



Carol Highsmith, 2011

FEEDING CONNECTICUT'S CHILDREN DURING THE SUMMER: AN EVALUATION OF ACCESS AND FAMILY PERSPECTIVES ON MEAL SITES

PREPARED BY:



www.csch.uconn.edu
www.uconnruddcenter.org

Background

The mission of the UConn Collaboratory on School and Child Health (CSCH) is to facilitate innovative and impactful connections across research, policy, and practice arenas to advance equity in school and child health. CSCH is committed to anti-racist work that prioritizes inclusion, reduces disparities, and creates systemic change.

The UConn Rudd Center conducts research to inform policy solutions that address inequities in childhood health, poor nutrition, and weight bias. In collaboration with the Connecticut State Department of Education, the Rudd Center conducted a study that examined the 2021 USDA Summer Meal Program's open sites in Connecticut.

In order to learn more about the families who participate and their perception of the meal program, surveys were distributed at open meal sites across the state. We visited 21 Summer Meal open sites (sites open to the public versus closed sites which serve meals only to students participating in an attached program, like summer school). The sites chosen represent all 8 counties in Connecticut and were a mixture both types of meal programs: Seamless Summer Option (SSO) and Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). In total, 529 participants completed surveys.



Free Summer Meals!
Comidas de Verano Gratis!

Kids and teens 18 and under
Niños y adolescentes de 18 años y menos

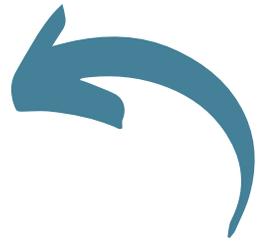
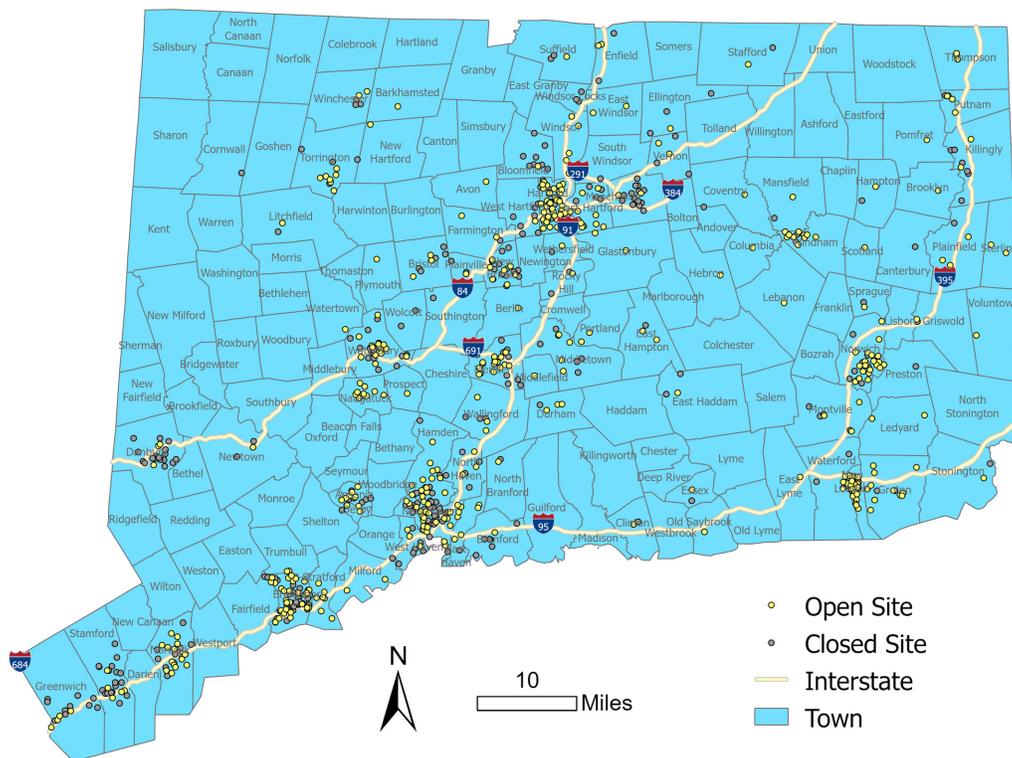
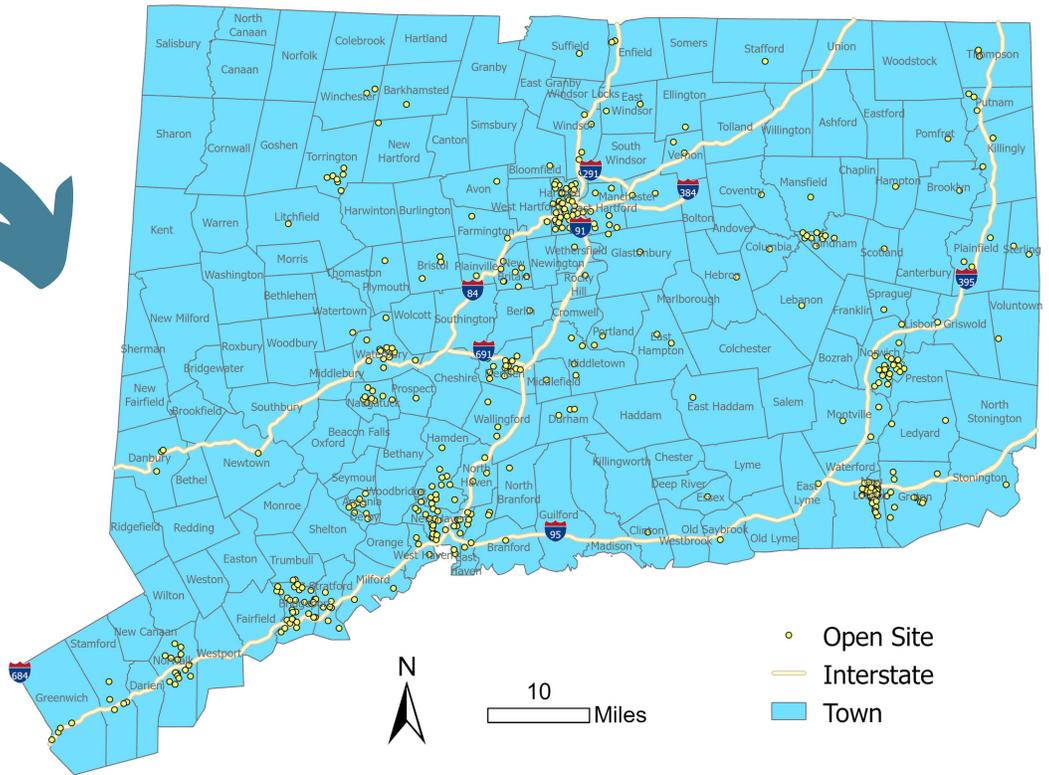
EHCI | **NOKID HUNGRY** | **CSDE**
ENDING HUNGER IN CONNECTICUT | BRAND OUR STRENGTH CONNECTICUT | CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

FOR SITES NEAR YOU, CALL/LLAME **211**
TEXT **CTmeals** TO **877877**
www.CTSummerMeals.org

USDA IS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY PROVIDER AND EMPLOYER.

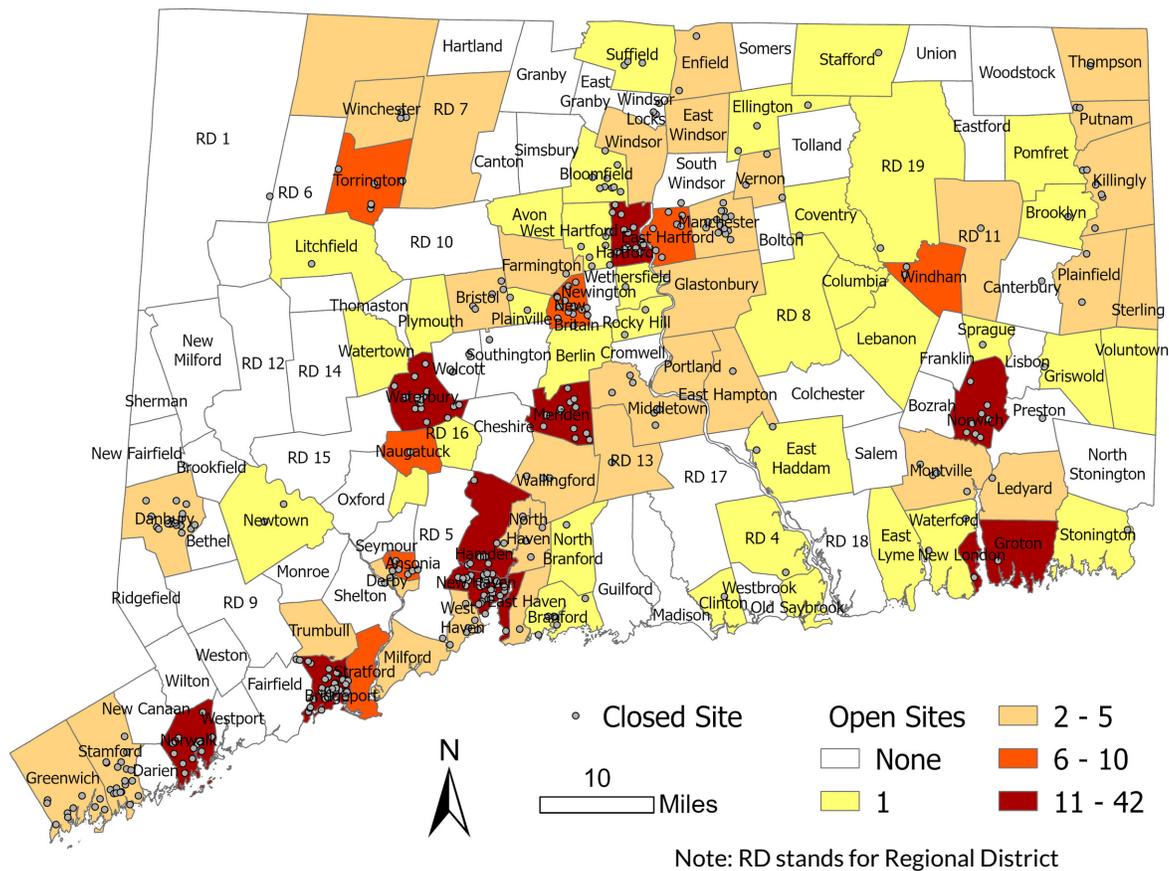
2021 Summer Meal Sites

OPEN SITES ONLY



ALL SITES

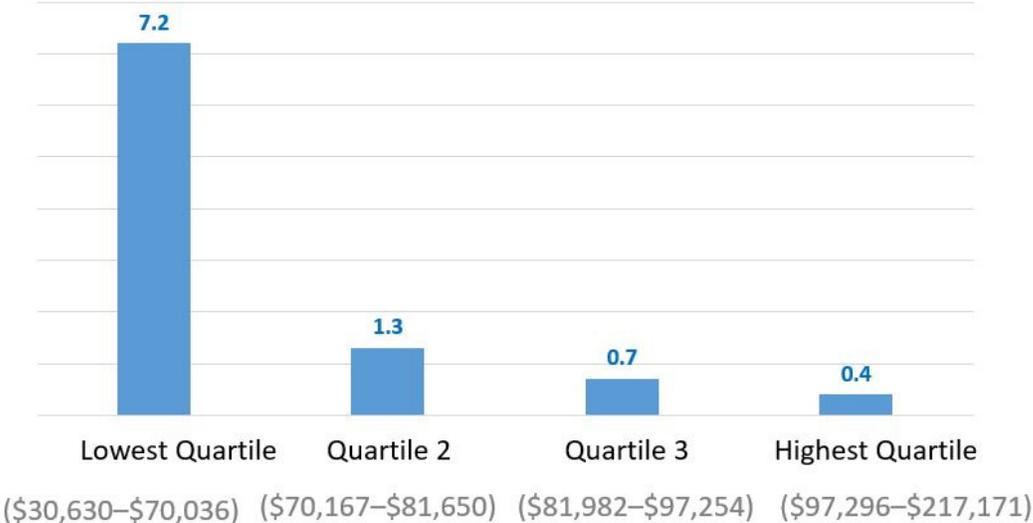
2021 Summer Meal Sites



SCHOOL DISTRICTS BY NUMBER OF OPEN SITES

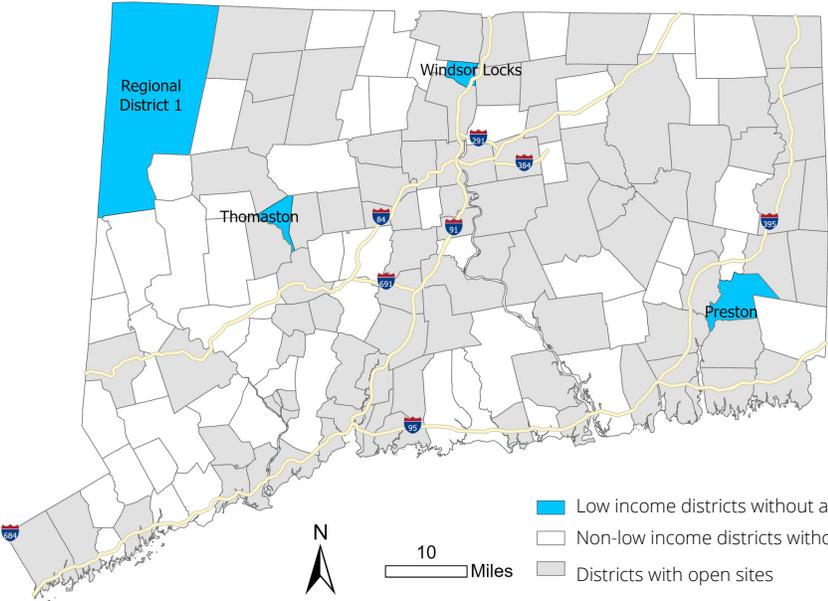
Summer Meal Sites

Average Number of Open Sites by Median Household Income Quartiles



Note: Analysis includes open sites only
 Note: The analysis ($n = 169$) is based on the median household income by the single-factor analysis of variance (ANOVA). The difference in the average site count is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$).

LOW-INCOME SCHOOL DISTRICTS WITHOUT ANY OPEN SUMMER SITES:



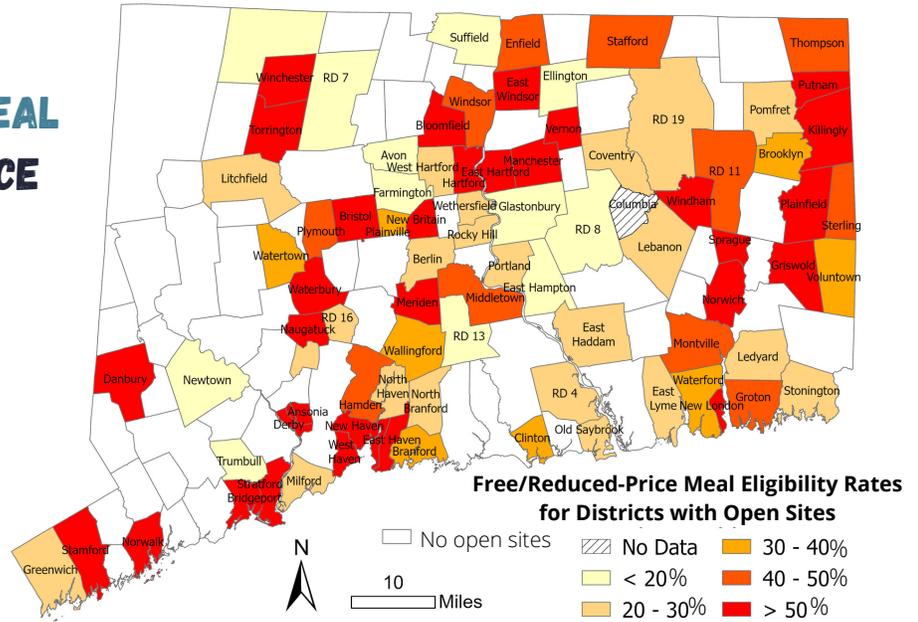
Note: Towns are defined as low income if they are in the lowest quartile for median household income (\$30,630–\$70,036) (2015 American Community Survey data). School districts containing at least one low-income town are defined as low-income.

■ Low income districts without any open sites
 Non-low income districts without any open sites
 Districts with open sites

N
 10 Miles

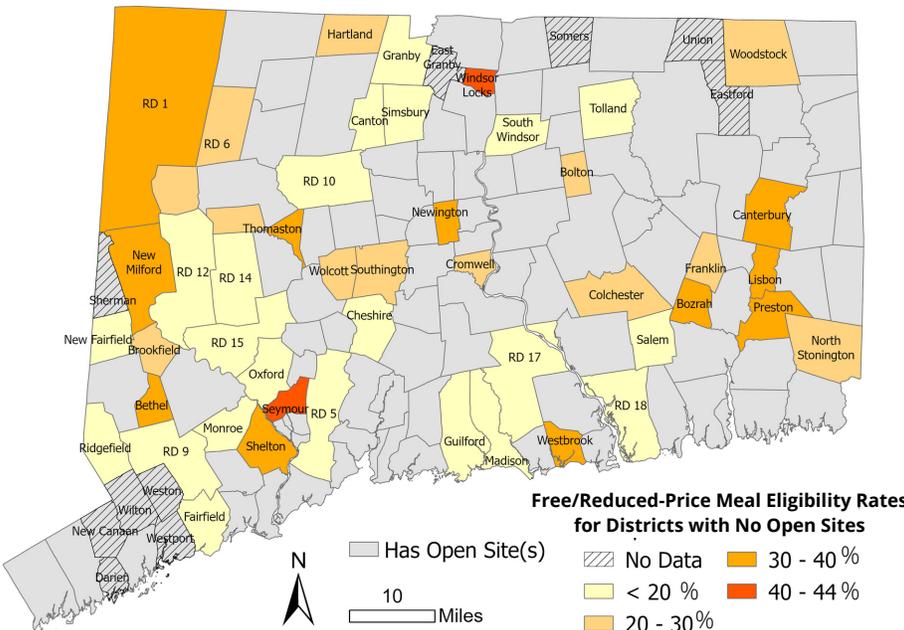
Summer Meal Sites

TOWNS WITH OPEN SUMMER MEAL SITES BY FREE/REDUCED-PRICE MEAL ELIGIBILITY RATE



Note: Free and reduced lunch rate is from 2019

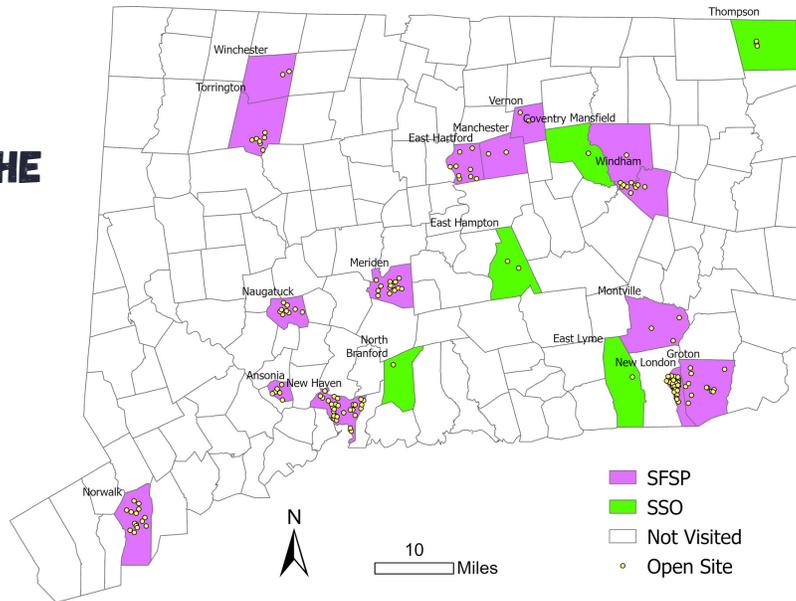
TOWNS WITH NO OPEN SUMMER MEAL SITES BY FREE/REDUCED PRICE MEAL ELIGIBILITY RATE



Note: Free and reduced lunch rate is from 2019
 Note: RD stands for Regional District

Survey Participants

**WHERE FAMILIES
WERE INVITED TO
PARTICIPATE IN THE
SURVEY:**

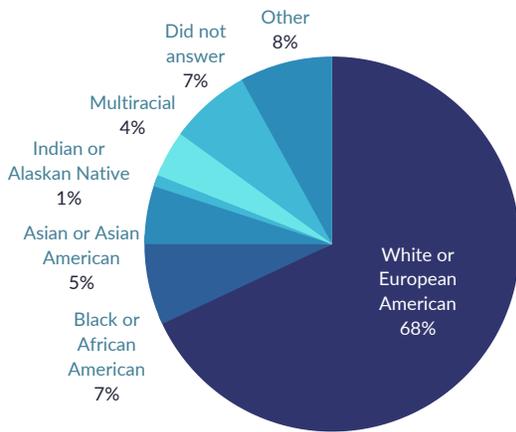


VERNON AND MERIDEN EACH ACCOUNTED FOR 17.8% OF THE OVERALL PARTICIPANTS.

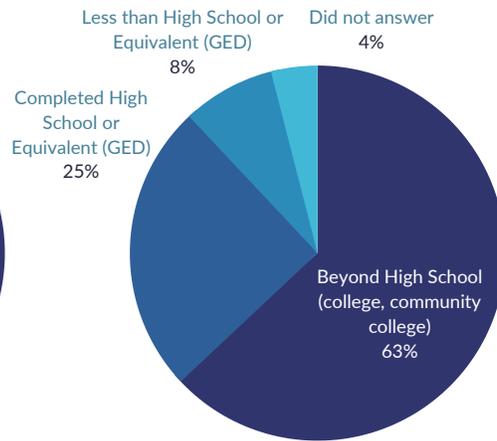
County	Town	Location	Frequency
Fairfield	Norwalk	Colonial Village – Housing Authority	19
Hartford	Manchester	Manchester High School	7
Litchfield	Torrington	Friendly Hands Food Bank	8
Litchfield	Torrington	Vogel Wetmore School	14
Litchfield	Winchester	Pearson Middle School	34
Middlesex	East Hampton	East Hampton High School	45
New Haven	Ansonia	Mobile Bus Route	8
New Haven	Meriden	Maloney High School	94
New Haven	Naugatuck	Naugatuck High School	20
New Haven	New Haven	Roberto Clemente Elementary School	10
New Haven	New Haven	Troup School	10
New Haven	North Branford	Totoket Valley Elementary School	8
New London	East Lyme	East Lyme High School	50
New London	Groton	Mary Morrisson Elementary	17
New London	Montville	Montville Social Services	2
New London	New London	Mobile Bus Route	40
Tolland	Coventry	Nathan Hale Middle School	28
Tolland	Mansfield	Mansfield Middle School	10
Tolland	Vernon	Vernon Middle School	94
Windham	Thompson	Thompson Middle School	8
Windham	Windham	West Ave Apartment	8
Total			529

529 Survey Participants

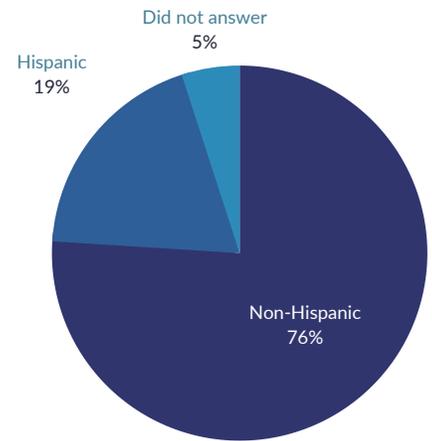
RACE



EDUCATION



ETHNICITY



83% ARRIVED TO THE SITE VIA PERSONAL CAR

86% PRIMARILY SPEAK ENGLISH AT HOME

Demographic Comparison

ALL PARTICIPANTS

- **Race:**
 - 68% White or European American
 - 7% Black or African American
 - 5% Asian or Asian American
 - 1% Indian or Alaskan Native
 - 4% Multiracial
 - 8% Other
 - 7% Did not answer
- **Ethnicity:**
 - 76% Non-Hispanic
 - 19% Hispanic
 - 5% Did not answer
- **Education:**
 - 88% High school graduate or higher

STATE-WIDE

- **Race:**
 - 80% White or European American
 - 12% Black or African American
 - 5% Asian or Asian American
 - 1% Indian or Alaskan Native
 - 3% Multiracial
 - 0.1% Other
 - 0% Did not answer
- **Ethnicity:**
 - 66% Non-Hispanic
 - 17% Hispanic
 - 17% Did not answer
- **Education:**
 - 91% High school graduate or higher

Child Characteristics

PARTICIPANTS PICKED UP MEALS FOR AN AVERAGE OF 2.8 CHILDREN.

88.8%

stated that their children eat school meals during the school year.

69.6%

say they plan on using summer meals next year (i.e. 2022).

63.1%

reported that they did not use summer meals before the COVID-19 pandemic (pre-2020).

min. **1 CHILD**



max. **10 CHILDREN**

**AVERAGE AGE:
9.3 YEARS**

Communication

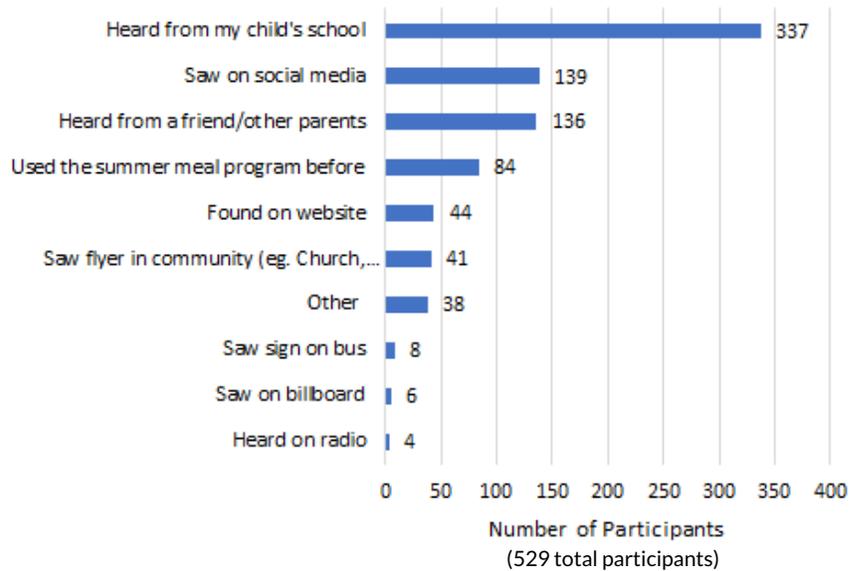
HOW DID FAMILIES INITIALLY HEAR ABOUT THE PROGRAM?

34%

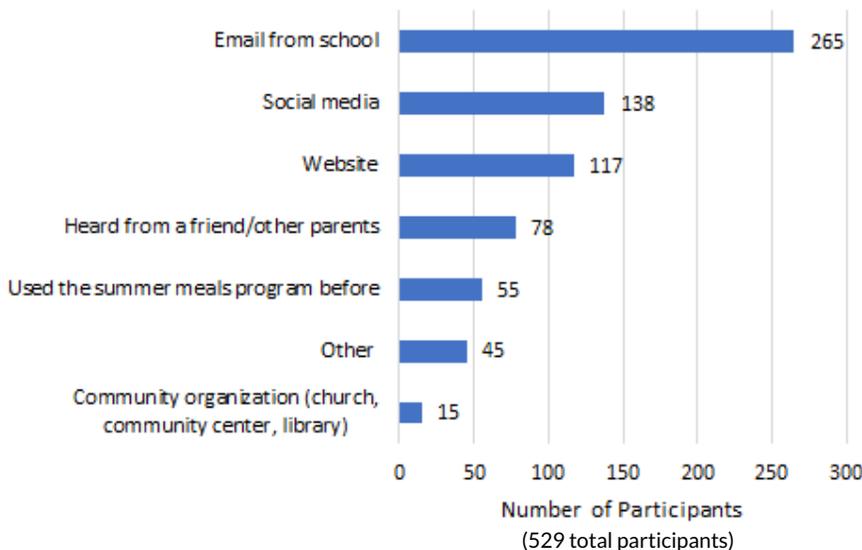
of participants reported initially hearing about the program from multiple sources.

93%

of initial social media engagement was through **Facebook**.



HOW DO FAMILIES GET UPDATED INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROGRAM?



29%

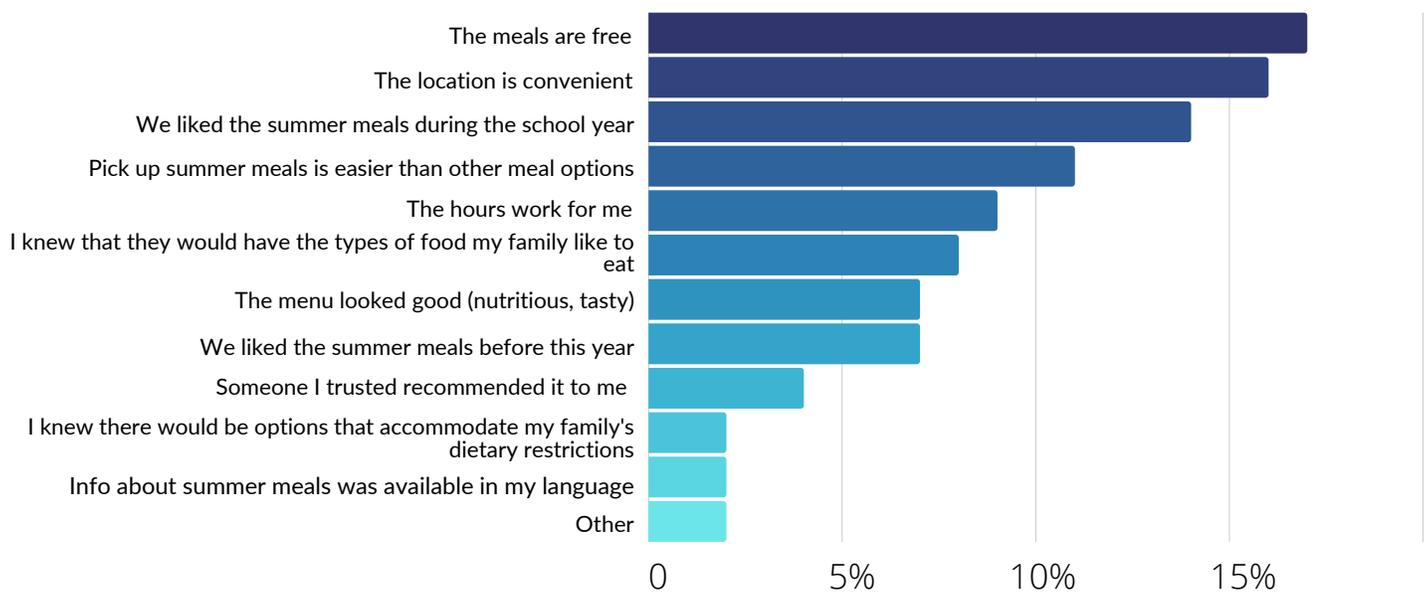
of participants reported getting updates from multiple sources.

96%

of ongoing social media engagement was through **Facebook**.

Trying the Program

THE FOLLOWING CHART DEPICTS ANSWERS TO THE QUESTION:
"What convinced you to try the summer meals program?"

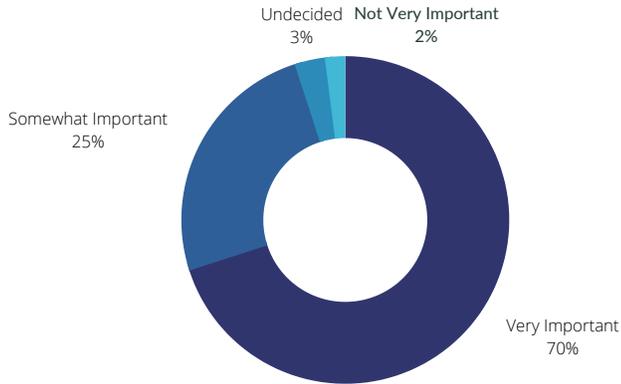


68.4%
of participants
selected multiple
reasons

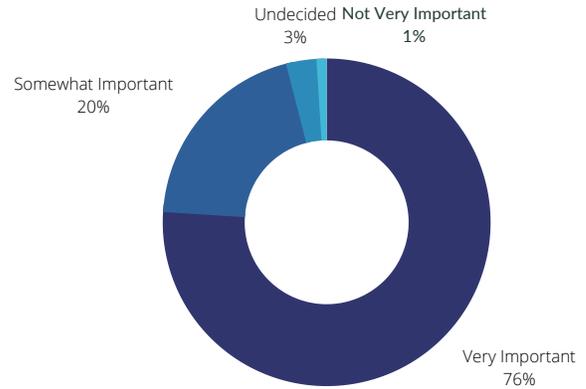
Important Features

Participants were asked to rate how important the following features of the summer meal program were to them. (*Very Important, Somewhat Important, Undecided, Not Very Important, Not Important at All*)

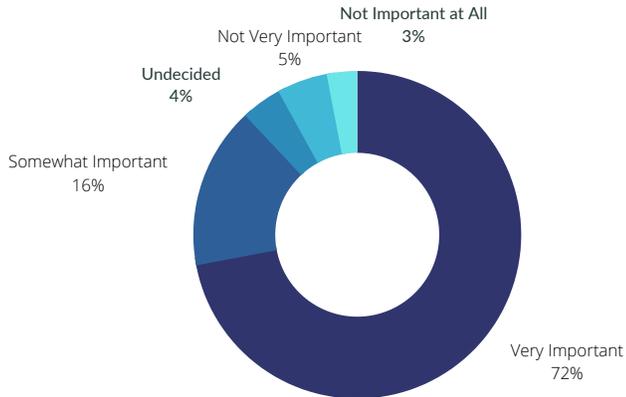
A GRAB-AND-GO OPTION IS AVAILABLE



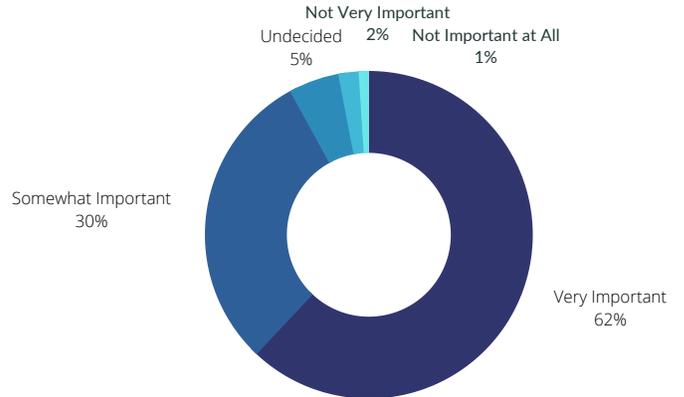
MULTIPLE MEALS ARE PROVIDED AT ONE TIME



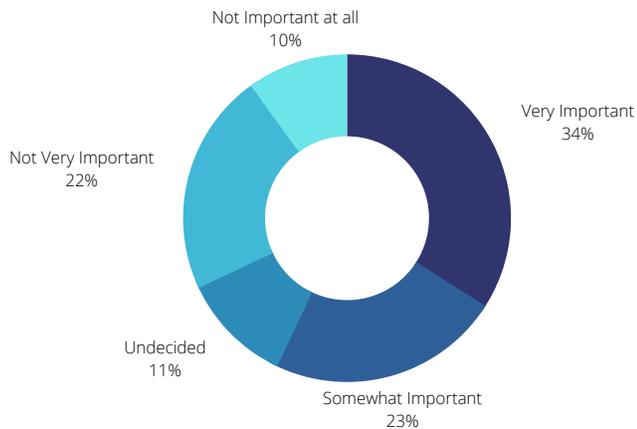
I CAN PICK UP MEALS WHEN MY CHILD IS NOT PRESENT



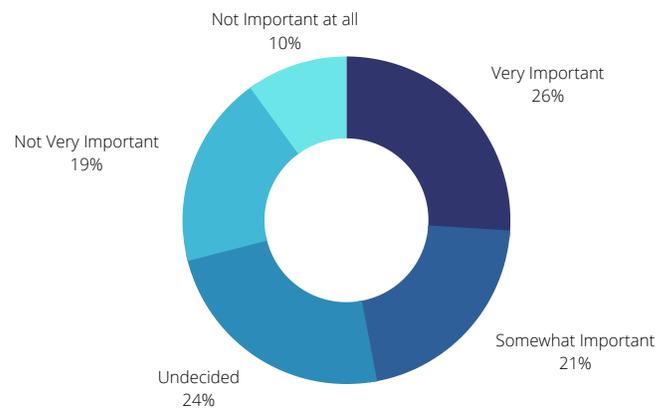
MEALS BESIDES LUNCH ARE OFFERED



THE SUMMER MEAL SITE IS AT MY CHILD'S SCHOOL



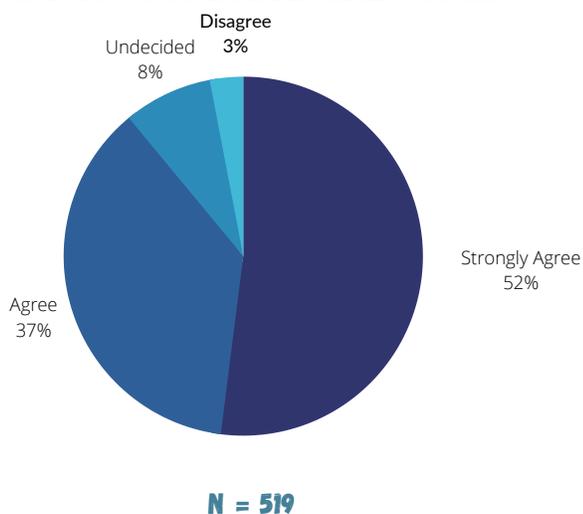
OTHER ACTIVITIES ARE OFFERED AT THE SUMMER MEAL SITES



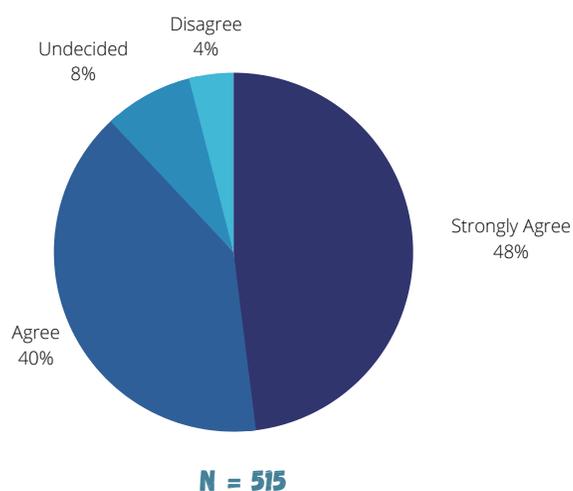
Satisfaction

Participants were asked to rate their satisfaction with various components of the Summer Meal Program. (Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree)

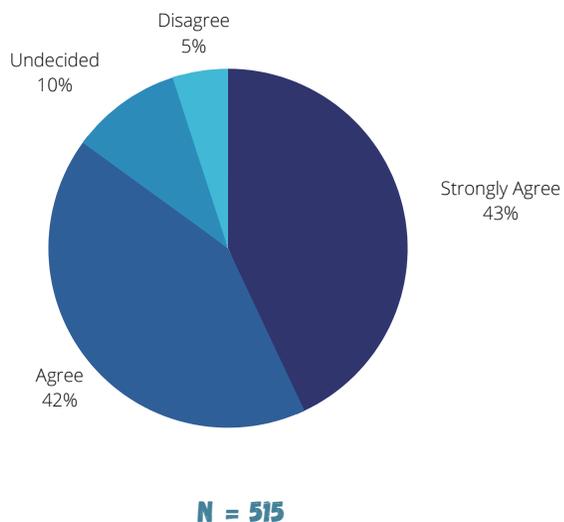
OVERALL, I AM SATISFIED BY THE MEALS MY CHILD RECEIVES FROM THE SUMMER MEAL PROGRAM



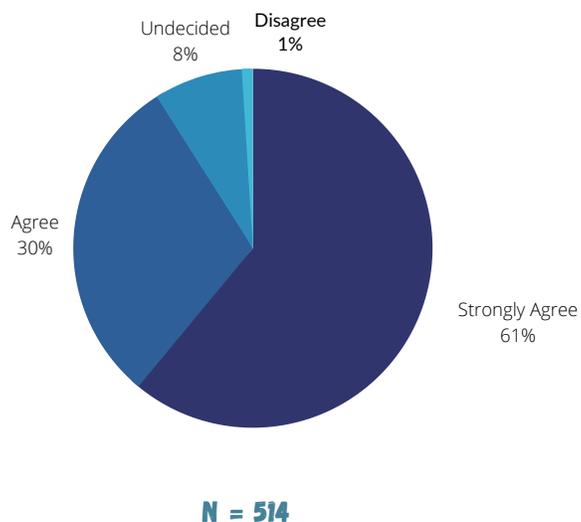
I AM SATISFIED BY THE NUTRITIONAL QUALITY (HEALTHINESS) OF THE MEALS



I AM SATISFIED WITH THE VARIETY OF MEALS

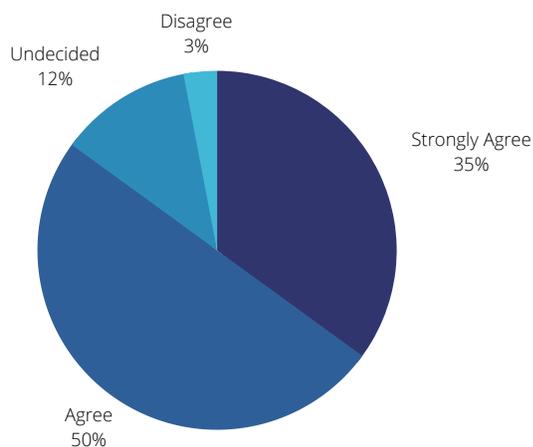


MY CHILDREN LIKE THE TASTE OF THE MEALS



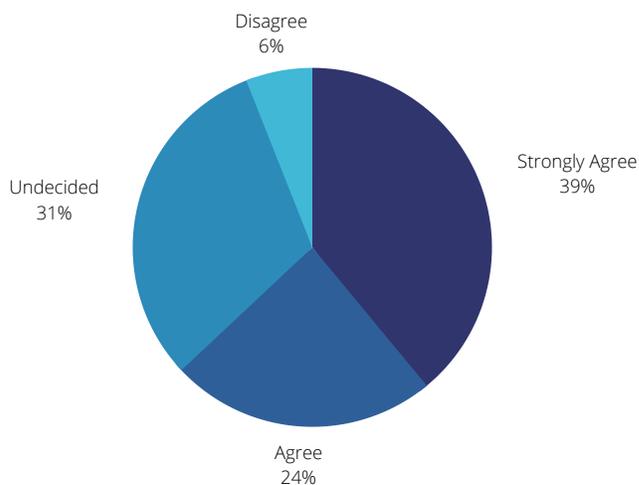
Satisfaction

THESE MEALS FIT WITH MY CHILD'S DIETARY RESTRICTIONS



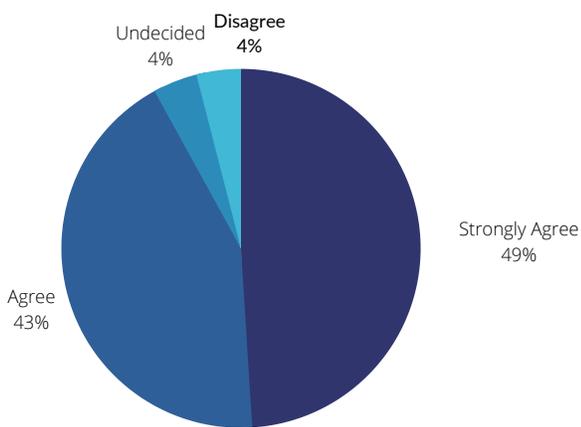
N = 459

THESE MEALS PROVIDE FOODS FROM MY CULTURE



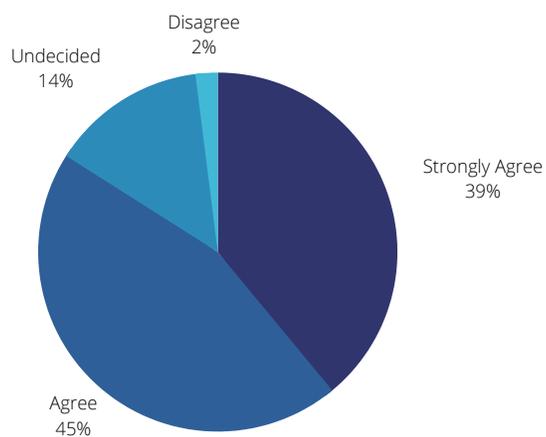
N = 509

THERE IS ENOUGH FOOD PROVIDED



N = 516

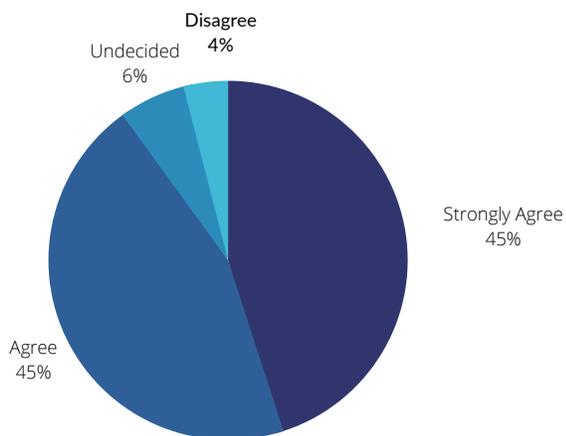
THESE MEALS FIT WITH MY CHILD'S FOOD ALLERGIES (E.G. WHEAT, DAIRY)



N = 421

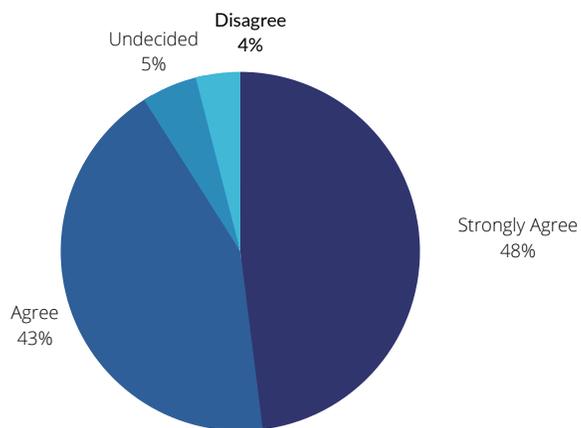
Satisfaction

I LIKE THE WAY THE MEALS ARE PACKAGED



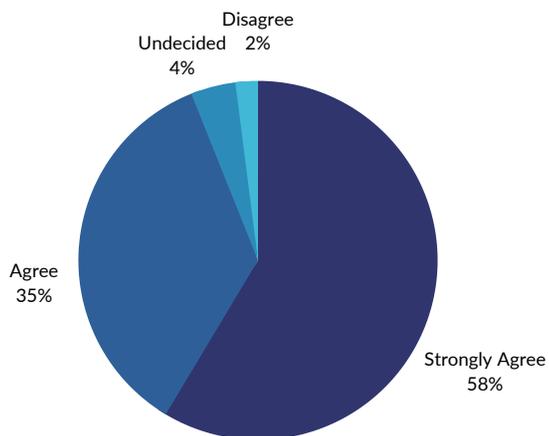
N = 515

THE AVAILABLE DAYS OF THE WEEKS MAKE IT EASY FOR ME TO GET MEALS



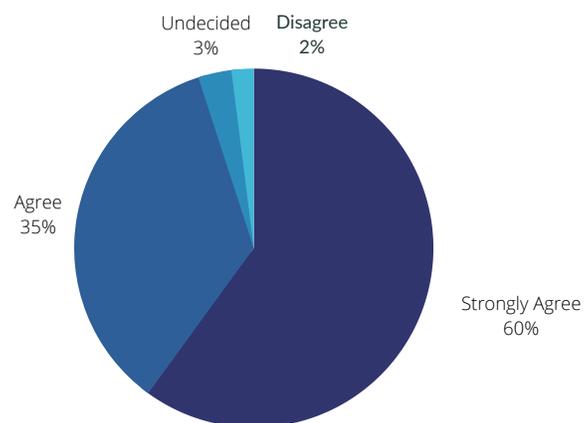
N = 516

THE TIME IT TAKES TO PICK UP MEALS IS QUICK



N = 518

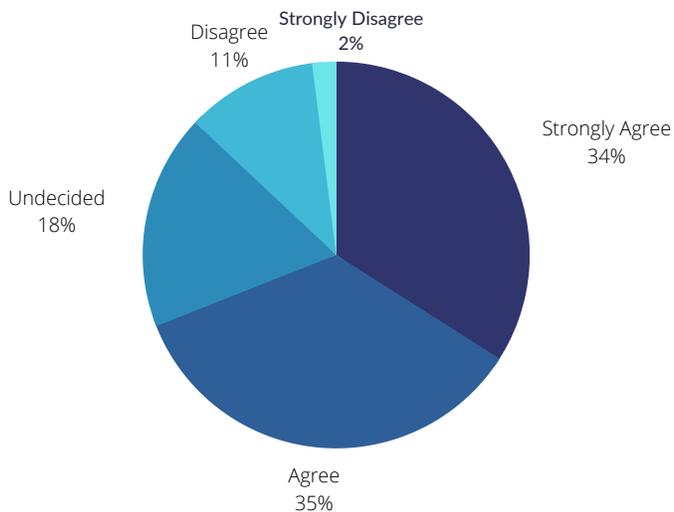
IT IS EASY FOR ME TO FIND OUT WHEN AND WHERE TO GET THE MEALS



N = 517

Satisfaction

IT IS EASY FOR ME TO FIND OUT THE MENU EACH DAY



N = 512

We asked families to describe aspects of the Summer Meal Program they liked. The word cloud diagram below illustrates the key words and phrases that participating families reported:

WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT SUMMER MEALS?



Satisfaction

"Many fruits and
veggies and everything
is healthy."

- **NAUGATUCK**

"They are convenient and
make lunch and breakfast
easier to prepare."

- **NORTH BRANFORD**

"Available right near my
home."

- **NEW HAVEN**

"The nutrition, the kids
enjoy them, the lunch
lady is awesome."

- **MONTVILLE**

"My son feels
connected to the
school."

- **THOMPSON**

"Easy for my kids to
make."

- **MANSFIELD**

Satisfaction

"It helps our family financially."

- **MERIDEN**

"Saves time to prepare meals when tired from a long day at work."

- **NORWALK**

"Free and easy! Quick to prepare (kids like variety) some healthy options, fresh fruit, organic treats, etc."

- **VERNON**

"Convenient with weekly meals available on one day."

- **TORRINGTON**

WE ALSO ASKED FAMILIES HOW THE SUMMER MEAL PROGRAM COULD BE IMPROVED.

64%

of the participants either said "nothing" or skipped the question.

36%

provided feedback



Feedback included:

1. Desire for more variety (~6%)
2. Accessibility - either the location or hours were barriers (~5%)
3. Desire for less packaged foods and more fresh foods (~2%)
4. Concerns about their inability to heat frozen meals or frozen meals not reheating well (~2%)

Additional Quotes

THE FOLLOWING QUOTES ARE SOME RESPONSES TO THE SURVEY QUESTION:

"Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience with the summer meal program?"

The staff is AMAZING & we can't thank them enough for all their hard work! Don't love the 9 million pizza options but we understand why"

- COVENTRY

"It really helped out when we couldn't afford enough food for the house, we know kids had daytime food."

- VERNON

It's been very helpful. Having to go to the stores less avoids our family from covid-exposure"

- WINDHAM

"We are super grateful for this program, I just wish there was more V/GF food options"

- EAST HAMPTON

"Keep the program going, it helps a lot of families."

- EAST LYME

Additional Quotes

THE FOLLOWING QUOTES ARE SOME RESPONSES TO THE SURVEY QUESTION:

"Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience with the summer meal program?"

"I feel it is a great idea and huge convenience to parents and huge help time and financially"

- **MANCHESTER**

"People who run it are very friendly. Try to come 1 or 2x per week - allows funds to buy clothes, etc."

- **ANSONIA**

"Makes being a single mom, active duty member budget and not worry about loss of time and nutrition while on duty away from kiddos."

- **NEW LONDON**

"This is a great program! It has helped so many families in this town."

- **WINCHESTER**

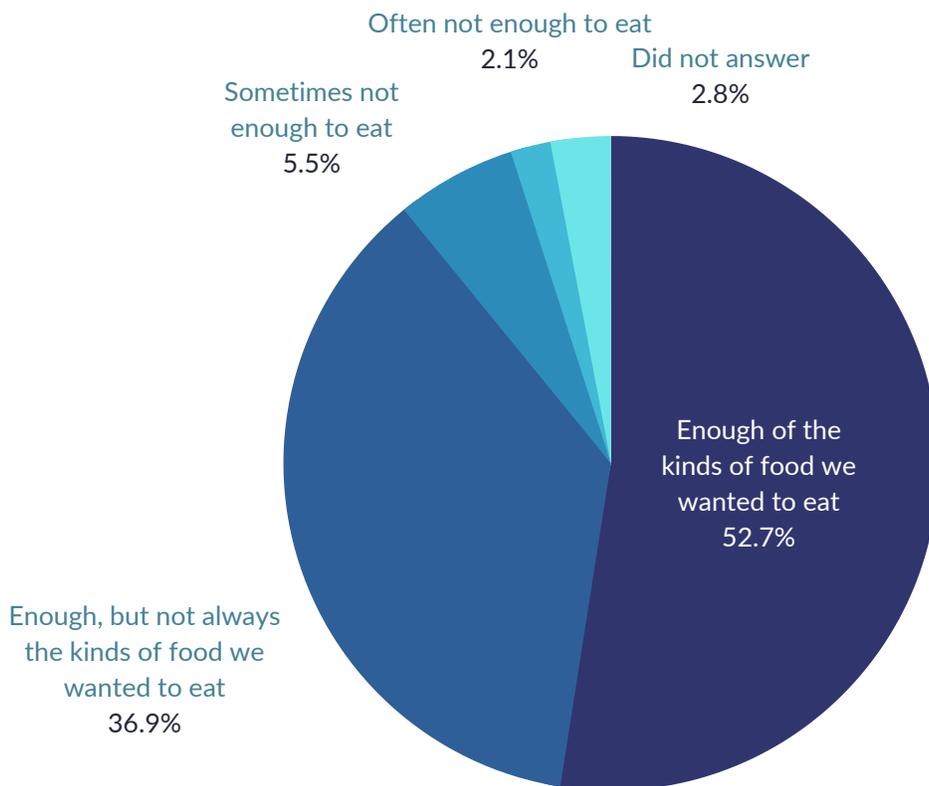
"The staff is lovely. We love to come on Friday when they have toys for the kids."

- **GROTON**

Household Pulse Survey Items

The following two charts illustrate survey participants' responses to questions related to food security. The questions used are from the **U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey**. The Household Pulse Survey is a 20-minute online survey studying how the coronavirus pandemic is impacting households across the country from a social and economic perspective. The survey asks questions about how childcare, education, employment, food security, health, and other topics have been affected by the ongoing crisis.

Getting enough food can be a problem for some people.
In the last 7 days, which of these statements best describe the food eaten in your household?



n = 529

Household Pulse Survey Items

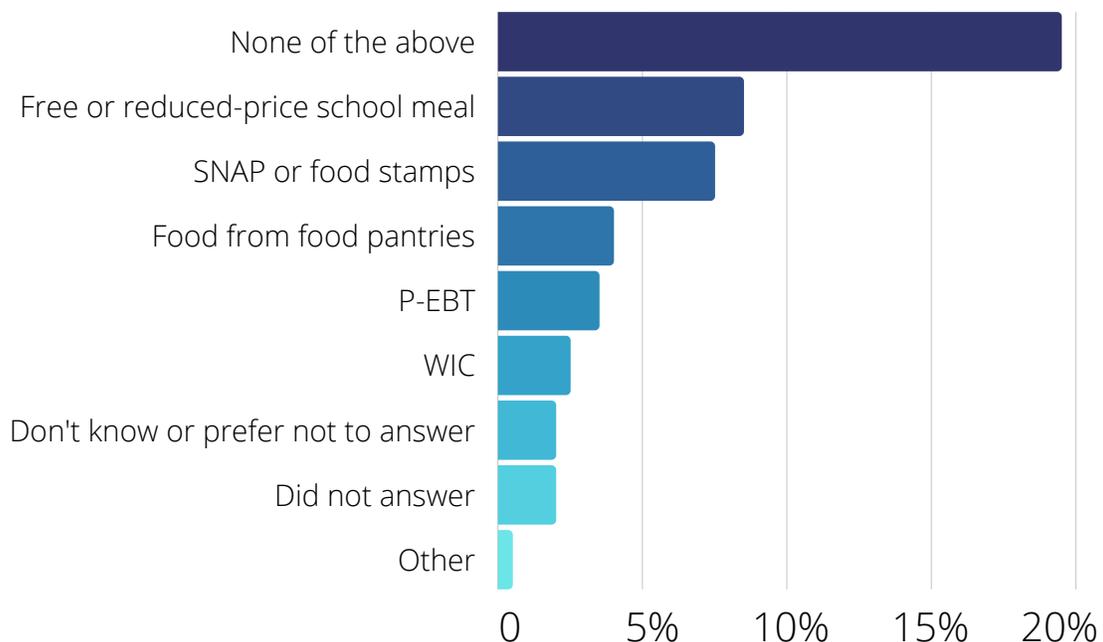
Only the 235 individuals who endorsed not having enough of the kinds of foods they wanted to eat, or sometimes or often not enough to eat, were asked a follow-up question about the children in their home having access to food.

17.2% REPORTED CHILDHOOD FOOD INSUFFICIENCY

Adults saying children in their household were not eating enough because they couldn't afford enough food.

THE FOLLOWING CHART DEPICTS ANSWERS TO THE QUESTION:

"Are you or any one in your household currently receiving any of the following?"



14.4% of participants selected multiple resources

Household Pulse Survey Items

The following statistics are from the results of the U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey - a nationwide survey designed to examine how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected people's lives. **In Households with Children:**

OUR SAMPLE

36.9% REPORTED MARGINAL FOOD SUFFICIENCY

A household reports they had enough to eat but not always the kinds of food they wanted to eat in the last 7 days.

7.6% REPORTED FOOD INSUFFICIENCY

A household did not have enough to eat, sometimes or often, in the last 7 days.

100% REPORTED THEY RECEIVED FREE MEALS AND/OR FOOD ASSISTANCE FOR THEIR CHILDREN IN THE LAST 7 DAYS

CONNECTICUT

29.2% REPORTED MARGINAL FOOD SUFFICIENCY

A household reports they had enough to eat but not always the kinds of food they wanted to eat in the last 7 days.

4.7% REPORTED FOOD INSUFFICIENCY

A household did not have enough to eat, sometimes or often, in the last 7 days.

39.1% REPORTED THEY RECEIVED FREE MEALS AND/OR FOOD ASSISTANCE FOR THEIR CHILDREN IN THE LAST 7 DAYS

UNITED STATES

19.3% REPORTED MARGINAL FOOD SUFFICIENCY

A household reports they had enough to eat but not always the kinds of food they wanted to eat in the last 7 days.

9.1% REPORTED FOOD INSUFFICIENCY

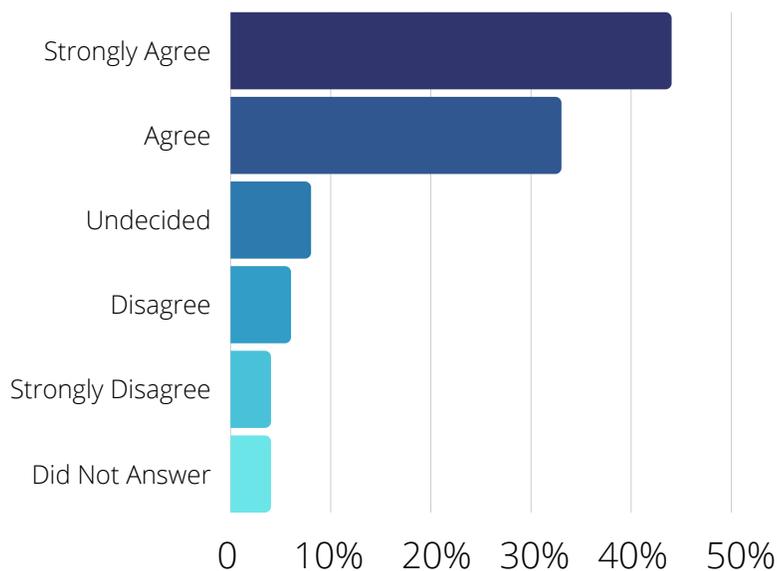
A household did not have enough to eat, sometimes or often, in the last 7 days.

43.4% REPORTED THEY RECEIVED FREE MEALS AND/OR FOOD ASSISTANCE FOR THEIR CHILDREN IN THE LAST 7 DAYS

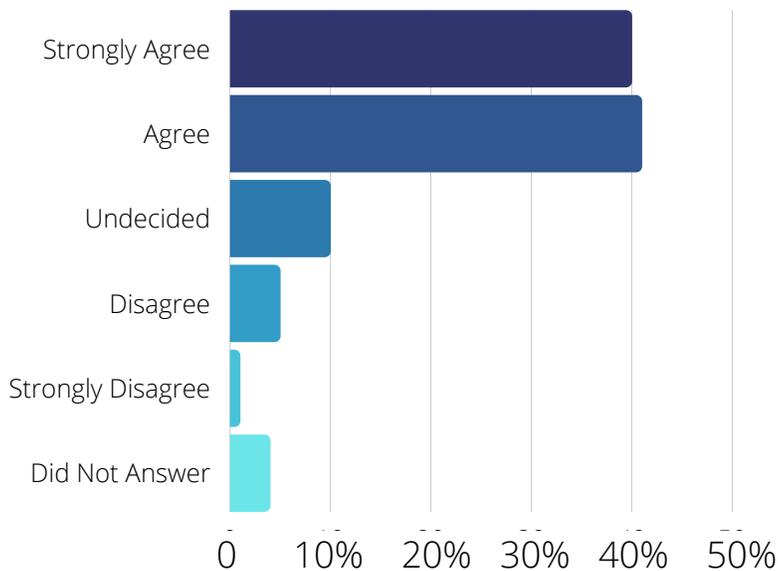
Source of data: United States Census Bureau. Week 37 Household Pulse Survey: September 1 – September 13.
Retrieved from: <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2021/demo/hhp/hhp37.html#techdoc>

Impact on Finances

THE SUMMER MEAL PROGRAM HELPS ME WORRY LESS ABOUT OUR FOOD RUNNING OUT BEFORE WE HAVE MONEY TO BUY MORE



THE SUMMER MEAL PROGRAM HELPS ME WORRY LESS ABOUT OUR CHILDREN EATING NUTRITIONALLY BALANCED MEALS



Conclusion

- The Summer Meal Program's open sites encompassed much of the state and frequently clustered in more densely populated areas. However, several districts with median incomes in the lowest quartile and high free/reduced lunch participation rates did not have an open summer meal site. Future support efforts should be directed towards those districts.
- The majority of participants reported they learned about the program directly from their child's school or through social media, underscoring the potential usefulness of these avenues for future program-related communication.
- Despite 63% of participants reporting they had not used the Summer Meal Program prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, 70% of them plan on using it during future summers
- Participants reported high rates of satisfaction with most components of the Summer Meal Program's open sites including nutritional quality, variety of meals, and quantity of food. Participants also were primarily satisfied with the logistics of program's open sites, including the days and times of meal pick-up.
- As expected, the rate of marginal food sufficiency among Summer Meal Program open site participants was much greater than state and national rates. Additionally, the percentage of participants meeting criteria for food insufficiency was greater than in-state rates, but similar to national rates.
- Overall, the state's Summer Meal Program open sites were well-received by participants. 78% reported that the Summer Meal Program helped them worry less about food running out and 81% reported that it helps them worry less about ensuring that their children are eating nutritionally balanced meals, illustrating the positive assistance the program provided.

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- Joseph Kim
- Angel Ojide
- Darlene Burckson
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- Breanna McFarlane
- Kate Walder

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