

# Hunger takes no summer vacation, report says

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AUSTIN—A new national report on child nutrition shows Texas has made progress expanding the reach of publicly funded summer food programs in 2009. But more work is needed to ensure that low-income children have access to nutritious food during the summer, according to the Texas Food Policy Roundtable, a new hunger and nutrition advocacy coalition.

The report shows in July 2009, less than 10 percent of eligible Texas children received the summer meals on an average daily basis, ranking Texas 42nd among the states. If Texas boosted participation in July 2010 to serve 40 percent of eligible low-income children, the state would feed an additional 659,400 children and gain \$45.4 million in federal summer food funds.

“The new report highlights the importance of the summer food programs, especially in the current economic recession,” said Celia Hagert, senior policy analyst at the [Center for Public Policy Priorities](#) and a member of the Texas Food Policy Roundtable steering committee.

“Over 2.6 million Texas school children rely on free or low-cost meals during the school year. When schools close for the summer, these kids often don’t get enough of the right food to stay healthy. The summer food programs help to meet this need.”

From 2008 to 2009, Texas increased the number of feeding sites by 33.6 percent and achieved modest increases in the number of lunches—up 7.8 percent—and children—up 4.7 percent—served, according to the report. Feeding efforts in June have been significantly higher than efforts in July when summer school ends and schools stop serving free and reduced meals

to students.

Steering committee member Suzii Paynter, director of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission said: “We celebrate the addition of summer food sites and sponsors across the state. We will continue to work hard to solve the problem of hunger in Texas and feed more children all year round.”

This year, Congress must reauthorize the summer food programs, providing an opportunity for legislators to increase funding for and restructure the programs to reach more children, organizers said.

In addition to increased federal funding, advocates say Texas legislators should reinstate supplemental state funding for summer food that was cut from the state budget in 2005.

The summer food programs provide funds to states to feed children in low-income families during the summer months.

The Texas Department of Agriculture administers the programs, which are operated locally by schools, nonprofit agencies and local governments, such as parks and recreation centers.

The Texas Department of Agriculture uses federal funds to reimburse local sponsors for meals served, freeing up their limited resources to provide recreational and educational activities to kids.

“Texas is facing an epidemic of childhood obesity that experts agree is the result of poor access to healthy food and low levels of physical activity, especially during the summer,” said Bee Moorhead, executive director of Texas Impact and member of the roundtable steering committee.

“The Texas Legislature and Congress should act now to strengthen the summer food programs to prevent hunger, help reduce obesity, and draw children into educational and enrichment programs that send them back to

school ready to learn.”

Summer program sponsors can take steps locally to increase participation in summer food programs. For example, [Central Dallas Ministries](#) expanded the reach of its summer program by implementing a mobile feeding initiative called “Food on the Move.” Americorps and VISTA volunteers take food in vans to children who must stay home alone or who live in low-income communities without a summer feeding site. CDM hopes to reach an additional 10,000 children this summer through Food on the Move.

To find a neighborhood feeding site, visit [www.summerfood.org](http://www.summerfood.org) .