traditional community sites such as parks or fire station parking lots. Such deliveries allow sponsors to reach multiple, smaller, groups of children every day in areas where there is no single accessible, central location.

In Kentucky, school systems also operate summer bus routes that pick up children at existing school bus stops and bring them to and from the nearest meal sites every day. Aside from simply transporting children to meal sites, rural sponsors also face the challenge of delivering fresh, nutritious, and food-safe meals to areas that may be a significant distance from where those meals are prepared. Some sponsors in Arizona and Louisiana produce frozen meals on a weekly or bi-weekly schedule, which allows them to minimize long-distance deliveries and mitigate the risk of hot meals falling below food-safe temperatures while on the road. In Arizona, sponsors lend out freezers, fridges, and microwaves to rural sites that wouldn't otherwise have the capacity to store and reheat frozen meals. A rural sponsor in Kentucky contracted with local grocery stores to prepare meals in harder to reach communities, which sites could then pick up daily.

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Though not currently reimbursable under federal guidelines, sponsors may also elect to seek additional funding to provide meals to adults and caregivers in attendance, which increases the likelihood that children will come to these rural sites and fully consume their meal.²⁰ Second Harvest Food Bank piloted this approach in Louisiana through private grant funding in some rural parishes. Unfortunately, unpredictable funding has prevented the food bank from consistently offering these adult meals.

EXPANDING MARKETING & OUTREACH

Effective marketing and outreach are essential to build awareness that summer meals are available and to reduce the stigma around receiving free summer meals. Targeted, consistent marketing and outreach to key communities is necessary not only leading up to the summer, but throughout the program. In the months leading up to summer, sponsors and sites should consider who are the leaders and the messengers in their communities and partner with them to share information about the program with potential sites and participants. These may include traditional child-focused partners such as schools, libraries, and community centers, or more adjacent partners such as police departments and churches that act as cornerstones in their communities.

Summer Feeding sites and sponsors should also collaborate with schools to disseminate information about sites directly to parents and students. Fliers, emails, text messages and robocalls are often already integrated into school notification systems and can already reach the majority of families in any given community. These messages are most successful when employed both during the last weeks of school and throughout the summer. Social media is another effective means of attracting children and families to summer meal sites.

In Arizona, local food banks circulate site information in relevant Facebook groups, on designated pages, and through sponsored advertising. Other sites host kick-off parties with giveaways, family activities, and outside organizations. These events may be hosted by the state agency, local sponsors or sites, affiliated anti-hunger organizations, or some combination of interested groups and can be targeted to regions where participation is historically low.

CHILD NUTRITION REAUTHORIZATION

For the purposes of this report, we chose to highlight opportunities at the state level to strengthen the SFSP program in Louisiana. However, many program flexibilities that would lead to more meals reaching children on a local level are decided at the federal level. The Child Nutrition Reauthorization process is ongoing now: Congressional hearings began last fall and bill may pass in 2020.

Several federal changes to SFSP that would significantly benefit Louisiana children are currently under consideration:

- » Lowering the area eligibility requirement for summer meals sites from 50% or higher poverty rate to a 40% or higher poverty rate.
- » Allocating grant funding for areas with high need and low participation or for areas hit by disasters.
- » Allowing all sites to serve up to three full, reimbursable meals every day.
- » Allowing sites to serve "non-congregate" or mobile meals to children rather than requiring them to eat on site.
- » Allowing states to implement Summer EBT which provides additional SNAP benefits during the summer months to families with children who participate in the free/reduced school lunch program during the school year.

LEGISLATIVE ACTION

While much of the funding and program design for the Summer Feeding program is legislated at the federal level, state legislatures can strengthen their commitment to feeding children over the summer months through policy changes. The options discussed below have been proven effective in other states, but they are not the only options. States should consider any policy that addresses the barriers sponsors face in ultimately getting meals to children.

REGULATING SCHOOL PARTICIPATION

As of this report's publication, 11 states require some or all school districts to operate SFSP or the summer option of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP).²¹ Each state bases this participation from school districts on criteria including geographic location, summer programming, or the level of need in the area surrounding the school (the exception is California, which requires all K-12 schools to offer summer meals). These distinctions may be based on the free/reduced lunch rate of the school, the size of the school (measured by number of students), school's distance from nearby schools, and the existence of summer programming such as summer school or an enrichment program. Some states have required schools that provide summer meals to serve all children in their community, not just those that attend the school. Most of these laws allow individual schools or school districts to opt-out of the program if they can prove significant financial or logistical barriers, by voting on the decision at a public school board meeting, or by requesting a waiver from their state agency. To mitigate these barriers, five states have also passed laws to allocate funding to schools that have low capacity to operate summer meals but are located in a low-income areas or serve a significant number of economically disadvantaged students.

PROVIDING FINANCIAL SUPPORT

The cost of starting, operating, and expanding a Summer Feeding program is often higher than the federal meal reimbursement rate. For this reason, the financial support of state legislatures through various appropriations can have a significant impact on program capacity. Eleven states support their Summer Feeding programs with state dollars such as grants to schools with free or reduced lunch rates above a certain rate and/or to non-profit sponsors that wish to expand, start-up, increase participation, or increase length of the program. Legislatures have also appropriated funding to supplement the federal meal reimbursement, either through cents added to every meal reimbursement or by incentivizing meals that meet certain local-food sourcing or nutritional standards.



Some states have required schools that provide summer meals to serve all children in their community, not just those that attend the school.

REDUCING SUMMER HUNGER

FORMALIZING RESEARCH & LEADERSHIP

Three states—Nebraska, Virginia and Texas—have taken legislative steps to strengthen the administration of their Summer Feeding programs. This may include the creation of state-level councils or task forces focused on summer hunger, provisions to require additional data collection and sharing, and mandates to develop an action plan to expand the reach of the program. These types of initiatives can provide long-term support for the study and expansion of Summer Feeding programs without initially requiring state or school funding.



APPENDIX A

JULY 2018 SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM PARTICIPATION RANKINGS

STATE	JULY 2018 ADP	JULY 2018 SFSP-NSLP RATIO	RANK
District of Columbia	15,274	34.5%	1
Vermont	7,826	31.0%	2
Maine	15,214	27.4%	3
New York	348,387	27.1%	4
New Mexico	45,816	27.0%	5
New Jersey	95,512	22.7%	6
Maryland	65,425	22.4%	7
Connecticut	33,977	20.5%	8
Idaho	17,869	20.0%	9
Montana	9,091	19.6%	10
Rhode Island	9,235	18.9%	11
Minnesota	46,437	17.3%	12
California	413,455	17.3%	13
Georgia	146,746	17.2%	14
Wyoming	4,012	16.9%	15
Delaware	10,415	16.8%	16
Utah	25,886	16.8%	17
Massachusetts	53,772	16.7%	18
South Dakota	7,640	16.6%	19
Indiana	68,609	16.2%	20
South Carolina	54,749	16.0%	21
Wisconsin	41,996	15.7%	22
Oregon	30,808	15.5%	23
Virginia	64,294	15.1%	24
New Hampshire	4,826	14.7%	25

ADP: Average Daily Participation, the average number of children receiving a meal through the School Lunch Program or the Summer Food Service Program each day

SFSP-NSLP Ratio: The number of children participating in the Summer Food Service Program for every child who receives Free or Reduced Price lunch when school is in session

APPENDIX A

JULY 2018 SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM PARTICIPATION RANKINGS

STATE	JULY 2018 ADP	JULY 2018 SFSP-NSLP RATIO	RANK
Tennessee	69,516	14.5%	26
North Carolina	90,724	14.4%	27
Pennsylvania	89,416	14.0%	28
Florida	194,458	13.5%	29
Arizona	56,979	12.6%	30
Michigan	65,338	12.5%	31
Illinois	87,412	11.4%	32
Iowa	18,625	10.9%	33
Arkansas	24,246	10.9%	34
Washington	34,867	10.6%	35
Alabama	36,351	10.3%	36
Ohio	61,926	10.1%	37
Alaska	3,719	9.6%	38
Kansas	17,154	9.5%	39
Colorado	19,588	9.0%	40
Kentucky	35,528	8.9%	41
North Dakota	2,823	8.9%	42
Hawaii	5,353	8.8%	43
Missouri	29,343	8.5%	44
Mississippi	24,034	8.4%	45
West Virginia	11,228	8.3%	46
Nevada	13,688	8.0%	47
Texas	178,430	7.2%	48
Nebraska	8,470	7.1%	49
Louisiana	24,918	5.8%	50
Oklahoma	16,612	5.5%	51
United States	2,858,022	14.1%	N/A

2018 SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM PARTICIPATION RANKINGS USING MONTH OF HIGHEST PARTICIPATION*

STATE	HIGHEST PARTICIPATION MONTH 2018 ADP (ESTIMATED)	HIGHEST PARTICIPATION MONTH 2018 SFSP-NSLP RATIO	RANK
District of Columbia	15,274	34.5%	1
Vermont	7,826	31.0%	2
New Mexico	52,575	30.9%	3
Missouri	104,796	30.4%	4
Maine	15,214	27.4%	5
New York	348,387	27.1%	6
Indiana	111,232	26.3%	7
Idaho	21,408	23.9%	8
Arizona	107,801	23.8%	9
New Jersey	95,512	22.7%	10
Maryland	65,425	22.4%	11
Tennessee	106,519	22.3%	12
Connecticut	33,977	20.5%	13
South Dakota	9,325	20.3%	14
Georgia	171,415	20.1%	15
Montana	9,091	19.6%	16
Rhode Island	9,235	18.9%	17
Wyoming	4,426	18.7%	18
Utah	28,721	18.6%	19
Nebraska	20,915	17.4%	20
North Dakota	5,523	17.4%	21
Minnesota	46,437	17.3%	22
California	413,455	17.3%	23
Delaware	10,415	16.8%	24
Massachusetts	53,772	16.7%	25

* The U.S. Department of Agriculture publishes Average Daily Participation data for July only, but publishes the number of meals served, by month, for each state for all months that the Summer Food Service Program operates. But several states—including Louisiana—serve more meals in June than in July (in general, SFSP participation is highest in the month immediately following the end of the school year; there are no states serving more meals in August than in any other month). For states where the month of highest participation was June, rather than July, we estimated Average Daily Participation by calculating the average number of meals served per-participant in that state in July, and dividing the total meals served in June by that average consumption figure.

APPENDIX B

2018 SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM PARTICIPATION RANKINGS USING MONTH OF HIGHEST PARTICIPATION

STATE	HIGHEST PARTICIPATION MONTH 2018 ADP (ESTIMATED)	HIGHEST PARTICIPATION MONTH 2018 SFSP-NSLP RATIO	RANK
Kansas	29,595	16.5%	26
Alabama	58,074	16.4%	27
Mississippi	46,008	16.1%	28
South Carolina	54,749	16.0%	29
Wisconsin	41,996	15.7%	30
Oregon	30,808	15.5%	31
Virginia	64,294	15.1%	32
Florida	213,210	14.9%	33
New Hampshire	4,826	14.7%	34
North Carolina	90,724	14.4%	35
Pennsylvania	89,416	14.0%	36
Iowa	22,586	13.2%	37
Colorado	28,544	13.1%	38
Texas	321,527	13.0%	39
Michigan	65,338	12.5%	40
Alaska	4,792	12.4%	41
Louisiana	50,747	11.9%	42
Illinois	87,412	11.4%	43
Arkansas	24,927	11.2%	44
Oklahoma	33,086	10.9%	45
Kentucky	42,878	10.7%	46
Washington	34,867	10.6%	47
Ohio	61,926	10.1%	48
Hawaii	5,704	9.3%	49
West Virginia	11,228	8.3%	50
Nevada	13,688	8.0%	51
United States	3,401,625	16.8%	N/A

APPENDIX C

LOUISIANA SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM SITES BY PARISH, 2015-2019

PARISH	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Acadia	4	2	1	2	2
Allen	0	0	0	0	0
Ascension	9	2	2	0	1
Assumption	3	0	0	0	0
Avoyelles	6	4	3	4	3
Beauregard	5	6	6	6	5
Bienville	3	8	2	2	3
Bossier	13	13	11	8	8
Caddo	144	128	81	62	62
Calcasieu	31	30	39	39	41
Caldwell	1	1	1	1	1
Cameron	0	0	0	2	0
Catahoula	0	0	2	3	3
Claiborne	5	4	2	0	1
Concordia	5	8	7	8	8
De Soto	8	12	3	1	2
East Baton Rouge	122	136	133	119	129
East Carroll	2	2	2	2	2
East Feliciana	1	1	1	1	1
Evangeline	2	2	2	2	2
Franklin	2	3	2	1	1
Grant	1	1	1	1	2
Iberia	9	10	6	5	4
Iberville	11	9	5	3	4
Jackson	2	3	3	5	3
Jefferson	100	106	96	111	58
Jefferson Davis	8	6	9	8	6
Lafayette	23	28	27	28	31
Lafourche	1	1	1	4	8
Lasalle	0	0	0	4	3
Lincoln	15	9	10	10	10
Livingston	3	4	14	13	16
Madison	3	3	6	3	0

APPENDIX C

LOUISIANA SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM SITES BY PARISH, 2015-2019

PARISH	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Morehouse	7	7	4	4	3
Natchitoches	12	10	12	10	6
Orleans	155	152	155	150	154
Ouachita	21	17	16	14	14
Plaquemines	3	1	1	4	3
Pointe Coupee	8	7	5	5	5
Rapides	25	29	19	26	30
Red River	3	3	2	0	0
Richland	0	2	2	2	2
Sabine	4	3	3	3	3
St. Bernard	4	4	4	4	4
St. Charles	7	6	7	7	6
St. Helena	3	2	3	2	2
St. James	7	7	9	7	6
St. John the Baptist	6	6	6	6	5
St. Landry	21	21	28	17	17
St. Martin	8	7	8	12	11
St. Mary	11	11	9	9	9
St. Tammany	16	18	16	18	19
Tangipahoa	53	38	44	39	40
Tensas	0	0	0	0	0
Terrebonne	0	1	5	9	10
Union	2	2	4	5	2
Vermilion	1	4	6	4	5
Vernon	0	0	0	0	0
Washington	22	23	30	29	30
Webster	33	12	5	5	6
West Baton Rouge	12	14	14	10	11
West Carroll	0	0	0	0	0
West Feliciana	1	1	1	1	1
Winn	4	4	4	4	4
Total	991	954	900	864	828

Source: Louisiana
Department of Education

APPENDIX D

NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN POVERTY FOR EACH SFSP SITE, PER PARISH, 2019

PARISH	NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN POVERTY*	% CHILDREN IN POVERTY	CHILDREN IN POVERTY PER SFSP SITE	SFSP SITES†
Acadia	4485	27.6	2243	2
Allen	1243	22.4	0	0
Ascension	4923	15.2	4923	1
Assumption	(S)	(S)	(S)	0
Avoyelles	3086	31.7	1029	3
Beauregard	1824	20.2	365	5
Bienville	1129	36.6	376	3
Bossier	7189	22.9	899	8
Caddo	21409	35.7	345	62
Calcasieu	11888	24.3	290	41
Caldwell	(S)	(S)	(S)	1
Cameron	(S)	(S)	(S)	0
Catahoula	702	31.9	234	3
Claiborne	1302	44.8	1302	1
Concordia	2154	44.7	269	8
De Soto	2730	41.3	1365	2
East Baton Rouge	26021	25.8	202	129
East Carroll	(S)	(S)	(S)	2
East Feliciana	(S)	(S)	(S)	1
Evangeline	2981	35.5	1491	2
Franklin	2229	43	2229	1
Grant	(S)	(S)	(S)	2
Iberia	5903	31	1476	4
Iberville	2017	28.9	504	4
Jackson	1320	38	440	3
Jefferson	25741	27.2	444	58
Jefferson Davis	1899	24.2	317	6
Lafayette	12074	21.6	389	31
Lafourche	4921	22	615	8
Lasalle	(S)	(S)	(S)	3
Lincoln	2827	30.1	283	10
Livingston	6001	16.8	375	16

NO SUMMER FEEDING PROGRAM SITES

The following parishes have no SFSP sites for at-risk children (with number of children in poverty):

- Allen (1,243 children)
- Madison (1,383)
- Tensas (635)
- Vernon (2,975)

APPENDIX D

NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN POVERTY FOR EACH SFSP SITE, PER PARISH, 2019

PARISH	NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN POVERTY*	% CHILDREN IN POVERTY	CHILDREN IN POVERTY PER SFSP SITE	SFSP SITES†
Madison	1383	51.3	0	0
Morehouse	2568	40.2	856	3
Natchitoches	3672	40.2	612	6
Orleans	29939	38.3	194	154
Ouachita	14136	36	1010	14
Plaquemines	1336	21.8	445	3
Pointe Coupee	(S)	(S)	(S)	5
Rapides	8871	27.1	296	30
Red River	(S)	(S)	(S)	0
Richland	2143	43.4	1072	2
Sabine	1504	26.1	501	3
St. Bernard	3273	27.2	818	4
St. Charles	1992	15.3	332	6
St. Helena	(S)	(S)	(S)	2
St. James	1264	25.5	211	6
St. John the Baptist	2759	25.7	552	5
St. Landry	9386	42	552	17
St. Martin	3605	27.8	328	11
St. Mary	3276	26.1	364	9
St. Tammany	8092	13.4	426	19
Tangipahoa	9833	31.7	246	40
Tensas	635	54.2	0	0
Terrebonne	7504	26.6	750	10
Union	1819	37.7	910	2
Vermilion	3374	22.3	675	5
Vernon	2975	22.6	0	0
Washington	3743	33.9	125	30
Webster	3344	36.8	557	6
West Baton Rouge	1597	26.1	145	11
West Carroll	946	35.7	0	0
West Feliciana	(S)	(S)	(S)	1
Winn	1279	41	320	4

(S) = Data suppressed due to small sample size

* Source: Louisiana Department of Education

† Source: US Census American Community Survey 2017, 5-year Estimates, Table S1701

FOOTNOTES

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- ⁷ "Child Nutrition Tables."
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FOOTNOTES

¹⁰ "Map The Meal Gap: A Report on County and Congressional District Food Insecurity in the United States in 2017" (Chicago, IL: Feeding America, 2019), https://www.feedingamerica.org/research/map-the-meal-gap/overall-executive-summary?s_src=WXXX1MTMG.

¹² "7 CFR §225.18" (U.S. Office of the Federal Register, February 20, 2020), https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=9a204059a02f38af6ec6f40aa14d0741&mc=true&node=pt7.4.225&rgn=div5#se7.4.225_118.

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¹⁸ Terence R. McAuliffe, "Executive Order 34 (2014): Virginia Commonwealth Council on Bridging the Nutritional Divide" (Commonwealth of Virginia, November 20, 2014), <http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/sites/default/files/download-resource/Virginia%20Commonwealth%20Council%20on%20Bridging%20the%20Nutritional%20Divide.pdf>.

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Louisiana Budget Project

