



Virginia Poverty Law Center

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Summer Meals Reaching One in Six Low-Income Children in Virginia

RICHMOND – A new report finds that participation in the Summer Nutrition Programs decreased in Virginia last year, with 66,402 low-income children receiving summer meals on an average day in July 2013. This represents a decrease of 3.4 percent from the previous summer. Virginia Hunger Solutions – an initiative of the Virginia Poverty Law Center and the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) – noted that summer meals reached only 16.9 students for every 100 low-income children who got regular school year school meals during the 2012-2013 school year.

The report, *Hunger Doesn't Take A Vacation*, is released annually by FRAC. It measures the success of Summer Nutrition Programs at the national and state levels by comparing the number of children receiving summer meals to the number of low-income children receiving school lunch during the regular school year.

The FRAC report finds that summer meal participation nationally reached nearly three million students on an average day in July of 2013, up 161,000 children or 5.7 percent from July 2012. This represents the first considerable increase in participation in a decade, providing welcome momentum for the Summer Nutrition Programs.

“When the school year ends, millions of low-income children lose access to school meals, including about 394,000 in Virginia. It is in our state’s best interest to ensure that these children have adequate nutrition during the summer so they stay healthy, active, and return to school in the fall ready to learn,” said LaTonya Reed of Virginia Hunger Solutions.

Virginia was one of five states targeted in 2013 by the United States Department of Agriculture for increased assistance in growing the number of children eating summer meals. Though participation fell, the foundation for future growth was laid.

“Over the past year, the Virginia Department of Health has worked very closely with community partners across the Commonwealth and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to strengthen the Summer Nutrition Programs,” said Reed. “With its redoubling of efforts, we are likely to see a significant improvement in program participation this year.”

Low participation means missed meals for children and missed dollars for the state. If Virginia were to reach 40 children with summer food for every 100 low-income children who get school lunch during the regular school year, Virginia would have fed an additional 91,124 low-income children every day in July 2013 and brought in 6.8 million more federal dollars to do so.

The Summer Nutrition Programs, which include the Summer Food Service Program and the National School Lunch Program, should be filling the food gap for the thousands of low-income Virginia children who rely on school breakfast and lunch during the school year to help keep hunger at bay. These programs provide free meals at participating summer sites for children under 18.

Virginia families can find nearby summer meal sites here <http://www.whyhunger.org/findfood> or by calling 211. Also, new this year from USDA is “SummerFoodRocks,” a free web-based application that features a site locator and search tool, and works on devices such as iPads, iPhones, Blackberrys, and Androids. Visit www.fns.usda.gov/summerfoodrocks to locate a summer meal site near you.

About the report:

Data for Virginia come from the 2014 version of the annual report released by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), the lead advocacy organization working to end hunger in America through stronger public policies. The FRAC report, *Hunger Doesn't Take A Vacation*, gives data for all states and looks at national and state trends. FRAC measures national summer participation during the month of July, when typically all children are out of school throughout the month and lose access to regular school year meals. The report is available online at www.frac.org.

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