

October 2019

Summer Meals for School Success:

A School District Guide to Participating in the Summer Food Service Program



A Program of
Center for Food Action

**Hunger Free
New Jersey**

Fueling Change. Feeding All.

Adele LaTourette, Director

hungerfreenj.org



NEW JERSEY FOOD FOR THOUGHT CAMPAIGN

Healthy Food. Strong Kids.

Healthy Food. Strong Kids.

Led by Hunger Free New Jersey, the New Jersey Food for Thought Campaign works to reduce childhood hunger by expanding school and community participation in three key federal child nutrition programs: school breakfast, summer meals and afterschool meals.

The campaign has contributed to strong increases in school breakfast and summer meals participation. It is driven by a statewide steering committee that includes the New Jersey Departments of Agriculture, Education and Health, anti-hunger and health groups and New Jersey's major education associations. The campaign's national partners are the Food Research & Action Center and the American Dairy Association Northeast.

For more information, visit njfoodforthought.org.

Acknowledgements

This guide was made possible through the generous support of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.



Robert Wood Johnson
Foundation

Special thanks to the New Jersey Department of Agriculture for providing guidance and to the many school officials who spoke with us about their efforts to feed children. We'd also like to extend our gratitude to Nicole Ciullo for her assistance with the research and writing of this guide.

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DOUGLAS H. FISHER
Secretary

Dear School Leaders,

New Jersey has made strong progress in serving healthy meals to more children during the summer months.

In the last few years alone, the number of children receiving summertime nutrition has grown 38 percent. This is largely due to more communities teaming up to participate in the Summer Food Service Program. This federally-funded child nutrition program brings dollars directly into New Jersey communities to reduce childhood hunger.

The New Jersey Department of Agriculture, through the Division of Food and Nutrition, works closely with summer meals sponsors to help them operate effective meal sites, providing training and technical assistance to support their efforts to feed children in their communities. While we've made great progress, there is still a way to go before we can say we are reaching all children who could benefit.

Governor Phil Murphy and the State Legislature recognized the critical importance of school involvement in providing summertime nutrition when the Legislature passed and the Governor signed a bill requiring high-poverty districts to participate in SFSP.

We know school officials shoulder many responsibilities and that implementing a new program can be challenging. That is why we welcome this guide developed by Hunger Free New Jersey, with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. This guide provides a succinct and helpful overview of the Summer Food Service Program, along with smart strategies and links to resources that will help districts build successful programs and reach more children with summertime nutrition.

While the Department of Agriculture provides in-depth training and ongoing support to summer meals sponsors, this guide can help districts begin planning their programs this fall and beyond and provides useful insight into successful strategies used by other summer meals sponsors.

The Department of Agriculture stands ready to assist districts with that planning process. We will begin holding trainings in January and look forward to welcoming more New Jersey school districts as partners in our quest to ensure all New Jersey children have proper nutrition, all year long.

Sincerely,

Douglas H. Fisher
Secretary of Agriculture

Introduction

The research is clear. Good nutrition is a cornerstone of a child's health and school success. During the academic year, tens of thousands of New Jersey children and families rely on school meals for proper nourishment. When school is out, hunger sets in for far too many of these children.

To fill this gap, the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) provides federal dollars to school districts, local government and community organizations to feed children up to age 18 during the summer months.

Under a state law adopted in May 2018, New Jersey school districts where at least half of students are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals must participate in this federal child nutrition program, starting summer 2020.

Hunger Free New Jersey, with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, created this guide to specifically help school districts implement successful summer meal programs. When effectively administered, these programs can reduce summertime hunger, helping students return to school healthy and ready to learn.

School districts are uniquely positioned to play a key role in nourishing children in their communities. Many districts serve meals during the school year and have staff and other resources to participate in nutrition programs operated outside school time. These programs feed hungry students, while bringing federal funds into school districts.

The Summer Food Service Program is administered by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) at the federal level and the New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA) at the state level.



Schools Face Unique Challenges

Under the new state law, districts can choose to become a sponsor, which means they operate their own program, or they can become a site under an existing sponsor. Though the law allowed districts to request a waiver for summer 2019, all affected districts must participate by 2020.

In 2019, nearly all of the mandated districts requested and were granted waivers. Hunger Free New Jersey analyzed the waiver requests to learn more about barriers to participation. Most districts cited budgetary and operational challenges.

While these are legitimate concerns, comments revealed a lack of understanding of SFSP. This guide is intended to help address those concerns, highlight proven strategies and answer basic questions about participation in SFSP.

This guide is not intended to address the many technical aspects of operating a program. Instead, the New Jersey Department of Agriculture provides summer meal sponsors with in-depth training and ongoing support to ensure sponsors and sites meet all state and federal requirements.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Information in this report is based on extensive interviews with officials from New Jersey school districts that participate in the Summer Food Service Program, state officials, other summer meal sponsors and an exhaustive review of resources

from leading anti-hunger organizations, including Food Research & Action Center, No Kid Hungry and the United States Department of Agriculture. Endnotes provide specific sources and links to additional information.

10 Strategies for Building Successful Summer Meal Programs

Strategy 1:

Start early and engage your school community.

Effective planning and top-level leadership are critical factors in determining the success of any initiative. Child nutrition programs are no exception. When school leaders, especially superintendents and business administrators, embrace feeding children as an important piece of the academic continuum, child nutrition programs are most successful.

This leadership is critical to supporting food service directors in implementing successful summer meal programs and in enlisting the support of principals as key partners in feeding children year-round.

Planning for summer meal programs should begin in the fall. Start with engaging the school community. School leaders should clearly communicate the importance of the program. They should also solicit input from principals, parents, teachers and students to help shape and implement effective summer meal programs.

Resource:

USDA, [Proactive Planning for Sponsors](#)

Strategy 2:

Develop community partnerships.

Summer meal programs are most effective when communities team up to serve meals. The most successful summer meal programs tend to involve close collaboration between the school district and local government.

Other important partners include libraries, healthcare providers and community and faith-based organizations that operate summer programs for children. Depending on the community, each entity can play a role in feeding children during the summer.

Some community organizations may be best positioned to act as sites, especially if they have programs already operating. Others may be able to provide programming at schools to pair with the meals served. Still other organizations may be best equipped to lead marketing efforts.

School districts, then, should consider which local agencies and organizations would be best positioned to help implement summer meal programs. Once partners are identified, school leaders should convene a meeting with key stakeholders to discuss these partnerships. This should happen early in the process — preferably in the fall.

Creating a community-wide working group that meets regularly to review progress, troubleshoot and strategize for expansion can help build effective summer meal programs and lead to expansion of other efforts to feed children.

Resource:

[No Kid Hungry, Plan Collaboratively](#)

Who are Good Community Partners?

- Camps
- Child Care Centers
- Faith-based Organizations
- Food Banks and Food Pantries
- Healthcare Providers (i.e. hospitals, local clinics)
- Libraries
- Local government, especially municipal Parks & Recreation Departments
- Nonprofit Organizations (Groups that serve low-income children, such as the YMCA and Boys & Girls Clubs)

“Visit a Successful Site.”

- Visit a successful site to learn more about how it operates.
- Ask questions to be better prepared.

— Michael Pichowicz,
assistant business administrator,
Harrison School District

Strategy 3:

Serve suppers during the school year.

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) provides federal funds to serve afterschool snacks and suppers to children up to age 18.

In many communities, summer programs serve essentially the same group of children who participate in afterschool programs. To provide children with year-round nourishment, school districts should participate in both the summer meal and afterschool supper programs.

This approach eliminates gaps in service, allows districts to strike annual contracts with food vendors and enables districts to employ staff year-round.

Participation in both programs also reduces paperwork burdens, as documents uploaded in CACFP's online system can be used for sponsorship applications for the summer meal program. The additional CACFP reimbursements can also help support summer meal programs.

Not only does dual participation strengthen program operation, it also ensures that students have access to good nutrition all year long.

Resources:

Hunger Free New Jersey, [Food for Thought: The State of Afterschool Meals in New Jersey](#)

No Kid Hungry, [Differences and Similarities in the CACFP At-Risk Afterschool Meals Program and the Summer Food Service Program](#)

“Serve Meals to Parents.”

- Offer meals to parents and other caregivers for \$1 to help boost participation.
- Provide meals at community camps and other sites.

—Joel T. Johnston, school lead and founder,
Compass Academy Charter School

“Invite Siblings.”

- Invite siblings of students participating in a program to come for a meal to boost participation.
- Be sure you know the differences between SFSP and the National School Lunch Program and under which program you are serving meals.
- Follow the rules. NJDA carefully inspects and monitors sites.

—Alfred Savio, business administrator,
Newton School District

Strategy 4:

Sponsor community sites.

In the waivers, school officials frequently reported that buildings are closed for part, or all, of the summer for maintenance and repairs. This provides a unique challenge that can be overcome by sponsoring sites in the community where children already congregate.

Pools, parks, libraries, summer camps and housing developments all provide good opportunities for school districts to feed children in the community. Many of these entities already offer summer programming and have staff to supervise children.

Under this model, the school district manages the program and provides meals to sites. Even districts that have open facilities in the summer should consider partnering with community programs to reach more children and boost federal meal reimbursements.

Resources:

USDA, [Site Recruitment Strategies](#)

No Kid Hungry, [Recruit & Retain Sites & Sponsors](#)

Strategy 5:

Implement dual meal service.

Many districts participating in SFSP use the program to feed children enrolled in summer school, enrichment and recreation programs and Extended School Year (ESY). Since children are pre-enrolled in these programs, school officials can more accurately estimate how many students to expect to feed each day.

But participating schools are required under federal rules to have an open-door policy, meaning they must feed any child who shows up for a meal. To do this, some districts split meal service into two parts — first serving enrolled children and then opening service to any child in the community. This helps to address security concerns since students in the academic programs are either dismissed or back in their classrooms before community meal service takes place.

However, without strong promotion and activities to attract children, many districts report serving very few children from the community. That's why it is critical to market programs (see [Strategy 10](#)), as well as offer activities for children not enrolled in a program.

Resource:

USDA, [Administration Guide, Summer Food Service Program](#)

Strategy 6:

Pair food with fun and educational activities.

Extensive research documents that summer meal programs that provide structured activities for children attract far more students than those offering only meal service. In fact, New Jersey school officials interviewed for this guide uniformly reported that participation is low when only meals are offered.

While many districts already operate summer enrichment programs, expanding meal service to schools that do not offer programs requires thinking creatively about how best to attract children. One strategy is to partner with community organizations to provide programming.

This approach worked well in Dover where local churches teamed up with the town of Dover and community organizations to launch a new open summer meal site at St. John's Episcopal Church. Each community



organization provided activities one day a week. For example, the Patriot's Path Council Boys Scouts hosted fun scouting-related activities, while SNAP-Ed at Zufall Health served up nutrition education and cooking fun.

Providing activities helps enhance children's summertime experience, while also stabilizing participation, making it easier to operate a fiscally-viable program.

“Offer an Activity.”

- Offer an activity to increase participation.
- Encourage constant communication with sites, including attendance and changes in meal counts.
- Form a strong relationship with the food services vendor to ensure they can accommodate additional meals needed on a dime.

—Sharon Sperling Slater,
summer food coordinator/school liaison,
Plainfield City Division of Parks & Recreation

Strategy 7:

Serve up healthy, tasty food.

Serving fresh, healthy, tasty food is critical to building successful summer meal programs.

This can be a challenge for school districts in the summer, especially those that contract with a food vendor to deliver meals. Many resources, however, exist to help sponsors improve food quality.

Key strategies include:

- Creating menus and dishes that highlight local foods,
- Tapping into farm-to-school programs,
- Building strong relationships with food vendors,
- Testing out recipes using local foods during the summer when the volume of children being fed is lower,
- Surveying students to learn more about which foods are a hit — and which are not,
- Conducting taste tests with students prior to adding items to a menu to learn which ones may be most appealing.

Summer meal sites are the perfect places to highlight local products and feature fresh food, along with agriculture and nutrition education, especially here in the Garden State. From taste tests to school gardens, multiple resources exist to help sponsors bring local food to summer meal sites.

Through the New Jersey Department of Agriculture’s Farm to School Program, schools can partner with local farmers to source more than 100 types of Jersey-fresh produce grown right in the Garden State.¹

Farmer’s markets and community supported agriculture (CSA) programs are other good sources for local foods, especially since the volume of product typically needed to fulfill summer meals is smaller.

For school districts that contract with food service vendors to provide meals, school officials can improve the quality of meals by strengthening contract language and improving vendor communication, including immediately addressing any food quality issues that may arise.

Resources:

Food Research & Action Center, [A How-To Guide for Summer Food Sponsors on Purchasing High-Quality Summer Meals](#)

New Jersey Department of Agriculture, [Farm to School Program](#)

USDA, [Farm to School Grant Program Fact Sheet](#)

USDA, [Farm to Summer Fact Sheet](#)

USDA, [Integrating Local Foods into Child Nutrition Programs](#)

[USDA’s Office of Community Food Systems](#)

“Start Early.”

- **Start early.**
- **Communicate with principals and engage them in program implementation.**

—*Tonya McGill, executive director of food services, Newark Public Schools*

Strategy 8:

Tap into food banks.

New Jersey’s five community food banks all act as sponsors for federal child nutrition programs and may be looking to add sites in the communities they serve. They are experts at navigating the systems, while

providing healthy food to sites in communities across the state. Following is contact information and areas served by all five of New Jersey’s food banks.

New Jersey Food Banks

Name	Website	Counties Served
Community Food Bank of New Jersey	https://www.cfbnj.org/	Atlantic, Bergen, Cape May, Cumberland, Essex, Hudson, Middlesex, Morris, Passaic, Somerset, Union
Food Bank of South Jersey	https://foodbanksj.org/	Camden, Burlington, Gloucester, Salem
Fulfill	https://fulfillnj.org/	Monmouth, Ocean
Mercer Street Friends	https://mercerstreefriends.org	Mercer
NORWESCAP	https://norwescap.org	Hunterdon, Sussex, Warren

Strategy 9:

Serve supper in the summer.

Many summer meal sponsors report low participation in breakfast, especially at open sites. Children in supervised activities, such as camps or recreation programs, are unavailable to come to a site for breakfast and lunch. This has led some New Jersey communities to switch to serving supper in the late afternoon or early evening.

By doing so, children in camps and other programs can participate. It is also more likely that parents are home and able to provide transportation and supervision. These sites often serve a snack and a supper. Under federal rules, sites are not allowed to serve both lunch and dinner.

Sponsors that have switched to serving supper report substantial increases in participation, as well as higher federal reimbursements.

Resource:

New Jersey Food for Thought: [Snacks and Dinners Boost Summer Meals in East Orange](#)

Strategy 10:

Spread the word about summer meals.

With all the planning that goes into implementing summer meal programs, sponsors often overlook the critical function of marketing the programs to their communities. If parents are unaware of the program and where sites are located, participation will suffer.

Marketing must go beyond a single flyer sent home at the end of the school year or an ad placed in the local newspaper. Effective marketing must be consistent and ongoing.

Messages should include an easy way to find site locations and hours of service. The USDA operates an online directory, summerfoodrocks.org, where parents can input a zip code and find sites near them. Parents can also text "food" to 97779 to find sites. The state agriculture department uploads all open sites into this directory each summer.

It's also a good idea to "brand" your summer meals program with a catchy title, coupled with engaging graphics of children eating and playing. This helps to eliminate stigma and infuses a fun element into the programs.



Marketing efforts should include a strategic mix of messages and channels, including:

- Flyers or letters sent home with site locations/ hours in students' backpacks,
- Robo-calls,
- Morning announcements,
- Prominently posting site locations on the school district website,
- E-mails to parents,
- Printed information on the back of lunch menus,
- Posters in common areas,
- Social media posts,
- A message on outdoor signs: "School's Out, Summer Meals Are Served!"
- Sharing on partner websites, social media pages and local online media (i.e. TAPinto, NextDoor)

Involve the Community

Engaging the school and broader community in marketing efforts is especially important. Start with PTAs or other parent leaders in all schools to get the word out.

School officials should also team up with community organizations serving parents and children to circulate flyers, send e-alerts to their networks and prominently post site information on their websites and social media pages.

Libraries, child care centers, social service organizations, faith-based organizations and the local department administering community and social service programs should all be involved in a community-wide effort to spread awareness of summer meals.

Resource:

New Jersey Food for Thought Campaign/Hunger Free New Jersey have created flyers and an [outreach toolkit](#) to help sponsors publicize their programs.

Start Early and Share Often!

Planning for summer meals marketing should begin in the early spring, with marketing efforts continuing throughout the summer.

Sample Summer Meals Marketing Plan

Spring:

- Connect with community partners. Explain the program. Determine how each organization will get the word out.
- Create a marketing plan.
- Begin planning a kickoff event.

Early June to school closing:

- Send letters and/or flyers home to parents describing the program and providing site locations/hours.
- Post locations and times prominently on the district website.
- Place posters in high-traffic areas.
- Launch robo-calls and e-mails to parents.
- Include in morning announcements.
- Print information on the back of lunch menus.

One week before program begins:

- Issue a news release to local media outlets.
- Invite media and local or state officials to visit your program.
- Post on social media with link to sites and service times.
- Hold a “blitz day” when community members team up to distribute flyers and/or other promotional information.

Once school is out:

- Share social media posts at least twice per week throughout the summer. Try to include pictures of children eating and having fun.
- Post a message on outdoor signs: “School’s Out. Summer Meals Are Served!”
- Share on partner websites, social media pages and local online media. (i.e. TAPinto, NextDoor).
- Send reminder emails and/or robo-calls to parents.
- Continue to work with partners to get the word out.

Become a Nutrition Hub!

Given the strong link between nutrition and learning, school districts have a keen interest in ensuring their students are well-nourished. Districts are well-positioned to lead community efforts to feed children.

Districts that embrace feeding students can become nutrition hubs — maximizing participation in all available federal child nutrition programs — school breakfast, lunch, afterschool and summer meals. Not only does this strategy feed more children, it also boosts revenue, optimizes staff time and increases operational effectiveness.

Serve breakfast after the bell. Serving breakfast during the regular school day — rather than before school — ensures that all students receive the nutrition they need to concentrate and learn.

Serve summer meals. As this guide notes, summer nutrition is critical for helping students stay nourished when school is out and hunger sets in for far too many children.

Serve afterschool meals. Snacks and suppers help students and working parents, ensuring children have healthy food in the afternoon and evening hours.

Learn more about all three nutrition programs at njfoodforthought.org.

Sponsor or Site?

The summer meal legislation requires districts to become either a summer meal sponsor or site. Generally speaking, operating a site is much less onerous than becoming a sponsor.

Sponsors are responsible for:

- Submitting an application to the New Jersey Department of Agriculture to participate in SFSP,
- Providing all necessary documentation,
- Attending state-sponsored trainings,
- Identifying and/or recruiting sites,
- Providing training to sites,
- Ensuring sites meet health and safety standards,
- Ensuring sites accurately account for meals served,
- Providing meals to sites,
- Submitting claims for meal reimbursements to the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, which then submits claims to the USDA and reimburses sponsors.

While sponsors bear more responsibility for program administration, acting as a sponsor can give school districts more control over the program, including the type of food served, hours of operation and other considerations.

School districts that become sponsors can also serve community-based sites, such as libraries, parks,

pools, housing developments and local recreation programs, including those run by municipalities and/or community and faith-based organizations. This is a good way to expand participation and fiscally strengthen programs. The more meals served, the higher the federal reimbursements.

Site Responsibility

Sites must meet safety and health standards, serve meals at the designated times, accurately account for meals served and report the number of meals served to sponsors. Sites do not have to pay for meals or other costs associated with food service. They must, however, provide staff to maintain adequate supervision for participating children.

Key questions to consider when deciding whether to become a sponsor or a site:

- Does the community already have a sponsor serving summer meals? If so, district officials should explore the possibility of adding schools as summer sites under that sponsor.
- Is there adequate funding for start-up costs? If not, can funds be secured?
- What school buildings are available to become meal sites?
- Which schools have summer programs operating? Are there enough students in those programs to make sponsorship viable?

By the Numbers

Data can help districts target areas that would benefit most from summer meal sites. Data can be used to identify service gaps in your community, helping to strengthen existing programs and locate potential new sites. Statistics are also helpful in developing outreach efforts and boosting the reach of summer meal programs.⁶

Resource:

USDA's [Using Data](#) fact sheet provides links to key databases, mapping tools and calculators.



Jamesburg Jumps on Board with Summer Meals



The school operates summer camps and Extended School Year. Since the district was already feeding the children who attended those programs, participating in SFSP was a “no brainer,” says Nick Mackres, assistant school business administrator.

While the paperwork was more onerous than he expected, the extra reimbursements have helped to improve overall food service.

“I was spending \$10,000 on summer meals feeding our children,” Mackres notes. “Now, with the federal reimbursements, I’m able to provide better food that improves my program.”

Being able to operate an open site and just “click kids through” was another real benefit of the program, he added, although he is still working on ways to attract more children from the community.

Jamesburg was one of the few New Jersey districts that opted to begin participating in SFSP in 2019. The district hosted one site — an elementary school — and served breakfast and lunch each weekday throughout most of the summer.

“It was a win-win,” Mackres says. “I was able to serve better food, improve our High Five Summer Camp Program, and it feels good to feed our children healthy meals.”



Summer Food Service Program Timeline

Following is the general timeline for SFSP sponsor participation:

By November: New Jersey Department of Agriculture releases the list of districts mandated to participate in SFSP.

January: Training is held for sponsors to learn how to apply to participate. (2020 will be the first year that applications will be submitted through a new online system).

March: SFSP applications are due.

May 31: All applications are approved.

May and June: Operations training is held for sponsors.

Sponsors may add sites to their programs as late as **July**.

Frequently Asked Questions — And Answers!

Who pays for summer meals?

The USDA reimburses sponsors for each qualified meal served. Sponsors located in rural areas or those that prepare their own meals on-site receive a higher reimbursement.

Summer nutrition funding can add up. For example, a summer program serving breakfast and lunch to up to 50 children for eight weeks would receive more than \$12,000 in federal funding through SFSP.² Rural or self-prep sites would receive even more. By serving more meals, the per meal costs decreases, allowing sponsors to maximize the amount they receive in federal funding to support their programs.³

School districts already participating in the federal School Breakfast Program, National School Lunch Program and Child and Adult Care Food Program can use federal reimbursements from any child nutrition program to support the operation of summer meals and vice versa.

Do federal reimbursements cover all costs?

Many summer meal sponsors find that the Summer Food Service Program or National School Lunch Program reimbursements cover the entire cost of the meals and snacks they serve. Even if the entire cost of providing summer meals is not covered, many still decide to participate because of the significant benefits of feeding children during the summer.⁵

Resource:

Food Research & Action Center, [Staying in the Black: Operating a Cost-Effective Summer Food Service Program](#)

What about start-up costs?

The [New Jersey Child Nutrition Fund \(NJCNF\)](#), created and administered by the Reinvestment Fund and supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, provides capital funding and technical assistance for federal nutrition program sponsors, sites and meal vendors to expand the availability of fresh and nutritious food to children across the state of New Jersey.

The New Jersey Department of Agriculture is in the process of creating the Nourishing Young Minds Fund, which will provide grants for school breakfast and summer meals. Other organizations provide grant opportunities for summer and other child nutrition programs. Links can be found on the [New Jersey Food for Thought Campaign](#) website.

Resources:

[New Jersey Child Nutrition Fund](#)

[New Jersey Food for Thought Campaign](#)

[New Jersey Department of Agriculture](#)

How can I get help with implementation?

The New Jersey Department of Agriculture provides comprehensive trainings to new sponsors. A department representative is also assigned to each sponsor to monitor program operation and assist with any issues that may arise.

Resource:

New Jersey Department of Agriculture, (609) 292-4498.

2019 Summer Meal Food Service Program Reimbursement Rates⁴

Type of Meal	Rural or Self-Prep	All Other Site Types
Breakfast	\$2.2975	\$2.255
Lunch or Supper	\$4.0325	\$3.9675
Snacks	\$0.9525	\$0.9325

Resource: [No Kid Hungry Summer Meals Calculator](#)

Lakewood Serves Up Meals All Summer Long

At the Lakewood School District, feeding kids is a year-round business.

By leveraging community partnerships, the district has created a successful summer meal program that reaches hundreds of children every day throughout the summer.

Just a few days after school lets out for the summer, the food service staff begins serving up breakfast, lunch and dinner at 18 school and community-based sites. Meal service continues until just a few days before school starts.

Working closely with a host of community partners, including the township Parks and Recreation Department, the Girl Scouts of America and a local charter school, the district makes feeding kids an integral part of its mission.

"We've seen even more growth this year," says Cory Goldfarb, the district's food service director. "For some of these kids, these are the only meals they get. The program is absolutely essential."

And the district is always looking to add new sites.

"It's really simple to become a site," Goldfarb explains. "You fill out a form, attend a training and send in the paperwork each week. The food is free. You can feed kids twice a day. Why would anyone say no to that?"

He adds that marketing efforts start months in advance and continue throughout the summer, helping the district to feed thousands of children all summer long — helping to ensure they return to school healthy and ready to learn.



What are Open Summer Meal Sites?

Open sites feed any child who arrives for a meal. No identification or income verification is required. Open sites must be located in districts where at least half of children are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Under federal rules, schools participating in SFSP must be open to all children in the community.

Closed sites serve only children enrolled in a particular program. A hybrid — sometimes referred to as open

enrolled — means children are required to register but parents do not pay any program fees.

A major challenge for sponsors of open sites is determining how many meals to order or prepare, as attendance can vary widely from day to day. Providing regular activities, tasty food and effective marketing helps to ensure more consistent attendance.

Compass Academy Charter School Partnering with the Community

Now in its third year of serving summer meals, Compass Academy Charter School is working to expand the program to community sites.

With its own kitchen, the K-5 charter school prepares healthy, tasty meals, serving breakfast and lunch each weekday for six weeks in the summer, according to Joel T. Johnston, school lead and founder.

The school's food service staff prepares the meals and monitors the students, he explains. The struggle has been in attracting children to the site. For some families, transportation is an issue. For others, children may be enrolled in camps or other day programs.

To boost participation, the school teamed up with the local Salvation Army and provided meals to its summer camp in 2019.

"It's been a very positive relationship," Johnston says. "The Salvation Army camp is one mile away. They come and pick up meals. I bought insulated containers and trained their staff on how to serve meals. We fed more kids this summer, so it helps make the program more economically viable."

Next summer, Johnston hopes to establish meal service at a nearby apartment complex where they have a patio and



shade. He is partnering with the apartment management company to work out the logistics.

Another strategy he has employed to boost participation is offering meals to parents or other caregivers for \$1. While the Summer Food Service Program does not reimburse meals served to adults, the small fee helped offset the cost of meals for parents.

"We are seeking ways to be of service to the community," Johnston explains. "There is such a need in Cumberland County, since we are in an economically depressed area. It's also a great way to get our school better known in the community. We are able to educate parents about who we are as a school."



■ Technical Notes/Data Sources

- ¹ New Jersey Department of Agriculture, Farm to School Program website, <https://www.farmtoschool.nj.gov/agriculture/farmtoschool/>
- ² Food Research & Action Center, Summer Food Service Program Fact Sheet, http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/sfsp_fact_sheet.pdf
- ³ Food Research & Action Center, Summer Food Service Program Fact Sheet, http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/sfsp_fact_sheet.pdf
- ⁴ Federal Register, Summer Food Service Program: 2019 Reimbursement Rates, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/03/20/2019-05184/summer-food-service-program-2019-reimbursement-rates>
- ⁵ Food Research & Action Center, Summer FAQ, <https://www.frac.org/wp-content/uploads/summer-faq-1.pdf>
- ⁶ USDA, Summer Meals Toolkit, Using Data, https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/sfsp/SMT_Data.pdf

More Help to Serve up Summer Meals

Many additional resources exist to help school districts and other sponsors operate successful summer meals programs. Below are more resources, including grants, technical assistance and fact sheets.

[Food Research & Action Center Summer Meals FAQ](#)

Food Research & Action Center, [Outreach to Increase Participation in the Summer Nutrition Programs](#)

[Hunger Free New Jersey](#) works with local communities to bring together key stakeholders to implement effective summer meals programs. Visit hungerfreenj.org or contact Lisa Pitz, outreach director, lpitz@cfanj.org.

[New Jersey Department of Agriculture](#) administers child nutrition programs on the state level and

assists districts with implementation of school breakfast and lunch, summer and afterschool meals. Contact: 609-292-4498.

[New Jersey Food for Thought Campaign](#) has compiled a host of resources to help advocate for and implement school breakfast, summer meals and afterschool snacks and suppers.

[New Jersey Child Nutrition Fund](#) provides grants and loans to assist communities in implementing or expanding summer and afterschool meal programs.

[USDA Summer Meals Toolkit](#) provides information on everything from start-up logistics to forming partnerships.

Go Mobile?

Mobile meal delivery is growing in New Jersey and across the country. Mobile meal programs allow sponsors to serve children in places where transportation or safety issues may prevent children from visiting meal sites.

This can be a good option for a school district that lacks access to a kitchen or is located in a rural area where students have difficulty getting to a school in the summer.

Operating a successful mobile program requires planning, coordination and resources to outfit and staff a food truck. It's important to first assess whether mobile feeding may be appropriate for your community.

Resource:

[USDA's Mobile Feeding Fact Sheet](#)



A Program of
Center for Food Action

**Hunger Free
New Jersey**

Fueling Change. Feeding All.

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