

June 2024

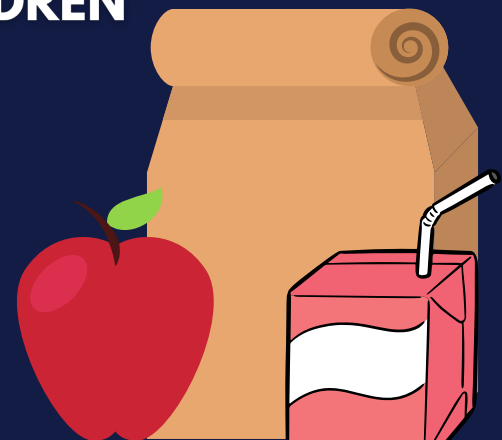
FIGHTING SUMMER HUNGER PANGS

*How Summer Feeding Programs
Bridge the Nutrition Gap*



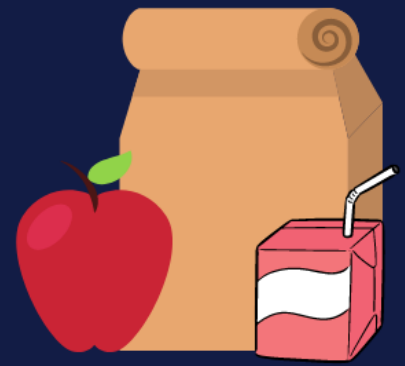
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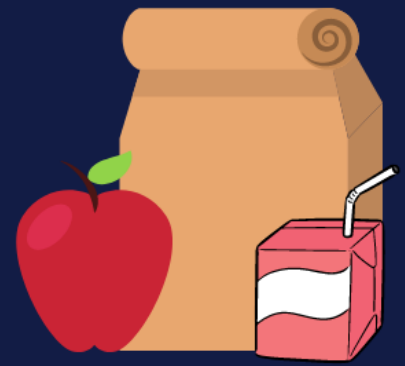
INTRODUCTION

Signed by President Harry S. Truman in 1946, the creation of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) marked a new chapter in child nutrition, extending and making permanent previous efforts to provide school lunches for children. The program was established as “a measure of national security, to safeguard the health and well-being of the Nation’s children...”ⁱ NSLP’s creation reflected the deepening recognition of the significance of healthy foods for children’s overall health and development. While NSLP was an important step forward, hunger remained a problem for children and families nationwide. A survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare between 1968 and 1970 found that out of 24,000 families, a significant portion were malnourished or at an increased risk of developing nutrition-related health difficulties.ⁱⁱ With hunger and malnutrition growing, the need for additional food assistance began to garner national attention. It became clear that—despite the success of the National School Lunch Program—hunger persisted through the school year and during school breaks.

Recognizing that there was more work to be done, in 1968, the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) was created as part of the Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) larger three-year pilot program to address food insecurity, providing states with grant funding to serve meals to children when school was not in session.ⁱⁱⁱ The creation of SFSP and its targeted focus on the summer months marked a critical milestone in addressing the nation’s malnutrition and hunger gap. Since then, Congress has since bolstered and expanded summer feeding and recently created new options for feeding children during the summer months. Most notably, the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (S-EBT) program is now a permanent avenue for bridging the gap during the summer months, providing essential support to children who rely on school meals during the academic year.^{iv}

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TACKLING FOOD INSECURITY: SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM AND SEAMLESS SUMMER OPTION

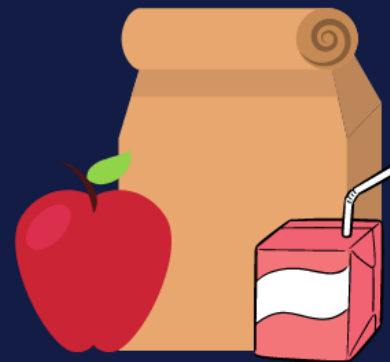
Children who rely on school meals during the academic year often face increased need and food hardship over the summer when school these meals are not available.^v Due to this reality, low-income children can often be at a higher risk of food insecurity and poor nutrition during the summer.^{vi} Moreover, during the school year, school meal programs subsidize the nutrition budgets of many families and without this assistance, the financial burden of feeding children is larger during the summer compared to during the school year – limiting access to healthy food for kids.^{vii}

During its first year as its own program, SFSP served meals to approximately 1.79 million children each day, and since then, the program has grown.^{viii} In 2023, roughly 2.2 million children a day were served through SFSP—still a fraction of the nearly 28.6 million children that currently rely on the National School Lunch Program.^{ix} Lower participation can be attributed to factors such as stigma, insufficient availability of meal sites, or a lack of familiarity with the program.^x Despite lower participation, SFSP is a critical summer program beyond food and nutritional support. SFSP provides federal dollars to schools and other local or nonprofit organizations that serve meals and snacks to children.^{xi} Alongside meal services, these summer sites typically offer a range of enrichment activities and recreational programs. SFSP is administered by sponsor organizations that are trusted community partners, such as YMCAs and Boys and Girls Clubs, that manage the program at meal sites in “areas in which poor economic conditions exist.”^{xii} Additionally, meals must meet nutritional requirements, such as certain amounts of fruits, grains, vegetables, and milk served per meal.^{xiii}

In 2004, the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) program was authorized to provide a streamlined pathway for schools to provide meals to children during the summer months, where schools generally follow the same rules that they would follow for other school meal programs during the school year (NSLP and Summer Breakfast Program (SBP)).^{xiv} SSO simplifies the process of providing meals into the summer, which makes it administratively easier and therefore more “seamless” for schools to continue to provide meals.^{xv}

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Summer food benefits for children give **families** the boost they need in difficult times, help local **communities**, and boost the **economy**.



Summer EBT decreased the household with children who did not always have enough to eat by one-third.



Children reached by states that issued summer p-EBT benefits in summer 2021



\$392 Per Child

Families of eligible children will typically receive \$391 per child, for the summer.

If all states issued summer 2022 p-EBT, it could pump

\$14 BILLION

into the economy

SUMMER MEALS HELP KEEP CHILDREN HEALTHY AND READY TO LEARN

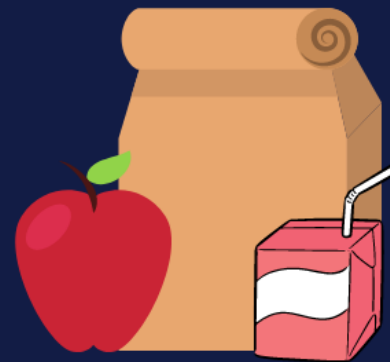
Summer feeding programs keep children healthy and ready to learn—addressing the well-researched intersection between healthy eating and educational attainment. Children and adolescents experiencing hunger are more likely to encounter behavioral, emotional, and mental health challenges, as well as academic problems.^{xvi} Food insecure children are more likely to have behavior and attention challenges and tend to be more hyperactive, absent, and tardy compared to their food secure peers.^{xvii} Additionally, research has shown that food insecure children and adolescents have lower math scores and poorer grades than their food secure peers.^{xviii} In particular, low-income, food insecure children are more likely to repeat a grade, receive special education services, or undergo mental health counseling in comparison to low-income children who do not experience hunger, illustrating a strong relationship between hunger and learning.^{xix}

Additionally, many students—particularly low-income students—do not always have access to engaging, educational, and social summer activities, such as camps, in the same capacity as their higher-income peers.^{xx} Research highlights that low-income students are disproportionately affected by summer learning loss, also known as the summer slide, due to socioeconomic disparities and limited access to educational resources.^{xxi} This learning loss often manifests through gaps in academic achievement and persists with time.

Through on-site consumption of meals, congregate feeding sites have the potential to improve achievement gains and mitigate the learning loss that disproportionately impacts low-income students.^{xxii} In a study on summer learning programs for low-income youth that provided free meals, students with high attendance saw improvements in

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mathematics and language arts learning that persisted into the spring.^{xxiii} Through summer meal sites, these programs provide a range of activities, from arts and sports to tutoring sessions, reinforcing academic development and addressing social and emotional needs of children.^{xxiv} Simply put, summer meals are more than a meal; summer meal sites meet a critical need for students by providing essential nourishment and engaging summer activities.

While summer meals programs have traditionally operated through congregate feeding sites, beginning summer 2024, Congress allowed for a limited non-congregate option in SFSP—allowing pathways for offsite consumption. Non-congregate meal services are now an option in rural areas with no congregate meal services. During the COVID-19 public health emergency, USDA provided temporary non-congregate feeding flexibilities allowing for meal pick-up options and grab-and-go meals for students.^{xxv} While non-congregate meal service can help fill a gap in certain areas, it does not include the enrichment or recreational opportunity for children that congregate meals often provide. Congregate feeding sites remain instrumental in addressing the summer slide by providing a place where children can learn, socialize, and stay engaged during the summer months.^{xxvi}

SUMMER LEARNING MATTERS

During the summer students lose **2 months** of math skills.



Low-income students also lose **2+ months** in reading achievement.

9 in 10 teachers spend at least **3 WEEKS** re-teaching lessons at the start of the school year.



SUPPORT IS STRONG

Parents & teachers value summer learning programs

AMONG TEACHERS



88% say summer learning programs are important to students' success

AMONG PARENTS



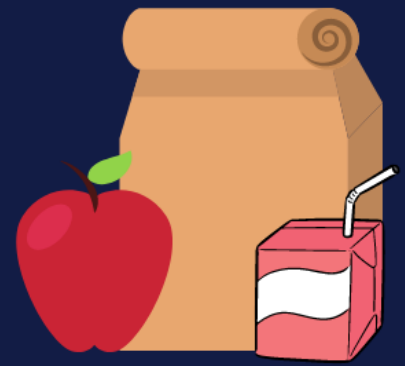
73% say it's important for their child to have summer activities that help them learn



85% support public funding for summer learning programs

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EXAMINING THE ROLE AND IMPACT OF SUMMER EBT INITIATIVES

The Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (S-EBT) Program was launched by USDA in 2011 as a demonstration project, providing grocery benefits, also known as SUN Bucks, to low-income families with school-aged children when schools were closed for the summer.^{xxvii} S-EBT was created to complement existing summer nutrition programs, giving families an additional resource during the summer months. Using an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card, families can purchase food at grocery stores at their convenience, ensuring flexibility in mealtimes and food preparation. This approach mirrors the model of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which has proven to be an instrumental EBT program to combat hunger and boost local economies.^{xxviii} Notably, the economic impact of EBT programs extends beyond the food assistance itself. For example, each dollar redeemed by households through SNAP effectively boosts the economy by approximately \$1.54.^{xxix}

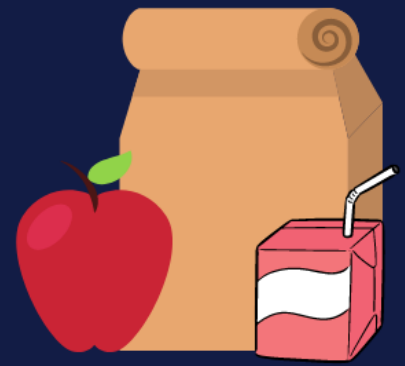
The S-EBT demonstration program was a success. During the summers of 2011-2014, the program provided a monthly benefit of \$30 or \$60 per child.^{xxx} When the demonstration ended, USDA conducted an extensive evaluation of the program, which revealed:

- Food insecurity among children was reduced by up to one-fifth.^{xxxi} A \$60 benefit led to a 33 percent decrease in very low food security among children compared to receiving no assistance at all.^{xxxii}
- The average household used approximately 79.6 percent of the benefits they received.^{xxxiii}
- Any amount of benefit, whether \$30 or \$60 per month, resulted in improved nutritional outcomes for children compared to receiving no benefit at all.^{xxxiv}

The success of the S-EBT demonstration project and the role Pandemic-EBT^{xxxv} benefits played during the pandemic paved the way for a permanent EBT program with dedicated funding.

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NEW SUMMER-EBT PROGRAM WILL FURTHER PREVENT SUMMER HUNGER

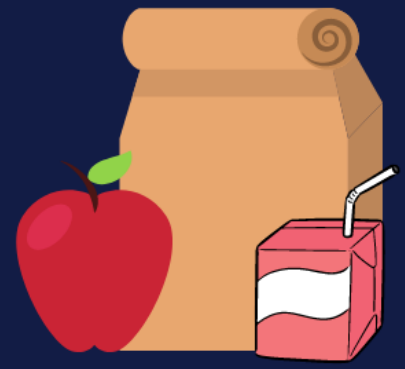
Beginning this summer, S-EBT benefits will come in the form of preloaded cards that families can use to purchase groceries, similar to SNAP; families will generally receive \$40 per eligible child, per month (with higher benefits in Alaska, Hawaii, and the U.S. Territories).^{xxxvi} The new, permanent program will operate nationwide; any household with a child eligible for free or reduced-price meals will receive S-EBT benefits when their state or Indian Tribal Organization (ITO) implements the program.^{xxxvii}

S-EBT benefits are intended to work in tandem with other nutrition assistance programs with the goal of ensuring eligible children have access year-round to critical nutrition. To date, 37 states and the District of Columbia, five territories, and two ITOs have signed up to offer S-EBT this year.^{xxxviii}

Not all states have agreed to participate, citing reasons ranging from administrative funding and lack of infrastructure to disagreements over eligibility criteria. Sadly, several states that have yet to opt into the program are doing so based on ideological objections. Some governors have equated the S-EBT program to the COVID-19 era Pandemic-EBT program despite the fact that S-EBT predated the COVID-19 public health emergency by nearly a decade.^{xxxix} States including Florida and Oklahoma have either cited concerns over program duplication or have voiced support for their current approaches to child hunger, despite research demonstrating that S-EBT would benefit approximately 2.2 million children in Florida and over 400,000 children in Oklahoma.^{xl} These decisions have sparked contentious debate about the implications for food insecure children. Public health and nutrition groups argue that opting out could deepen food insecurity among low-income households, potentially exacerbating existing inequalities; they argue that withholding benefits from eligible families limits available solutions to hunger.^{xli} Despite existing nutrition programs, S-EBT is a critical addition for families and children who lack the financial resources to obtain healthy and nutritious meals. All in all, the program has the potential to deliver approximately \$3.5 billion in nutrition assistance to over 29 million eligible children—underscoring the importance of S-EBT for struggling families nationwide.^{xlii}

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CONCLUSION

While efforts to address child hunger span decades, the establishment of permanent programs and initiatives past and present demonstrates a steadfast commitment to ensuring eligible children receive balanced and nutritious meals. Summer nutrition programs play a crucial role in addressing the hunger challenges low-income children face, particularly during critical periods when they are out of school and lack access to nutritional meals. It is imperative to continue supporting summer nutrition programs as part of the nation's ongoing commitment to addressing child hunger.

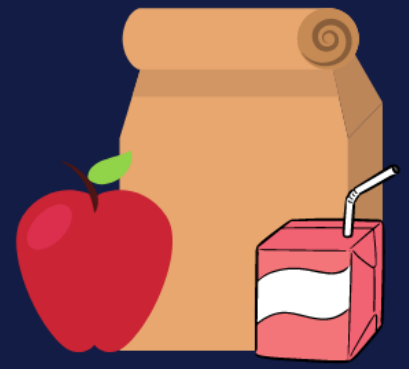
"There's no lunch at home during the summer. I wouldn't be having lunch if it wasn't here."

10-year-old Luis eats lunch at the Henry Hyde Resource Center in Addison, Illinois

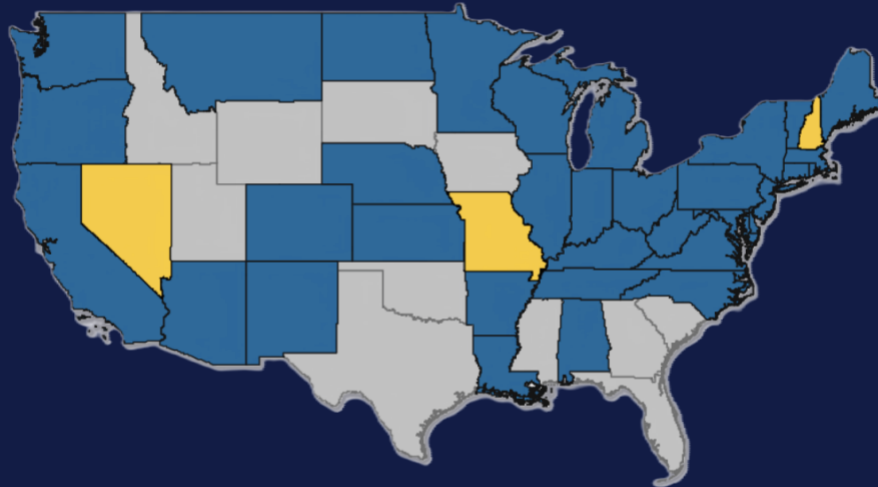
Expanding access to summer nutrition programs is crucial to ensuring all eligible children can benefit. The integration of innovative delivery methods, such as mobile meal sites, along with the enhancement of meal nutritional quality, can significantly improve the quality and accessibility of nutritional initiatives.^{xliii} Again, continued investments in summer feeding sites are essential as they continue to meet a critical need through engaging summer enrichment activities and nourishing meals.^{xliiv} Congress must continue to support and fund summer nutrition programs, enhancing the well-being of the nation's youth.

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STATES PARTICIPATING IN THE SUMMER-EBT PROGRAM*

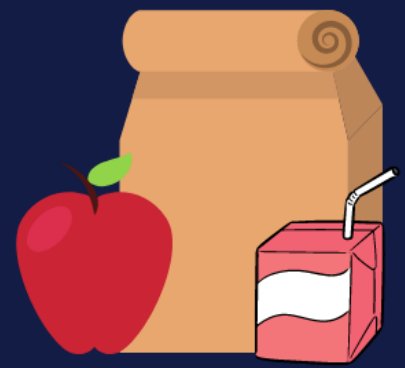


- Participating
- Future Participants
- Not Participating

*Not Including American Samoa, Alaska, Hawaii, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, United States Virgin Islands

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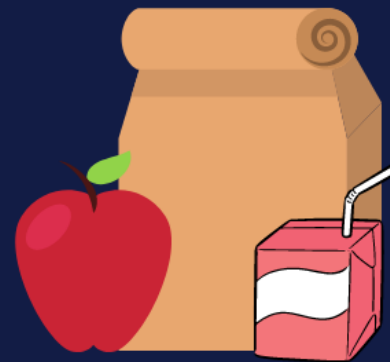
STATE-BY-STATE NUMBERS OF CHILDREN POTENTIALLY ELIGIBLE FOR SUMMER-EBT*

STATE OR TERRITORY	ELIGIBLE CHILDREN	STATE OR TERRITORY	ELIGIBLE CHILDREN
Alabama	545,000	Montana	68,000
Alaska	58,000	New Hampshire	39,000
American Samoa	14,000	Nebraska	175,000
Arizona	550,000	New Jersey	540,000
Arkansas	315,000	New Mexico	223,000
California	3,851,000	New York	2,027,000
Colorado	337,000	Nevada	352,000
Connecticut	273,000	North Carolina	968,000
Delaware	80,000	North Dakota	40,000
District of Columbia	80,000	Northern Marina Islands	11,000
Florida	2,158,000	Ohio	837,000
Georgia	1,156,000	Oklahoma	403,000
Guam	26,000	Oregon	294,000
Hawaii	100,000	Pennsylvania	1,166,000
Idaho	107,000	Puerto Rico	280,000
Illinois	1,145,000	Rhode Island	66,000
Indiana	669,000	South Carolina	543,000
Iowa	240,000	South Dakota	57,000
Kansas	266,000	Tennessee	644,000
Kentucky	600,000	Texas	3,752,000
Louisiana	594,000	Utah	198,000
Maine	63,000	Vermont	35,000
Maryland	500,000	Virgin Islands	12,000
Massachusetts	515,000	Virginia	791,000
Michigan	836,000	Washington	507,000
Minnesota	412,000	West Virginia	202,000
Mississippi	324,000	Wisconsin	401,000
Missouri	429,000	Wyoming	32,000

Source: FRAC

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ⁱ 42 U.S.C. § 1751.

ⁱⁱ Health Servs. and Mental Health Admin., *Ten-State Nutrition Survey 1968- 1970*, U.S. Dep't of Health, Educ., and Welfare (1972), <https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/19141>.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Special Food Service Program for Children (SFSPC) was authorized in 1968 to fund meals in summer and child care settings; See Kara Clifford Billings, *School Meals and Other Child Nutrition Programs: Background and Funding*, Cong. Rsch. Serv. (Dec. 18, 2023), <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46234>.

^{iv} Zoe Neuberger & Katie Bergh, *Permanent Summer Grocery Benefits Are a Big Win for Children in Low-Income Families, Despite Disappointing Tradeoffs*, Ctr on Budget & Policy Priorities (Dec. 20, 2022), <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/permanent-summer-grocery-benefits-are-a-big-win-for-children-in-low-income-families-despite>.

^v *Id.*

^{vi} *Summer Nutrition Programs*, Food Rsch. & Action Ctr., <https://frac.org/programs/summer-nutrition-programs> (last visited Apr. 18, 2024).

^{vii} *Food Budgeting Changes in Summer*, La Capitol Federal Credit Union (June 15, 2023), <https://www.lacapfcu.org/blog/food-budgeting-changes-summer>.

^{viii} Econ. Rsch Serv., *Effects of Food Assistance and Nutrition Programs on Nutrition and Health*, U.S. Dep't of Ag. (2004), https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/46556/30229_fanrr19-3h_002.pdf?v=3916.2.

^{ix} Food and Nutrition Service, *Program Information Report (Keydata)*, U.S. Dep't of Ag. (Dec. 2023), <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/data-files/keydata-december-2023.pdf>.

^x *Summer Food Service Program Status Report*, Hunger Solutions New York (Aug. 2020), <https://hungersolutionsny.org/federal-nutrition-programs/summer-food-service-program/report/>.

^{xi} Funding for schools runs through School Food Authorities (SFAs); See Billings, *supra* note 3, at 36.

^{xii} Areas in which poor economic conditions exist are defined as areas in which 50 percent of the children are eligible for free and reduced meals; See Billings, *supra* note 3, at 36.

^{xiii} Food & Nutrition Service, *SFSP Meal Patterns*, U.S. Dep't of Ag., <https://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/meal-patterns> (last visited Mar. 12, 2024).

^{xiv} Kara Clifford Billings, *Summer Food for Children: An Overview of Federal Aid*, Cong. Rsch. Serv. (Aug. 15, 2023), [https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11633#:~:text=The percent20Seamless percent20Summer percent20Option percent20\(SSO.SBP percent5D\) percent20into percent20the percent20summer.](https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11633#:~:text=The percent20Seamless percent20Summer percent20Option percent20(SSO.SBP percent5D) percent20into percent20the percent20summer.)

^{xv} *Id.*, at 1.

^{xvi} *Benefits of School Lunch*, Food. Rsch. & Action Ctr., <https://frac.org/programs/national-school-lunch-program/benefits-school-lunch#:~:text=School percent20lunch percent20is percent20critical percent20to,obesity percent20rates percent20C percent20and percent20poor percent20health> (last visited Apr. 2, 2024).

^{xvii} *Id.*

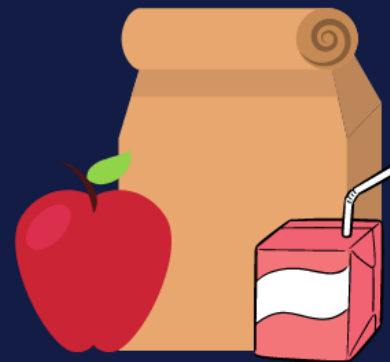
^{xviii} *Id.*

^{xix} *Id.*

^{xx} *Summer Nutrition and Enrichment Programs: Effective Tools to Support Child Food Security, Health, and Learning During the Summertime*, Food Rsch. & Action Ctr., 2 (2019), <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/summer-nutrition-and-enrichment-programs.pdf>.

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^{xxi} Cooper et al., *The Effects of Summer Vacation on Achievement Test Scores: A Review and Meta-Analytic Review*, Review of Educ. Rsch. (1996), <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543066003227>.

^{xxii} *Summer Nutrition and Enrichment Programs: Effective Tools to Support Child Food Security, Health, and Learning During the Summertime*, *supra* note 20, at 3.

^{xxiii} Augustine et al., *Learning from Summer: Effects of Voluntary Summer Learning Programs on Low-Income Urban Youth*, RAND Corporation (2016), <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR1557>.

^{xxiv} Food & Nutrition Service, *Summer Food Service Program FAQs*, U.S. Dep't of Ag. (Nov. 2023), <https://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/frequently-asked-questions>.

^{xxv} Food & Nutrition Service, *Nationwide Waiver to Allow Non-Congregate Meal Service for SY2021-22*, U.S. Dep't of Ag. (Apr. 20, 2021), <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/covid-19-child-nutrition-response-87.pdf>.

^{xxvi} *Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation: Summer Nutrition Status Report*, Food Rsch. & Action Ctr. (July 2023), <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/summer-report-2023.pdf>.

^{xxvii} *Id.*

^{xxviii} *Policy Basics: The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)*, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (June 9, 2022), <https://www.cbpp.org/research/policy-basics-the-supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>.

^{xxix} Meredith Jorss, *SNAP Feeds Families and Feeds Our Economy*, NoKidHungry (Jan. 31, 2023), <https://www.nokidhungry.org/blog/snap-feeds-families-and-feeds-our-economy>.

^{xxx} Food & Nutrition Service, *Summary of the Evaluation of the USDA Summer EBT Demonstrations: Lessons Learned From More Than a Decade of Research*, U.S. Dep't of Ag. (Mar. 2024), <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/ops-sebt-summary.pdf>.

^{xxxi} *Id.*

^{xxxii} Food & Nutrition Service, *Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer for Children (SEBTC) Demonstration: Summary Report 2011-2014*, Food Rsch. & Action Ctr. (May 2016), <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/ops/sebtcfinalreport-summary.pdf>.

^{xxxiii} Food & Nutr. Serv., *supra* note 32, at 5.

^{xxxiv} *Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer for Children (SEBTC) Demonstration: Summary Report 2011-2014*, *supra* note 32, at 2.

^{xxxv} Pandemic EBT was a part of the federal response to the COVID-19 public health emergency that allowed eligible children to receive nutrition benefits through EBT cards used to purchase food; See Food & Nutrition Service, *State Guidance on Pandemic-EBT*, U.S. Dep't of Ag. (Dec. 18, 2023), <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/state-guidance-coronavirus-pandemic-ebt-pebt>.

^{xxxvi} Food & Nutrition Service, *Summer EBT 2024 Benefit Levels*, U.S. Dep't of Ag. (2024), <https://www.fns.usda.gov/sebt/2024-benefit-levels>.

^{xxxvii} Food & Nutr. Serv., *supra* note 32, at 3.

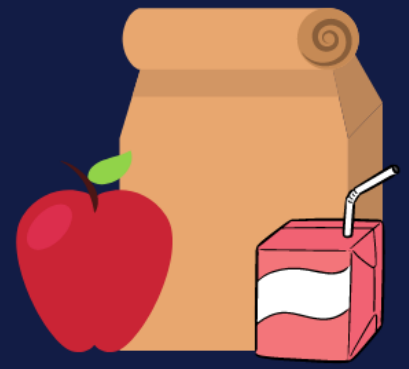
^{xxxviii} *2024 Summer EBT Implementing States, Territories, and Tribes*, U.S. Dep't of Ag. (Feb. 26, 2024), <https://www.fns.usda.gov/sebt/implementation>.

^{xxxix} Joy Saha, *15 States Chose Not to Participate in Summer EBT for Hungry Kids. Here's Why*, Salon (Feb. 13, 2024), <https://www.salon.com/2024/02/13/15-states-chose-not-to-participate-in-summer-ebt-for-hungry-kids-heres-why/>.

^{xl} *Id.*

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^{xli} Libby Stanford, *A New Federal Summer Food Program Targets Child Hunger. Why Are 15 States Opting Out?*, Educ. Week (Jan. 12, 2024), <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/a-new-federal-summer-food-program-targets-child-hunger-why-are-15-states-opting-out/2024/01>.

^{xlii} *The Importance of Summer EBT: Why States Must Operate Summer EBT and Summer Nutrition Programs*, Food Rsch. & Action Ctr. (2021), <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/Summer-EBT-and-Summer-Nutrition-national.pdf>.

^{xliii} Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids Act, H.R. 8450, 117th Cong. §501 (2022).

^{xliv} *Summer Nutrition and Enrichment Programs: Effective Tools to Support Child Food Security, Health, and Learning During the Summertime*, *supra* note 22, at 3.

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