

## Summer Nutrition Programs for Kinship/ Grandfamilies



When the school year ends, millions of children lose access to the school breakfasts and lunches they rely on during the school year. This can exacerbate summertime food insecurity for those children in kinship/grandfamilies. (“Kinship/grandfamilies” is a term that refers to families in which grandparents, other relatives, or close family friends are raising children whose parents are unable to do so.)

Fortunately, the Summer Nutrition Programs are designed to replace school breakfast and lunch and can help lower food costs for families. These programs ensure that children have consistent access to healthy meals during the summer months, which is critical for their health and well-being. In addition to providing nutritious meals, many Summer Nutrition Programs sites offer educational, enrichment, physical, and recreational activities; keep children safe and out of trouble; and provide crucial childcare for grandparents and other caregivers.

In 2023, a new permanent program was created to further reduce summertime food insecurity. Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (Summer EBT) provides families approximately \$40 a month per eligible child to help with food costs during the summer months. Children are automatically eligible for Summer EBT benefits if they qualify for free or reduced-price meals during the school year. The Summer Nutrition Programs combined with Summer EBT is an effective recipe to meet children’s nutritional needs during the summer.

### What Are the Summer Nutrition Programs?

The federal [Summer Nutrition Programs](#) provide funding to organizations to serve meals and snacks to children 18 and under at sites during summer vacation. There is no cost to children or their families.

Local governments, school districts, and private nonprofits can operate summer meal sites, which may be located at schools, parks, recreation centers, housing complexes, tribal lands, YMCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs, houses of worship, camps, summer school, and other places where children congregate. Summer meal sites are classified as either

“open” or “closed enrolled.” An “open” site is open to all the children in the community. A “closed enrolled” site only provides meals to children enrolled in the program.

### **Summer Meals in Action: Lunch Lab in Larimer County, Colorado**

The Food Bank for Larimer County operates Lunch Lab, a food truck that covers different daily sites and provides both hot and cold meal options for kids' lunches. They also partner with community organizations to provide activities to keep children engaged and well-fed. Examples of meals include tacos and chicken nachos. [Learn more here.](#)

## **What Are the Benefits of Summer Meals?**

The Summer Nutrition Programs contribute to children's healthy growth and development by providing them with nutritious meals and snacks over the summer months, [a time when children can be more at risk for hunger and weight gain](#). Summer meals must meet specific nutrition standards. Most summer meal sites provide educational, enrichment, or recreational activities that keep children learning, active, and safe when school is not in session.

## **How Do I Know if a Student is Eligible to Participate in the Summer Nutrition Programs?**

Free summer meals are available to all children and teenagers 18 years of age or younger who visit an approved site. Unlike school meals, there is no need for grandparents or caregivers to submit paperwork to participate in the Summer Nutrition Programs. Eligibility for summer meals is determined by an area's school data and census data, which are used to identify areas where a high percentage of children are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.

## **How Can I Access Summer Meals in Rural Locations?**

A relatively new program option through the Summer Nutrition Programs is rural non-congregate, which allows families to take meals home rather than consume the meals on site. This program is meant to fill the gap in rural areas, where transportation and other access barriers may exist.

## **How Can I Find Summer Meal Sites Near Me?**

To find the closest summer meals site, use the [Summer Meals for Kids Site Finder](#) on the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service website. Caregivers can use this mapping tool to find directions to nearby meal sites, as well as their hours of

operation and contact information. The map also designates whether they are traditional sites (where children eat at the program) or non-congregate (meaning children can take the meals home).

Schools are also required to share information about summer meals site locations. Caregivers should check with their school district to learn more.

## **What is Summer EBT and How Do I Know if a Student is Eligible?**

Summer EBT provides families approximately \$40 a month per eligible child to help with food costs during the summer months. [Not every state has chosen to participate.](#)

Those who qualify for free or reduced-price meals while attending a school participating in the National School Lunch Program or School Breakfast Program are automatically eligible for Summer EBT benefits.

Schools determine eligibility for free or reduced-price meals by asking families to fill out a school meal application, or by directly certifying if the child participates in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), or Medicaid (if applicable in the state), or if they are experiencing homelessness, a foster child, or a migrant student. Families need to apply for Summer EBT if their student attends a Community Eligibility or Provision 2 school and is not directly certified through the program options listed above.

For more information on eligibility, please see the Food Research & Action Center's [Eligibility Guide.](#)

## **Where Can I Learn More Information About the Summer Nutrition Programs?**

For more information about summer meals and Summer EBT, contact your school district's Food and Nutrition Services Department or parent liaison or your school's guidance counselor.

For more information on food assistance for kinship/grandfamilies, visit the Food Research & Action Center's [Hunger Among Grandfamilies and Kinship Families](#) webpage.

### **Did You Know?**

- ▶ The Summer Food Service Program was created in 1968, which means the Summer Nutrition Programs have been combatting summer food insecurity for over 50 years.

- ▶ Just over 2.8 million children participated in the Summer Nutrition Programs on an average day in July 2023.
- ▶ Only 15.3 children received summer lunch for every 100 children who received a free or reduced-price lunch in the 2022–2023 school year.
- ▶ Lack of awareness about the program remains one of the biggest barriers to participation.
- ▶ States must opt in to Summer EBT. Twelve states have chosen not to participate in Summer EBT in 2025: Alaska, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Mississippi, Oklahoma (Tribal Nations are participating), South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee (Tennessee participated in 2023 but chose not to opt in again), Texas, and Wyoming.

---

The Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network: A National Technical Assistance Center (Network) helps government agencies and nonprofits in states, tribes, and territories work across jurisdictional and systemic boundaries to improve supports and services for families in which grandparents, other relatives, or close family friends are raising children whose parents are unable to do so. For more information, please visit [www.GKSNetwork.org](http://www.GKSNetwork.org).

*The Network is supported by the Administration for Community Living (ACL), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$9,950,000 with 95 percentage funded by ACL/HHS and \$523,684 and 5 percentage funded by non-government sources. The contents are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by ACL/HHS, or the U.S. Government.*

The Network is a project of  
Generations United.

**generations  
united**  
Because we're stronger together®

©Generations United and the Food Research & Action Center, 2025