



OHIO
CHILDREN'S
BUDGET
2022-2023



December
2020

ISSUE BRIEF

Issue: Expand Summer Food Access for Children

Food insecurity among Ohio's youngest citizens impacts 1 in 5 or more than 489,000 children. Ohio ranks 12th highest for childhood food insecurity in the nation (Feeding America, Map the Meal Gap 2018). Research since the pandemic began suggests that rates for child food insecurity have risen to 1 in 4. Among some populations as many as 1 in 3 children are food insecure. When these children lose access to their safety net of school breakfasts and lunches in the summer months, they are at greater risk of not having enough food to eat.

Policy

- The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and Seamless Summer Option (SSO), provides funding to operate meal sites for children and teens in low-income areas when school is out and in emergency situations, such as the current global pandemic.
- State agencies administer the program on behalf of the USDA. The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) is the administering agency in Ohio.
- Sponsors such as schools, local government agencies, faith-based, and other non-profit community organizations enter into agreements with ODE to operate the program and receive reimbursement on a per meal basis through the SFSP or SSO.
- Meal sites are located in a variety of settings such as schools, parks, community centers, health clinics, hospitals, apartment complexes, churches and migrant centers in high-poverty areas where children 18 and younger receive meals free of charge. The USDA allowed flexibilities to these regulations governing SFSP and SSO starting in March 2020 at the onset of the pandemic allowing meals to be consumed in non-congregate settings to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

Challenge

- SFSP/SSO regulations, without the flexibilities provided due to the pandemic, requires all meals to be consumed in a congregate setting to obtain the federal reimbursement.
- Ohio ranks 37th among states for summer food service participation, with only 1 in 10 free- and reduced-eligible children accessing a summer meal who participated in school breakfast and/or lunch during the school year.
- In very rural areas there are limited options for congregate meal sites. Few children are within walking distance and lack of reliable transportation restricts access to sites which are accessible only by car.
- Ideally the congregate requirement allows for the opportunity to engage students in education and enrichment opportunities while also receiving a meal. However, there is a lack of program partners available to host these types of activities. School and community sponsors who are well-equipped to prepare and distribute food are often not equipped to offer these opportunities due to funding, staffing, skill-set to develop educational/enrichment opportunities, and time constraints. Due to these challenges, more children could be served under a non-congregate model.

[Photo by Izzy Park, Kiana Bosman, and Michał Parzuchowski on Unsplash](#)



Opportunity

- Efforts should be made to maximize SFSP/SSO through the permanent adoption of non-congregate food service.
 - USDA flexibilities granted due to COVID-19 during Summer 2020 allowed school and community sponsors of SFSP/SSO to distribute “grab-and-go” meals without the challenges of congregate feeding.
 - As a point of comparison, in July of 2020 summer sponsored meals distributed were over 5.84 million versus 1.87 million meals in July of 2019.
 - Sponsors implemented a variety of unique distribution methods in summer 2020 using the non-congregate flexibility that otherwise would not have been possible with the congregate mandate. Some examples include: using bus routes to deliver food to students’ homes; using school bus stop locations to distribute food to children in low-income neighborhoods; and identifying other low-income locations without meal access to be used for mobile meal sites.
 - Senate Bill 1918, the Hunger-Free Summer for Kids Act of 2019, was introduced on June 19, 2019 by Arizona Senator John Boozman and currently has 23 bi-partisan sponsors including Senate President Mitch McConnell and Ohio Senator Sherrod Brown. The bill would make the current USDA flexibilities permanent that have allowed non-congregate food service in SFSP and SSO during the pandemic.
- The USDA should continue to provide and expand funding for the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer for Children (S-EBT) to states and jurisdictions to complement SFSP/SSO and further reduce childhood food insecurity.
 - The program is designed to help overcome the unique summer feeding challenges facing rural communities. Summer EBT demonstration grants have been provided to a small cohort of states and tribal nations since 2011 providing a monthly benefit during the summer for families whose children are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Findings from the 2011-2014 demonstration projects showed that Summer EBT reduced the prevalence of food insecurity by nearly 20 percent. The Pandemic EBT program, which was created to provide nutritional support similar to Summer EBT, provided households an EBT card with the value of the free school breakfast and lunch reimbursement rates for the days that schools were closed during COVID-19. This has led states to develop infrastructure to implement a similar program during the summer months if permanent and expanded funding is made available for Summer EBT.

Support Child Well-Being: Budget Recommendation

- Increasing summer food access through SFSP and SSO will bring additional federal dollars to Ohio to support schools, faith-based, and community non-profit partners operating summer food service. Doubling the number of summer meals served in Ohio would bring an additional \$4.35 million in federal funding back to Ohio.
- Work with Ohio’s Congressional delegation to ensure support of making permanent critical USDA flexibilities that have been vital to states during the pandemic such as allowing non-congregate food service in the SFSP and SSO. Such flexibilities could be passed in stand-alone legislation (e.g. S 1918), or as a part of more comprehensive reforms in the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act if enacted in the 117th Congress.
- Other USDA regulatory flexibilities allowed during the COVID-19 pandemic have been instrumental in providing food and food access to children in Ohio and should be given consideration for future incorporation into existing regulations. These include: reducing area-eligibility below the current 50% free and reduced eligibility threshold for sites to be eligible to participate in SFSP/SSO; multi-day or parent pick-up of meals (especially in rural areas lacking transportation and/or where families have a significant distance to travel to receive meals); and meal pattern flexibilities for substitutions when food supply disruptions do not allow meals or snacks to meet standard meal pattern regulations for meal component or portion size.
- Work with the USDA and Ohio’s Congressional delegation to increase funding to expand the USDA Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer for Children (S-EBT) to all states including Ohio to complement SFSP and SSO and further reduce childhood food insecurity.addit