

US Department of Agriculture Summer Meals Program

What's Hot?

Sheila Fleischhacker, PhD, JD

Lindsey Turner, PhD

Jerold R. Mande, MPH

This article provides an overview of the US Department of Agriculture Summer Meals Program (SMP) and highlights opportunities to strengthen SMP's public health impacts. We also discuss initial SMP implications of 2 relevant policy provisions of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (P.L. 116-127), signed into law on March 18, 2020. Ensuring access to summer meals among high-risk students can provide (1) supplemental nutrition assistance to families that helps address food insecurity during the summer months when there are no school meals, (2) healthy meals in structured settings that might help reduce obesity risk, and (3) support to other programs that offer other benefits such as education, physical activity, or job training. *Nutr Today*. 2020;55(3):116–124

Reducing childhood obesity and related illness has garnered tremendous attention over the last 2 decades, particularly in schools, afterschool programs, and child care centers.^{1,2} Less attention has been given to where children spend their summer.³ Emerging research indicates weight gain accelerates in the summer, particularly

among certain racial/ethnic populations and children who are overweight.⁴ The summer has other understudied impacts on children's developmental trajectories and well-being that likely disproportionately affect high-risk children.⁵ Recently, a National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine Ad Hoc Committee on Summertime Experiences put forth a range of recommendations aimed at improving planning, administration, and coordination of summertime programs and services for children and youth; improving availability, access, and equity of summertime programs; and advancing data collection and research.⁶ Although work is needed to understand and address accelerated summer weight gain, structured environments—such as federally assisted summer meal programs—could be a critical building block for school-aged children's health.^{4,7–11} That is, summer meals can provide (1) supplemental nutrition assistance to high-risk families to help address food insecurity during the summer months when there are no school meals; (2) healthy meals in structured settings that might help reduce obesity risk; and (3) support to other programs that offer education, physical activity, or job training. This article provides an overview of the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Summer Meals Program (SMP) and highlights opportunities to strengthen SMP's public health impacts. We also discuss initial SMP implications of 2 relevant policy provisions of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (P.L. 116-127), signed into law on March 18, 2020.

Call out: Federally assisted summer meal programs are a critical building block for school-aged children's health.

Sheila Fleischhacker, PhD, JD, is adjunct professor of law, Law Center, Georgetown University, Washington, District of Columbia. This article reflects—in part—research and recommendations shared when a panelist at the *Summer Break Shouldn't Mean Kids Go Hungry!* Congressional Briefing hosted in conjunction with the Food is Medicine Working Group of the House Hunger Caucus on July 9, 2018 (sef80@georgetown.edu). She has more than 15 years of experience in government, academic, and non-government sectors working on federal food and nutrition assistance programs.

Lindsey Turner, PhD, is research professor, Initiative for Healthy Schools, Boise State University, Idaho. She has more than 15 years of experience examining how policies can improve student health and academic outcomes.

Jerold R. Mande, MPH, is professor of practice, Gerald J. and Dorothy R. Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy, Jaharis Family Center for Biomedical and Nutrition Sciences, Tufts University, Boston, Massachusetts, and served as a senior advisor at the US Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service for the Obama Administration working to reform the national food and nutrition assistance programs including the Summer Meals Programs.

The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

Correspondence: Sheila Fleischhacker, PhD, JD, Law Center, Georgetown University, 600 New Jersey Ave NW, Washington, DC 20001 (sef80@georgetown.edu).

Copyright © 2020 Wolters Kluwer Health, Inc. All rights reserved.

DOI: 10.1097/NT.0000000000000413

WHAT IS THE USDA SUMMER MEALS PROGRAM?

Since 1968, the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) works to provide free, nutritious meals to children when school is not in session during the summer with state education agencies, the state health or social service departments, or a designated FNS regional office (Table 1).^{12–14} Units of local government, camps, schools, housing projects, and private nonprofit organizations such as community centers, hospitals, and churches can sponsor the USDA Summer Food

TABLE 1 Selected Legislative History of the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Summer Meals Program (SMP)

Year	SMP Relevant Legislative Effort
1946	The Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act of 1946 (79 P.L. 396, 60 Stat. 230) created the National School Lunch Program to provide low-cost or free school meals to qualified students through subsidies to schools. This program was limited to the school year. While many innovative efforts took place, schools, among other community entities, struggled to afford ensuring access to healthy meals for these students during the summer months for decades.
1968	The 90th Congress (1967-1969) amended the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act of 1946 (79 P.L. 396, 60 Stat. 230) to authorize and appropriate funds to the USDA to help service institutions (eg, settlement houses and recreation centers) to initiate, maintain, or extend food service programs for children during the summer months. ⁴³ Since this time, Summer Food Service Program continues to be 1 of the 5 main school-aged child nutrition programs (ie, National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program, and Special Milk Program) that have been a part of Child Nutrition Reauthorization. ⁴⁴
1975	As part of Child Nutrition Reauthorization, the 94th Congress (1975-1977) amended the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act of 1946 and the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 to make the Summer Food Service Program permanent. ⁴⁵
2010	In the 2010 Agriculture Appropriations Act (P.L. 111-80), Congress authorized and provided funding for the USDA to implement and rigorously evaluate the Summer Food for Children Demonstrations for summers 2011 through 2014. ²⁶ Demonstration projects continued to operate through annual appropriations for fiscal years 2015 through 2019. ²⁷
2016 through 2020	The reauthorization of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-296) failed during the 114th Congress (2015-2017). ⁴⁴ Although the Senate Agriculture Committee and the House Education and the Workforce Committee put forth their respective bills—Improving Child Nutrition Integrity and Access Act of 2016 (S. 3136) and Improving Child Nutrition and Education Act of 2016 (H.R. 5003), neither was acted upon by the full House and Senate. Instead, these programs were extended as part of the fiscal year 2016 appropriations process (P.L. 114-113) and subsequent appropriations bills through fiscal year 2019, including authorization to revise in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program nutrition standards regarding sodium, whole grains, and flavored, low-fat fluid milk in fiscal year 2017 (P.L. 115-31). While no specific schedule for Child Nutrition Reauthorization has been announced at present, the House Committee on Education and Labor held a hearing focused on school meal programs in March 2019 entitled “Growing a Healthy Next Generation: Examining Federal Child Nutrition Programs.” ⁴⁶ Then, the Senate held a hearing in April 2019 that included discussions on innovative ways to feed students during the summer months. ⁴⁷

Service Program (SFSP) and be approved as open, enrolled, or camp sites.¹⁵ Summer Food Service Program is also known as the SMP; for our purposes, SMP refers to both SFSP and the Seamless Summer Option.¹² At most sites, children 18 years or younger are generally able to receive either 1 or 2 reimbursable meals each day; exceptions include sites serving persons with disabilities older than 18 years who participate in USDA breakfast or lunch programs or migrant children. The Seamless Summer Option is available for schools that participate in the USDA school meal programs, allowing streamlined continuation of the same meal service rules and claims procedures used during the regular school year.¹⁶ For all types of SMP, children must consume meals and snacks on-site, which is known as the “congregate feeding” requirement.¹⁷

In July 2018, during the peak month for summer meals, SFSP provided meals to 2.7 million children each day at 49 795 sites.¹⁸ But, the SFSP reaches only 16% of children who receive federal food and nutrition assistance during

the regular school year or less than one-sixth of children who receive free or reduced-price meals during the school year. Participation varies across states. For example, 0.2% of the eligible population participated in SFSP in Arizona, whereas 4.2% participated in the District of Columbia. In a study examining the geographic availability of the SFSP and Seamless Summer Option in California, urban counties were more likely than rural counties to have higher participation rates and many rural counties did not have programs in July.¹⁹ This is unfortunate because USDA school meals program participation helps to protect households from food insecurity during the school year.^{20,21}

Nevertheless, the USDA's estimates for SMP participation lack reliability. A recent Government Accountability Office report found estimates of SFSP participation were calculated inconsistently from state to state and from year to year.^{22,23} The Government Accountability Office recommended that the FNS administrator (1) improve program participation estimates, particularly by focusing on variations

in the number of operating days of meal sites and in the months in which the greatest number of meals are served; (2) communicate with SFSP stakeholders regarding flexibility with the on-site requirement in areas that have experienced crime and violence; (3) evaluate and annually report to Congress its use of waivers and demonstration projects to grant states and sponsors flexibility with requiring children to consume meals on-site in areas experiencing crime or violence; and (4) disseminate information about existing flexibilities available to streamline administrative requirements for sponsors.

Another issue is SFSP administration. The USDA Office of the Inspector General recently examined the administration of SFSP.²⁴ The Office of the Inspector General recommended FNS strengthen its SFSP monitoring and oversight by a variety of strategies, such as (1) modifying the management evaluation review guidance; (2) improving the SFSP waiver process to ensure the financial and operational integrity of sponsor and site operations by obtaining formal written legal opinion from the USDA Office of the General Counsel as to whether FNS has the legal authority to create nationwide waivers of SFSP regulations through policy memoranda in the absence of a State agency or sponsor written request and other requirements; and (3) enhancing the processes for assessing SFSP's risk for improper payments.

STRENGTHENING SMP'S PUBLIC HEALTH IMPACTS

Congress could make meaningful improvements to the SMP through the Child Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR) process across a variety of domains including access, dietary quality, engagement, enrichment, teen job training programs, food security, health, and poverty alleviation (Tables 2 and 3). Over the last 5 decades, a variety of legislative efforts have taken place during or outside of the CNR process aiming to expand access to summer meals (Table 1). This reauthorization process usually occurs every 5 years or so and allows Congress to make any modifications to the permanent statutes that authorize the USDA child nutrition programs and the related policies; specifically, the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act of 1946, the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 (P.L. 111-296) and, in a few cases, Section 32 of the Act of August 24, 1935 (P.L. 74-320). Most of the funding for SFSP requires annual appropriated mandatory spending based on criteria such as per-meal reimbursements set forth in authorization legislation. Therefore, this summer is a critical time for food, nutrition, and health professionals to contact their respective congressional members and arrange opportunities to see SMP in action and to hear from SMP participants and parents about what is working and

TABLE 2 Legislative Proposals of the 116th Congress (2019-2020) on the Summer Meals Program	
Bill Overview	Bill Summary
H.R. 2494—Tribal Nutrition Improvement Act/ S.1307—Tribal Nutrition Improvement Act	Amends the Richard B. Russell National School Act to allow an Indian tribe to administer various US Department of Agriculture programs including Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), which promotes tribal sovereignty
H.R. 2818—Summer Meals Act/S.1908 Summer Meals Act	Amends the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act to improve the efficiency of summer meals by striking 50% each place it appears and inserting 40%, which enables more sites to participate who too often just miss qualifying despite having close to or more than half their area qualifying for food assistance
H.R. 3378—Stop Child Summer Hunger Act/S.1941 Child Summer Hunger Act	Amends the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act to establish a permanent, nationwide summer electronic benefits transfer (EBT) for children program and authorizing travel reimbursement to service institutions for travel to satellite congregate feeding sites, which enables families to receive supplemental nutrition assistance during the summer months for the potentially 10 or more meals the student(s) in the household are not eating at home, and this emergency EBT provision is being utilized during the COVID-19 response
H.R. 3667—Summer Meals and Learning Act/S.2070 Summer Meals and Learning Act	Creates a new Federal grant program that provides grants to State libraries to allow schools with summer lunch programs to keep their libraries open for student use during the summer months, which helps integrate nutrition with enrichment activities at schools serving high-risk student populations
S.1918 Hunger-Free Summer for Kids Act	Amends the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act to require alternative options for Summer Food Service Program delivery, which helps tackle the access issue often cited as a barrier to SFSP participation

TABLE 3 Recommendations for Strengthening US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Summer Meals Program's Public Health Impacts

Amend the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act and, where necessary, the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 to

- Reinforce the current requirement of the Secretary of Agriculture to establish Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) meal pattern requirements aligned with the latest *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, including authorizing and appropriating funds to examine the modifications necessary to existing suggested Summer Meals Program (SMP) meal patterns, recognizing the exigency of accelerated summer weight gain, SMP reimbursement levels, kitchen equipment and storage capacity, and technical capacity.
- Require the Department of Agriculture to make permanent an expanded program that provides eligible households with summer electronic benefits transfer cards, which can only be used to purchase foods and beverages from retail food stores that have been approved for participation in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.
- Redefine "areas in which poor economic conditions exist," where SFSP may operate, as areas in which at least 40% (currently, 50%) of the children have been determined to be eligible for free or reduced price school meals under the USDA National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program.
- Allow federally recognized Indian tribes to administer various USDA programs including SFSP.
- Establish a pilot program allowing SMP service institutions to serve up to 3 meals or 2 meals and 1 snack each day of operation.
- Authorize and appropriate funds to allow the Secretary of Agriculture to award competitive grants to service institutions focusing on
 - Developing innovative partnerships with the US Departments of Education, Housing and Urban Development, Labor, Transportation, among other government, nongovernment, and private sectors that help to identify and scale up best practices for community-based sites such as public housing, faith-based organizations, schools, libraries, parks and recreational centers, and teen job training programs, in addition to providing access to transportation or alternative models for sites and off-site consumption when sites and transportation are limited, such as mobile SMP trucks or farmers' markets. Strengthening community and parental engagement should be a facet of these grants. Connections with community gardens should be encouraged. In addition, these calls for proposals should include identifying best practices for strengthening clinic to community connections with SMP offered at hospitals, alongside opportunities for annual school wellness check-ups. This can include partnerships with national, state, or local health provider organizations that mobilize their members to volunteer with SMP sites to offer physical, dental, eye, nutrition, among other assessments and counseling.
 - Providing outreach and technical assistance to ensure foreign-born noncitizens as well as US citizens who are members of mixed-status households who are eligible or live in areas eligible for SMP understand how their children's participation in SMP should not impact their immigration status. These efforts can also work to ensure these children are enrolled in their USDA School Meals Programs and, if eligible, other federal food and nutrition assistance programs such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.
 - Conducting studies that rigorously examine the most effective and efficient ways of tracking participation in SMP and identifying best practices to improve access across states and within rural, urban, and suburban areas. These studies should examine poverty alleviation for participating families.
 - Conducting studies to advance our understanding of the impact of the USDA SFSP and related Seamless Summer Option have on participant's food security, dietary intake, and health outcomes including weight status. This could include supporting targeted samples and questions specific to summer time eating and participation in the SMP within the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey.

address barriers to access. The following are key potential legislative actions to highlight.

Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer for Children (SEBTC) is a promising approach to address food security during the summer and is being utilized as emergency EBT during the COVID-19 response.

Ensuring Access to Summer Meals

One of the most promising recent congressional actions to address summer food insecurity is the authorization and appropriations to support the Summer Electronic Benefits

Transfer for Children (SEBTC).²⁵ This innovative but limited demonstration project distributes a monthly benefit during the summer on USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children electronic benefit transfer (EBT) cards to children eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. In the 2010 Agriculture Appropriations Act (P.L. 111-80), Congress authorized and provided funding for the USDA to implement and rigorously evaluate this program from summers 2011 to 2019.^{26–28} In summer 2011, 11 400 children were served through SEBTC; by 2016, more than 209 000 children in 9 states and 2 tribal nations were served. Rigorous research found the benefit of \$60 per month per child reduced the most severe category of food insecurity among children during the summer by one-third and the \$30 benefit was as effective. Households redeemed benefits at similar rates in the \$30 versus \$60 monthly benefit categories. Children in households receiving the \$60 benefit ate slightly more nutritious foods (fruits and vegetables, whole

TABLE 4 Meal Patterns of the US Department of Agriculture Summer Food Service Program^a

Breakfast—Select all 3 components for a reimbursable meal

1 Milk	1 Cup	Fluid Milk
1 Fruit/vegetable	½ cup	Fruit or vegetable juice (must be full strength), fruit and/or vegetable
1 Grain/bread (must be made from whole-grain or enriched meal or flour and cereal must be whole-grain or enriched or fortified)	1 slice 1 serving ¾ cup ½ cup ½ cup	Bread or Cornbread or biscuit or roll or muffin or Cold dry cereal or Hot cooked cereal or Pasta or noodles or grains

Lunch—Select all four components for a reimbursable meal

1 Milk	1 cup	Fluid milk
2 Fruits/vegetables	¾ cup	Fruit or vegetable juice (must be full strength), fruit and/or vegetable
1 Grain/bread (must be made from whole-grain or enriched meal or flour and cereal must be whole-grain or enriched or fortified)	1 slice 1 serving ½ cup ½ cup	Bread Cornbread or biscuit or roll or muffin or Hot cooked cereal or Pasta or noodles or grains
1 meat/meat alternative	2 oz 2 oz 2 oz 1 large ½ cup 4 tbsp 1 oz 8 oz	Lean meat or poultry or fish or Alternative protein product or Cheese or Egg or Cooked dry beans or peas or Peanut or other nut or seed butter or Nuts and/or seeds or Yogurt (may be plain or flavored, unsweetened or sweetened)

Snack—Select 2 of the 4 components for a reimbursable snack

1 milk	1 cup	Fluid milk
1 fruit/vegetable	¾ cup	Fruit or vegetable juice (must be full strength), fruit and/or vegetable
1 grain/bread (must be made from whole-grain or enriched meal or flour and cereal must be whole-grain or enriched or fortified)	1 slice 1 serving ¾ cup ½ cup ½ cup	Bread or Cornbread or biscuit or roll or muffin or Cold dry cereal or Hot cooked cereal or Pasta or noodles or grains
1 meat/meat alternate	1 oz 1 oz 1 oz ½ large ¼ cup 2 tbsp 1 oz 4 oz	Lean meat or poultry or fish or Alternative protein product or Cheese or Egg or Cooked dry beans or peas or Peanut or other nut or seed butter or Nuts and/or seeds or Yogurt (may be plain or flavored, unsweetened or sweetened)

^a<https://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/meal-patterns>.

grains, dairy foods, and less added sugars) than children in the \$30 group, and both had positive nutrition outcomes compared with children with no benefit.²⁹ The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (P.L. 116-127) allows the USDA to approve state plans to provide emergency SNAP assistance to households with children who would otherwise receive free or reduced-price meals at school (if not for their schools being closed due to the COVID-19 emergency), through EBT. To be eligible, the child's school must be closed for at least 5 consecutive days. Thus, there is a natural experiment occurring regarding the expansion of this program, and it might extend through the summer, pending the progress of this current pandemic.

Besides SEBTC, other innovative legislative approaches could improve access to SMP sites, which poses a hurdle when children and/or parents do not know how to find a program or cannot get there even if they do find one.³⁰ The USDA Summer Meal Site Finder helps children identify local sites offering USDA-supported meals and snacks.³¹ Parent, guardian, or youth awareness of a possible local site helps. However, a study in Texas found limited SMP site coverage and site density in rural, urban, and suburban areas and transportation accessibility are a key determinant for SMP site success.³² The USDA reported only 18% of SFSP sites offered transportation, although the majority of children did not use these services even if it was offered.³³ A study in California reported geographic accessibility was associated with a significantly lower probability of very low food security, particularly among households with younger children and those living in less urban areas.³⁴

Effective strategies to promote summer nutrition include expanding (1) the number of summer meals sites, (2) the number of meals served at sites, and (3) sites' hours of operation. A 2010 exploratory study examining SFSP among rural communities found lack of transportation and long distance to SFSP sites to be primary barriers to participation in addition to children's lack of interest in leaving home to participate or the parents' desire or need for children to stay home.³⁵ Public libraries might be well positioned to provide summer meals and enrichment.³⁶ Using a mixed-methods approach and supported by both public and private funding, a study examined the role of 10 public libraries in serving meals to children and adults for 6 to 8 weeks in low-income communities in Silicon Valley, California, during summer 2015. The surveyed adults in the program were primarily Latino (71%) and Asian (23%) and shared how they appreciated the libraries' enrichment programs, resources, and open and welcoming atmosphere. The adults participating in the program reported the following barriers to summer meals participation: lack of awareness, misinformation about the programs, structural barriers such as transportation, immigration fears, and stigma. Moreover, the CNR process should work to ensure sufficient support and oversight are in place to improve the reliability of the

estimates for the USDA's SMP participation identified as problematic in the recent Government Accountability Office report, which will help better identify underserved areas, as well as better-performing sites.²²

Improving SMP Meal Pattern Requirements

Summer Food Service Program has meal pattern requirements that sponsors must follow to receive reimbursement, which should align with the latest dietary guidelines (P.L. 101-445). Sponsors receive cash reimbursements for each meal and snack served, and federal-donated commodity foods are also offered.²⁷ The SFSP requirements are less stringent than the USDA National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and do not meet the latest edition of the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* (Table 4).¹⁴ Requiring SFSP participants to consume all their food on site and not be allowed to take components off-site might also encourage overconsumption for some participants. The USDA recently proposed a rule change (FNS-2019-0034) that will likely result in further weakened nutrition standards. Currently, sites using the Seamless Summer Option may use the NSLP and School Breakfast Program meal patterns. A 2015 review examined the nutrition standards of the USDA child meal programs and recommended the SFSP nutrition standards be updated to match those of the NSLP and the School Breakfast Program.³⁷ The review explained how the last time SFSP underwent modifications was in 2000 and noted few studies have examined the nutritional adequacy of SFSP meals or the dietary intakes and health outcomes of SFSP participants. More rigorous studies of SFSP's impact on dietary intakes and health outcomes are needed. A 2017 cross-sectional study examined foods and beverages served to and consumed by children in 5 Boston summer day camps that provided meals and also looked at the extra foods and beverages brought into the summer camp. The researchers concluded the average total calories served for breakfast and lunch were consistent with national recommendations, but the average total calories for snacks served was more than double the recommended targets. Nonetheless, children consumed relatively little in this setting, especially fluids, and often consumed less-healthy options when bringing in outside foods and beverages.

Future research could focus on improving the healthfulness and appeal of meals served to children in the summer; efforts to promote water consumption should be considered as well. More research is needed to examine how to strengthen the nutrition standards of SFSP, recognizing the increasingly important role summer months have on student weight status and that many SFSP sites do not have the kitchen equipment or technical capacity of the USDA school meal programs. Given the SFSP nutrition standards are currently permitted as an option for the NSLP during the COVID-19 response, there is a natural experiment taking place, along with increased attention to the challenges

(eg, logistical, financial) and opportunities (eg, product innovation) to strengthen the SFSP nutrition standards (P.L. 116–127, Sec. 202).

Incentivizing Innovative Partnerships

To strengthen SMP participation and public health impacts, each site should be encouraged to develop meaningful partnerships to promote other child development goals, such as education, physical activity, and job training. A critical partnership that the CNR could strengthen is between the USDA and the US Department of Education, which through innovative authorities and appropriations could collaborate to identify and scale up the most promising ways to maximize educational facilities, staff, and programs during the summer to effectively integrate healthy meals with learning.³⁸ Building on the results of a study funded by the National Institutes of Health examining year-round schooling, the USDA and Department of Education could explore innovative data sharing agreements and joint funding mechanisms to expand understanding of the educational and health outcomes of year-round schools. Another partnership the CNR process could foster is between the USDA and the US Department of Labor to explore ways to optimize summer teen job training programs and professional development opportunities aligned with the development, promotion, and evaluation of the SMP. Other departmental partnerships with the USDA such as with the US Department of Housing and Urban Development and with the US Department of Transportation could be strengthened during CNR. As one example, in Maryland, a public-private partnership that included National Institutes of Health support developed and evaluated an integrative health intervention known as “Mission Thrive Summer.”³⁹ Among African American high school students in Baltimore, participants experienced statistically significant improvements in self-reported physical activity and dietary behaviors and enjoyed the various components of the program including cooking, farming, mindfulness, and employment. More work is needed to understand the impacts of youth development and job training programs on SMP participation and ultimately participant health and academic outcomes.

Encouraging Tribal, State, and Local Innovation

Tribal governments play important roles in ensuring the health and well-being of their members and further legislative attention (eg, H.R. 2494 and S.1307) should be given in the form of pilot programs, research, and oversight hearings on the main opportunities and barriers to allowing tribal governments to administer SMP, among other child nutrition programs. Food, nutrition, and health professionals can help tribal governments assess their member's SMP usage, strengthen connections between tribal leaders and SMP nearby sites, and help build the tribe's capacity to administer SMP.

States could improve health and lower healthcare costs by expanding access to and improving the nutrition standards for summer meals.

States can also play key roles in developing policies, programs, and partnerships to support healthy eating and activity for children during summer.⁴⁰ Without question, states have foundational roles in improving SMP participation and ensuring site compliance with SMP regulations. They can develop innovative departmental connections across social services, housing, transportation, and health sectors to identify high-risk families and optimize regular SMP participation. Similar to state efforts to strengthen NSLP nutrition standards, states can require or incentivize summer feeding sites to provide meals and snacks that meet higher nutrition standards than required by the USDA. That is, states could seek USDA waivers to test innovative SMP strategies, for example, expanding the emergency EBT option being used for the COVID-19 response for broader use during summer months. Mobilizing support from the SNAP–Education Program and Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program, states can help build Healthy Kids During the Summer Time Coalitions, which can share best practices. These coalitions could be a subcomponent of a State Nutrition Action Council, which were established more than a decade ago by the USDA FNS regions to maximize nutrition education efforts and coordination and cooperation among state agencies, FNS nutrition assistance programs, public health agencies, and the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program.⁴¹ In addition, these summer food–focused coalitions can develop working groups to create and/or tailor model joint-use/shared-use agreements for local entities to adopt to utilize sites such as indoor and outdoor physical activity facilities at schools, nongovernment organizations, or parks and recreational centers, among others. State child nutrition leaders could also meet with congressional leaders to highlight what is working with SMP and where legislative changes, enhancements, or innovations are needed to accelerate the role of SMP in supporting children's health during these vulnerable summer months. Food, nutrition, and health professionals can be instrumental in contacting their respective state elected and agency leaders and arranging opportunities to see SMP in action and hear from SMP participants and their parents.

Ultimately, SMPs are local programs, where government and entities such as schools, public housing, faith-based organizations, parks, and recreational centers play a critical role. Local farms and businesses are essential as they most often provide the foods and beverages. The quality of meals served—and, in many cases, the adult supervision and the

programming these sites offer—is invaluable in ensuring children eat the foods and beverages served and that they keep coming back. The literature is scarce on understanding why children come to an SMP site and what keeps them coming back. More attention should be given to securing funding and other supports from government agencies, nongovernment organizations, and the private sector to rigorously evaluate what makes a successful and sustainable SMP site. Similar to local efforts to improve the dietary quality of school meals, cities, towns, and counties can require or incentivize summer feeding sites to provide meals and snacks that meet higher nutrition standards than required by the USDA. Food, nutrition, and health professionals also can play key roles by improving the foods and beverages offered, integrating nutrition education and promotion, and contributing to the evidence base by evaluating SMP's impacts.⁴²

CONCLUSIONS

Summer Meals Program participation may promote food security and nutrition, particularly for youths living below the federal poverty line. More attention is needed in research, policy, and practice to better understand the role these programs play in children's development and where improvements on both the summer meal and enrichment offerings are needed so we can best ensure our children's short- and long-term success. The upcoming CNR could potentially strengthen SMP's public health impacts by improving access to the program, strengthening meal pattern nutrition standards, and supporting innovative pilot programs, as well as rigorous research and evaluation studies. Food, nutrition, and health professionals can also work with tribal, state, and local decision makers to identify further ways to strengthen SMP's public health impacts.

REFERENCES

1. Institute of Medicine of the National Academies. Committee on Accelerating Progress in Obesity Prevention, Food and Nutrition Board, Glickman D, Parker L, Sim LM, Del Valle Cook H, Miller EA. *Accelerating Progress in Obesity Prevention: Solving the Weight of the Nation*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press; 2012.
2. US Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service. School meals. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/healthy-hunger-free-kids-act>. Accessed March 21, 2018.
3. Kenney EL, Lee RM, Brooks CJ, Craddock AL, Gortmaker SL. What do children eat in the summer? A direct observation of summer day camps that serve meals. *J Acad Nutr Diet*. 2017;117(7):1097–1103.
4. Franckle R, Adler R, Davison K. Accelerated weight gain among children during summer versus school year and related racial/ethnic disparities: a systematic review. *Prev Chronic Dis*. 2014;11:E101.
5. Turner L, Calvert HG. The academic, behavioral, and health influence of summer child nutrition programs: a narrative review and proposed research and policy agenda. *J Acad Nutr Diet*. 2019; 119(6):972–983.
6. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. *Shaping Summertime Experiences: Opportunities to Promote Healthy Development and Well-being for Children and Youth*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press; 2019. <https://doi.org/10.17226/25546>.
7. Baranowski T, O'Connor T, Johnston C, et al. School year versus summer differences in child weight gain: a narrative review. *Child Obes*. 2014;10(1):18–24.
8. Tanskey LA, Goldberg J, Chui K, Must A, Satchek J. The state of the summer: a review of child summer weight gain and efforts to prevent it. *Curr Obes Rep*. 2018;7(2):112–121.
9. Beets MW, Brazendale K, Weaver RG. The need for synergy between biological and behavioral approaches to address accelerated weight gain during the summer in children. *Int J Behav Nutr Phys Act*. 2019;16(1):39.
10. Tanskey LA, Goldberg JP, Chui K, Must A, Satchek JM. Accelerated summer weight gain in a low-income, ethnically diverse sample of elementary school children in Massachusetts. *Childhood Obes*. 2019;15(4):244–253. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1089/chi.2017.0228>.
11. Hunt ET, Whitfield ML, Brazendale K, Beets MW, Weaver RG. Examining the impact of a summer learning program on children's weight status and cardiorespiratory fitness: a natural experiment. *Eval Program Plann*. 2019;74:84–90.
12. US Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service. Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). <https://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/frequently-asked-questions>. Accessed March 20, 2019.
13. US Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service. Part 225—Summer Food Service Program. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/part-225%E2%80%94summer-food-service-program>. Accessed April 1, 2019.
14. US Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service. Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) Summer Meals Toolkit. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/summer-meals-toolkit>. Accessed April 1, 2019.
15. US Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service. An Opportunity for Schools. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/opportunity-schools>. Accessed February 3, 2020.
16. US Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service. School meals. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/opportunity-schools>. Accessed March 22, 2019.
17. Congressional Research Service. Child nutrition programs: current issues. January 31, 2019. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R45486.pdf>. Accessed April 1, 2019.
18. US Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service. Child nutrition programs expenditures by program, fiscal year 2018. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/child-nutrition-programs/charts/#expenditures>. Accessed February 3, 2020.
19. Turner L, O'Reilly N, Ralston K, Guthrie JF. Identifying gaps in the food security safety net: the characteristics and availability of summer nutrition programmes in California, USA. *Public Health Nutr*. 2019;22(10):1824–1838.
20. Huang J, Kim Y, Barnridge E. Seasonal differences in National School Lunch Program participation and its impacts on household food security. *Health Soc Work*. 2016;41(4):235–243.
21. Nord M, Romig K. Hunger in the summer: seasonal food insecurity and the National School Lunch and Summer Food Service Program. *J Children Poverty*. 2007;12(2):141–158.
22. US Government Accountability Office. Summer meals: actions needed to improve participation estimates and address program challenges. GAO-18-369. Released May 2018. <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-18-369>. Accessed April 1, 2019.
23. The Government Accountability Office. Testimony before the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, US Senate regarding Child Nutrition: observations on USDA Actions to Improve Program Integrity and Address Improper Payments. GAO-19-506T (April 2019). <https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/698386.pdf>. Accessed May 5, 2020.
24. US Department of Agriculture Office of the Inspector General. FNS Controls Over Summer Food Service Program. Audit Report 27601-0004-41. March 2018. <https://www.usda.gov/oig/webdocs/27601-0004-41.pdf>. Accessed April 1, 2019.
25. US Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service. Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer for Children (SEBTC). <https://www.fns.usda.gov/sebtc>.

www.fns.usda.gov/ops/summer-electronic-benefit-transfer-children-sebtc. Accessed April 1, 2019.

26. P. L. 111-80, Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2010. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-111publ80/pdf/PLAW-111publ80.pdf>. Accessed April 1, 2019.
27. Congressional Research Service. School meals programs and other USDA child nutrition programs: a primer. Updated February 11, 2019. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R43783.pdf>. Accessed January 14, 2020.
28. No Kid Hungry Maryland. Summer SNAP for children: Maryland is leading the way towards ending summer hunger for children. <https://state.nokidhungry.org/maryland/whatwedo/summer-snap-for-children/>. Accessed March 21, 2020.
29. Gordon AR, Briefel RR, Collins AM, Rowe GM, Klerman JA. Delivering summer electronic benefit transfers for children through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children: benefit use and impacts on food security and foods consumed. *J Acad Nutr Diet*. 2017;117(3):367–375.e2.
30. Kannam A, Wilson NLW, Chomitz VR, Ladin K. Perceived benefits and barriers to free summer meal participation among parents in New York City. *J Nutr Educ Behav*. 2019;51(8):976–984.
31. US Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service. Find Summer Meals in Your Community. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/summerfoodrocks>. Accessed April 1, 2019.
32. Wilkerson R, Khalife D, Krey K. Associations between neighborhoods and summer meal sites: measuring access to federal summer meals programs. *J Applied Res Child*. 2015;6(9):1–17.
33. US Department of Agriculture The Summer Food Service Program (SFSF). FNS 824. March 2019. <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/sfsp-infographic.pdf>. Accessed February 3, 2020.
34. Miller DP. Accessibility of summer meals and the food insecurity of low-income households with children. *Public Health Nutr*. 2016;19(11):2079–2089.
35. Wauchope B, Stracuzzi N. Challenges in serving rural American children through the Summer Food Service Program. Carsey Institute. 2010. Issue brief no. 13. <https://scholars.unh.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1107&context=carsey>. Accessed March 28, 2019.
36. Bruce JS, De La Cruz MM, Moreno G, Chamberlain LJ. Lunch at the library: examination of a community-based approach to addressing summer food insecurity. *Public Health Nutr*. 2017;20(9):1640–1649.
37. Hopkins L, Gunther C. A historical review of changes in nutrition standards of USDA child meal programs relative to research findings on the nutritional adequacy of program meals and the diet and nutritional health of participants: implications for future research and the Summer Food Service Program. *Nutrients*. 2015;7:10145–10167.
38. National Summer Learning Association. Healthy summers for kids: turning risk into opportunity. <http://www.summermatters.net/healthy-summers-for-kids-turning-risk-into-opportunity/>. Accessed March 28, 2019.
39. Pierce B, Bowden B, McCullagh M, et al. A summer health program for African-American high school students in Baltimore, Maryland: community partnership for integrative health. *Explore*. 2017;13(3):186–197.
40. Bohnert A, Zarrett N, Beets MW, et al. Society of Behavioral Medicine (SBM) position statement: SBM supports curbing summertime weight gain among America's youth. *Transl Behav Med*. 2017;7(4):912–914.
41. The Public Health Institute. *State Nutrition Action Council (SNAC) Toolkit: A Guide for Developing State-Level, Cross-Program Partnerships to Reduce Obesity*. <http://centerforwellnessandnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/SNAC-Toolkit-Final.pdf>. Accessed May 29, 2019.
42. Brusseau TA, Burns RD, Fu Y, Weaver RG. Impact of year-round and traditional school schedules on summer weight gain and fitness loss. *Child Obes*. 2019;15(8):541–547.
43. P.L. 90-302 (H.R. 15398). National School Lunch Act, Amendment. <http://uscode.house.gov/statutes/pl/90/302.pdf>. Accessed March 29, 2019.
44. Congressional Research Service. In Focus: An Introduction to Child Nutrition Reauthorization. Updated March 8, 2019. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/IF10266.pdf>. Accessed April 3, 2019.
45. P.L. 94-105 (H.R. 4222). National School Lunch Act and Child Nutrition Act of 1966 Amendments of 1975. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-89/pdf/STATUTE-89-Pg511.pdf>. Accessed March 29, 2019.
46. Matz M, Szemraj R. Opinion: child nutrition reauthorization moves forward. Posted March 21, 2019. <https://www.agri-pulse.com/articles/12026-child-nutrition-reauthorization-moves-forward>. Accessed March 29, 2019.
47. US Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry. Full committee hearing: perspectives on child nutrition reauthorization (April 10, 2019). <https://www.agriculture.senate.gov/hearings/perspectives-on-child-nutrition-reauthorization>. Accessed May 29, 2019.

For more than 80 additional continuing education articles related to Nutrition topics, go to NursingCenter.com/CE.

Instructions:

- Read the article on page 116.
- The test for this CE activity must be taken online. Tests can not be mailed or faxed.
- You will need to create (its free!) and login to your personal CE Planner account before taking online tests. Your planner will keep track of all your Lippincott Professional Development online CE activities for you.
- There is only one correct answer for each question. A passing score for this test is 14 correct answers. If you pass, you can print your certificate of earned contact hours and access the answer key. If you fail, you have the option of taking the test again at no additional cost.
- For questions, contact Lippincott Professional Development: 1-800-787-8985.

Registration Deadline: March 4, 2022

Continuing Education Information for Registered Dietitians and Dietetic Technicians, Registered:

The test for this activity for dietetic professionals is located online at <http://alliedhealth.ceconnection.com>. Lippincott Professional Development (LPD) is a Continuing Professional Education (CPE) Accredited Provider with the Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR), provider number L1001. Registered dietitians (RDs) and Dietetic Technicians, Registered (DTRs) will receive 1.0 continuing professional education units (CPEUs) for successful completion of this program/material, CPE Level 2. Dietetics practitioners may submit evaluations of the quality of programs/materials on the CDR website: www.cdrnet.org. LPD is approved as a provider of continuing education for the Florida Council for Dietetics and Nutrition, CE Broker # 50-1223.

Continuing Education Information for Nurses:

Lippincott Professional Development will award 1.0 contact hour for this continuing nursing education activity.

The test for this activity for nurses is located at <https://nursing.ceconnection.com>.

Lippincott Professional Development is accredited as a provider of continuing nursing education by the American Nurses Credentialing Center's Commission on Accreditation. This activity is also provider approved by the California Board of Registered Nursing, Provider Number CEP 11749 for 1.0 contact hour. Lippincott Professional Development is also an approved provider of continuing nursing education by the District of Columbia, Georgia, and Florida CE Broker #50-1223.

Disclosure Statement:

The planners have disclosed no financial relationships related to this article.

Payment:

- The registration fee for this test is \$17.95.