



Food for Thought: The State of Summer Meals in New Jersey, 2020

Free Meals for Kids Soar During the Summer of COVID

New Jersey communities nearly tripled the number of free meals provided to children in summer 2020, while doubling the number of children reached.

This federally-funded nutrition helped to reduce childhood hunger during a time when many families faced job loss or reduced hours because of the COVID pandemic.

In July 2020 alone, more than 9 million meals were provided to roughly 203,000 children throughout the Garden State — a 183 percent increase in meals served over July 2019. The number of children served during that same time was twice the number served during

July 2019, according to a Hunger Free New Jersey analysis of data provided by the New Jersey Department of Agriculture. This includes both public and private school students.

For the first time ever, New Jersey exceeded a national benchmark of reaching 40 percent of children who receive free or low-cost school meals, serving 51 percent of students who received free or reduced-price lunch at school during the academic year.

Please see HFNJ's report, [New Jersey Summer Meals for Kids: 2020 Snapshot](#), for more information about statewide trends.

Local summer meal participation data

After moving to an online system in summer 2020, the New Jersey Department of Agriculture could provide site-level data for the first time, enabling HFNJ to calculate community-level participation data. The statistics shown below by county include participation in two federal summer meal programs: Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and Seamless Summer Option (SSO).

There are a few caveats. First, because these statistics are from the summer of the COVID pandemic, many more communities participated in these two federal summer meal programs and were allowed to feed all children for free, regardless of the community's level of poverty. Normally, only communities with at least half of students eligible for free lunch can provide meals for free to any child, age 18 years and younger.

Some of the communities that participated in 2020 have lower levels of poverty than those that normally participate in these programs. Summer meal participation rates are calculated as a percentage of low-income students who received free or low-cost school lunch in February 2020. Since these higher-income communities have fewer children participating in the National School Lunch Program, some served summer meals to more children than those who participated in the National School Lunch Program. This resulted in participation rates of more than 100 percent. This is not something we would expect to see during "normal" times.

Second, in calculating local data, we removed private and religious schools from the local totals. Many private and religious schools do not participate in the National School Lunch Program. As noted, participation rates are based on the number of low-income students receiving free or reduced-price lunch. Since many private schools do not participate, it is impossible to calculate accurate rates for those schools.

Data presented in the chart include only summer lunches served. Some sites may also serve breakfast, dinner and/or snacks. There were communities, such as Bradley Beach and Moonachie, that served breakfast or other meals, but not lunches. Those sites were not included on this list as it is focused on summer lunches, which is the most common meal served by sponsors across New Jersey.

The missed federal reimbursements represent the amount each community would have claimed if it served 40 percent of students who received free or low-cost school lunch during the academic year. This is the amount for July 2020 only. Actual reimbursements for the entire summer would be higher since many communities serve meals in June and August.

All data were provided by the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, which administers summer meal programs on the state level.

Why are summer meals important?

Tens of thousands of New Jersey children rely on school meals to get the nutrition they need to be healthy and learn. In the summer, hunger sets in when these meals are not available and families struggle to put food on the table. Federal summer meal programs ward off summertime hunger for children across New Jersey.

Schools, local government and community organizations sign on to be summer meal sponsors and provide food to sites in a community or communities.

Sites can be libraries, schools, parks, pools, playgrounds, housing developments and other places where children congregate in the summer. Sites do not pay for the

meals. Sponsors are reimbursed by the federal government for each meal served. The program is administered on the state level by the New Jersey Department of Agriculture.

Last summer and this summer, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) relaxed rules to make it easier for communities to serve meals. This includes allowing parents to pick up meals without their children present, providing meals free to all children, regardless of a community's level of poverty, and allowing flexibility in when meals are served. These rule waivers contributed to the substantial increase in summer meal service in 2020 and may have the same effect in 2021.

For information about becoming a summer meal sponsor or site, contact the New Jersey Department of Agriculture at (609) 292-4498.

New Jersey Summer Meals Participation, By Municipality, July 2020

County	City/Municipality	Average Daily Participation	Participation as a Percent of Students Receiving Free/Reduce-Price School Lunch	Number Eligible Students NOT Receiving Summer Meals on an Average Day, July 2020	Additional Federal Reimbursements if Summer Nutrition to NSLP Ratio Reached 40:100*
Atlantic	Absecon	20	1%	2,049	75,924
Atlantic	Atlantic City	605	13%	4,220	124,568
Atlantic	Buena/Buena Vista Township	375	50%	368	Met Goal
Atlantic	Egg Harbor City	91	29%	221	3,206
Atlantic	Galloway	484	30%	1,149	15,862
Atlantic	Hammonton	384	35%	724	5,521
Atlantic	Margate City	10	79%	2	Met Goal
Atlantic	Mays Landing/Hamilton	1,295	105%	0	Met Goal
Atlantic	Pleasantville	331	16%	1,738	46,655
Atlantic	Somers Point	37	10%	324	10,135
Atlantic	Ventnor	9	3%	246	8,751
Atlantic	Weymouth	59	115%	0	Met Goal
Bergen	Bergenfield	623	76%	197	Met Goal
Bergen	Cliffside Park	751	59%	523	Met Goal
Bergen	Englewood	1,043	68%	500	Met Goal
Bergen	Fair Lawn	511	154%	0	Met Goal
Bergen	Fairview	215	40%	324	22
Bergen	Fort Lee	73	17%	353	9,126
Bergen	Hackensack	502	24%	1,628	32,901
Bergen	Lodi	91	7%	1,170	38,880
Bergen	Teaneck	23	2%	1,082	39,365
Bergen	Wood-Ridge	13	10%	120	3,741
Bergen	Garfield	324	15%	1,842	50,970
Burlington	Beverly/Beverly City	83	43%	110	Met Goal
Burlington	Burlington City	257	35%	471	3,198
Burlington	Burlington Township	457	64%	255	Met Goal
Burlington	Edgewater Park	87	21%	330	7,517
Burlington	Florence	80	23%	267	5,555
Burlington	Mt. Holly	343	70%	144	Met Goal
Burlington	Pemberton/Browns Mills	715	37%	1,206	4,995
Burlington	Riverside	44	7%	571	18,991
Burlington	Willingboro	487	25%	1,454	27,237
Camden	Atco	718	36%	1,294	8,150
Camden	Brooklawn	34	24%	108	2,168
Camden	Camden City	3,574	41%	5,063	Met Goal
Camden	Cherry Hill	1,096	90%	121	Met Goal
Camden	Clementon	88	34%	168	1,366

*NSLP stands for National School Lunch Program

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Camden	Collingswood	202	41%	292	Met Goal
Camden	Lawnside	74	35%	138	1,037
Camden	Lindenwold	1,516	81%	354	Met Goal
Camden	Pennsauken	529	20%	2,059	47,581
Camden	Pine Hill	228	28%	571	8,650
Camden	Runnemede	300	156%	0	Met Goal
Camden	Somerdale	37	28%	93	1,410
Camden	Waterford Township	86	49%	91	Met Goal
Camden	West Berlin/Berlin Township	71	38%	114	323
Camden	Winslow/Sicklerville	510	25%	1,502	27,684
Camden	Woodlynne	44	12%	311	9,188
Cape May	Lower Township	355	65%	193	Met Goal
Cape May	Middle Township	559	73%	207	Met Goal
Cape May	North Wildwood	8	12%	62	1,863
Cape May	Woodbine	40	21%	151	3,422
Cumberland	Bridgeton	2,397	46%	2,823	Met Goal
Cumberland	Commercial Township/Port Norris	46	12%	329	9,741
Cumberland	Deerfield/Rosenhayn	23	18%	100	2,500
Cumberland	Millville	1,042	36%	1,847	10,705
Cumberland	Upper Deerfield/Seabrook	91	26%	259	4,615
Cumberland	Vineland	1,061	20%	4,144	95,991
Essex	Belleville	1,040	60%	705	Met Goal
Essex	Bloomfield	35	2%	1,714	62,499
Essex	Cedar Grove	20	33%	40	376
Essex	East Orange	713	13%	4,947	145,858
Essex	Irvington	745	19%	3,161	76,824
Essex	Maplewood	300	38%	499	1,843
Essex	Montclair	140	24%	431	8,331
Essex	Newark	7,702	34%	14,757	120,469
Essex	Nutley	189	61%	119	Met Goal
Essex	Orange	702	22%	2,531	55,549
Essex	West Orange	365	17%	1,826	48,037
Gloucester	Clayton	64	14%	382	10,716
Gloucester	Glassboro	338	54%	291	Met Goal
Gloucester	Monroe	195	17%	963	25,214

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Gloucester	Paulsboro	178	20%	706	16,480
Gloucester	Pitman	141	99%	2	Met Goal
Gloucester	Westville*	60	N/A	N/A	#VALUE!
Gloucester	Woodbury	414	50%	412	Met Goal
Hudson	Bayonne	304	7%	4,027	134,333
Hudson	Guttenberg	137	26%	390	6,948
Hudson	Harrison	530	431%	0	Met Goal
Hudson	Hoboken	53	8%	577	18,747
Hudson	Jersey City	5,822	57%	4,471	Met Goal
Hudson	Kearny	350	17%	1,678	43,368
Hudson	North Bergen	231	8%	2,631	85,893
Hudson	Union City	4,884	62%	3,038	Met Goal
Hudson	West New York	777	19%	3,293	79,973
Hunterdon	Delaware	9	47%	10	Met Goal
Hunterdon	East Amwell	36	77%	11	Met Goal
Hunterdon	Flemington	145	33%	298	3,066
Hunterdon	High Bridge	31	70%	13	Met Goal
Mercer	Hamilton	20	2%	1,212	44,449
Mercer	Lawrence	60	32%	126	1,388
Mercer	Princeton	503	153%	0	Met Goal
Mercer	Trenton	2,368	31%	5,155	60,241
Mercer	West Windsor/Plainsboro	303	105%	0	Met Goal
Middlesex	Carteret	192	9%	1,974	63,379
Middlesex	Edison	166	8%	1,993	65,555
Middlesex	Highland Park	110	30%	263	3,647
Middlesex	Metuchen	49	51%	47	Met Goal
Middlesex	Monroe	185	54%	159	Met Goal
Middlesex	New Brunswick	2,627	39%	4,132	7,228
Middlesex	North Brunswick	123	6%	2,083	71,380
Middlesex	Perth Amboy	1,457	21%	5,433	122,076
Middlesex	Piscataway	376	23%	1,294	27,457
Middlesex	South Plainfield	177	37%	305	1,476
Middlesex	Woodbridge	96	3%	3,445	124,121
Monmouth	Asbury Park	226	15%	1,325	37,076
Monmouth	Belmar	244	101%	0	Met Goal

*A participation rate could not be calculated for Westville because sites served more than one school community.

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Salem	Salem	208	19%	865	20,786
Monmouth	Eatontown	25	7%	310	10,288
Monmouth	Freehold Borough	233	22%	849	18,755
Monmouth	Hazlet	170	50%	170	Met Goal
Monmouth	Highlands	23	35%	43	295
Monmouth	Keansburg	27	3%	909	32,621
Monmouth	Keyport	126	32%	262	2,774
Monmouth	Manasquan	36	40%	55	38
Monmouth	Neptune Township	272	200%	0	Met Goal
Monmouth	Ocean Township	157	26%	438	7,608
Monmouth	Red Bank	203	20%	811	19,028
Morris	Dover	485	25%	1,472	27,963
Morris	Madison	98	93%	7	Met Goal
Morris	Morris Township	266	19%	1,135	27,702
Morris	Mount Olive	200	48%	217	Met Goal
Morris	Netcong	34	42%	46	Met Goal
Morris	Randolph	195	80%	48	Met Goal
Morris	Wharton	97	30%	228	3,067
Ocean	Jackson	11	1%	1,456	54,103
Ocean	Lakehurst	38	23%	125	2,567
Ocean	Lakewood	9,420	199%	0	Met Goal
Ocean	Little Egg Harbor	529	47%	593	Met Goal
Ocean	Ocean Township/Waretown	150	86%	25	Met Goal
Ocean	Seaside Heights	5	3%	154	5,533
Ocean	Toms River	546	20%	2,207	52,226
Passaic	Clifton	2,873	64%	1,625	Met Goal
Passaic	Haledon	93	14%	571	16,192
Passaic	Passaic	8,640	81%	2,069	Met Goal
Passaic	Paterson	1,432	8%	15,655	507,967
Passaic	Prospect Park	713	107%	0	Met Goal
Passaic	Wayne	125	32%	270	3,081
Salem	Penns Grove/Carneys Point	204	17%	996	25,950
Salem	Pilesgrove	149	62%	90	Met Goal
Salem	Pittsgrove/Elmer	23	7%	325	Met Goal
Salem	Quinton	90	91%	9	Met Goal

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Somerset	Bound Brook	723	62%	449	Met Goal
Somerset	Franklin	7	63%	4	Met Goal
Somerset	Manville	178	33%	359	3,443
Somerset	North Plainfield	114	7%	1,569	52,555
Somerset	Somerville	50	11%	387	11,778
Sussex	Byram	24	69%	11	Met Goal
Sussex	Newton	88	23%	298	6,224
Sussex	Vernon	83	25%	246	4,548
Union	Elizabeth	11,679	70%	5,120	Met Goal
Union	Hillside	356	28%	915	14,296
Union	Linden	207	7%	2,652	88,024
Union	Plainfield	908	19%	3,773	90,685
Union	Rahway	88	5%	1,634	56,455
Union	Roselle	317	21%	1,186	26,710
Union	Union	162	7%	2,035	67,414
Warren	Belvidere	8	11%	71	2,184
Warren	Hackettstown	20	5%	414	14,440
Warren	Phillipsburg	90	5%	1,548	53,166



Hunger Free New Jersey works to change policy and practice to ensure every New Jersey resident has healthy food to eat, every single day. Using a strategic combination of state and federal advocacy and local grassroots activism, Hunger Free New Jersey advances a comprehensive approach to solving hunger. HFNJ is a program of the Center for Food Action.



HFNJ leads the New Jersey Food for Thought Campaign, a statewide effort to reduce childhood hunger by expanding participation in federal child nutrition programs. This effective partnership of state agencies, including the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, health, wellness and education organizations, municipal government, child advocates and others has resulted in many more children receiving the nutrition they need to grow, learn and thrive. **For more information and to view the campaign partners, visit njfoodforthought.org.**

Acknowledgments

Our sincere thanks go to the New Jersey Department of Agriculture for its assistance with providing data and for its efforts to ensure children have nutritious food to eat all year long. We'd also like to thank the many communities that step up each year to feed children in the summer. Their frontline efforts help to reduce childhood hunger in New Jersey.

A special thanks to Nicole Holt for lending her extensive data expertise to this project and to the Food Research & Action Center for its ongoing support and technical assistance.

Technical Notes

Participation rates were calculated using National School Lunch Program participation data from February 2020. The additional federal reimbursements are based on a reimbursement rate of \$4.87 — the lowest rate for 2020 — and assume 23 days of service in July 2020. HFNJ relied on New Jersey Department of Agriculture Average Daily Participation reports for Summer Food Service Program and Seamless Summer Option for July 2020 to calculate these rates and reimbursements.



A Program of
Center for Food Action

Hunger Free New Jersey

Fueling Change. Feeding All.

Adele LaTourette
Director

Hunger Free New Jersey
192 W. Demarest Avenue
Englewood, NJ 07631

(201) 569-1804

hungerfreenj.org

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This report was written by Nancy Parello, HFNJ communications director. Questions? Contact Nancy at nparello@cfnj.org.