

NYC Policy Alert: The 2021 Free Summer Meals Challenge



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The 2021 Summer Meals Challenge

Hundreds of thousands of NYC children rely on the free school meals program for daily nutrition. The Federally funded program also helps parents spend less on food and instead use the saved money for other necessities. Here are findings, challenges and opportunities for the summer of 2021:

- **For the summer of 2021, no NYC child should experience hunger insecurity.** United States Department of Agriculture COVID-19 waivers allow school districts to offer a combination of grab and go meals (reheated at home) or children can eat the breakfast and lunch meals at schools, day camps, parks and public pools. Parents can get several days worth of meals with one pick up including weekend meals. Also, the Biden Administration has taken important steps to make sure all families will have sufficient nutrition with two months of P-EBT payment covering cost of breakfast and lunch; all NYC public school children are eligible for the P-EBT cards (around \$375 per child). For July and August, between the P-EBT card payments and summer meals program, and a massive publicity campaign, there shouldn't be any hunger insecure children.
- **Based on an analysis of government breakfast and lunch data, only 23.5% of NYC public school children were taking the summer meals during July.** While the free breakfast and lunch meals are available each summer, participation has been a constant problem. Based on New York State Education Department-Child Nutrition Office data, for the month of July-2019, the Average Daily Participation (ADP) number of lunch meals was 141,889 meals. The school year (September to June) ADP number was 604,577 meals. For July, meals participation was 23.5% when compared with the school year (the number drops to 17% when only low income children are analyzed and counted). August is an even bigger challenge than July. In August 2019, meals participation was 12% when compared with the school year.
- **NYC parents can get several days worth of meals including weekend meals with *just one pick up*:** The NYC-DOE has confirmed by email that parents can pick up multiple meals (lasting several days) with one trip; parents can also pick up weekend meals. ***This is great news!*** The convenience of one trip up will encourage more families to use the summer meals program for their children. But with just a few days until the summer meals program begins on June 28, there is no official notice yet alone publicity about multiple meals on the [NYC-DOE summer meals webpage](#). Nor is there a posting of this information on any website or social media.
- **Massive publicity campaign:** NYC families need to know that NYC-DOE summer meals program will be offering good tasting and nutritious food at neighborhood school buildings. A massive publicity campaign in NYC's low income neighborhoods can begin this morning. No one's permission is required nor is more funding needed. All that is needed is for anti-hunger organizations, hundreds of community based organizations, food pantries, elected officials, City government agencies, community boards, churches, mosques and synagogues to simply create and post flyers where people will see them and in languages most frequently spoken (a computer and color printer will do just fine). Here on our [website](#) are examples of how easy it is to jumpstart a citywide publicity campaign.

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Summary: As New York City recovers from the Pandemic and returns to the new normal, what happens to the hundreds of thousands of families that struggled with hunger insecurity. The Biden Administration has taken important steps to make sure all families will have sufficient nutrition with two months of P-EBT payment covering cost of breakfast and lunch for children that participated during the school year. At the same time, the Federal Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) will run this summer, beginning on June 28, with free breakfast and lunch meals for any child up to 18 years of age (NYC-DOE program ends on August 30). Here in NYC and in many large school districts across the country, parents can pick up multiple meals covering three to seven days with just one trip. The programs already in place should ensure that no child experiences hunger insecurity this summer; however, recent meals participation data obtained from New York State Education Department-Child Nutrition Office shows that challenges remain. In 2019, when only the number of low income children are considered, the number of children participating in the summer free meals program was around 17% of the total number of NYC public school low income children.



1. NYC-DOE Summer Breakfast and Lunch Meals Data and Analysis

1-a. Comparison of summer and school year meals participation: Based on data supplied by the New York State Education Department-Child Nutrition Office, for the month of July-2019, the Average Daily Participation (ADP) number of lunch meals taken dropped by 76.5% when compared with the school year ADP. Only 23.5% of public school children were taking the summer meals in July when compared with the number of meals taken during the school year. In other words, only one in four children took a meal during the summer compared with the school year.

Chart 1. Month of July: comparison between school year and summer meals taken¹

Average Daily Participation (ADP) Breakfast Program				
	Sept to June School Year Meals	July Meals	Change	% Change
2018	271,601	76,669	-194,932	-71.7%
2019	269,459	77,500	-191,959	-71.3%
2020	274,354	109,377	-164,977	-60%
Average Daily Participation (ADP) Lunch Program				
	Sept to June School Year Meals	July Meals	Change	% Change
2018	610,138	139,940	-470,198	-77%
2019	604,577	141,889	-462,688	-76.6%
2020	618,789	157,843	-460,946	-74.5%

School year 2018-19 and the summer of 2019 was the last full year before the disruptions in the school attendance caused by the COVID-19 Pandemic. While the free breakfast and lunch meals are available each summer, participation has been a constant problem. Much more still needs to be done to increase meals participation this summer. In the summer of 2020, the meals were offered mainly as a grab and go program.

Only 23.5% of public school children were taking the summer meals in July-2019 when compared with the number of meals taken during the school year. In other words, only around one in four children took a meal during the summer compared with the school year.

1-b. Documentation of the number of NYC-DOE low income students participating in the summer meals program: Because NYC-DOE operates as a Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) program, all children can eat a breakfast or lunch for free regardless of income. Therefore, another method for establishing the relationship between need and actual participation is by counting only the number of low income students.

¹ **Sources and notes for July meals taken:** The NYC-DOE school year Average Daily Participation (ADP) number is from the NYC Mayor's Management Report FY 2020. The source for the NYC-DOE Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) meals numbers for July and August is the New York State Education-Child Nutrition Office (by email). The NYC figure includes both district and charter schools that participate in the NYC-DOE Office of School Food and Nutrition Services breakfast and lunch program. Around 15% of NYC charter schools operate their own school meals program independent of the NYC-DOE. For the month of July, the total number of breakfast meals served was 1,705,013 and total lunch meals was 3,121,561. July 2019 and July 2020 had 22 weekdays. July 2018 had 21 weekdays. The New York City Department of Education (NYC-DOE) Office of School Food provides breakfast and lunches to all district schools and most of the charter schools. Not included in the chart are the private (mostly parochial) schools that are a NYSED approved School Food Authority and operate their own summer meals program fully independent of the NYC-DOE-Office of School Food and Nutrition Services.

The total number of NYC-DOE low income students for the 2019-20 school year was 832,148 for grades 3K to 12 (includes both district and charter schools). The NYC-DOE summer **Average Daily Participation (ADP)** for the month of July 2019 was 141,889 lunch meals. Based on these two figures, around 17% of all low income NYC public school children (district and charter schools) were participating in the summer meals program in July 2019².

Maximum number of NYC-DOE low income children taking a lunch each day during July

NYC Public Schools	Total Student Enrollment	Low Income Students	NYC DOE Summer Lunch Meals ADP-July 2019	% of participating students
NYC DOE District and Charter Schools Grades 3K to 12	1,126,501	832,148	141,889	17%

For July-2019, when only low income students are counted, the maximum number of NYC public school children taking a lunch each day was 17%.

Maximum number of NYC-DOE low income children taking a lunch each day during August³

NYC Public Schools	Total Student Enrollment	Low Income Students	NYC DOE Summer Lunch Meals ADP-August 2019	% of participating students
NYC DOE District and Charter Schools Grades 3K to 12	1,126,501	832,148	68,660	8.2%

For August-2019, when only low income students are counted, the maximum number of NYC public school children taking a lunch each day was 8.2%.

² **Source and notes for NYC-DOE district and charter schools low income children:** NYC-DOE Demographic Snapshot 2020 (includes both district and charter schools); NYC-DOE defines poverty as follows: NYC DOE "Poverty" counts are based on the number of students with families who have qualified for free or reduced price lunch, or are eligible for Human Resources Administration (HRA) benefits. Within the 17% figure could be students that only took a meal once or twice each week. The total amount of meals taken would only serve 17% of all low income children if the same children took a lunch meal each day. To account for NYC children that receive July lunches from SFA Charter Schools that operate a summer meals program, 1,855 students were subtracted from the total low income figure.

³ *ibid*

2. Many large school districts are offering a grab and go summer meals program allowing a family to pick up multiple meals with just one trip.

“This summer is now a critical time. As life returns to normal for many of us, too many children still face the painful consequences of food insecurity as vulnerable families continue to struggle.” [Feed the Children America](#)

In addition to New York City, other large school districts are also allowing families to pick up enough breakfast and lunch meals to last four or even seven days (meals can be reheated at home). Some school districts also include fresh fruit and vegetables.

School District	“Grab and Go” Hot and cold meals	Five to Seven Days worth of meals-one pick up	Grab and Go Pick up Times
Albuquerque	Yes	Offers both daily meals at most schools and multiple meals at six schools	
Atlanta	Yes	Yes	Once a week
Broward County	Yes	Yes	Once a week on Tuesday.
Chicago	Yes	Meal kits for three days	Daily 9:00 to 1:00
Dallas Texas	Yes	yes	Wednesday 9:30 to 2:00
Houston	Yes	Three days worth of meals are given out every Thursday.	
Los Angeles	Yes	Daily pick up. weekend meals kit on Friday	Daily 9:30 to 10:30
Miami-Dade County	Yes	Twice a week pick up	Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9:30 a.m. – 11 a.m.
Minneapolis	Yes	Yes	Daily 10:00 to 3:00
New York City	Yes	Families can pick up multiple meals with one trip including weekend meals	Open Daily 9:00 am to 1:00 pm
Oakland	Yes	Offers daily meal pickup at schools and two locations offer once a week pick up	
Orlando	Yes	Yes	Monday 3:00 to 6:00
Philadelphia	Yes	Yes	Once a week on Friday 9:00 to 2:00
San Francisco	Yes	Yes	Once a week, every Thursday
St. Paul	Yes	yes	Food box home delivery or once a week pick up
Tulsa	Yes	Friday pickup includes meals for Sat and Sunday	Daily

3. Publicity samples from other school districts

CBO's, food pantries and anti-hunger groups could take the DOE menu information posted on its website and format it in an attractive flier. All that's needed is a computer and color printer. Here are samples of summer meals flyers from other school districts. NYC should be flooded with the summer meals flyers.



References

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