



News Release

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Can You Help Hungry Children This Summer? MDE Seeks More Partners to Expand Access to Summer Meals

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LANSING – More partners are needed to help feed hungry young mouths in this year’s statewide *Meet Up and Eat Up*™ Summer Food Service Program, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) announced today.

“Many families across Michigan struggle with food security, and there is no reason that children should go hungry when programs like this are available,” State Superintendent Brian Whiston said. “I strongly encourage schools, local governments, churches, and community organizations to step up by supporting the Summer Food Service Program for a positive impact on the health and lives of children in their community.

“Aligning with Michigan’s plan to become a Top 10 education state in 10 years, feeding children throughout the year is key to reducing the impact of high-risk factors such as poverty, and providing equal resources to meet the needs of all children and ensure access to quality educational opportunities,” Whiston added.

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) serves nutritious meals to children up to age 18 living in low-income areas where 50 percent or more of the students qualify for free or reduced-price school meals. Many summer food sites also provide educational enrichment and recreational activities in addition to meals and snacks, helping children continue to learn and stay safe when school is not in session.

The program operates in schools, public housing centers, playgrounds, camps, parks, and faith-based facilities, preventing more than half a million children in Michigan from going hungry each year after school lunchrooms close for summer break.

In 2017, 517,000 low-income Michigan children received meals during the school year, while only around 99,000, or 19 percent, received free meals or snacks at about 1,850 approved summer meal sites in their communities.

MDE is recruiting new partners to help fill this summer hunger gap, and to help reduce the resulting risk of summer learning loss.

The impact of summer learning loss on low-income children is dramatic. According to the *Afterschool Alliance*, such children typically lose more than two months of reading achievement and math skills, in addition to one month of spelling skills, during summer break.

Further, research shows a direct relationship between good nutrition and learning, making *Meet Up and Eat Up* a key building block in Michigan communities to develop healthy, happy kids ready to learn.

With more partners and community involvement, especially in many rural areas, Michigan can reach a national goal of providing nutritious meals to 40 percent of children who are eligible for free or reduced-priced summer meals, and in so doing, draw an additional \$11 million in federal funding to the state.

Sponsors of summer feeding sites receive federal reimbursement for both the meals served to children and the administrative costs of serving the meals. All sponsors receive free training and technical assistance from MDE.

For more information on joining the SFSP, please contact MDE at 517-373-3347 or mde-sfsp@michigan.gov by March 15, 2018. For more information on the SFSP, visit [here](#).

The SFSP, administered by MDE through funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, is available to children 18 and under regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability.

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