

Oklahoma Senate Education Committee
IS 19-48, Review of Summer Feeding Programs for Youth
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Hunger Free Oklahoma is an organization that works to bring a unified, statewide voice to the issues and solutions surrounding hunger, with a goal to ensure all Oklahomans have access to affordable, nutritious food. We believe that food insecurity is a solvable problem.

The Need

More than **1 in 5 kids in Oklahoma is food insecure**, meaning that at some time during the year, they do not have access to adequate food due to a lack of resources within their household. Numerous studies demonstrate that food insecurity has detrimental effects on children's health outcomes and academic performance in school.

The **School Breakfast Program** and **National School Lunch Program** provide nutritious meals for kids during the school year, but when school closes for summer, students no longer have access to these healthy meals. The **Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)**, often called the **Summer Meals Program**, was created to fill this gap.

Summer Feeding Programs for Youth

The Summer Food Service Program is a U.S. Department of Agriculture Program that allows kids and teens aged 18 and under to access **free, healthy meals** at eligible meal sites in low-income areas. Below, we provide an overview of the program:

- Oklahoma currently ranks 51st in the nation for participation in SFSP
- Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) administers SFSP in Oklahoma
- Sponsoring organizations assume financial and administrative responsibility for partner meal sites
- Summer Meals sites must be located in high-need areas where at least 50% of students qualify for free-and-reduced meals at school
- It is a congregate meal program that requires kids to eat their meal at approved sites
- Summer Meals sites can offer breakfast, lunch, snack, or dinner; or any combination of the two listed except for lunch and dinner
- Meals must follow nutritional meal pattern requirements outlined by USDA

Recognizing the serious effects that hunger has on a child's development and his or her ability to focus in the classroom, the Oklahoma Department of Education has committed to increasing the state's participation in federal child nutrition programs. In *The Edge*, Oklahoma's ESSA plan, OSDE has identified "increase access to child nutrition programs" like **SFSP** as one of its key initiatives to ensure the overall success for Oklahoma's students.

According to annual data published by USDA, more than 1.52 million meals and snacks were served in Oklahoma during summer 2018, bringing in more than \$4.3 million in federal reimbursements to 174 sponsors for qualifying meals served at 685 Summer Meals sites across the state. While this collective effort was laudable and celebrated, it still only reached **5 out of every one hundred students** that qualifies for free-and-reduced meals. This means that most kids who needed these meals did not access them. Considering that more than **425,000** public school students across the state qualify for free-and reduced price meals during the school year, the need is urgent to increase awareness about this important program as well as access to Summer Meals sites.

Collaborative Solutions

Hunger Free Oklahoma has had the opportunity to collaborate with like-minded partners such as OSDE and other founding members of the **Oklahoma Childhood Food Security Coalition (CFSC)** for the past three years to identify specific strategies to improve Oklahoma's performance in the Summer Meals Program. Through numerous **public-private partnerships** across the state we are collectively moving the needle in childhood hunger in Oklahoma. Some of these initiatives include:

- Partnering with Saxum to create and launch a brand new OSDE *Food for Thought OK, Food, Friends & Fun* Summer Meals statewide outreach campaign
- Convening Summer Meals stakeholders during regular CFSC meetings to build sponsor and meal site networks
- Creating the Meals4KidsOK.org website to help families locate their nearest summer meals site
- Investing more than \$100,000 in private funding to support statewide brand and marketing to increase awareness and promote the program
- Hosting the 2019 Summer Meals Kickoff event, convening more than 120 stakeholders across the state to share innovative ideas and best practices and to build program capacity

As a result of collaboration from partners across the state, Summer 2019 shows promise to see growth in participation as evidenced by an increase in the number of meal sites and participating sponsors.

In order to support OSDE, the 183 sponsors, the 738 Summer Meals sites that were open in 2019, and countless volunteers and staff who dedicated their time to this important work, Hunger Free Oklahoma asks for your support to keep this forward momentum going. The Summer Meals Program is not a one size fits all program. It requires strategic planning and problem solving, community buy-in, and a multitude of resources to connect vulnerable children to nutritious meals. Operating Summer Meals in densely populated metros looks vastly different than serving meals in a smaller community. **To help this program succeed in Oklahoma, we ask that you continue learning about this program, ask questions, get involved to help make this a more user-friendly experience for all, most importantly though, for the children and teens across the state who rely on this program.**