

Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)

Food That's In When School is Out!



During the school year, many children receive free and reduced-price breakfast and lunch at school. But what happens during the summer? Hunger is one of the most severe roadblocks to the learning process. Lack of nutrition during the summer months may set up a cycle for poor performance once school begins again. Hunger also makes children more prone to health problems. The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) is designed to fill that food gap by providing free, nutritious meals and snacks to help children in low-income areas get the nutrition they need to learn, play, and grow throughout the summer.

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) funds the program. Each state runs the program locally; here, the Colorado Department of Education oversees SFSP.

Communities large and small in which at least 50% of students are eligible for free and reduced-price school lunches may participate. In these areas, all children 18 and under can receive free meals at the approved SFSP food site; they do not need to show id or be eligible for free and reduced-price school meals themselves.

Even though this is a great program—and free—in many communities not many children participate. In other communities, SFSP has not found any groups willing to prepare or serve the food. SFSP needs help in getting out the word about this important program, and also good partners to offer joint activities at meal times. And there are many benefits to libraries to get involved, too.

What can libraries do to get involved with SFSP in their eligible communities?

- Promote the program; go to the websites below for promotional materials to post and distribute in your library and elsewhere in your community. Talk about it to kids and parents, and mention it during your spring and summer programs.
- If you're in an eligible community that does not have anyone to prepare or serve the meals, ask your community partners and reach out to others that may be able to do this important work. Many possible food providers and distribution venues do not know about the program. Food providers get all expenses for the food and preparation reimbursed!
- Do some outreach to food distribution sites during meal times to sign kids up for your SRP, read books aloud, pass out library flyers and library card forms, lead a craft project, bring a tech petting zoo, etc. You may well reach kids that don't come to the library. It's a great opportunity to both promote the library and bring reading to the kids.
- Hold a fun SRP event at a food distribution site during mealtime—bring the library to the kids, and the kids to the food.

- If there's a food distribution site nearby, take a group from the library on a walk to the food site regularly. Many kids do not know about the program and this may inform them. Some may be embarrassed to go on their own but be more comfortable in a group.
Note: this is a great project for teen volunteers to help with—and they get free meals too!
- After the meal, walk other kids back to the library, perhaps ones that have never been there.
- Become a site for food distribution. This is a great way to bring kids into the library, and to get free meals to more kids.

Library involvement in SFSP also leads to:

- increased positive community visibility for your library
- helping kids learn better by being healthier
- reaching more kids with the message to read more over the summer
- potential new community partnerships and funding

The information for feeding site locations is not yet set, but watch the CO Department of Education SFSP website; it'll arrive soon. To determine if your site is eligible, go to the K-12 Free and Reduced Lunch Eligibility chart (www.cde.state.co.us/cdereval/download/PDF/2011PM/K-12FreeandReducedLunchEligibilitybyDistrictandSchool.pdf), find your district, and look at the number at the far right column; if it's over 50%, your area should be eligible for SFSP.

For more information, promotional materials (coloring pages, door hangers, posters, etc.), and outreach ideas:

- USDA SFSP: <http://www.summerfood.usda.gov/>
- CO Department of Education SFSP: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdenutritran/nutrisummer.htm>
- SFSP Outreach Toolkit: http://www.summerfood.usda.gov/library/SFSP_toolkit.pdf

To become a SFSP site, or for more information:

Contact Connie Harlow, CO Department of Education, (303) 866-6650

