



Healthy Eating in Summer Programs

Incorporating healthy food and physical activity into afterschool and out-of-school time (OST) programs is an integral component of a comprehensive strategy to prevent childhood obesity. This factsheet focuses on opportunities to improve children's access to healthy snacks and meals during the summer months. To learn more, please visit the Center's [*Minnesota Afterschool and Out-of-School Time Toolkit for Healthy Eating and Physical Activity*](#).

NSLP and SFSP

During the summer months when school is out, about 35,500 Minnesotan school children receive meals and snacks through two federal programs, the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). These programs reach only 14% of the children who receive free or subsidized lunches in Minnesota during the school year, leaving many children hungry or without access to healthy food during the summer months. The Minnesota statistics

These programs reach only 14% of the children who receive free or subsidized lunches in Minnesota during the school year, leaving many children hungry or without access to healthy food during the summer months.



match the national average for the gap between summer and school year for low-income children.¹

The NSLP usually applies in school-sponsored summer programs that have access to a school food service staff and facilities. The SFSP, on the other hand, is usually run by non-profits or by parks and recreation departments. Some schools run an SFSP because the program has a higher reimbursement rate than the NSLP.² In 2011, St. Paul's Parks and Recreation Department worked with the St. Paul Public School District to offer the SFSP at 29 recreation centers, mobile recreation sites, and summer camps in the city.³ In 2012, Minneapolis' Parks and Recreation Department offered the SFSP at 26 sites throughout the city.⁴

The SFSP guidelines are the same as the CACFP breakfast, meal, and snack guidelines for children ages six to 12 years of age. The meal patterns require offering lean meats, poultry, fish, an alternative protein product, cheese, an egg, beans, nuts, or nut butters, low-fat (1%) milk or skim milk, 100% fruit or vegetable juices, and water, but do not regulate amounts of sodium or sugar, or require that fruits and vegetables be rotated regularly to provide variety.⁵ The USDA's *At-Risk Afterschool Meals, A CACFP Handbook*, which applies to SFSP programs, was revised in July 2013, and provides a new guidance on meal patterns, which is highlighted throughout the handbook—"Better Choices for Better Meals"—to assist providers in preparing appetizing meals that meet children's nutritional needs and are consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.⁶ The SFSP has access to a smaller percentage of commodity foods than the NSLP. Rural programs and programs that prepare their own foods are reimbursed at slightly higher rates than other programs. Rural programs face special transportation challenges in getting children to a central location and consequently have higher operating costs due to low attendance, and these programs often struggle financially even with the higher reimbursement.⁷

Public and non-profit implementation of nutrition standards and guidelines

Standards for summertime programs have been developed by a national advocacy organization, the [Food Resource and Action Center](#) (FRAC), and by a public-private partnership involving the City of Philadelphia's Parks and Recreation Department.

FRAC has developed *Standards of Excellence* for use by summer food programs. The standards designate programs as bronze, silver or gold sites and assess them on the quality of their food offerings, environment, and outreach efforts. A gold site offers only skim milk or low fat milk and serves three different fruits and five different vegetables during the week. A gold site also promotes its program through community hotlines and local newsletters. A top-level program also incorporates fresh, appealing and culturally appropriate food, and allows children to taste-test new foods. FRAC's website contains descriptions of several [model programs](#).⁸

In Philadelphia, the Parks and Recreation Department and the city's Department of Public Health partnered with a non-profit organization, the Food Trust, to develop guidelines for afterschool and summer programs in Philadelphia's Parks and Recreation Centers, which reach more than 10,000 children at 150 locations. The afterschool and summer guidelines recommend specific activity levels based on program type and duration. The nutrition guidelines follow federal CACFP meal patterns, but add standards for offering skim milk or low-fat milk for children over the age of two, offering water, encouraging social interaction at meals, and providing healthy foods at celebrations and fundraisers. Whole-grain products, and items that are low in fat, sodium, and sugar, are served whenever possible.⁹ For more information on CACFP guidelines and states that have supplemented the federal guidelines with guidelines of their own, please

see the companion publication in this series, [*Child and Adult Care Food Program \(CACFP\) in Afterschool and Other Out-of-School Time Settings*](#).

Opportunities

Minnesota's parks and recreation departments may be a natural fit for improving low-income children's access to healthy foods and fitness, and further investments would appear to tie in nicely with existing efforts. Notably, in St. Paul's Parks and Recreation Department's 2011–2015 strategic implementation plan, the first goal for 2011 was to

promote physical activity because of its “enormous health benefits in combating obesity, reducing the risk of chronic disease, and improving mental health.”¹⁰ The Department also planned to evaluate its nutrition guidelines and develop new standards.¹¹ In St. Paul alone, introducing health and nutrition standards at the city's parks and recreation centers has the potential to reach several thousand children. In 2011, 5,277 children participated in St. Paul's mobile recreation centers at parks and public housing sites, and 2,313 children participated in daily tennis lessons at 32 sites.^{12,13,14}

Last updated: January, 2014

The Public Health Law Center thanks Hanna Kite, MPH, Health Policy Workshop, for her assistance in writing and editing this series, as well as Cassie Benson for her work on the project. The Public Health Law Center would also like to thank Allison Anfinson, Senior Program Evaluator, Center for Prevention, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, and Jenny Butcher, SFSP Coordinator, Food and Nutrition Service, Minnesota Department of Education, for their assistance in reviewing this document.



This publication was prepared by the Public Health Law Center at William Mitchell College of Law, St. Paul, Minnesota, with financial support provided by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota.

The Public Health Law Center provides information and technical assistance on issues related to public health. The Public Health Law Center does not provide legal representation or advice. This document should not be considered legal advice. For specific legal questions, consult with an attorney.

Endnotes

- ¹ Rachel Cooper et al., FOOD RESEARCH & ACTION CTR., HUNGER DOESN'T TAKE A VACATION: SUMMER NUTRITION STATUS REPORT 2012 (2012), available at http://frac.org/pdf/2012_summer_nutrition_report.pdf.
- ² FOOD RESOURCE & ACTION CTR., SUMMER NUTRITION PROGRAMS, <http://frac.org/federal-foodnutrition-programs/summer-programs> (last visited Nov. 21, 2012).
- ³ SAINT PAUL PARKS & RECREATION, 2011 ANNUAL REPORT (2011), available at <http://stpaul.gov/DocumentCenter/View/58956>.
- ⁴ MINNEAPOLIS PARKS & RECREATION BD., 2012 SUMMER MEALS PROGRAM SITES AND DETAILS (2012), available at http://www.minneapolisparcs.org/documents/activities/Summer_Meals_Program.pdf.
- ⁵ FOOD & NUTRITION SERV., U.S. DEP'T OF AGRIC., SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM (2012), available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/sfsp-meals-and-snacks>.
- ⁶ FOOD & NUTRITION SERV., U.S. DEP'T OF AGRIC., AT-RISK AFTERSCHOOL MEALS: A CHILD AND ADULT CARE FOOD PROGRAM HANDBOOK (2012), available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/atriskhandbook.pdf>.

- ⁷ FOOD & NUTRITION SERV., U.S. DEP'T OF AGRIC., SUMMER FOODS SERVICE PROGRAM TIPS FOR SUCCESS: RURAL PROGRAMS (date unknown), *available at* http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/Rural_Sites.pdf.
- ⁸ FOOD RESOURCE & ACTION CTR., STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE — SUMMER PROGRAMS, *available at* <http://frac.org/federal-foodnutrition-programs/summer-programs/standards-of-excellence-summer-programs> (last visited Aug. 8, 2013).
- ⁹ PHILA. PARKS & RECREATION, HEALTHY PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND NUTRITION GUIDELINES (2012), *available at* http://www.foodfitphilly.org/FOODFITPHILLY/assets/File/Guidelines_Booklet_rev_4_17_2012.pdf.
- ¹⁰ SAINT PAUL PARKS & RECREATION, 2011–2015 STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION PLAN (2011), *available at* <http://www.stpaul.gov/DocumentCenter/Home/View/7940>.
- ¹¹ *Id.*
- ¹² SAINT PAUL PARKS & RECREATION, *supra* note 3.
- ¹³ While similar numbers were not readily available for Minneapolis, in November of 2012, 43 of 49 recreation facilities in the city offered afterschool activities.
- ¹⁴ MINNEAPOLIS PARKS & RECREATION BD., RECREATION CENTERS BY COMMUNITY SERVICE AREA, *available at* http://www.minneapolisparcs.org/documents/recCtrs/Rec_Centers_GrId.pdf.