

USDA Summer Meals Study

Volume 1. Participant and Nonparticipant Characteristics

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Executive Summary

The USDA Summer Meals Study provides a comprehensive assessment of the two summer meal programs operated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the Seamless Summer Option (SSO). This report, the first volume in the USDA Summer Meals Study report series, focuses on the **national estimates of program coverage, characteristics of participants and nonparticipants and their households, reasons for participation and nonparticipation, and satisfaction with the summer meal programs.**

Background

The summer meal programs provide free, nutritious meals and snacks to children ages 18 years and younger who rely on school meals during the school year. These programs serve meals at sites located in low-income areas and at sites in other areas serving a high proportion of low-income children, both in the summer when school is not in session and during long school breaks in communities with year-round school calendars. Children who participate in the summer meal programs receive meals free of charge, regardless of household income.¹ Meal types include breakfast, lunch, supper, and snack (morning, afternoon, and evening). Sites may receive reimbursement for up to two meals (including snacks) per child per day, with the exception of migrant sites and camps that can receive reimbursement for up to three meals each day.²

The summer meal programs are federally funded and State administered. In both the SFSP and SSO, sponsors are approved by the State to operate one or more summer meal sites. Sites are located in a variety of settings, such as schools, parks, community centers, Boys and Girls clubs, apartment complexes, churches, and migrant centers. Sites can be open or closed-enrolled, and they can also be camps. Open sites are located in a low-income area where at least half of the children in the defined geographic area are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals; any child age 18 and under can receive free meals at these sites. Closed-enrolled sites may or may not be located in a low-income area; however, at least half of the children enrolled at the program site (e.g., a parks and recreation

¹ Eligibility is determined based on household income at camps.

² Sites cannot serve a lunch and supper combination.

program, summer enrichment programs) must be eligible for free or reduced-price meals, and all children who are enrolled receive free meals. Residential or day camps only receive reimbursement for meals served to children who qualify for free and reduced-price meals.

Overview of the USDA Summer Meals Study

The USDA Summer Meals Study is a nationally representative study of summer meal program sites, program participants, and program nonparticipants. The study employed a mixed-methods design to address the research objectives. Approximately 4,690 participant and nonparticipant caregivers participated in data collection activities; participation varied by study instrument. Nonparticipant caregivers were in households with children that lived in the geographic area surrounding the site, but none of their children went to the summer meal program site. Results presented in this report volume are primarily based on an analysis of data collected from surveys that were administered to program participants and nonparticipants and their caregivers. Spatial analysis is used to estimate national program coverage. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with a subset of participant and nonparticipant caregivers. Results summarized from the surveys and spatial analyses are presented as descriptive statistics, such as means and percentages. Information gathered from in-depth interviews with caregivers is used to provide context to further explain the survey results, as well as highlight caregivers' most common recommendations for program improvement.

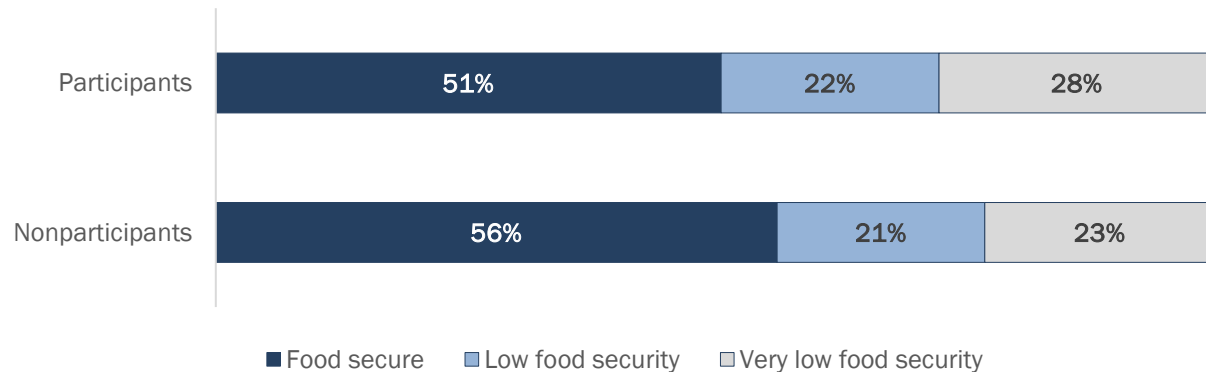
Key Findings

Characteristics of Participants and Nonparticipants

- **Nearly 80 percent of children in low-income households live within one mile of an urban summer meals site or within 10 miles of a rural site.** One-third of children in low-income households live within 0.25 miles of an urban site and within five miles of a rural site.
- **Although the majority of children living in low-income households live near a Summer Meals Program site, most do not participate.** More than 80 percent (83%) of caregivers with children ages 5 through 18 living near a summer meals site report that they do not receive free meals from the site closest to their home.
- **Overall, 45 percent of households with children living near a summer meals site are food insecure, which is higher than the 14 percent of households with**

children who are food insecure nationally.³ Further, household food insecurity is significantly higher for summer meal program participants than for nonparticipants (49% and 44%, respectively). Twenty-eight percent of participant households and 23 percent of nonparticipant households report very low food security. At the child level (rather than the household), there are no significant differences in food security between participants and nonparticipants; both are about 30 percent food insecure, with 5 percent having very low child food security.

Figure ES-1. Participant and nonparticipant household food security



Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households. Nonparticipant households are representative of nonparticipant households living within 0.75 miles of an urban site or 5 miles of a rural site. Participants: unweighted n = 1,713, weighted n = 1,986,284. Nonparticipants: unweighted n = 2,958, weighted n = 9,731,328.

Note: Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding. Differences between participants and nonparticipants are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests for household food security for food secure and very low food security.

- **Seventy-eight percent of participant caregivers and 85 percent of nonparticipant caregivers report that their children receive free or reduced-price school lunches.** Together, the majority of caregivers (participants and nonparticipants in the areas surrounding the site) report that children in the household receive free or reduced-price lunches (84%) or breakfasts (66%) during the school year.
- **Nearly three-quarters (74%) of caregivers report receiving benefits through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in the past 12 months and about one-fourth (23%) report receiving benefits through the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).** Participation rates in SNAP and WIC do not differ between participants and nonparticipants.
- **About one-quarter (26%) of caregivers report obtaining food from a food pantry, food bank, or soup kitchen.** The use of emergency food sources, such as food

³ Coleman-Jensen et al., 2019.

pantries, food banks, and soup kitchens, is more common among participant households (35%) than nonparticipant households (24%).

- **The majority of children (79%) spend the summer months at home during the day with their parent, guardian, or sibling.** The second most frequent place children spend their time during the day in the summer is at a summer camp or summer school (20%), with nearly twice as many participant children attending these types of summer programs than nonparticipant children (30% and 17%, respectively).
- **Household demographic characteristics are relatively similar between participants and nonparticipants, though participants have lower household income:**
 - On average, households with children who live near summer meals sites are composed of two adults and two children. Most households have elementary-age children (78%); nearly half have teens in the household (48%); and about one-third (34%) have children under age five. Participant households are significantly more likely to have younger children—ages 5 through 12—than nonparticipant households (83% compared with 77%).
 - For the majority of households with children living near a summer meals sites (85%), English is the primary language spoken at home.
 - Participant households have lower income than nonparticipant households and relatively few households have income above 185 percent of the poverty threshold. Most participant (82%) and nonparticipant (76%) households have incomes at or below 130% of the poverty threshold. Nine percent of participant households and 11 percent of nonparticipant households have incomes between 130 and 185 percent of the poverty threshold. Fewer households have income above 185 percent of poverty (9% of participant households and 13% of nonparticipant households). Overall, 36 percent of households report having difficulty making ends meet each month, including 7 percent who report that they are “in over their head” (response options range from “very comfortable and secure” to “in over my head”).

Reasons for Participation and Nonparticipation

- **Over half (56%) of participant caregivers first find out about the summer meal program closest to their home the same year they send their child(ren) to the site.** Another 19 percent first heard of the program last year, so about three-quarters of participants do not have a long history with the program. One-quarter of caregivers report first hearing of the program a few years ago.
- **Participant caregivers most frequently find out about the program through word of mouth (46% of participants), hearing about the program from school staff (17%), friends and neighbors (16%), and their children (13%).** Caregivers at open

sites are significantly more likely to hear about the program through a flyer or poster at their child's school, through a flyer or poster at a local food bank, by television or radio, and through a poster or billboard on a bus stop, bus, or train, compared to caregivers whose children attend closed sites.

Table ES-1. Top five ways participant caregivers find out about the program, by site type

How caregivers find out about the program	All caregivers (%)	Caregivers at open sites (%)	Caregivers at closed sites (%)
Flyer or poster at child's school	30.7	33.5*	20.0
Staff at child's school told me about it	16.8	15.9	20.1
My friend or neighbor told me about it	15.8	15.3	17.6
My child told me about it	13.1	13.0	13.3
Mail	12.8	12.4	14.6

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with participant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households. All caregivers unweighted n = 1,716; weighted n = 1,992,303.

*T-test statistic testing of site type differences is significant at $p < 0.05$.

- **Two-thirds of all caregivers (participants and nonparticipants) indicate that mail is the best way to provide program information; however, only about 13 percent of participant caregivers find out about the program through the mail.** The other top responses, each cited by at least one-quarter of all caregivers, include flyers or posters at the child's school, email or text messages, and the internet/social media.
- **Nearly three-quarters of caregivers send their children to summer meals sites because the meals served at the sites are free.** This is the most frequently cited reason for caregivers at both open and closed sites, although caregivers at open sites are more likely to cite this reason than those at closed sites (76% and 65%, respectively). Other reasons cited by at least one-third of caregivers include the site location (47%); the opportunity for the child to make friends (44%); games and activities are provided (37%); the site's hours (32%); and the child's friends go to the site (31%). Caregivers whose children attend closed sites more frequently mention the opportunity to make friends and the provision of games and activities than those at open sites.
- **The most common form of transportation to all site types, used by half (50%) of children attending both open and closed sites, is a family vehicle, followed by walking (31%).** Children attending open sites are significantly more likely to walk to and from the site than children attending closed sites (33% compared to 21%). There is no significant difference in the percentage of children using site-provided transportation to get to and from open versus closed sites, although this is much more likely to be an option at closed sites (24%) than open sites (7%).
- **Children usually attend the summer meals program as often as their caregivers' desire.** Only 16 percent of caregivers report that their children attend less often than they desire. Participant caregivers at open sites are more likely to report that their

children do not attend the site as often as the caregiver desires (18%) than participant caregivers at closed sites (9%). Almost half (49%) of participant caregivers who report that their children do not attend the program every day suggest that better attendance would be possible if the site provides more or better games and activities. Other frequently reported ways to increase attendance include providing free transportation (32%), having the child's friends attend the program (30%), and having a safe location for the site (26%). About one-quarter of these caregivers suggest changes to the site schedule that would improve attendance, including increasing the number of weeks the program is offered over the summer (27%), the number of days each week it operates (24%), and the hours of operation each day (24%). There are no significant differences in these responses between participants of children at open and closed sites.

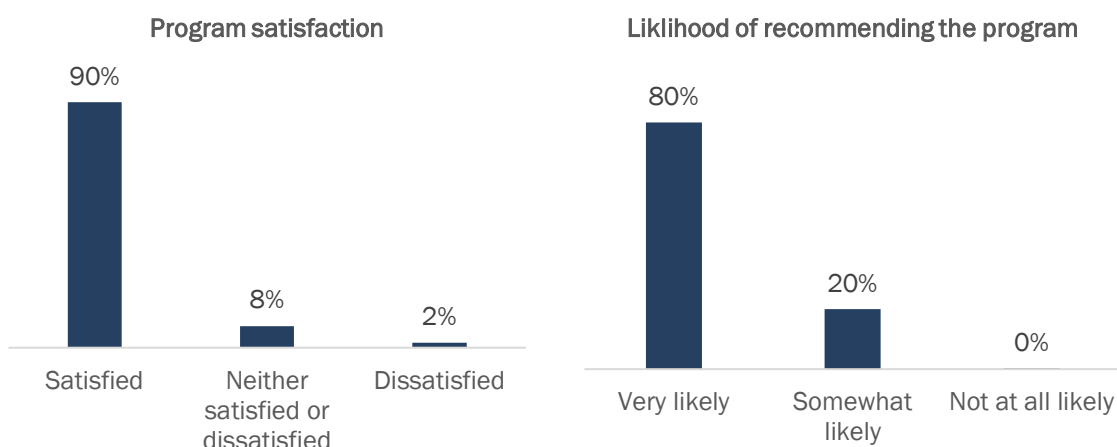
- **The most frequently cited ways to encourage children to eat summer meals more often all revolve around meal quality.** Caregivers suggest children would be encouraged to eat summer meals on all the days they attend if the meals include more variety of foods (44%), better tasting food (35%), and better looking food (26%). Other top recommendations include serving more hot meals (26%) and allowing children to bring meals and/or snacks home (20%).
- **Lack of awareness about the summer program located near their home is the most frequent reason both nonparticipant teens and nonparticipant caregivers give as to why they or their children do not participate in the summer meals program.** Seventy-three percent of nonparticipant teens and 46 percent of nonparticipant caregivers indicate that they did not know about the program at the site closest to their home. At the same time, about one-third (35%) of nonparticipant caregivers have prior experience with a free summer meals program, mostly with children 5 through 12 years of age.
- **The most frequently cited program features that would encourage nonparticipants to attend the site are the provision of games and activities (38%); free transportation (28%); a daily schedule with more hours (20%), and an affordable program cost⁴ (20%).** Only 12 percent of nonparticipant caregivers would not be interested in sending children to a summer program that offers free meals regardless of the program's features.

Satisfaction with the Summer Meal Programs

- **Overall, 90 percent of participant caregivers are satisfied or very satisfied with the program.** Only two percent are dissatisfied. Eighty percent of caregivers say they are very likely to recommend the program to others, and 20 percent say they are somewhat likely. No caregivers said that they would not recommend the program to others.

⁴ While meals served at Summer Meals Program sites are free, sites may charge participants to participate in the activities.

Figure ES-2. Caregiver satisfaction with program children attended and likelihood of recommending the program to others



Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with participant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Answered only by those caregivers whose children had already attended a program at the time of the survey. Participants' program satisfaction: unweighted n = 1,077; weighted n = 1,138,741. Participants' likelihood of recommending the program to others: unweighted n = 1,074; weighted n = 1,130,155.

- **Over three-quarters of caregivers (77%) report being satisfied or very satisfied with the meals and snacks served.** Just 4 percent say they are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.
- **More than three-fourths of caregivers rate both the appearance of meals and snacks served by the program (82%) and the variety of foods served at meals and snacks (77%) to be “excellent” or “good.”** Few caregivers say the appearance (6%) or variety (10%) are poor.
- **Ninety-one percent of participant caregivers say they would send their child to the summer meals program next summer.**
- **More than half of nonparticipant caregivers (58 percent) say they would send their child to the program at the site next summer.** One-third say they are not sure if they would send their child to the site. Just one percent of participants and nine percent of nonparticipants say they would not send their child to the site next summer.

Teens

- **More than half of teens think the foods served are delicious (16%) or pretty good (49%).** About one-third (34 percent) rate the food as “okay.” Only 1 percent of teens say that the food served at their site is “terrible.”
- **Sixty-five percent of teens report that the food served at their site “tastes good” all or most of the time.** Seventy-three percent say the food served “looks fresh” all or

most of the time, and 74 percent say it “smells good” all or most of the time. Few teens (6%) indicate that the taste, appearance, and smell of the food served is hardly ever or almost never good.

- **About half (51%) of teens report that there are many food choices each day “all or most of the time,” and 62 percent report that there are many food choices during the week “all or most of the time.”** Fewer participant teens report food choices available “hardly ever” or “almost never.”
- **Nearly 60 percent of teens report that there is enough free food at the site most of the time for them to feel full.** However, about one-quarter of teens feel there is enough free food served at the site they attend to make them feel full just “some of the time,” and 17 percent say that sites serve enough free food to make them feel full “hardly ever” or “almost never.”
- **The most frequently cited reason teens like eating at their summer meals site (cited by 52 percent of teens) is that they get to eat with their friends.** Another common reason for liking to eat at the site is that the teen is hungry (38%).
- **Most teens say they would recommend the program to their friends.** Two-thirds of teens would tell their friends to attend the summer meals program next summer. Just one percent of teens say “no,” they would not recommend the summer meals program to a friend.

Children

- **Nearly all children ages 5 through 12 (95%) say that the food served at the summer meals site is delicious (28% of children) or okay (67% of children).** Only 5 percent of children say the food is “terrible.”
- **When asked specifically about the appearance, smell, and taste of the foods served, children ages 5 through 12 tend to respond more positively, with 86 to 87 percent of children saying the food looks good, smells good, and tastes good.** Smaller percentages, but still a majority of children, say they feel full after eating the food (68 percent) and that there are different kinds of food to pick from (63 percent).

Caregiver Likes and Dislikes about the Summer Meal Programs

During the 24 interviews and among 308 open-ended survey comments,⁵ participant caregivers provided comments about specific aspects of the program that they liked or disliked. Their most common likes and dislikes include the following:

What caregivers like most about the program:

- The quality of the food served at their child's summer meal program (54 caregivers);
- The quality of the program staff (48 caregivers); and
- The recreational and/or educational programming that their child's meal site provided (21 caregivers).

"[The summer meals program] helps a lot of families because some families like mine sometimes can't afford the breakfast and the lunches during the summer so I'm grateful..."

- Caregiver

What caregivers like least about the program:

- The requirement that children stay at the site to eat their meal (15 caregivers);
- The limited variety in the summer menu (14 caregivers);
- The site ran out of meals before all the children arrived to eat and/or that the meal portion sizes are too small to meet their children's needs (12 caregivers); and
- Lack of transportation assistance (10 caregivers).

⁵ A total of 1,722 participant caregivers completed surveys.

Caregiver Recommendations for Program Improvement

During the 24 interviews and in 308 open-ended survey comments,⁶ many of the participant caregivers provided suggestions that they believe would improve the summer meals program at their sampled site. Their most common recommendations include the following:

- Improve the variety of food served and allow for options to accommodate children's preferences (17 caregivers);
- Relax the statutory requirement that children stay at the site to eat their meal so that certain children are always allowed to eat off site and all children are allowed to take all or part of their meal or snack home sometimes (15 caregivers);
- Improve the overall quality and taste of the meals by incorporating foods that are both healthy and kid-friendly (11 caregivers);
- Provide transportation to the site (10 caregivers);
- Modify program and meal schedules (10 caregivers);
- Increase meal and snack portion size, particularly for teenagers (8 caregivers);
- Encourage family engagement with the children and offer meals for caregivers at a minimal or no-cost (6 caregivers); and
- Provide meal and other accommodations for children with special dietary needs (5 caregivers).

⁶ A total of 1,722 participant caregivers completed surveys.

1. Introduction and Background

The USDA Summer Meals Study provides a comprehensive assessment of the two summer meal programs operated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), and the Seamless Summer Option (SSO). This study examines the characteristics of participating and nonparticipating children, including sociodemographic characteristics, household food security status, reasons for participation or nonparticipation, and satisfaction with the meals served to children in the summer of 2018. The USDA Summer Meals Study also describes the operational aspects of the programs at summer meal sites, characteristics of their food service environments, and the nutritional quality of the meals served to children.

This report, the first volume in the USDA Summer Meals Study report series, focuses on the national estimates of program coverage, characteristics of participants and nonparticipants and their households, reasons for participation and nonparticipation, and satisfaction with the summer meal programs. Volume 2 examines the operational characteristics of summer meal program sponsors and sites and program sponsor and site perspectives on children's participation in the summer meal programs; Volume 3 focuses on the characteristics of food service environments at summer meal program sites; Volume 4 assesses the content and nutritional quality of summer menus; Volume 5 provides additional information about the study methodology; and Volume 6 contains all the study instruments.

Study Objectives

The USDA Summer Meals Study addresses six study objectives focused on participation, food quality, and implementation of the summer meal programs.

1. Identify reasons for participation and satisfaction levels with the summer meal programs;
2. Assess how characteristics differ between participants and nonparticipants;
3. Determine the reasons for nonparticipation;
4. Determine the food service characteristics of the summer meal sites;
5. Describe the characteristics and content of the summer meals; and
6. Assess facilitators and barriers to preparing and serving summer meals.

1.1 School Meal Programs

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) administers several programs that address food insecurity among families and children, including programs that provide benefits to

In 2018, the school meal programs delivered free and reduced-price lunches to more than 21.9 million children, and free and reduced-price breakfasts to more than 12.5 million children every day (FNS, 2019).

families to purchase food or to organizations that serve meals to children in congregate settings. The largest programs that provide meals directly to children are the school meal programs—the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the School Breakfast Program (SBP). These programs provide meals to children attending schools during the regular academic school year. The SFSP and SSO provide meals to children during the summer months when the NSLP and SBP are not operating.

The school meal programs are part of USDA’s overall effort to improve nutrition and reduce food insecurity among children in low-income households. In 2018, food insecurity—defined as not having consistent, dependable access to adequate food for active, healthy living—affected 13.9 percent of households with children at some time during the year (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2019).⁷ Because families allocate food within the household to shield children from disrupted eating patterns, fewer children experience food insecurity themselves. Research also suggests that some children fear stigma around hunger and actively hide it (Popkin, Scott, and Galvez, 2016). Compared to food secure children, those who experience food insecurity are at risk of numerous negative

Six million children experienced food insecurity in 2018 (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2019).

physical, emotional, and educational outcomes, including higher rates of obesity, more behavioral problems, poorer social skills, and poorer test scores and educational

achievement (Jyoti, Frongillo, and Jones, 2005; Metallinos-Katsaras, Must, and Gorman, 2012; Winicki and Jemison, 2003).

Findings from multiple studies with varying methodologies and data sources consistently show that the school meal programs reduce food insecurity. Specifically, past research shows that food insecurity rises during the summer months, when the NSLP and SBP are not operating. Using data from the Current Population Survey, Nord and Romig (2006) compared household food security during the school year to food security during the summer and found higher rates of household food insecurity when school was out for the summer. Similar analyses using the National Health and Nutrition Examination Study and the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Birth Cohort confirm these findings (Arteaga and Heflin, 2014; Gundersen, Kreider, and Pepper, 2012). These consistent findings from three large-scale, national studies suggest that the school meal programs play an

⁷ Program participation and household food security data for 2018 are displayed because this is the year in which study data were collected.

important role in alleviating food insecurity among households with children and highlight the struggle for families to find alternative sources of food for children during the summer.

1.2 Summer Meal Programs

The summer meal programs help children who rely on school meals during the school year access nutrition assistance during the summer months. The SFSP and SSO, authorized under section 13(a) of the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (42 U.S.C. 1761(a)), provide free, nutritious meals and snacks to children ages 18 years and younger.⁸ These programs serve meals at sites located in low-income areas and at sites in other areas serving a high proportion of low-income children, both in the summer when school is not in session and during long school breaks in communities with year-round school calendars. Children who participate in the summer meal programs receive meals free of charge, regardless of household income.⁹ Sponsors may receive reimbursement on behalf of sites for up to two meals (including snacks) per child per day, with the exception of migrant sites and camps that can receive reimbursement for up to three meals each day. Meal types include breakfast, lunch, supper, and snack (morning, afternoon, and evening).

The summer meal programs are federally funded and State administered. In both the SFSP and SSO, sponsors are approved by the State to operate one or more summer meal sites. Sites are located in a variety of settings, such as schools, parks, community centers, Boys and Girls clubs, apartment complexes, churches, and migrant centers. Sites can be open or have closed enrollment, and they can also be camps. Open sites are located in a low-income area where at least half of the children in the area are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals; any child aged 18 and under can receive free meals. Closed-enrollment sites may or may not be located in a low-income area; however, at least half of the children enrolled at the program site (e.g., a parks and recreation program, summer enrichment programs) must be eligible for free or reduced-price meals, and all children who are enrolled receive free meals. Residential or day camps only receive reimbursement for meals served to children who qualify for free and reduced-price meals.

In many ways, the SSO program is an extension of the school meal programs, while the SFSP differs in terms of management structure, meal pattern requirements, and reimbursements. First, SFSP

⁸ Individuals over age 18 who are enrolled in school programs for persons with disabilities may also receive meals.

⁹ Except for children in camps, who must be individually eligible for free or reduced-price meals to receive free summer meals.

program sponsors can include a variety of entities, including school food authorities (SFAs), private nonprofit organizations, and local governments. SSO program sponsors, in contrast, are exclusively SFAs. While all SSO sponsors are SFAs, SSOs can operate in a variety of settings. Second, the SFSP and SSO programs follow different meal patterns, with SSO sites required to follow the meal patterns set forth for the school meal programs. There are key differences between the SFSP and school meal patterns for milk, grains, fruits and vegetables, and for calories, sodium and saturated fat (see Table 1-1).

Table 1-1. Differences in the meal patterns used in SFSP and SSO in summer 2018

Meal component	SFSP	SSO
Milk	All varieties allowed	Only low-fat (1% milk fat or less, unflavored) or fat-free (unflavored or flavored) allowed
Grain	Whole grain-rich or enriched products allowed	All grain products must be whole grain-rich (unless the site has a waiver)
Fruits and vegetables	Single requirement for fruit and/or vegetable quantity No weekly quantity requirements for types of vegetables	Requires separate quantities of fruits and vegetables at lunch Weekly quantity requirements for types of vegetables
Calories, sodium, and saturated fat	No limits	Limits

Finally, the federal per meal reimbursement rates differ between the SFSP and SSO; SFSP reimbursement rates for meals are higher (the snack reimbursement rate is the same) (see Table 1-2). With simplified meal patterns and higher reimbursement rates, many SFA sponsors choose to operate the SFSP over the SSO; however, the SSO offers continuity in operations over the entire year and requires less paperwork, making it easier and more attractive for many schools to serve meals to children during the summer months.

Table 1-2. Federal reimbursement rates for meals served in SFSP and SSO, summer 2018¹

Meal type	SFSP rates for rural and self-prep sites	SFSP rates for all other types of sites	SSO ²
Breakfast	\$2.2325	\$2.1900	\$2.14
Lunch or supper	\$3.9225	\$3.8575	\$3.48
Snack	\$0.9300	\$0.9100	\$0.91

¹ Reimbursement rates are higher in Alaska, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico.

² SFSP reimbursement rates also differ for rural or self-prep sites. SSO reimbursement rates are the same as the free reimbursement rates for the NSLP and the SBP. SSO reimbursement rates also differ for SFAs that serve fewer than 60 percent free or reduced-price meals and severe need sites. In addition, for SSO sites, school food authorities certified as meeting the meal pattern and nutrition standard requirements set forth in 7 CFR 210 and 220 are eligible to receive performance-based cash assistance for each reimbursable lunch served (an additional six cents per lunch, adjusted annually).

Participation rates in the summer meal programs are much lower than in the school meal programs, suggesting that the programs may not reach everyone who may need food assistance. In July 2018, an average of 2.7 million children per day received meals through SFSP. An additional 1.0 million children received free and reduced-price lunches in NSLP¹⁰ that same month, some of which were lunches served through SSO (FNS, 2019). This is far below the school-year free and reduced-price lunch participation level of 21.9 million children per day in 2018 (FNS, 2019).

There are several fundamental differences between the summer meal programs and the school meal programs that likely account for the lower participation levels. First and foremost, USDA offers the school meal programs through schools where attendance is mandatory, thus ensuring access to all children. Provision of summer meals, in contrast, is through a variety of summer programs and delivery sites for which attendance is voluntary. Additionally, virtually every public school and many private schools make the school meal programs available and provide transportation, while the summer meal programs are primarily offered in areas with high concentrations of low-income children and may or may not provide transportation.¹¹ Furthermore, summer meal sites may serve different populations or subgroups of children, depending on the programs and activities of the site. Finally, while the school meal programs operate for the entire duration of the school year, summer meal programs are available for varying lengths of time, ranging from less than one week to the entire summer and at specific times during the day.

¹⁰ FNS does not collect separate program data for the SSO but reports it as part of NSLP/SBP.

¹¹ The Richard B Russell National School Lunch Act (NSLA) allows the use of school or census data to establish area eligibility in the Summer Food Service Program. When determining area eligibility using school data, the proposed meal site must be located in the attendance area of a school where at least 50 percent of the children are eligible for free or reduced price school meals. When using census data to determine eligibility, the proposed site must be located in a Census Block Group (CBG) or Census Tract in which 50 percent or more of the children are eligible for free or reduced price meals.

2. Methods

The USDA Summer Meals Study is a nationally representative study of summer meal program sites and program participants and nonparticipants. The study employed a mixed-methods design to address the research objectives. Surveys were administered to sponsors, site staff, and caregivers of participants and nonparticipants.¹² In-depth interviews were conducted with a subset of current and former sponsors, site staff, and participant caregivers and nonparticipant caregivers. Table 2-1 illustrates the primary data collection activities supporting each study objective. The results featured in this report volume respond to research questions related to characterizing summer meal program participants and nonparticipants (Study Objective 2), identifying reasons for participation and nonparticipation, and assessing program satisfaction (Study Objectives 1 and 3).

Study Objectives

The USDA Summer Meals Study addresses six study objectives focused on participation, food quality, and implementation of the summer meal programs.

1. Identify reasons for participation and satisfaction levels with the summer meal programs;
2. Assess how characteristics differ between participants and nonparticipants;
3. Determine the reasons for nonparticipation;
4. Determine the food service characteristics of the summer meal sites;
5. Describe the characteristics and content of the summer meals; and
6. Assess facilitators and barriers to preparing and serving summer meals.

Table 2-1. Primary data collection activities supporting the research objectives

Respondent type and data collection method	Objective 1	Objective 2	Objective 3	Objective 4	Objective 5	Objective 6
Caregivers of participants and nonparticipants						
Survey	✓	✓	✓			
In-depth interviews	✓		✓			
Child participants and teen participants and nonparticipants¹						
Survey	✓		✓			
Site staff						
Survey				✓		✓
Menus					✓	
In-depth interviews						✓

¹² Site Surveys and Caregiver Surveys were available in Spanish.

Table 2-1. Primary data collection activities supporting the research objectives (continued)

Respondent type and data collection method	Objective 1	Objective 2	Objective 3	Objective 4	Objective 5	Objective 6
Current and former sponsors²						
Survey				✓		✓
In-depth interviews						✓

¹ Child nonparticipants did not complete a survey.

² Former sponsors did not complete a survey.

Provided below is a summary of the sampling methodology for the entire study. Following that is a description of the data sources, response rates, and analyses that underpin the results presented in this report. A more detailed description of the technical details of the study is provided in Volume 5 (Vericker et al., 2020).

2.1 Sampling

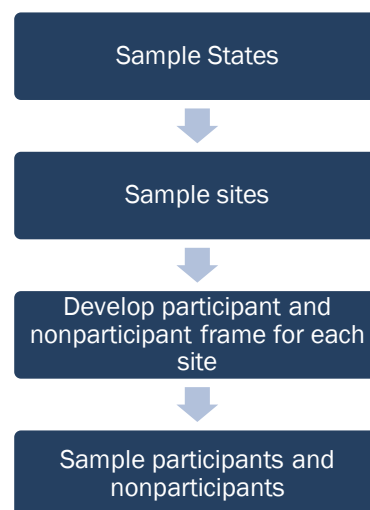
This study implemented a multi-stage sampling procedure to obtain a nationally representative sample of summer meal sites and program participants and nonparticipants.

Figure 2-1 illustrates the sampling approach employed.

First, 24 States were randomly selected using a systematic sampling method after first sorting by FNS region and a measure of size.¹³ Twenty-three States agreed to participate in the study. Figure 2-2 depicts the States that participated in the study.

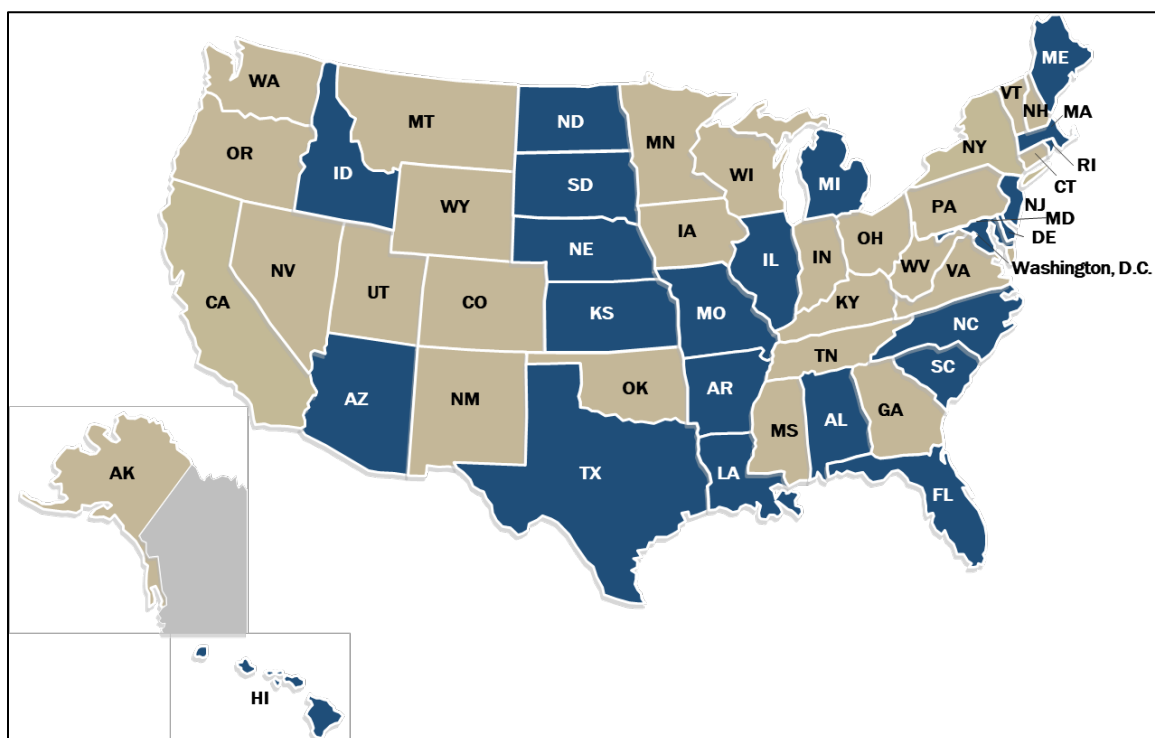
The study States provided lists of summer meal sites planned for operation in 2018. From those lists, 3,349 sites were sampled using a stratified sampling approach. The site sample size was designed to allow for comparisons between several key subgroups of interest (e.g., program type [SFSP/SSO] and SFA status [SFA/non-SFA]).

Figure 2-1. Sampling approach



¹³ The measure of size used in this study was a normalized value for each State that combined the number of summer meal sites in the State with the average daily number of meals served in July 2018.

Figure 2-2. States that participated in the USDA Summer Meals Study



Note: The following States highlighted in blue participated in the study: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, North Carolina, North Dakota, Nebraska, New Jersey, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, and Texas.

A multipronged approach was used to develop a sample frame of summer meal participants and nonparticipants, as neither FNS nor the States had lists of these groups. The sample frame for participants and nonparticipants is based on defining site catchment areas. The concept is that the catchment area represents the community the site serves and where the participating children live. A 0.75-mile catchment area was drawn around each urban site and a five-mile catchment area was drawn around each rural site.¹⁴ To be eligible for the study, a household living in a catchment area had to have at least one child age 5 through 18. To determine presence of children in the household and summer-meal participation status, screeners were mailed to a sample of addresses in the catchment areas. From the responses to the screener, the sample frames of participants and nonparticipants were built.

¹⁴ This study used the U.S. Census Bureau's definition of an urban area. Census defines an urban area as one that has at least 2,500 people. Rural includes all areas that are not included in an urban area.

Sampling Participants. Participants were sampled using two strategies. First, hard copies of the survey were provided to the sites to distribute to caregivers and children directly. This was the most direct way to contact participants. Second, additional participants were identified through the screener process. All caregivers who responded to the screener and said there were children in the household who went to the sampled site were asked to complete a survey. Survey responses were reviewed to ensure that no individuals provided more than one survey response.

Sampling Nonparticipants. For nonparticipants, the screener was used to create the sample frame. A subsample of households was drawn from those that responded to the screener indicating that they had children but that no one in the household participated in the summer meal programs. This sample of nonparticipants was asked to complete a survey.

2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Five data collection strategies were used to address study objectives featured in this report volume: (1) a survey of caregivers of program participants and nonparticipants; (2) a survey of program participants ages 5 through 12; (3) a survey of program participants ages 13 through 18; (4) a survey of program nonparticipants ages 13 through 18; and (5) in-depth telephone interviews with caregivers of participants and nonparticipants. Data collection activities took place between June and November 2018. The survey instruments and in-depth interviews covered a range of topics including characteristics of participants and nonparticipants and their households (e.g., food security status, where children spend their time in the summer, types of summer programs they frequent, and demographic characteristics such as household income and economic well-being), their reasons for participation or nonparticipation, and participants' satisfaction with the programs. Study instruments are provided in Volume 6 (Rothstein et al., 2020).

Analyses in this report volume are based on a sample size of 4,688 respondents to the Caregiver Survey; 930 respondents to the Child and Teen Participant Survey; 814 respondents to the Teen Nonparticipant Survey; 24 in-depth interviews with participant caregivers; 24 in-depth interviews with nonparticipant caregivers; and geographic information system (GIS) analysis of the locations of summer meal sites to estimate program coverage using secondary data sources. The response rates to the Caregiver Survey, Child and Teen Participant Survey, and Teen Nonparticipant Survey are

52 percent, 54 percent, and 58 percent, respectively.¹⁵ Survey respondents are a nationally representative sample of households with children ages 5 through 18 living near a summer meals program site in 2018.¹⁶ Table 2-2 displays characteristics of these children's households by their summer meal program participation status. There are no statistically significant differences in the average number of children in participant and nonparticipant households, but participant households are more likely to include 5 through 12 year olds and less likely to include 13 through 18 year olds. Participants are also more likely to live further from the sampled site, with 24 percent of participant households living over one mile from the sampled site compared to 16 percent of nonparticipant households.

For the in-depth interviews, 24 participant caregivers and 24 nonparticipant caregivers were selected and recruited from a list of survey respondents who volunteered to be interviewed. In-depth interview respondents were recruited by email or telephone, and if recruited by telephone, the informed consent and interview were conducted at that time. For both groups, caregivers were purposely selected to capture different experiences with regard to their nearest summer meals site location (urban/rural) and type (open/closed) and whether a teen lived in the household. Further, respondents were selected for their diversity in expressed level of satisfaction with summer meals.

Descriptive statistics such as proportions and means were used to summarize results from the surveys. Differences between participants and nonparticipants were also examined; tables showing differences between site type (i.e., open and closed sites) are presented in the Appendix. Statistically significant differences between subgroups of interest were assessed using t-tests; results significant at the 0.05 confidence level are reported.¹⁷ Survey weights were applied to analyses to account for survey nonresponse, and standard errors were adjusted to account for the complex survey design.

¹⁵ Nonresponse bias analyses were conducted and no serious nonresponse bias was detected (see Vericker et al., 2020).

¹⁶ The Child Survey and the Teen Surveys were representative of children living in households located near a summer meals program site.

¹⁷ The Bonferroni correction was used to account for multiple comparisons when comparisons were made between more than two groups.

Table 2-2. Characteristics of study participants

Characteristics	Participants	Nonparticipants
Age of children in household (percent of households)		
Less than 5 years old	32.7	33.7
5 - 12 years old	83.4*	77.1
13 - 18 years old	43.7*	48.5
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,722	2,964
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,996,535	9,754,858
Number of children in household (percent of households)		
Average number of children ages 18 and younger in the household	2.2	2.3
Median number of children ages 18 and younger in the household	1.5*	1.6
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,722	2,966
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,996,535	9,757,211
Proximity to site (percent of households)		
< 0.5 mile	45.7	46.5
0.5 to < 1 mile	30.2*	37.6
1 to < 4 miles	17.1*	11.6
4 or more miles	6.9	4.3
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,710	2,959
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,986,611	9,709,125

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households. Nonparticipant households are representative of nonparticipant households living within 0.75 miles of an urban site or 5 miles of a rural site.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

*T-test statistic testing of participant/nonparticipant differences is significant at $p < 0.05$.

The in-depth interviews with caregivers were recorded and later transcribed. Each of the interview transcripts was imported into NVivo Version 11 Plus qualitative analysis software. A coding structure was developed based on the similarities and differences in responses identified in a review of the full transcripts, and key findings summary documents were prepared after each interview. Analyses of the coded interviews focused on identifying common responses, experiences, and themes associated with the study research questions. A classification system was also entered into the database, allowing for simple descriptive analysis of characteristics of the site nearest the participant's household address, the degree of child participation relative to desired participation, and whether nonparticipants attended another program in summer 2018.

Table 2-3 shows the characteristics of the 48 caregivers interviewed.

Table 2-3. In-depth interviews of caregivers: characteristics by child participation status

Characteristic	Child participated		Total
	Yes	No	
Sponsor type			
SFA	13	16	30
Non-SFA	11	8	18
Site type			
Open	19	19	38
Closed	5	5	10
Degree of child participation at site			
As much as desired	11	n/a	11
Less than desired	11	n/a	11
Not clear	2	n/a	2
Child participated at any other summer program site ¹			
Yes	n/a	14 ¹	14
No	n/a	10	10

¹ Includes five respondents whose children attended sites that provide free meals/snacks, which could include other SFSP or SSO sites not included in the study.

Table 2-4 displays the characteristics and the number of Caregiver Survey respondents who provided open-ended survey responses about the summer meals program. These numbers represent the 308 open-ended survey comments that addressed the study research questions or provided either praise or recommendations for the summer meal program.

Table 2-4. Characteristics of Participant Caregiver Survey respondents who provided open-ended survey responses about the summer meals program¹

Characteristic	Total
Sponsor type	
SFA	212
Non-SFA	96
Site type	
Open	253
Closed	55
Urbanicity of summer meal program site	
Urban	228
Rural	80

¹ These numbers represent the 308 open-ended survey comments to the survey question “Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the summer meals site where this child receives meals this summer?” There were an additional 23 open-ended comments entered for this question that were not directly related to the summer meal site or program, e.g., concerns related to individual questions in the survey or overall comments about the survey, or repeated descriptive information provided in the site survey (e.g., number of meals served at the site). These 23 comments were excluded from this table and the analysis of key qualitative findings.

To estimate the percentage of children in the United States who have access to a summer meals program site, an analysis was completed comparing site locations, for all sites and for open sites only, to the location of potential program participants using Census 2010 and 2013 – 2017 American Community Survey (ACS) data (Manson et al., 2018). Addresses for the 32,781 summer meal program site locations operating in the summer of 2018 across the 23 sampled States were first geocoded to provide a specific latitude and longitude location.

Then, circular buffers of varying sizes were created for each location to support the following two buffer configurations:

Urban buffer	Rural buffer
0.25 miles	5 miles
1 mile	10 miles

These areas were used to estimate the percentage of children ages 0 through 17¹⁸ who are below 185 percent of poverty¹⁹ that have access to a summer meals program site for each of the 23 sampled States and then State weights were applied to calculate a national estimate. State weights were benchmarked using data from the Census Population Estimates Program (for the total number of children ages 0 to 17 in the U.S.) and data from the latest national ACS estimates (for the percent of children ages 0 to 17 who are in families with income less than 185 percent of poverty.)

Population counts for blocks by age come from the 2010 Census. For each Census tract²⁰ in the sampled States, the total number of children ages 0 through 17 and the number with access to a summer meals site was calculated by summing block-level data. Tract-level poverty data from the ACS was then linked to these data to estimate the number of children ages 0 through 17 who are below 185 percent of poverty in each tract and the number of these children that have access to a summer meals site. Results were summed by State and State weights applied to get national estimates of the percentage of children ages 0 to 17 who are below 185 percent of poverty that have access to a summer meals site.

¹⁸ The Summer Meals Program serves children through 18 years of age. Census and ACS data are available for children 0 through 17 years of age and are used in this analysis as a proxy for the summer meal program eligible population.

¹⁹ The Summer Meals Program is targeted to serve children who would typically be eligible to for the NSLP, which has a household income eligibility threshold of 185 percent of poverty to receive reduced-price meals. ACS data are available for households with income below 185 percent of poverty and are used in this analysis as a proxy for the summer meal program population.

²⁰ Census tracts are small, relatively permanent statistical subdivisions of a county and average about 4,000 inhabitants.

3. Participant and Nonparticipant Characteristics

"I've gone days where there was no food in the house. At least they had something [summer meals] to eat for that day."

– Caregiver

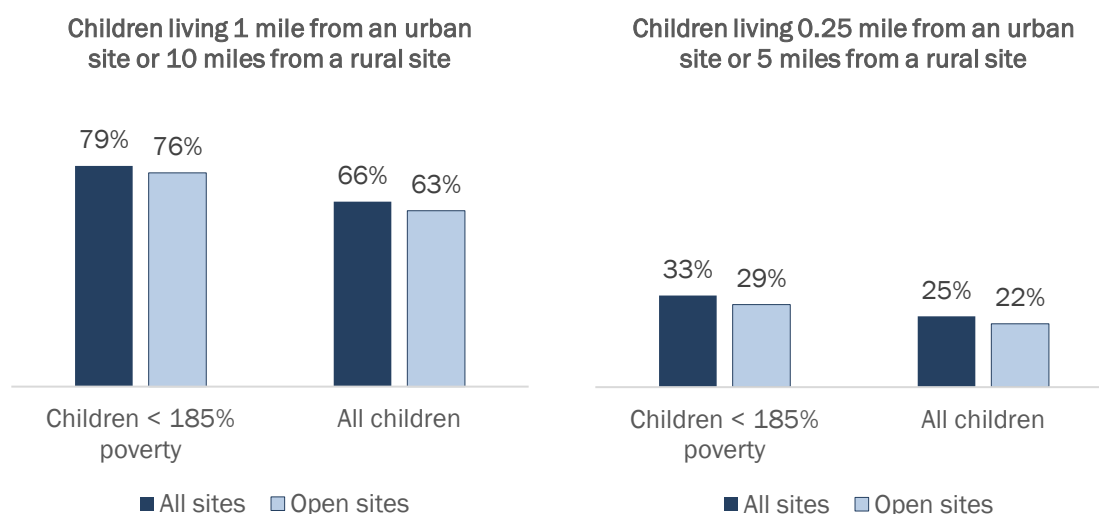
Prior to this study, little was known about the characteristics of summer meals program participants and nonparticipants. This chapter examines summer meals program coverage and the demographic and economic characteristics of households with children

living near summer meals sites in 2018. Comparisons are made between participant and nonparticipant households to reveal differences between the groups. Results indicate that the summer meals program is available to a large proportion of the low-income child population. Typically, children living near summer meals sites, particularly children who participate in the program, reside in households with high rates of food insecurity, are using other meal programs such as SNAP and emergency food to fulfill their food needs, and have very low income. Later chapters examine factors associated with participation in the summer meals programs and with participant program satisfaction. The information presented in this chapter is based on data collected from surveys of caregivers, children, and teens, and from in-depth interviews with a small sample of both participant and nonparticipant caregivers in the summer and fall of 2018.

3.1 Summer Meals Program Coverage

Summer meals sites are typically targeted to communities with a majority of children living in low-income households, defined as those with income at or below 185 percent of poverty. Nationally, nearly 80 percent of children in low-income households live within one mile of an urban summer meals site or within 10 miles of a rural site (see Figure 3-1). One-third of low-income children live within 0.25 miles of an urban site and within five miles of a rural site. When limited to open sites only (that is, those sites where any child can attend), the analysis shows similar coverage estimates compared to those for all sites, suggesting some overlap exists in coverage areas across open and closed sites.

Figure 3-1. Summer meals program coverage estimates



Source: Westat analysis of site locations compared to locations of potential program participants, Census 2010 data, and data from the 2013 – 2017 American Community Survey.

Notes: The Summer Meals Program serves children through 18 years of age. Census and ACS data are available for children 0 through 17 years of age and are used in this analysis as a proxy for the summer meal program eligible population. The Summer Meals Program is targeted to serve children who would typically participate in the NSLP, which has a household income eligibility threshold of 185 percent of poverty to receive reduced-price meals. ACS data are available for households with income below 185 percent of poverty and are used in this analysis as a proxy for the summer meal program population.

Surveys of caregivers and their children for this study were distributed to households primarily living within 0.75 miles of an urban site and within 5 miles of a rural site.²¹ About two-thirds (67%) of children from low-income households live within 0.75 miles of an urban site or 5 miles of a rural site. Although the majority of children living in low-income households live near a Summer Meals Program site, most do not participate. More than 80 percent (83%) of caregivers with children ages 5 through 18 living near a summer meals site report that they do not receive free meals from the site closest to their home.

²¹ Nonparticipant caregivers who lived within 0.75 miles of an urban site or 5 miles of a rural site were eligible to be sampled for the USDA Summer Meals Study. This was also the case for participant caregivers. However, participant caregivers could also receive a survey if they lived farther away from a site; open sites distributed surveys to children to take home to their caregivers to fill out and some closed sites provided rosters of participants who received mail surveys.

3.2 Food Security Status

The Caregiver Survey included the 18-item U.S. Household Food Security Survey Module to measure food security among households with children living near summer meals program sites. The module has been tested for validity and reliability and its use ensures comparability of the resulting food security estimates with national statistics. Food security status measures the adequacy of food available to households, adults, and children, as reported by the caregiver respondent. Nationally, 86.1 percent of households with children are food secure, and 70.9 percent of households with income below 185 percent of the poverty threshold are food secure (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2019).²² In comparison, the rate of food security of households with children living near summer meals sites is much lower than the national averages because summer meals sites are located in low-income communities; only 55 percent of households with children living near a summer meals site are food secure (data not shown).

"We run out of food at home at the end of the month, most of the time."

– Caregiver

"In the summertime when the kids are not in school we really push it a lot of times to make it to the end of the month, but I make sure the kids eat even if I don't always eat."

– Caregiver

"I'm not working right now. I haven't worked all summer, so... money gets tight. And we have food, but sometimes just not a whole lot, and we run out at home."

– Caregiver

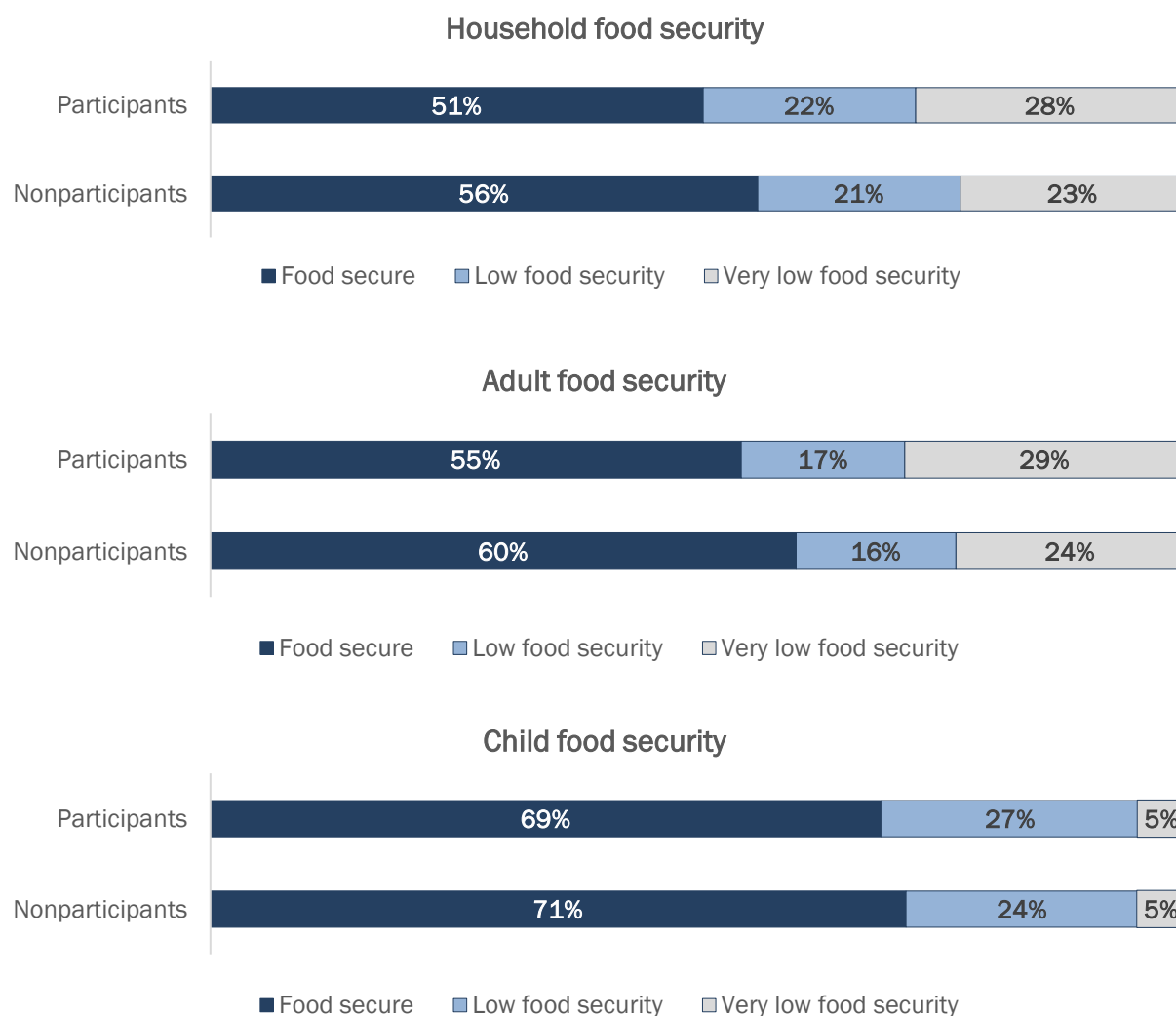
Household food security status is lower for participants than for nonparticipants (51% and 56%, respectively) (see Figure 3-2). Forty-nine percent of participant households and 44 percent of nonparticipant households report food insecurity, with a significant difference in the percent of households with very low food security involving disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake. Twenty-eight percent of participant households and 23 percent of nonparticipant households report very low food security.

²² Food insecurity among children may be underreported, as research has shown that some children fear stigma around hunger and actively hide it (Popkin, Scott, and Galvez, 2016).

Food security for adults also differs significantly between participants and nonparticipants. Fifty-five percent of adults in participant households are food secure, compared to 60 percent of adults in nonparticipant households.

There are no significant differences in child food security between participants and nonparticipants. Both are about 30 percent food insecure, with 5 percent having very low child food security.

Figure 3-2. Participant and nonparticipant food security



Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households. Nonparticipant households are representative of nonparticipant households living within 0.75 miles of an urban site or 5 miles of a rural site. Participants: unweighted n = 1,713, weighted n = 1,986,284. Nonparticipants: unweighted n = 2,958, weighted n = 9,731,328.

Note: Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding. Differences between participants and nonparticipants are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests for household and adult food security for food secure and very low food security.

3.3 Participation in Other Meal Programs

"[The summer meals program] helps a lot of families because some families like mine sometimes can't afford the breakfasts and the lunches during the summer so I'm grateful..."

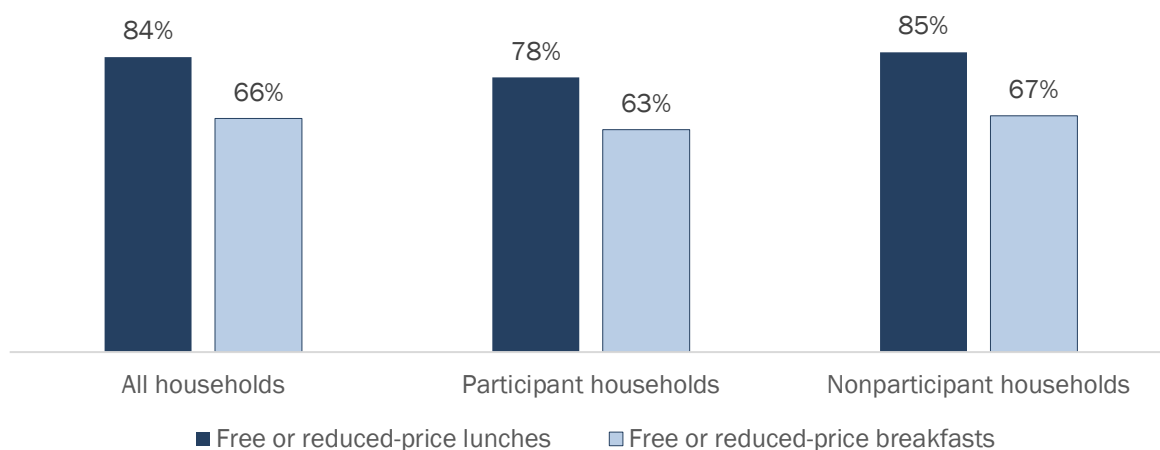
– Caregiver

The summer meals program is intended to provide free meals to children in the summer to make up for the loss of free or reduced-price meals the children normally receive during the school year through the NSLP and the SBP. The program is operating where

the target audience resides, with the majority of caregivers (participants and nonparticipants living in the area around the site) reporting that children in the household receive free or reduced-price lunches (84%) or breakfasts (66%) (see Figure 3-3).

A large majority of both participant and nonparticipant caregivers report their children receive free or reduced-price school lunches, although nonparticipants are significantly more likely to report this than participants. Seventy-eight percent of participant caregivers and 85 percent of nonparticipant caregivers report that their children receive free or reduced-price school lunches.

Figure 3-3. Households with children who report receiving free or reduced-price lunch and/or breakfast during the school year



Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households. Nonparticipant households are representative of nonparticipant households living within 0.75 miles of an urban site or 5 miles of a rural site. Participants: unweighted n = 1,521 weighted n = 1,787,519. Nonparticipants: unweighted n = 2,417, weighted n = 7,774,673.

Note: Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding. Differences between participants and nonparticipants for free or reduced-price lunches are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Nearly three-quarters (74%) of caregivers report receiving SNAP in the past 12 months, and about one-fourth (23%) report receiving WIC (see Table 3-1). (Only about one-third of caregiver households report having children less than 5 years old (see Figure 3-4) so most caregiver households are not likely to be eligible for WIC.) There are also no significant differences between participants and nonparticipants in household participation rates in SNAP and WIC.

"...when my food stamps are gone, we sometimes run out of food at home and it's hard."

– Caregiver

Table 3-1. Household participation in other federal food programs in the past 12 months

Household participation in other federal food programs in the past 12 months	All households (%)	Participants (%)	Nonparticipants (%)
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)	74.4	72.7	74.8
Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)	23.4	25.2	23.0
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	3,633	1,365	2,268
Number of caregivers (weighted)	8,893,495	1,637,409	7,256,085

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households. Nonparticipant households are representative of nonparticipant households living within 0.75 miles of an urban site or 5 miles of a rural site.

Several States participate in the Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) for Children program, which distributes a monthly benefit during the summer on EBT cards to households with children eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. While the program was not heavily used by either participants or nonparticipants (19%), summer meal participants were significantly more likely to participate in this program than nonparticipants (28% compared with 18%) (see Table 3-2).

Table 3-2. Participation in Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children

Participates in summer electronic benefits transfer for children for respondents in Michigan, Missouri, and Texas	All households (%)	Participant (%)	Nonparticipant (%)
Yes	19.1	27.7*	17.7
No	80.9	72.3*	82.3
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,404	528	876
Number of caregivers (weighted)	4,175,390	580,316	3,595,074

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households. Nonparticipant households are representative of nonparticipant households living within 0.75 miles of an urban site or 5 miles of a rural site.

Note: Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

*T-test statistic testing of participant/nonparticipant differences is significant at $p < 0.05$

Use of other programs that offer food is less common. About one-quarter (26%) of caregivers report obtaining food from a food pantry, food bank, or soup kitchen, with the practice being more common among participant households (35%) than nonparticipant households (24%) (see Table 3-3). Fewer than 20 percent of households say that their children receive snacks at before or after school programs, however more participant households (22%) receive this benefit than nonparticipant households (16%). Receipt of meals or snacks from daycare programs (10%) or Head Start (9%) is uncommon, though only one-third of the households have children under age five (see Figure 3-4, page 3-9).

"I go to a lot of different food banks and try to do odds and ends to make ends meet. It's a struggle, you just [have] to make sure you stay on top of going to the pantries and finding out about little booths that different churches are doing."

– Caregiver

"Every Tuesday and Thursday they have an open door food pantry and we go to get food because my budget is very tight. And we're allowed to go once a week so that helps a lot... I go since I found out about it because I worry about not having enough of the right food for my son."

– Caregiver

Table 3-3. Participant and nonparticipant household participation in other programs that offer meals in the past 12 months

Household participation in other programs that offer meals in the past 12 months	All households (%)	Participants (%)	Nonparticipants (%)
Food pantry, food bank, or soup kitchen	26.3	35.0*	24.3
Snacks at before or after school programs	17.5	22.3*	16.4
Daycare program or childcare center that provides meals and snacks at no cost	10.4	12.7	9.9
Head Start	9.3	12.2	8.6
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	3,938	1,521	2,417
Number of caregivers (weighted)	9,562,192	1,787,519	7,774,673

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households. Nonparticipant households are representative of nonparticipant households living within 0.75 miles of an urban site or 5 miles of a rural site.

Note: Respondents selected all that apply.

*T-test statistic testing of participant/nonparticipant differences is significant at $p < 0.05$.

3.4 Where Children Spend Their Time in the Summer

The majority of children (79%) spend their summer days at home with their parent, guardian, or sibling (see Table 3-4). The second most frequent place children spend their time in the summer is at a summer camp or summer school (20%), with nearly twice as many participant children attending these types of summer programs than nonparticipant children (30% and 17%, respectively). Less common summer arrangements include staying at a relative or friend's house (16%), staying home with another relative (12%), going to a childcare home or center (8%), staying home alone (7%), or having a summer job (5%).

Table 3-4. Summer child care arrangements for participants and nonparticipants

Where respondents' children spend their days in summer months	All households (%)	Participants (%)	Nonparticipants (%)
At home with parent/guardian/sibling	79.2	77.1	79.6
At a summer camp or summer school	19.6	30.4*	17.4
At a relative's/friends home	16.2	15.3	16.4
At home with another relative	12.2	11.6	12.3
At a childcare/daycare home or center	7.6	9.5	7.3
Home alone	7.1	5.8	7.3
At a summer job	5.4	5.1	5.4
Other	2.7	2.1	2.8
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	4,635	1,688	2,947
Number of caregivers (weighted)	11,648,418	1,967,145	9,681,273

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households. Nonparticipant households are representative of nonparticipant households living within 0.75 miles of an urban site or 5 miles of a rural site.

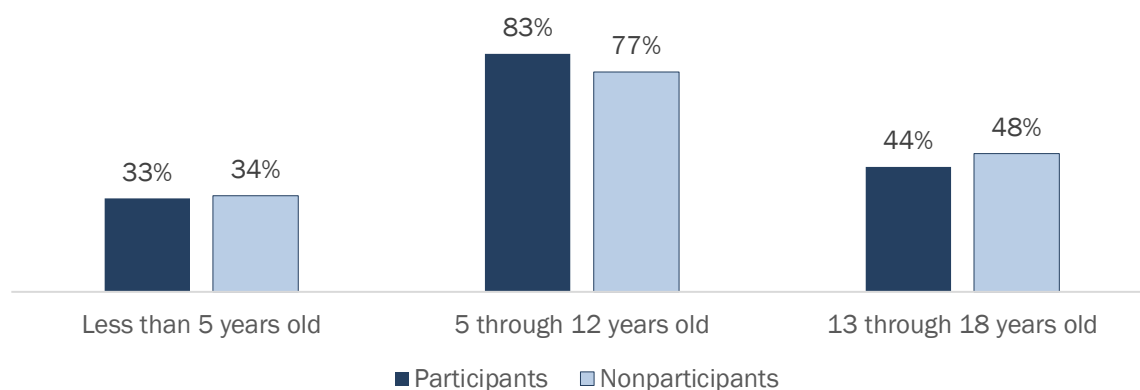
Note: Caregivers selected all that apply.

*T-test statistic testing of participant/nonparticipant differences is significant at $p < 0.05$.

3.5 Demographic Characteristics of Households

On average, households with children who live near summer meals sites are composed of two adults and two children (data not shown). Most households have elementary-age children (78%), nearly half have teens in the household (48%), and about one-third (34%) have children under age five (see Figure 3-4). Participant households are significantly more likely to have children ages 5 through 12 than nonparticipant households (83% compared with 77%). They are also significantly less likely to have children 13 through 18 years of age (44% compared with 48%). There are no significant differences between participant and nonparticipant households in having children age 5 or younger.

Figure 3-4. Ages of children in households near a summer meals program site



Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households. Nonparticipant households are representative of nonparticipant households living within 0.75 miles of an urban site or 5 miles of a rural site. Participants: unweighted n = 1,722, weighted n = 1,996,535. Nonparticipants: unweighted n = 2,964, weighted n = 9,754,858.

Note: Differences between participants and nonparticipants are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests for "5 through 12 years old" and "13 through 18 years old."

Among households living nearest an urban site, most (95%) lived less than one mile from the site, with the majority (54%) living within half a mile of the site (see Table 3-5). In contrast, among households living near a rural site, most (80%) lived more than one mile from the site; 61 percent live between one and four miles of the site.

Table 3-5. Proximity to site, by urbanicity

Proximity to site	All households (%)	Urban (%)	Rural (%)
< 0.5 mile	46.4	53.9*	9.3
0.5 to < 1 mile	36.3	41.5*	10.7
1 to < 4 miles	12.5	2.8*	60.5
4 or more miles	4.7	1.7*	19.5
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	4,669	3,346	1,323
Number of caregivers (weighted)	11,695,737	9,723,853	1,971,884

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs.

Note: Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

*T-test statistic testing of urban/rural differences is significant at $p < 0.05$.

For the majority of households with children living near a summer meals sites, English is the primary language spoken at home (85%) (see Table 3-6). Spanish is the primary language for

12 percent of households, and 3 percent speak another language. Participant and nonparticipant households do not differ significantly in terms of the language they speak at home.

Table 3-6. Language spoken at home, participants and nonparticipants

Language spoken at home	All households (%)	Participant (%)	Nonparticipant (%)
English	85.3	88.0	84.8
Spanish	11.8	9.5	12.3
Other	2.9	2.5	2.9
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	4,649	1,700	2,949
Number of caregivers (weighted)	11,641,035	1,975,437	9,665,598

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households. Nonparticipant households are representative of nonparticipant households living within 0.75 miles of an urban site or 5 miles of a rural site.

Note: Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Participant households have lower income than nonparticipant households and relatively few households have income above 185 percent of the poverty threshold (see Table 3-7). Most participant (82%) and nonparticipant (76%) households have incomes at or below 130% of the poverty threshold. Nine percent of participant households and 11 percent of nonparticipant households have incomes between 130 and 185 percent of the poverty threshold. Fewer households have income above 185 percent of poverty (9% of participant households and 13% of nonparticipant households). Three-fourths (75%) have incomes less than \$30,000, with 34 percent reporting incomes less than \$10,000. Participants (41%) are more likely than nonparticipants (33%) to report income below \$10,000. Nonparticipants are significantly more likely than participants to report incomes of \$70,000 or more (8 percent compared with 3 percent). Overall, 36 percent of households report having difficulty making ends meet each month, including 7 percent who report that they are “in over their head.” Among those with household income at or below 185 percent of the federal poverty line, 8 percent report that they are “in over their head,” with no significant difference between participants and nonparticipants. More nonparticipants than participants receive income from an employer (74% compared with 68%).

Table 3-7. Household income, participants and nonparticipants

Household Income	All households (%)	Participants (%)	Nonparticipants (%)
Income relative to the poverty threshold			
At or below 130% poverty	76.5	81.6*	75.5
Between 130% and 185% poverty	10.9	9.2	11.2
Above 185% poverty	12.6	9.2*	13.3
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	4,555	1,677	2,878
Number of caregivers (weighted)	11,425,933	1,940,314	9,485,618
Household Income last year			
Under \$10,000	34.0	41.2*	32.5
\$10,000 to \$29,999	41.3	39.8	41.6
\$30,000 to \$49,999	13.2	11.2	13.7
\$50,000 to \$69,000	4.5	4.4	4.5
\$70,000 or more	7.0	3.4*	7.7
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	4,555	1,677	2,878
Number of caregivers (weighted)	11,425,933	1,940,314	9,485,618
Sources of income from the past 12 months			
Wages, salary, commissions, bonuses, or tips	72.4	67.6*	73.5
Supplemental Security Income	11.7	14.0	11.2
Any public assistance or welfare payments from a State or local welfare office	7.8	10.2	7.3
Social Security or Railroad Retirement	9.0	9.0	9.0
Self-employment income	8.6	6.3	9.1
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	4,058	1,497	2,561
Number of caregivers (weighted)	9,966,619	1,705,359	8,261,261
Household's current financial condition			
Very comfortable and secure	9.4	9.0	9.5
Able to make ends meet without much difficulty	20.0	17.3	20.6
Occasionally have some difficulty making ends meet	34.4	34.6	34.4
Tough to make ends meet but keeping your head above water	29.1	30.4	28.8
In over your head	7.0	8.7	6.7
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	4,602	1,687	2,915
Number of caregivers (weighted)	11,519,140	1,950,027	9,569,113

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households. Nonparticipant households are representative of nonparticipant households living within 0.75 miles of an urban site or 5 miles of a rural site.

Note: Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

*T-test statistic testing of participant/nonparticipant differences is significant at $p < 0.05$.

Despite having very low income that would likely qualify them for assistance, fewer than half of households with children living near a summer meals program site receive benefits from public benefit programs such as Medicaid (44%), the Low Income Energy Assistance Program (21%), housing assistance (14%), or the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program (10%) (see Table 3-8). Participants are less likely to report using Medicaid in the last 12 months than non-participants (39% compared with 45%), but more likely to report using TANF (13% compared with 9%). There are no significant differences in household participation in the Low Income Energy Assistance Program or in housing assistance between summer meals program participants and nonparticipants.

Table 3-8. Household participation in benefit programs in the past 12 months, participants and nonparticipants

Household participation in other benefit programs in the past 12 months	All households (%)	Participants (%)	Nonparticipants (%)
Medicaid	44.1	39.4*	45.1
Assistance to pay electric or gas utility bills from the Low Income Energy Assistance Program	21.4	24.2	20.8
Financial assistance to pay rent or housing costs	14.0	17.3	13.3
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families	9.5	13.3*	8.7
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	3,633	1,365	2,268
Number of caregivers (weighted)	8,893,495	1,637,409	7,256,085

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households. Nonparticipant households are representative of nonparticipant households living within 0.75 miles of an urban site or 5 miles of a rural site.

* T-test statistic of participant/nonparticipant differences is significant at $p < 0.05$.

3.6 Demographic Characteristics of Children and Teens

Table 3-9 presents characteristics of child and teen participants and teen nonparticipants including gender, age, and how close they live to the sampled site. Surveys were not conducted with child nonparticipants. The gender distribution of children and teens is roughly evenly split, with girls making up nearly half of children participants, but fewer than half of teen participants and nonparticipants. Among child participants, about 40 percent are ages 5 through 8, and 60 percent are ages 9 through 12. Among teens, 45 percent are ages 13 and 14, 33 percent are ages 15 and 16, and 22 percent are ages 17 and 18. Participant teens are younger than nonparticipant teens, with 58 percent of participant teens ages 13 and 14, compared with 49 percent of nonparticipant teens. More than 70 percent of child participants live less than one mile from a summer meals program site

and fewer than 10 percent live four or more miles away. Among participant teens, a large majority (82%) live less than one mile from the summer meals site they attend, while just four percent live four or more miles away.²³

Table 3-9. Child participant characteristics and teen participant and nonparticipant characteristics

Child and teen characteristics	Child ¹	Teens		
	Participants (%)	All teens (%)	Participants (%)	Nonparticipants (%)
Gender				
Girl	46.6	53.0	45.3	53.9
Boy	53.4	47.0	54.7	46.1
Number of children (unweighted)	763	985	186	799
Number of children (weighted)	2,844,837	6,833,689	716,506	6,117,183
Age				
5 or 6 years old	18.2	n/a	n/a	n/a
7 or 8 years old	23.0	n/a	n/a	n/a
9 or 10 years old	32.7	n/a	n/a	n/a
11 or 12 years old	26.2	n/a	n/a	n/a
13 or 14 years old	n/a	45.3	57.9*	43.9
15 or 16 years old	n/a	33.2	31.8	33.4
17 or 18 years old	n/a	21.5	10.3*	22.8
Number of children (unweighted)	760	987	186	801
Number of children (weighted)	2,816,327	6,846,375	716,506	6,129,869
Proximity to site				
< 0.5 mile	46.2	49.0	53.4	48.5
0.5 to < 1 mile	26.2	34.7	28.2	35.4
1 to < 4 miles	19.0	12.0	15.4	11.6
4 or more miles	8.5	4.3	2.9	4.5
Number of children (unweighted)	757	1,003	189	814
Number of children (weighted)	2,839,827	6,954,545	717,814	6,236,731

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households. Nonparticipant households are representative of nonparticipant households living within 0.75 miles of an urban site or 5 miles of a rural site.

Note: Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

*T-test statistic testing of participant/nonparticipant differences is significant at $p < 0.05$.

¹ Nonparticipant children did not complete a survey.

²³ Comparisons between teen participants and teen nonparticipants by their proximity to site should be made with caution. Nonparticipants were sampled to live within 0.75 miles of an urban site and 5 miles of the sampled rural site. Participants, however, could live any distance to their sampled site.

4. Reasons for Summer Meal Program Participation and Nonparticipation

This chapter examines the factors associated with participation and nonparticipation in the summer meals programs. When appropriate, comparisons are made between participant and nonparticipant caregivers, and between open and closed sites to reveal differences between the groups. Results indicate that participants are relatively new to the program they attend with over half (56%) having first heard of the program at the sampled site in 2018. Almost three-quarters of caregivers cite free meals as a main reason they send their children to the sampled site. Most nonparticipant caregivers are also interested in sending their children to a summer program that offers free meals. Just 12 percent of nonparticipant caregivers are not interested in such a program. The information presented in this chapter is based on data collected from surveys of caregivers and teens, and from in-depth interviews with a small sample of both participant and nonparticipant caregivers in the summer and fall of 2018.

4.1 Reasons for Participation

4.1.1 Program Awareness and Outreach

Before caregivers can choose to have their child participate in a summer meals program, they have to be aware that the program exists in their area. Over half (56%) of participant caregivers first find out about the summer meal program closest to their home²⁴ the same year they send their child(ren) to the site. Another 19 percent first heard of the program last year, so about three-quarters of participants do not have a long history with the program. One-quarter of caregivers report first hearing of the program a few years ago (see Table 4-1).

²⁴ The survey asked respondents when they found out about the summer program at the site sampled for the study, which in most cases is the summer meals site closest to their home.

Table 4-1. When participant caregivers first find out about the summer meals program at the site closest to their home

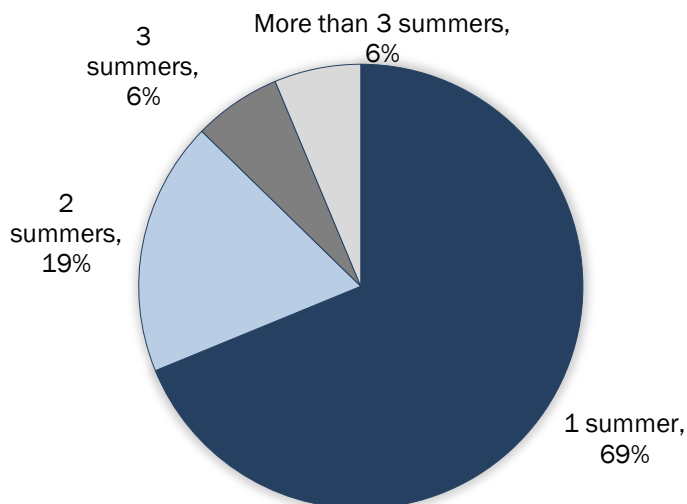
When caregivers first find out about the program	Participant caregivers (%)
This year	56.2
Last year	19.2
A few years ago	24.6
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,586
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,835,260

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with participant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households.

Note: Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Most teen participants are also new to the program they attend. For 69 percent of teen participants, the current year (i.e., 2018, when the survey was conducted) is the first year they have attended the site closest to their home. Nineteen percent of teens have been attending for two summers and 12 percent have attended for three or more summers (see Figure 4-1).

Figure 4-1. Number of summers teens have attended the site



Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Teen Survey, summer 2018.

Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all participant teens. Unweighted n = 180; weighted n = 690,820.

Note: Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Caregivers find out about the program in a variety of ways.

Participant caregivers most frequently find out about the program through a flyer or poster at their child's school (see Table 4-2). While this is the most frequently cited method for finding out about the program, it is cited by only 31 percent of participants, suggesting that sites should use multiple avenues for getting information to caregivers about the program. Word of mouth is an important source of information for almost half (46%) of caregivers, with

caregivers hearing about the program from school staff (17%), friends and neighbors (16%), or their children (13%). Caregivers at open sites are significantly more likely to hear about the program through a flyer or poster at their child's school, through a flyer or poster at a local food bank, by

television or radio, and through a poster or billboard on a bus stop, bus, or train, compared to caregivers whose children attend closed sites.

Table 4-2. How participant caregivers find out about the program, by site type

How caregivers find out about the program	All caregivers (%)	Caregivers at open sites (%)	Caregivers at closed sites (%)
Flyer or poster at child's school	30.7	33.5*	20.0
Staff at child's school told me about it	16.8	15.9	20.1
My friend or neighbor told me about it	15.8	15.3	17.6
My child told me about it	13.1	13.0	13.3
Mail	12.8	12.4	14.6
This survey	10.6	10.8	9.9
Internet or social media	10.0	10.5	8.2
Flyer or poster at local government or public assistance office	9.0	9.1	8.6
My relative told me about it	8.8	7.7	13.2
Flyer or poster at church or other community group	6.6	6.7	6.3
Email or text message	3.9	4.3	2.1
U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Site Finder	3.9	4.0	3.2
Flyer or poster at local food bank	3.6	4.2*	1.2
Television or radio	2.8	3.5*	0.3
Poster or billboard on a bus stop/bus/train	2.5	3.0*	0.6
Toll-free hotline	0.9	0.6	2.4
Other	6.2	5.8	7.7
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,716	1,427	289
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,992,303	1,579,957	412,346

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with participant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households.

Note: Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

*T-test statistic testing of site type differences is significant at $p < 0.05$.

"Our school sends home a newsletter that I remember receiving, but then I'd seen a lot of advertising for it down the road when they had it at the school and when they had it at the [NAME OF STUDY SITE]. So there was a lot of signage for it, but I first heard about it when the kids got the newsletters in school."

- Caregiver

"I'm with a program called [NAME OF PROGRAM] and I have a case worker. I try to shop wisely but a lot of times, my food stamps don't last until the end of the month. So I'll call her, and she'll provide information for me to help me make it through and this year she told us about this program and it helped us make it through."

- Caregiver

About 81 percent of all caregivers (participants and nonparticipants) receive materials about the summer meal program (data not shown). These materials most frequently include information about free meals (87%), the program schedule (57%), program location (55%), contact information (38%), and the types of activities offered (33%) (see Table 4-3). Closed sites are more likely to include information about the types of activities offered than open sites (51% for closed sites compared to 27% for open sites), as well as information about transportation options (28% for closed sites compared to 10% for open sites).

Table 4-3. Information included in program materials received by caregivers, among those who received program materials, by site type

Information included in the program materials	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Free meals	87.3	89.0	81.5
Program schedule	56.6	54.9	62.4
Program locations	55.3	52.7	64.3
Program contact information	37.9	34.5	49.1
Types of activities offered	32.6	27.2*	50.7
Program activity fee	16.2	14.9	20.8
How to apply	22.2	19.6	30.9
Transportation options	13.9	9.9*	27.5
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,393	1,145	248
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,583,842	1,223,277	360,565

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with participant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households.

Note: Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

*T-test statistic testing of site type differences is significant at $p < 0.05$.

"I think that when they advertise the program the school should mention that it's not just if your kids get free lunch—this is for everybody... People think, "Oh, that's only if you're poor and can't afford it," but that's not the way to treat kids. It's nice for my kids to be able to go to a summer program with a variety of kids they go to school with and in the neighborhood, without the stigma of who is or is not eligible."

- Caregiver

Participant and nonparticipant caregivers generally agree about the best ways to provide them information about the summer meals program. While only about 13 percent of participant caregivers report finding out about the program through the mail, about two-thirds of all caregivers (participants and nonparticipants) indicate that mail is the best way to provide program information

“So to decide whether I would participate, the program should provide information when they send out information about the program – does it provide free meals and do you have to qualify for free school lunch, along with what kind of food is provided.”
-Caregiver

(see Table 4-4). The other top choices for the best ways to provide program information, each cited by at least one-quarter of caregivers, include flyers or posters at the child’s school, email or text messages, and the internet/social media. Participant caregivers prefer flyers or posters at the child’s school more

often than nonparticipant caregivers (50% and 39%, respectively). As noted earlier, about 31 percent of participant caregivers find out about the program this way.

Table 4-4. How caregivers prefer to be informed about the program

Best ways to provide information	All households (%)	Participants (%)	Nonparticipants (%)
Mail	65.8	65.3	65.9
Flyer or poster at child’s school	40.8	49.6*	39.0
Email or text message	50.7	46.8	51.5
Internet or social media	26.4	23.1	27.0
Flyer or poster at local government or public assistance office	6.7	9.8*	6.1
Television or radio	10.1	8.9	10.3
Flyer or poster at church or other community group	6.9	7.8	6.8
Flyer or poster at local food bank	4.5	7.3*	3.9
Poster or billboard on a bus stop/bus/train	4.8	5.0	4.7
USDA-FNS Site Finder	3.5	4.6	3.3
Toll-free hotline	1.9	2.2	1.9
Other	2.2	1.2*	2.4
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	4,630	1,704	2,926
Number of caregivers (weighted)	11,585,085	1,969,261	9,615,825

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households. Nonparticipant households are representative of nonparticipant households living within 0.75 miles of an urban site or 5 miles of a rural site.

Note: Caregivers selected up to three.

*T-test statistic testing of participant/nonparticipant differences is significant at $p < 0.05$.

Caregiver Perspectives: Content of Outreach Materials

When the interviewed participant caregivers asked what kinds of information program outreach should include to help them decide whether their child would or could attend, their most common suggestions were similar to the most frequent content of materials received by caregivers in the study. Caregivers want the program materials to:

- Emphasize that the program offers free meals;
- List all the locations the program is offered in their area;
- Describe transportation assistance where available;
- List available site activities; and
- Include the program schedule (start and end times).

Two caregivers whose children attended the program during the summer but did not receive free meals during the school year suggested that the outreach materials be designed to reduce the stigma of the program by making it clear that all children attending the school or living in the area can attend and receive free meals.

Nonparticipant caregivers who had not heard about the program suggested that Summer Meal Program materials include the following information:

- Whether the meals are free and what the income test is, if any;
- The types of food and quality of the meals that will be served, preferably with sample menus;
- Whether and how children's food allergies and dietary customs will be accommodated;
- How adult supervision will be provided, if applicable; and
- The age of the children the program is targeting.

Source: Participant and nonparticipant caregiver interviews.

4.1.2 Factors Encouraging Participation

Nearly three-quarters of participant caregivers send their children to summer meals sites because the meals served at the sites are free (see Table 4-5). This is the most frequently cited reason for caregivers at both open and closed sites, although caregivers at open sites are more likely to cite this reason than those at closed sites (76% and 65%, respectively). Other reasons cited by at least thirty percent of caregivers include the site location (47%); the opportunity for the child to make friends (44%); games and activities are provided (37%); the site's hours (32%); and the child's friends go to the site (31%). Caregivers whose children attend closed sites more frequently mention the opportunity to make friends and the provision of games and activities than those at open sites.

Table 4-5. Main reasons participant caregivers send their children to summer meal sites

Reason for sending child to site	All caregivers (%)	Caregivers at open sites (%)	Caregivers at closed sites (%)
Meals are free	73.8	76.1*	64.7
Good location	47.3	46.1	52.1
My child can make new friends there	44.3	41.3*	56.0
Games and activities are provided	36.8	33.0*	51.7
Hours fit my schedule	32.2	29.5	42.8
My child's friends go there	30.5	31.4	27.2
My child does not want to stay home	20.0	19.9	20.2
Childcare is provided	19.1	17.2	26.6
Free transportation is provided	11.5	9.0	21.5
Proof of income is not required	6.8	7.2	5.2
Educational activities/reading program	3.7	3.0	6.5
Other	5.3	4.9	6.5
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,657	1,386	271
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,922,268	1,532,986	389,282

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with participant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households.

Note: Caregivers selected all that apply.

*T-test statistic testing of site type differences is significant at $p < 0.05$.

"Honestly the [NAME OF OTHER PROGRAM] is open a lot longer and it's closer to our house. But with the meals program I know that he's eating, [and it] was probably the thing that made my decision. I needed to pick that one that had free meals because we are having hard times and not sure if we always have the food to feed us all."

- Caregiver

"They gave out sandwiches. It was just like a school lunch, so it was just normal. It did fill her up, so I was happy about that. As long as she had something to eat. I wanted her to get a free healthy nutritious lunch and breakfast every day and that's what she got. They did a good job. "

- Caregiver

Participant Caregiver Perspectives: Factors That Encourage Children to Attend the Site

When probed regarding factors besides free meals that encourage caregivers to send their child to the site, of the 24 participant caregivers interviewed:

- Eleven said that the **proximity of the site to their home** was the most common additional factor affecting their participation decision (cited by one-half of the interviewees as the first or second most important reason they chose to send their child to the program at the sampled site.) Among this group, several mentioned the importance of being able to walk their child to the site or that older children can walk there on their own.
- Eleven said that a key factor was their **familiarity and comfort with the organization that administers the program and with the staff**, with most of these respondents noting that this was as important as or close to as important as the physical proximity of the site to their home. This included seven caregivers who said they chose this summer meal program because it was located at the school or after-school program their child regularly attended or because it was run by a church that the child and family were attending or whose staff they were very familiar with.

Source: Participant caregiver interviews.

"It's important that it's not too far from me. Of course, I'm struggling. I don't have very much gas or my car may break down. So it's important that it's closer to me."

- Caregiver

"It's just nice to have places nearby for them to be able to go during the week and get a meal when I am working. They are alone in the house, so having it close enough that they could walk to is awesome."

- Caregiver

"I don't want to just take my kids to a place where there's a bunch of kids being... a bunch of rowdiness or you don't want your kid to get bullied. I liked it because it's at a more decent location."

- Caregiver

"Somewhere that's safe — so that's what I mostly check for. Safe and that it has adults, capable adults, running the center."

- Caregiver

Participant teens also reported the reasons they attend their summer meals site (see Table 4-6). Over half of teens attend the summer meals site because their parents think it would be good for them (54%) and because their friends go there (53%). More than one-third (35%) report liking the food at the site as a reason they attend. About one-quarter (26%) say the site has fun things to do.

Table 4-6. Reasons teens attend the site

Reasons teens attend the site	Participant teens (%)
My parents think it would be good for me	54.1
My friends go there	52.9
I like the food offered at this program	35.0
There are fun things to do	26.2
I like the people who work there	17.7
My school teacher thinks it would be good for me	10.2
I can get my homework done	8.8
I have nowhere else to go	7.7
Other	6.9
Number of teens (unweighted)	189
Number of teens (weighted)	717,814

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Teen Survey, summer 2018.

Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all participant teens.

Note: Teens selected all that apply.

4.1.3 Transportation Availability

How participants travel to and from the site and the options available to them for getting to the site are important factors affecting participation. As noted above, about 47 percent of participant caregivers indicate the site's location as a key factor in deciding to send their children to the site, second only to free meals (74%). About one-half of children who attend open sites (52%) live less than one mile from the site, a significantly larger percentage than for closed sites, where 39 percent of children live less than a mile from the site (see Table 4-7). Consequently, children attending open sites are significantly more likely to walk to and from the site than children attending closed sites (33% compared to 21%). The most common form of transportation to all site types, used by half (50%) of children attending both open and closed sites, is a family vehicle. There is no significant difference in the percentage of children using site-provided transportation to get to and from open versus closed sites, although this is much more likely to be an option at closed sites (24%) than open sites (7%). The family vehicle is also the most common form of transportation to urban sites (48%) and rural sites (56%). However, children who live near an urban site are more likely to walk (35%) or ride a bike (5%) to the site than children who live near a rural site (15% and 2%, respectively).

Conversely, children living near a rural site are more likely to take transportation provided by the program (17%) than children who live near an urban site (8%).

Table 4-7. Traveling to and from the program site, by site type

Traveling to and from the program site	All participant caregivers (%)	Participant caregivers at open sites (%)	Participant caregivers at closed sites (%)
Distance from program site			
Less than 1 mile	48.9	51.5*	39.1
Between 1 mile and 3 miles	34.5	34.6	34.2
More than 3 miles but fewer than 5 miles	9.1	8.8	10.0
Between 5 miles and 10 miles	5.5	3.9*	11.9
More than 10 miles	1.9	1.2	4.8
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1705	1,422	283
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,983,846	1,576,573	407,273
How children usually travel to and from the site			
Family vehicle	49.6	49.3	51
Walk	30.7	33.4*	20.8
Program provides transportation	9.3	6.5	19.7
Bike	4.7	4.5	5.3
Public transportation	4.2	4.8	2.2
Other	1.5	1.6	1.0
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1699	1,415	284
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,966,123	1,558,038	408,085
Options also available for traveling to and from the site			
Family vehicle	43.5	45.2	37.0
Walk	33.5	35.1	27.6
Bike	15.7	16.4	12.9
There are no other options available	14.5	14.4	14.9
Public transportation	10.6	9.9	13.3
Program provides transportation	10.4	6.8*	24.2
Other	2.6	2.0	5.0
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1698	1,414	284
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,975,277	1,567,669	407,608

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with participant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households.

Note: Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

*T-test statistic testing of site type differences is significant at $p < 0.05$.

Transportation to sites is similar for children who attend urban and rural sites. Children who attend urban sites live closer to those sites than children who attend rural sites. Over half (56%) of children who attend urban sites live less than a mile away from the site, compared with less than one-fifth (19%) of children who attend rural sites. However, the most common form of transportation to both urban and rural sites is a family vehicle (48% and 56%, respectively; difference is not statistically significant). Walking is the second most common form of transportation for children who live near urban sites (35%), while the program providing transportation (17%) is the second most common form of transportation for children who live near a rural site. (Data not shown.)

4.1.4 Program Attendance

Children usually attend the summer meals program as often as their caregivers' desire. Only 16 percent of caregivers report that their children attend less than they desire (see Table 4-8). Participant caregivers at open sites are more likely to report that their children do not attend the site as often as the caregiver desires (18%) than participant caregivers at closed sites (9%). Even when the child goes to the site as frequently as the caregiver desires, that does not mean they go every week the program is offered. Only 69 percent of participant caregivers report that their children go to the site every week it is offered. This does not differ significantly by site type.

Caregivers most often report that children attend the site five or more days per week (31%). Children spend more days per week at closed sites than open sites, with 48 percent of children spending five or more days per week when attending closed sites, compared with 26 percent of children attending open sites. Sixteen percent of children at open sites attend the site just one day a week compared to 9 percent at closed sites.

Children at closed sites also attend the site more consistently. Three-quarters of children attending closed sites go to the site about the same number of days each week. This is true for a significantly smaller percentage of children at open sites (57%).

Table 4-8. Frequency of attendance at the program site, by site type

Frequency of attendance at program	Participant caregivers (%)	Caregivers at open sites (%)	Caregivers at closed sites (%)
Your child goes to the program			
As often as you desire	84.0	82.2*	91.1
Less often than you desire	16.0	17.8*	8.9
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,684	1,404	280
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,956,672	1,558,036	398,636
Your child goes to the program every week it is offered			
Yes	68.5	66.0	77.0
No	31.5	34.0	23.0
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,414	1,163	251
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,572,770	1,218,352	354,418
The number of days a week the child usually attends			
Once a week	14.9	16.3*	9.3
2 days each week	12.7	13.7	8.7
3 days each week	22.1	23.5	16.8
4 days each week	19.8	20.5	17.2
5 or more days each week	30.6	26.0*	48.0
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,689	1,404	285
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,966,610	1,558,389	408,222
The number of days your child goes to the program			
About the same each week	60.9	57.1*	75.1
Varies from week to week	32.1	35.6*	18.5
Does not apply to me, my child goes for 1 week or less	7.1	7.2	6.4
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,692	1,409	283
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,966,562	1,559,193	407,369

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with participant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households.

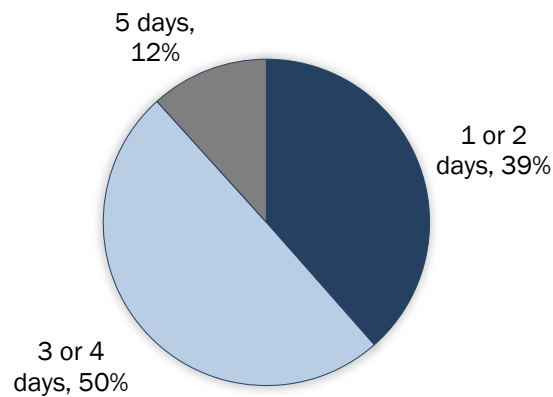
Note: Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

*T-test statistic testing of site type differences is significant at $p < 0.05$.

Teen participants report that they attend the program less frequently than the numbers caregivers report for all participants (including children and teens). Teens are most likely to attend the program site three or four days a week (50%), with 12 percent attending five days a week, and 39 percent attending just one or two days a week (see Figure 4-2).

As reported above, 32 percent of participant caregivers say their children do not attend the program every week it is offered. The most frequently cited reason for inconsistent attendance for all participant caregivers is that their children are visiting relatives and friends during their summer vacation (53%) (see Table 4-9). This does not differ significantly between participants at open and closed sites. Participant caregivers at open sites are more likely to report that their children do not consistently attend for all weeks because they are at other summer programs (24% compared with 14% for closed sites). Participant caregivers at open sites are also more likely to say there are not enough activities to keep the child happy, the child's friends do not go to the program, and the child does not want to stay at the site to eat the meal than those at closed sites (7 to 8 percent each for open sites, compared with 1 to 2 percent for closed sites).

Figure 4-2. Number of days teens attend each week



Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Teen Survey, Summer 2018.
Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all participant children ages 13 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Unweighted n = 189; weighted n = 717,814.

Note: Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Table 4-9. Reasons for inconsistent attendance by site type, among those whose children do not attend every week the program is offered

Why children do not consistently attend for all weeks the program is offered	Participant caregivers (%)	Caregivers at open sites (%)	Caregivers at closed sites (%)
Visiting relatives/friends	53.0	51.2	62.9
Prefer to be home some days/weeks	32.6	32.6	32.9
At other summer programs	22.7	24.4*	13.5
Do not like food served at the program	8.0	8.9	2.8
Not enough activities to keep the child happy	6.8	7.7*	1.9
Friends not going to the program	6.8	7.9*	0.6
Others might think our family cannot provide meals/snacks for our child	6.6	6.1	9.0
Do not want to stay at the site to eat the meal	5.9	6.8*	1.2
Only needy families should send children to the program every week	4.7	4.5	6.1
The location is not safe	0.8	0.8	0.9
There is no shelter from the heat or rain	0.5	0.5	0.7
Do not like times when meals are provided	0.4	0.4	0.7
Other	12.1	11.3	17.0
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	720	608	112
Number of caregivers (weighted)	892,961	756,158	136,803

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with participant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households.

Note: Caregivers selected all that apply.

*T-test statistic testing of site type differences is significant at $p < 0.05$.

When asked for ways to improve how often children attend the program, almost half (49%) of participant caregivers who report that their children do not attend the program every day suggest that better attendance would be possible if the site provides more or better games and activities (see Table 4-10). Other frequently reported ways to increase attendance include providing free transportation (32%), having the child's friends attend the program (30%), and having a safe location for the site (26%). About one-quarter of these caregivers suggest changes to the site schedule that would improve attendance, including increasing the number of weeks the program is offered over the summer (27%), the number of days each week it operates (24%), and the hours of operation

"He couldn't go a lot because it was not close to our home and he needed me to pick him up before I was getting off work, or I had to go to work before the program started."
- Caregiver

each day (24%). There are no significant differences in these responses between participants of children at open and closed sites.

Table 4-10. Ways to improve how often children attend the program, for those whose children do not attend the program every day

Ways to improve how often children attend the program	Participant caregivers (%)
Games and activities	48.7
Free transportation	32.0
Having friends going to the program	30.4
Number of weeks the program is offered	27.1
Safe location	25.5
Number of days each week the program is offered	24.3
Daily schedule (number of hours)	23.9
Staff supervision	23.3
Being able to take the meals home or to another place away from the site	22.5
Walkable distance from home	19.7
Cost of program (not including meals and/or snacks)	19.3
Shelter from heat and rain	13.0
Other	5.1
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,091
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,296,720

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with participant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households.

Note: Caregivers selected all that apply.

Participant Caregiver Perspectives: Reasons Children Did Not Attend the Site as Much as Desired

Eleven of twenty-four participant caregivers who were interviewed said their children did not go to the program as often as the caregiver desired. All but one of these respondents said that the main reason their child did not attend more often was because they could not bring their child to the site consistently due to their work schedule or health condition. One caregiver explained that her child did not attend the program for the first part of the summer because they only learned about the program several weeks after it started.

Source: Participant caregiver interviews.

When children attend the program, they may not always eat the meals served. The most frequently cited ways to encourage children to eat summer meals more often revolve around meal quality (see Table 4-11). Caregivers suggest children would be encouraged to eat summer meals on all the days they attend if the meals include more variety of foods (44%), better tasting food (35%), and better looking food (26%). Other top recommendations include serving more hot meals (26%) and

allowing children to bring meals and/or snacks home (20%), though taking meals away from the site is prohibited by the program statute.

Table 4-11. Ways to encourage children to eat summer meals on all the days they attend, among those who had eaten at the site, but not every day they attended

Ways to encourage children to eat summer meals on all the days they attend	Participant caregivers (%)
More variety of foods	44.2
Better tasting food	35.0
Better looking food	26.0
More hot meals	25.5
Allow child to bring meals and/or snacks home	20.0
Information about what foods will be provided	19.7
Healthier food	19.7
If breakfast were provided	15.1
Larger amount of food	13.7
More time to eat	12.4
If lunch were provided	12.2
If snack were provided	11.4
Meals for parents/caregivers	10.1
Shorter lines	7.0
If supper were provided	6.8
Shelter from heat and rain	6.7
Safe location	6.4
Information on the nutrition content of foods	6.1
Other	5.7
No change is needed; I am satisfied with the meals and snacks	16.1
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	294
Number of caregivers (weighted)	329,613

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with participant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households.

Note: Caregivers selected all that apply.

4.2 Reasons for Nonparticipation

4.2.1 Prior Experience with the Summer Meal Programs

Some nonparticipant caregivers have had prior experience with programs that offered free summer meals. About one-third (35%) of nonparticipant caregivers had prior experience with a free summer meals program, mostly with children 5 through 12 years of age (see Table 4-12).

Table 4-12. Nonparticipant prior experience with the summer meals program

Prior experience with summer meals	Nonparticipant caregivers (%)
Any children in household ever went to a program that offered free summer meals	
Yes	35.0
No	65.0
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	2,871
Number of caregivers (weighted)	9,472,337
Age of children when they attended a program that offered free summer meals	
5 - 12 years	88.2
13 - 18 years	21.0
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	963
Number of caregivers (weighted)	3,267,727

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with nonparticipant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Nonparticipant households are representative of nonparticipant households living within 0.75 miles of an urban site or 5 miles of a rural site.

Note: Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

4.2.2 Factors Affecting Nonparticipation

Lack of awareness about the summer program located near their home is the most frequent reason both nonparticipant teens and nonparticipant caregivers give as to why they or their children do not participate in the summer meals program. Seventy-three percent of nonparticipant teens and 46 percent of nonparticipant caregivers indicate that they do not know about the program at the site closest to their home (data not shown).

"I've never heard that [NAME OF SCHOOL] has a free summer lunch meal program too. I've never heard of it. If I had known we would have gone. It would have helped out a lot."

- Caregiver

In addition to being unaware of the program, nonparticipant caregivers most often report that their children are at other summer programs (14%) or prefer to be at home some days/weeks (12%). About 10 percent of nonparticipant caregivers say that they did not think their children were eligible to receive free meals. Ten percent also indicate that they believed only needy families should attend the program and five percent worry that if they attend the program others might think they cannot provide meals/snacks for their children, suggesting there is still at least some stigma associated with program attendance. Very few nonparticipant caregivers (3%) say they do not attend due to lack of transportation to the site (see Table 4-13), though 28 percent said that free transportation would be a program feature that would be a program feature that would make it possible for them to attend (see Table 4-14).

Table 4-13. Reasons children do not go to the summer meal program

Reasons children do not go to the summer meal program	Nonparticipant caregivers (%)
Do not know about the program at <Site>	45.9
At other summer programs	13.9
Prefer to be home some days/weeks	11.5
Visiting relatives/friends	11.1
Don't think children are eligible to receive free meals	10.3
Only needy families should send children to the program every week	10.2
Others might think family cannot provide meal/snacks for our child	4.6
Do not like the meals and/or snacks	3.3
Meals cannot be brought home	3.0
Lack of transportation to the site	2.5
Not enough activities to keep the child engaged	2.2
Friends not going to the program	2.1
Meals not provided for parents/caregivers	1.9
Do not like times when meals are provided	1.5
Other	7.7
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	2,892
Number of caregivers (weighted)	9,510,310

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with nonparticipant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Nonparticipant households are representative of nonparticipant households living within 0.75 miles of an urban site or 5 miles of a rural site.

Note: Caregivers selected all that apply.

Nonparticipant caregivers noted several features that might make it possible for their children to attend the site (see Table 4-14). The most frequently cited program features that would encourage

attendance are the provision of games and activities (38%); free transportation (28%); a daily schedule with more hours (20%), and an affordable program cost (20%). Only 12 percent of nonparticipant caregivers would not be interested in sending children to a summer program that offers free meals regardless of the program's features.

Table 4-14. Features that would make it possible for nonparticipants to attend

Features	Nonparticipant caregivers (%)
Games and activities	37.5
Free transportation	27.5
Daily schedule (number of hours)	20.1
Affordable program cost	19.7
Walkable distance from home	18.4
Safe location	18.3
Having friends of children going to the program	15.9
If child could bring meals and/or snacks home	15.6
Staff supervision	14.8
Meals for parents/caregivers	12.2
Shelter from heat and rain	11.6
If meals were offered more weeks during the summer	11.2
If meals were offered more days during the week	10.0
Advertise the program more (I did not know about it)	7.0
Other	6.5
Caregiver is not interested in sending children to a summer program that offers free meals	12.2
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	2,665
Number of caregivers (weighted)	8,714,777

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with nonparticipant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Nonparticipant households are representative of nonparticipant households living within 0.75 miles of an urban site or 5 miles of a rural site.

Note: Caregivers selected all that apply.

Teens report that, besides being unaware of the program (73%), they do not attend because they want to stay home (15%); the program is for teens in need (8%); and their friends do not go there (8%) (see Table 4-15). More nonparticipant teens than caregivers cite lack of transportation

"The high school is two miles from our house and there's no one to take her there or a bus. I have a small one at home. I can't walk her up there and then walk back. There's no one to take care of her. So how far it is to walk alone and no transportation that's really the main reason she could not go."

- Caregiver

as a reason they do not go to the sampled site, with seven percent of teens saying the site is not easy to get to.

Nonparticipant Caregiver Perspectives: Transportation

Interviewed nonparticipant caregivers were more likely to cite transportation as a barrier to participation than the survey responses would have suggested. Eight nonparticipant caregivers cited accessibility as a major barrier to sending their child to the study site. Three of these caregivers had known about the site prior to the study and five had not known about it, but said when they heard about it during the summer they could not send their child because it was too far to walk and/or there was no transportation available to help their child get to the site.

Source: Nonparticipant caregiver interviews.

Table 4-15. Reasons teens do not go to the summer meal program at the site closest to their home

Reasons teens do not go to the summer meal program	Nonparticipant teens (%)
I did not know about the program	73.1
I want to stay home	14.6
The summer food program is for children and teens in need	8.1
My friends don't go there	7.8
The program times do not fit my schedule	7.4
I have a job this summer	7.2
It is not easy to get there	7.2
I go to a different summer program	6.7
I don't like the food	4.4
I don't like the activities there	1.7
I don't like the facility	0.7
Other	4.7
Number of teens (unweighted)	801
Number of teens (weighted)	6,176,305

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of nonparticipant teens ages 13 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Nonparticipant teens are representative of nonparticipant teens who live within 0.75 miles of an urban site or 5 miles of a rural site.

Note: Teens selected all that apply.

5. Participant Satisfaction with the Summer Meals Program

"I was just happy, basically, that they were even offering that for families that need it. I'm glad that someone out there realized that there are people that need that type of help."

–Caregiver

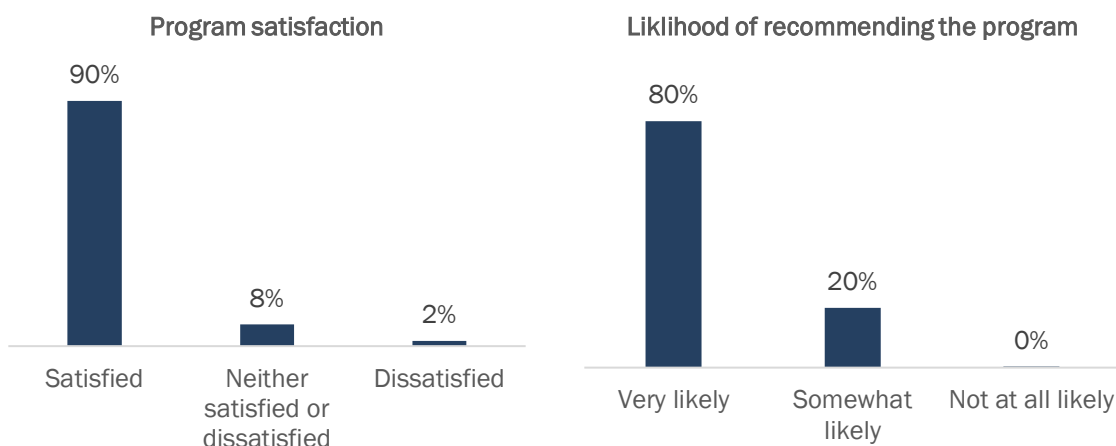
Caregivers, teens, and children are generally satisfied with the summer meals program and would recommend the program to others. The information presented in this chapter is based on data collected from surveys of caregivers, children,

and teens, and from in-depth interviews with a small sample of caregivers in the summer and fall of 2018.

5.1 Caregiver Satisfaction

Overall, 90 percent of caregivers are satisfied or very satisfied with the program (see Figure 5-1). Only two percent are dissatisfied. Eighty percent of caregivers say they are very likely to recommend the program to others, 20 percent say they are somewhat likely. No caregiver said that they would not recommend the program to others.

Figure 5-1. Caregiver satisfaction with program children attended and likelihood of recommending the program to others



Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with participant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Answered only by those caregivers whose children had already attended a program at the time of the survey. Participants' program satisfaction: unweighted n = 1,077; weighted n = 1,138,741. Participants' likelihood of recommending the program to others: unweighted n = 1,074; weighted n = 1,130,155.

Note: Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

"I just appreciate it a lot. I couldn't afford to send my kids to the programs that cost money. The program this summer definitely took a lot of the stress off of a mom of five, definitely a big help."

-Caregiver

"You don't even realize how much of a necessity a program like this is for our area."

- Caregiver

Participant caregivers report a high level of satisfaction with the meals and snacks provided at summer meal sites. Table 5-1 presents the satisfaction level reported by caregivers whose children had already attended a summer meals site at the time the survey was completed. Over three-quarters of caregivers (77%) report being satisfied or very satisfied with the meals and snacks served, and just 4 percent say they are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. These percentages differ significantly by site type, with 82 percent of caregivers at open sites saying they are satisfied or very satisfied with the meals and snacks served compared with 60 percent of caregivers at closed sites.

Table 5-1. Participant caregiver satisfaction with meals/snacks provided, overall and by site type

Satisfaction with meals and snacks for those whose children had attended a site at the time of the survey	All participant caregivers (%)	Caregivers at open sites (%)	Caregivers at closed sites (%)
Very satisfied/satisfied	76.9	81.7*	59.9
Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	11.6	8.4	22.9
Dissatisfied/Very dissatisfied	4.4	5.2*	1.6
Don't know	7.2	4.8	15.6
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,080	891	189
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,140,223	886,563	253,661

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with participant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs.

Note: Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

*T-test statistic testing of site type differences is significant at $p < 0.05$.

"Thanks very much for everything that this program offers to my kids over the summer. I know that they are getting a meal and a snack when they are away from home."

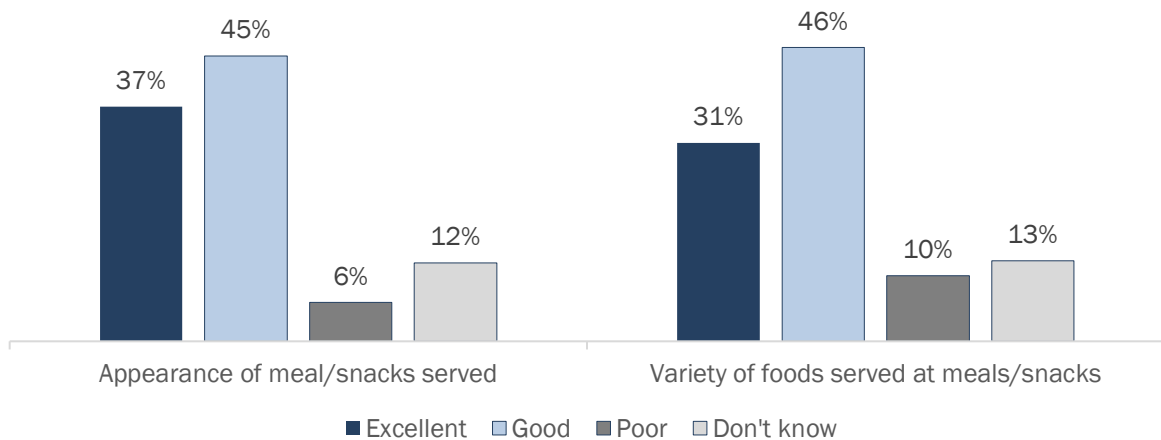
- Caregiver

"This was a great program. It made us very happy and grateful. Thank you."

- Caregiver

Caregivers also rated the meals and snacks served in terms of their appearance and the variety of foods served. Figure 5-2 presents these ratings, which did not differ significantly by site type (data not shown). More than three-fourths of caregivers rate both the appearance of meals and snacks served by the program (82%) and the variety of foods served at meals and snacks (77%) to be “excellent” or “good.” Few caregivers say the appearance (6%) or variety (10%) are poor.

Figure 5-2. Participant caregiver ratings of meals and snacks served



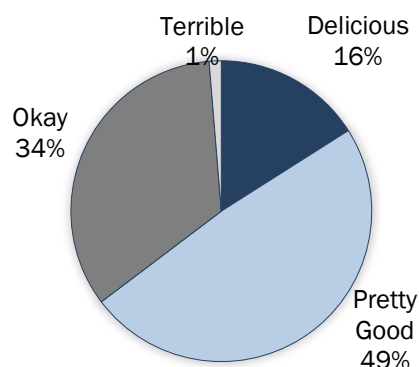
Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with participant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Answered only by those caregivers whose children had gone to the site at the time of the survey. Unweighted n = 1,080; weighted n = 1,138,444 (appearance of meals/snacks) and 1,140,014 (variety of food served). Note: Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

5.2 Teen Satisfaction

Teens are more likely than not to have a positive opinion of the foods served at the summer meal site they attend (see Figure 5-3). More than half of teens think the foods served are delicious (16%) or pretty good (49%), while about one-third (34 percent) rate the food as “okay.” Only one percent of teens say that the food served at their site is “terrible.”

When asked about the availability of food choices at their site, 51 percent of teens report that there are many food choices each day “all or most of the time,” and 62 percent report that there are many food choices during the week “all or most of the time” (see Figure 5-4). Much smaller percentages of participant teens report many food choices are available “hardly ever” or “almost never.”

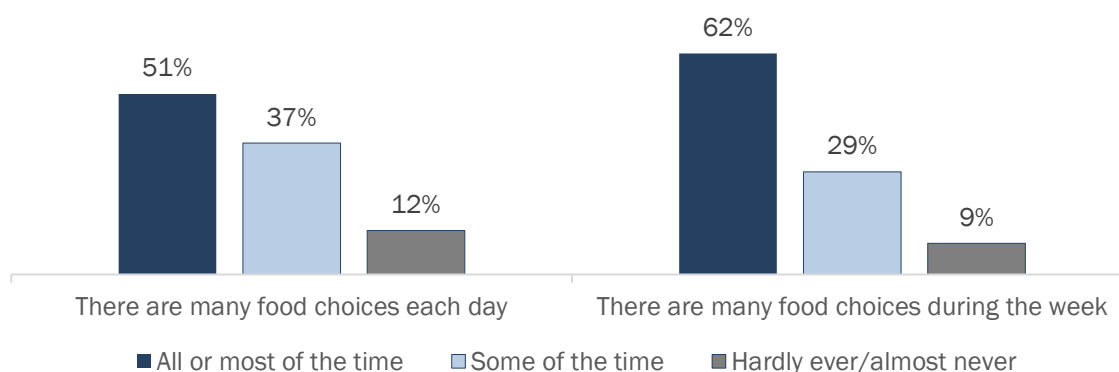
Figure 5-3. Teens' opinion of summer foods



Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Teen Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all participant teens. Unweighted n = 184; weighted n = 707,583.

Note: Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Figure 5-4. Participant teens' views on the availability of food choices

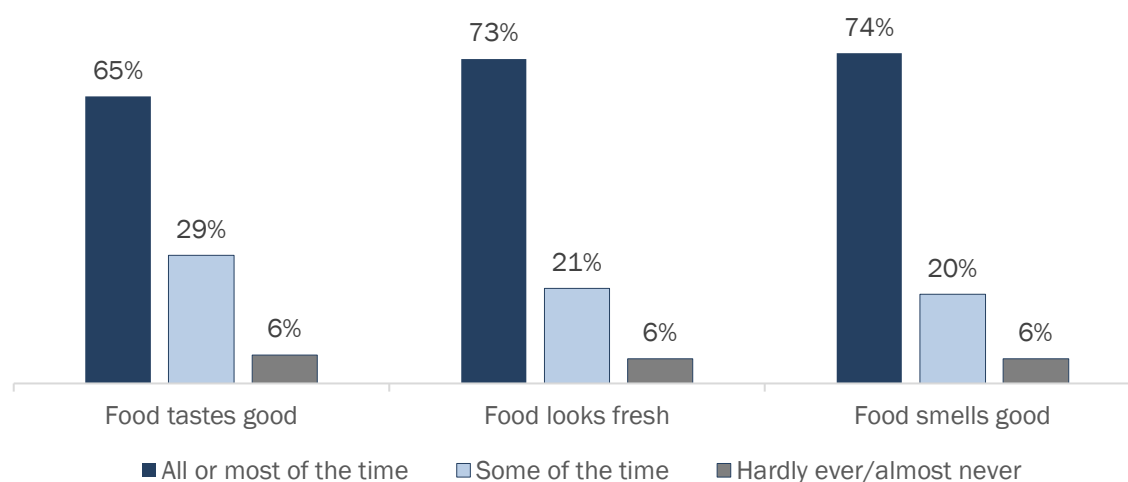


Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Teen Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all participant teens. For choices each day: unweighted n = 189; weighted n = 717,814. For choices during the week: unweighted n = 187; weighted n = 708,577.

Note: Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Teens also rated the taste, appearance, and smell of the food served at their sites. A substantial majority of teens report positive views on these aspects of the summer meals served at their sites. Sixty-five percent of teens report that the food served at their site “tastes good” all or most of the time (see Figure 5-5). Seventy-three percent say the food served “looks fresh” all or most of the time, and 74 percent say it “smells good” all or most of the time. Few teens (6%) indicate that the taste, appearance, and smell of the food served is hardly ever or almost never good.

Figure 5-5. Teens’ opinion of food taste, appearance, and smell

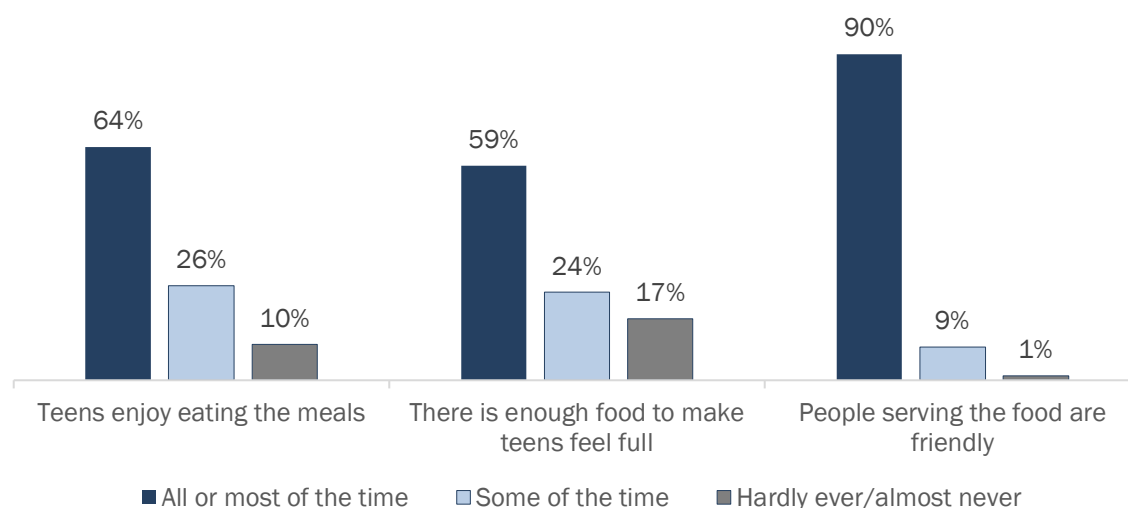


Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Teen Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all participant teens. For “food tastes good”: unweighted n = 188; weighted n = 709,937. For “food looks fresh” and “food smells good”: unweighted n = 187, weighted n = 708,581.

Note: Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

The majority of teens have a positive opinion of the summer meals program site they attend. Sixty-four percent of teens say they enjoy eating meals at the site they attend “all or most of the time” (see Figure 5-6). Nearly 60 percent of teens report that there is enough free food at the site for them to feel full. However, about one-quarter of teens feel there is enough free food served at the site they attend to make them feel full just “some of the time,” and 17 percent say that sites serve enough free food to make them feel full “hardly ever” or “almost never.” Finally, teens like the people who serve food at the sites they attend. Ninety percent of teens say that the servers are friendly “all or most of the time.”

Figure 5-6. Teens' opinion of the summer meal site



Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Teen Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all participant teens. For “enjoy eating the meals”: unweighted n = 186; weighted n = 707,646. For “enough food”: unweighted n = 185; weighted n = 702,344. For “people serving are friendly”: unweighted n = 188; weighted n = 716,459.

Note: Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Table 5-2 lists the reasons teens say they like eating at the site. The most frequently cited reason teens like eating at their summer meals site (cited by 52% of teens) is that they get to eat with their friends. Other common reasons for liking to eat at the site are that the teen is hungry (38%), the food is good (38%), the teens’ parents think the food is healthy (38%), and the teen likes the different types of foods served (31%).

Table 5-2. Reasons teens like to eat at the summer meal site, by site type

Why teens like eating at the site	Teens at all sites (%)	Teens at open sites (%)	Teens at closed sites (%)
I get to eat with my friends	52.4	50.6	63.2
I am hungry	37.6	41.0	17.4
The food is good	37.4	30.2*	79.9
My parents think the food is healthy	35.5	32.7	52.4
I like the different types of food served	30.6	24.9*	64.9
I think the food is healthy	21.0	19.5	29.8
I get to try different foods	13.0	12.9	13.4
Number of teens (unweighted)	182	151	31
Number of teens (weighted)	709,584	607,505	102,080

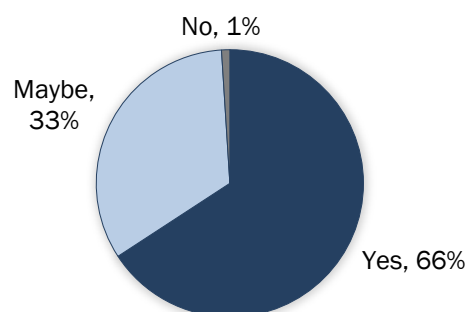
Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Teen Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all participant teens.

Note: Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

*T-test statistic testing of site type differences is significant at $p < 0.05$.

Teens differ somewhat in the reasons they like eating at the sites they attend based on site type, that is, whether the site is an open or closed site. Teens attending closed sites are more likely to say they enjoy eating at the site because the food is good (80% for teens at closed sites compared with 30% at open sites) and because they like the different types of food served (65% of teens attending closed sites compared with 25% of those attending open sites).

Figure 5-7. Percentage of teens recommending the summer meal program to friends



Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Teen Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all participant teens. Unweighted n = 185; weighted n = 712,023.
Note: Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

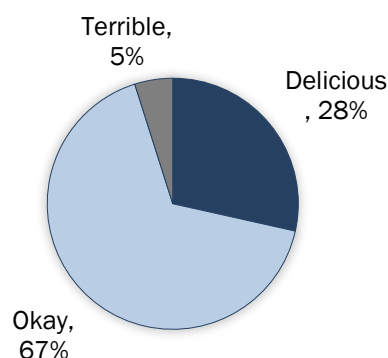
Most teens say they would recommend the program to their friends. Two-thirds of teens would tell their friends to attend the summer meals program next summer (see Figure 5-7). Just one percent of teens say “no,” they would not recommend the summer meals program to a friend.

5.3 Child Satisfaction

About two-thirds of children (67%) think the food is “okay” and 28 percent think it is “delicious” (see Figure 5-8). Only 5 percent of children say the food is “terrible.”

When asked specifically about the appearance, smell, and taste of the foods served, children tend to respond more positively, with 86 to 87 percent of children saying the food looks good, smells good, and tastes good (see Table 5-3). Smaller percentages, but still a majority of children, say they feel full after eating the food (68%) and that there are different kinds of food to pick from (63%).

Figure 5-8. Children's opinion of summer foods served at their site



Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Child Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all participant children ages 5 through 12. Unweighted n = 759; weighted n = 2,820,869.
Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Table 5-3. Children's view of summer foods served at their site

View of food served	Participant children (%)
Food looks good	
Yes	85.8
No	14.2
Number of children (unweighted)	760
Number of children (weighted)	2,831,697
Food smells good	
Yes	87.1
No	12.9
Number of children (unweighted)	759
Number of children (weighted)	2,819,500
Food tastes good	
Yes	86.0
No	14.0
Number of children (unweighted)	757
Number of children (weighted)	2,826,860
Child feels full after eating the food	
Yes	68.4
No	31.6
Number of children (unweighted)	754
Number of children (weighted)	2,802,592
There are different kinds of food to pick from	
Yes	62.6
No	37.4
Number of children (unweighted)	762
Number of children (weighted)	2,831,028

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Child Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all participant children ages 5 through 12.

Note: Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

5.4 Caregiver Comments on Specific Program Likes and Dislikes

In the 24 interviews and among the 308 open-ended survey comments, many caregivers of participating children provided comments about specific aspects of the program that they liked or disliked. Their comments have been grouped into the following categories: type, quality and amount of food served; the congregate feeding requirement; program staff; activities; opportunities of children to socialize with their peers; site accessibility; and other factors.

- **Type, quality and amount of food served**

In the in-depth interviews and open-ended survey comments, 54 caregivers reported that they liked the quality of the food served at their child's summer meal program. The large majority of these caregivers also praised the program's focus on serving children healthy meals and foods from the various food groups, including fruits and vegetables at each meal. A few of these caregivers also expressed appreciation that as a result of attendance at the summer meals program, their young children came home with more information about healthy eating and were more willing to try new foods at home because they had tried them at the program.

At the same time, a smaller number of caregivers expressed dissatisfaction with one or more aspects of the food served. The three most commonly expressed meal concerns were related to poor food quality (expressed by 17 caregivers), limited variety in the summer menu (expressed by 14 caregivers), and limited options to accommodate children's food preferences, allergies or special dietary needs (expressed by eight caregivers).

"I think that they can be healthier, have more fresh vegetables. I see a lot of them are like bologna and cheese sandwiches with a pack of mustard and mayonnaise and then a bag of chips and a fruit cup." -Caregiver

"This year they really didn't send a second option. It was like this is what you get and that's it. If they had ham and cheese sandwiches they did not offer another choice. She'd have her drink, and that's it, and the chips with her fruit or whatnot, but no sandwich because we don't eat ham." -Caregiver

Another food-related concern (expressed by 12 caregivers) was that the site ran out of meals before all the children arrived to eat and/or that the meal portion sizes are too small to meet their children's needs.

"If you didn't get in there first, maybe 30 minutes or so, sometimes they filled up and they would run out and they had only little snack cookies, or milk or juice... no trays left." -Caregiver

"The portion sizes were just not large enough for a teenager." -Caregiver

- **The congregate feeding requirement**

All nineteen interviewees whose children attended open sites were asked what they thought about the statutory program requirement that the food served for summer meals be eaten on-site. Twelve of these caregivers had no concerns, while seven interviewees and eight additional survey

commenters expressed dislike for this requirement. Among the latter group of 15 caregivers, the most common concerns reported were:

- There is not enough time allotted for eating the meals onsite;
- Some very young children who meet the minimum age requirement don't feel comfortable attending, but also need the food; and
- When a child needs a caregiver to drive them to the site, not all caregivers are able to stay and wait until the meal is served and the child eats, particularly when the meal start time varies from day to day and caregivers have other family and work demands.

"The rule of no food to leave the premises is absurd because most small children don't/can't consume the meals in 20 to 30 minutes." -Caregiver

"Sometimes it's a little hard if you have a kid who's in the car asleep or a younger one who does not feel comfortable at the site. You can't get a meal for them unless they can walk up there. I understand the reasoning behind it. I wish there was a way you could have a card or something to show how many kids you had and bring the food home to them sometimes." -Caregiver

- **Program staff**

Forty-eight caregivers praised the quality of the program staff in their interviews or survey comments. Among the interviewees, these were mostly caregivers of younger children who reported that the staff fostered a safe and nurturing environment and communicated well with them when they had questions or issues arose. Only four caregivers expressed concerns about the quality of staffing at the site their child attended, noting that there were not enough adults supervising the children or the staff were not paying attention to or interacting with the children.

"I think it's more satisfying there because the people that work through the church with it are accountable to checking on you and your family and seeing how you guys are doing. Because if you miss a couple days and then you go back, they're like, "Oh, my gosh. We've missed you. Where have you been? Is everything okay? Is there something we can help you with?" They actually take the time to get to know you and see what they can do to help you." -Caregiver

"It's an excellent site and the people in charge are awesome people and take great care of the kids." -Caregiver

- **Activities**

Comments about the activities provided at some of the summer meal sites were positive. In total, 21 caregivers praised the recreational and/or educational programming that their child's meal site

provided. Those whose children attended a site that included recreational activities explained that this is a very important component of the program because children need to stay active during the summer. Those whose children attended programs that offered formal summer school classes or small group academic lessons praised these activities, noting that they were well-planned, with some emphasizing the positive and creative way the program was run to keep the children interested and engaged. Some of these caregivers felt strongly that it is important for children to continue learning during the summer to get ahead or not fall behind when the school year begins.

“She liked it because they'd all go in, they'd grab their lunch, and they'd sit down. And then after lunch, they'd do different activities. Sometimes they'd go to the swimming pool. Sometimes they'd just play games there in the gymnasium. Just different activities every day.” -Caregiver

“She went to that summer meal program because she is interested in science in school and it had a science camp and it was free, at no cost, and they can go in if they are at a certain grade level. I liked that she really enjoyed it and she learned...things that she never knew. She had fun at the same time and enjoyed learning.” -Caregiver

- **Opportunities of children to socialize with their peers**

Eleven caregivers said that one of the primary benefits of the summer meal program is that it offers their children an opportunity to leave the house and regularly socialize in a safe environment with their peers when school is out.

“He seemed happy. He's more flamboyant, outgoing. He's not quiet all the time now. He went the first time and said, “Oh, can I come back? Can I come back? Oh, I got my friends here, and we get to do this, and I can do this with them, eat lunch with them.” -Caregiver

“He liked it because it was getting out of the house and mingling with the other kids in the apartment. I knew it was a meal we needed help with, but it was also good for him to be interacting with the different kids, because we just moved here...” -Caregiver

- **Site inaccessibility**

Ten caregivers living in both urban and rural areas expressed dissatisfaction with the program's lack of transportation assistance. These caregivers explained that the sampled site closest to their home was not a safe walking distance from their home for their child, they had no or limited access to a car to drop off and pick up their child, public transportation was nonexistent or limited, and the program did not offer any transportation assistance.

“[There is] no transportation and [they] cannot take meals from the site. Due to the lack of transportation, most kids cannot get to the meals, and the kids that need it do not have access to it. Also public transportation is not accessible, and [they] cannot even bike to the location.” -Caregiver

“Only two schools offer the summer free lunch program and none are close to our home.” -Caregiver

- **Other**

Two other areas of dissatisfaction with the program less frequently mentioned were inconvenient program hours or schedules (5 caregivers) and child safety concerns (4 caregivers). Caregivers mentioned scheduling concerns including the limited days or weeks the program was available, program hours, or limited time allotted for the children to eat when the program was open. Two of these caregivers noted specifically that the program start time is either too late or very inconsistent, making it hard for working parents to be able to consistently drop off and pick up their children.

“The days are convenient, but the time is a little bit short. They just feed them and that's it, and it's a long way from our house. It should have been a little longer for them to eat, for the time it takes to get there.” -Caregiver

While the number of caregivers who expressed concerns about child safety at the site was small, those who did express concerns raised serious ones. For example, one caregiver whose child attended an outdoor public playground site mentioned that many substance-using adults also frequent the site, making it uncomfortable for the children and limiting their attendance. A few caregivers expressed concern about child bullying or fights occurring at the site.

“The location isn't great. It's not in a safe neighborhood.” -Caregiver

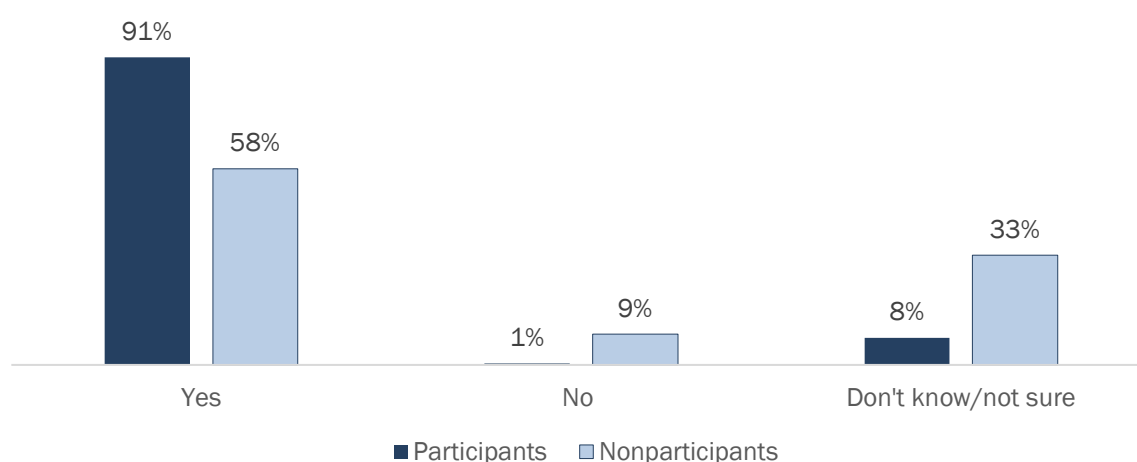
“I was told that basically he just ate and left. It's kind of a bad area, and people that are doing drugs are taking over the basketball court. I don't know why the cops aren't out there patrolling when the kids are there. If there was another choice I would send my son there, but there isn't. I don't know if I will let him go next year.” -Caregiver

5.5 Future Participation Decisions

Participant caregivers are significantly more likely than nonparticipant caregivers to say they will send their child to the summer meals program next year. Figure 5-9 shows expected summer meals program participation next year for participants and nonparticipants. Ninety-one percent of participant caregivers say they would send their child to the summer meals program next summer,

suggesting that for a very large majority of participants the program fulfills a need in a manner that is acceptable to caregivers and their children. Nonparticipants, who may be less familiar with the program, are less likely to say they would send their child to the program at the site closest to their home next summer. Nevertheless, a majority (58 percent) say they would send their child to the program at the site next summer, and another 33 percent do not reject the idea of sending their child to the site, but say they are not sure if they would do so. Just one percent of participants and nine percent of nonparticipants say they would not send their child to the site next summer.

Figure 5-9. Expected summer meal program participation next year

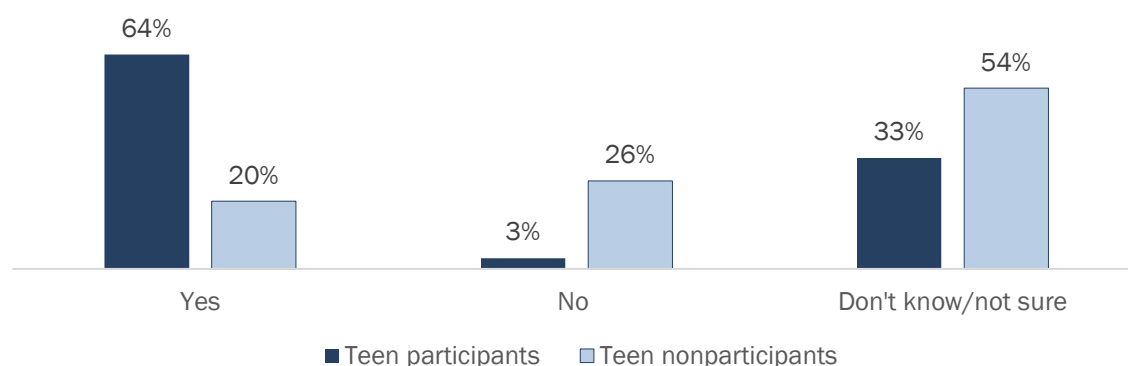


Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households. Nonparticipant households are representative of nonparticipant households living within 0.75 miles of an urban site or 5 miles of a rural site. Participant unweighted n = 1,710; weighted n = 1,983,273. Nonparticipant unweighted n = 2,959, weighted n = 9,741,718.

Note: Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding. Differences between participants and nonparticipants are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

When asked if they would like to attend the sampled site next summer, teens generally say they would, but at a lower rate than caregivers. Participant teens are significantly more likely to say they would attend next summer than nonparticipant teens. Figure 5-10 shows teens' responses to the question of future participation in the summer meals program. Sixty-four percent of participant teens say they would like to attend the sampled site next summer, compared with 20 percent of nonparticipant teens. Three percent of participant teens and 26 percent of nonparticipant teens say they would not like to attend the program next summer. The majority of nonparticipant teens (54%) and one-third of participant teens are not sure if they would like to attend next year.

Figure 5-10. Teens would like to attend the sampled site next year



Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Teen Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all participant and nonparticipant teens. Nonparticipant teens are representative of nonparticipant teens who live within 0.75 miles of an urban site or 5 miles of a rural site. Participant unweighted n = 185; weighted n = 712,023. Nonparticipant unweighted n = 812; weighted n = 6,233,177.

Note: Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding. Differences between teen participants and nonparticipants are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table 5-4 presents the reasons why caregivers report they would not (or may not) send their child to the sampled site next summer. The most frequently cited reasons for participants include that they expect their child to stay somewhere else during the day for the summer (27%), their child is not interested (25%), and their child will go to another program (24%). Reasons cited most frequently by nonparticipants are that their child was not interested (20%) and the lack of transportation (20%). Nonparticipants are significantly more likely than participants to cite no transportation, the cost of the program, site accessibility, lack of education or sports activities, and no shelter from the heat and rain as reasons they would not/may not send their child to the sampled site next year.

Table 5-4. Reasons why caregivers reported they may not/would not send their child to the sampled site next summer

For those who would not/may not send their child to the sampled site next summer, reasons why	Participants (%)	Nonparticipants (%)
Child will stay somewhere else during the day/for the summer	26.5	14.1
Child not interested	24.9	20.0
Child will go to another program	24.0	14.1
Child's friends will not go	12.7	4.6
Activities do not appeal to the child	9.8	6.0
Inadequate supervision	9.7	7.4
No transportation	8.7*	19.8

Table 5-4. Reasons why caregivers reported they may not/would not send their child to the sampled site next summer (continued)

For those who would not/may not send their child to the sampled site next summer, reasons why	Participants (%)	Nonparticipants (%)
Costs too much	4.7*	10.9
Location unsafe	4.7	5.9
Meals are not of high quality	4.3	5.5
Can't take the meals home or another place away from the site	4.0	6.2
Childcare is not provided	3.6	8.9
Is not easy to get to	3.0*	10.1
Doesn't provide the meals/snacks we want	2.8	4.2
Doesn't have a good reputation	2.6	6.0
Doesn't offer education or sports and recreational activities	2.3*	7.0
No shelter from heat and rain	0.0*	2.5
Other ¹	8.4*	15.5
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	138	1,195
Number of caregivers (weighted)	179,271	3,880,207

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households. Nonparticipant households are representative of nonparticipant households living within 0.75 miles of an urban site or 5 miles of a rural site.

¹ "Other" reasons include factors such stigma; schedule in conflict with work schedule; caregiver health issues; children have special needs; and concerns about behavior of children who attend the site.

* T-test statistic of participant/nonparticipant differences is significant at $p < 0.05$.

In the in-depth interviews, participant and nonparticipant caregivers were asked if they would send their children to the program at the sampled site the next summer. All but two of the participant caregivers said that if the program were available, they definitely would send their children again. When asked why they would send their children to the site next summer, the most common factors cited included the need for the food, the quality of the food and staff, the availability of activities where offered, and their familiarity with the staff and location. The two participant caregivers who said they would not send their children back to the site were those who expressed the most negative comments about the program, including the quality of the meals, the staffing, the location, and (in one case) child safety concerns.

Despite some perceived barriers to participation, when the 24 nonparticipant caregivers were asked if their child would participate the following summer if the program was offered at the sampled site, 20 caregivers—including the majority of those that attended another summer program in 2018—said they would consider it. Most of these caregivers cited more than one factor as important to their

decision. The four factors most commonly reported as key to their child's future participation at a summer meal site include:

- **Proximity of site or transportation assistance.** Almost half of these caregivers said that proximity of the site to their home or transportation assistance would be a key factor affecting their child's ability to attend the site next summer. (9 caregivers)
"I know the first thing I would look for is transportation because I know I don't have reliable transportation. We don't necessarily live in an area where I would feel comfortable with my child even walking to the bus stop. So the public transportation isn't an option either." -Caregiver
- **Quality of meals and accommodations for children with special dietary needs.** Caregivers said that they would want to know that the program offers healthy food in a setting that provides an opportunity for children to socialize and play together. Of this group, several caregivers mentioned wanting specific information about the content of the meals served, including sample menus and whether there would be options available to accommodate a child's dietary restrictions or food allergies. (9 caregivers)
- **Availability of activities at the site.** Caregivers said that they would like the program to offer recreational activities and/or educational programming to help their child get ready for the next school year. Some in this group also said that the type of programming offered and whether their child knew other children at the site would also be key to their child's own willingness to attend. (8 caregivers)
"I would like the program to have things that keep them active, exercise-wise and also things that could prepare them for the next school year to keep them out of trouble." - Caregiver
- **Assurance of child safety including quality of staff.** In order to consider sending their child to any summer program, caregivers mentioned that they would need assurances of child safety, including information about safety measures and security at the location and assurances that there would be an adequate number of high quality staff at the site who know how to work with children (with some mentioning required background checks). (4 caregivers)
"The program would need to have good adult supervision, especially, because...my kids have dealt with bullying in school. And if there's not enough people, then it's-- I don't want to send my kids somewhere where they can't be watched." -Caregiver

With the exception of the quality of the meals served, interviewed nonparticipant caregivers also mentioned the above factors when discussing the factors that drove their decision to have their child participate in another program in summer 2018.

5.6 Caregiver Recommendations for Program Improvement

During the 24 interviews and in 308 open-ended survey comments, many of the caregivers provided constructive suggestions that they believe would improve the Summer Meal Program at their sampled site, including recommendations that would require changes to the statute. Their most common recommendations are summarized below.

- **Relax the statutory congregate feeding requirement** so that certain children are always allowed to eat off site and all children are allowed to take all or part of their meal or snack home sometimes. (12 caregivers)

“My eight year old son is special needs and makes a mess when he eats. He also has other behaviors that make it where kids make fun of him. I wish they could take their food home.” -Caregiver

“It would be more practical to allow them to take their food if a container is already opened. Individual fruits/milk can easily be transported and should not be thrown away.” -Caregiver

“[CHILD NAME] would like to be able to bring the snacks and stuff home with him if he doesn't finish it. He feels like he wastes it. If he doesn't eat it then, he has to throw it away. He can't save it for later when he is hungry at home.” -Caregiver

- **Provide transportation** to the site. (11 caregivers)

“I would like a little transportation help. That's a big reason kids who need the meal can't always go. It's a biggie that would help a lot of people whose kids can't get there. They send buses during the school year. Why can't they have a way to transport children in the summer to meal sites.” -Caregiver

“Some of the kids in this neighborhood over here, their parents are at work or they don't have a car to get there. I feel like that's asking a lot, but maybe if they had cars that they could come out into some of the neighborhoods for kids who don't have a ride or parents aren't home.” -Caregiver

- **Improve the variety of types of food served** and allow for options to accommodate children's preferences. (11 caregivers)

“If there [are] two options for a main course, maybe that would help intrigue them a little more so that they do eat because they need the food even during the summer time. I think there must be choices...” -Caregiver

- **Improve the overall quality and taste of the meals** by incorporating foods that are both healthy and kid-friendly. (11 caregivers)

“It would be nice if they would give us a variety and healthier choices, rather than the things like breadsticks, pizza, corn dogs, or a sandwich all the time.” -Caregiver

- **Increase meal and snack portion size**, particularly for teenagers. (8 caregivers)

“If I could pick one thing to improve, it would probably be the amount. For them to give them a little bit more because my kids would say that it wasn't enough and they were still hungry.” -Caregiver

- **Offer program activities** at the site. (6 caregivers)

“It'd be awesome if there was a program where not only did they have the breakfast and lunch but maybe also a full camp, like low-income day camps or things like that for the summer because the kids here don't have camps like that that don't cost money.” -Caregiver

- **Encourage family engagement with the children** and offer meals for caregivers at a minimal or no-cost. (6 caregivers)

“It's a nice program that they don't have to offer, so really, anything is better than nothing. But if they had games that adults could play with the younger kids and offered low cost meals for the parents...because it would give the kids around here something to do in the summer and support our families.” -Caregiver

“If they offered meals for the parents I'm sure there'd be some parents who were willing to come as well because they don't have a whole lot at home. And I think even if they charged a couple bucks for a parent meal, for an extra one for the parents, I think something like that would be help a lot of people.” -Caregiver

- **Modify program and meal schedules.** (6 caregivers)

“The hours could be a little bit longer. That would be great. That would make it easier too for me to get him there and pick him up. Like I said, I would've taken him every day if I could've. It was very good for him.” -Caregiver

“I'd push the time up that they're going to do those sandwiches. Make it close to lunchtime. 11:30, 12:00 instead of 10:00 am when the kids have a hard time eating lunch type foods.” -Caregiver

“The time is a little bit short. They just feed them and that's it, and it's a long way from our house. It should have been a little longer for them to eat.” -Caregiver

- **Provide meal and other accommodations for children's special needs.** (5 caregivers)

“I would suggest that because some people have severe allergies or can't eat certain foods that we have a form we could fill out and those children could have another choice, whether the program is at a school or a park or any place.” -Caregiver

- **Offer the program for more days of the week or more weeks of the summer.**
(5 caregivers)

“[I] really wish the program would last all summer. I think it was only about three weeks long.” -Caregiver

“We were actually hoping to have more days next year. The kids had a blast on the days that the meal program was available.” -Caregiver

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Appendix A

Supplemental Tables

Appendix A

Supplemental Tables

The supplemental tables in this Appendix provide all the descriptive characteristics presented in the report for all caregivers, children, and teens and compare these groups by type of site they were sampled to (open sites and closed sites). These comparisons are made to address the study objectives.

Table A-1. Ages of children in participant households, by site type

Households with children ages 18 and younger	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Less than 5 years old	32.7	33.7	28.9
5 - 12 years old	83.4	82.8	85.6
13 - 18 years old	43.7	44.4	41.3
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,722	1,432	290
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,996,535	1,583,803	412,731
Average number of children ages 18 and younger in the household	2.2	2.2	2.1
Median number of children ages 18 and younger in the household	1.5	1.5	1.5
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,722	1,432	290
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,996,535	1,583,803	412,731

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with participant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households.

Table A-2. Where participant children spend their days in the summer months, by site type

Where participant children spend their days in summer months	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
At home with parent/guardian/sibling	77.1	79.4	68.4
At a summer camp or summer school	30.4	24.7*	52.3
At a relative's/friends home	15.3	13.3	23.3
At home with another relative	11.6	9.7*	19.1
At a childcare/daycare home or center	9.5	8.9	11.7
Home alone	5.8	5.8	5.6
At a summer job	5.1	5.1	5.0
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,688	1,405	283
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,967,145	1,563,840	403,305

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with participant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households. Respondents were asked to select all that apply.

* Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-3. Participant households and their children's attendance at summer programs, by site type

Attendance at sites offering education and/or activities	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Children attend sites offering education and/or activities			
Yes	68.1	66.5	74.4
No	31.9	33.5	25.6
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,692	1,410	282
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,969,539	1,570,016	399,523
Average number of children per household, when children attend such programs	1.6	1.6	1.5
Median number of children per household, when children attend such programs	1.0	1.0	1.0
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,187	962	225
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,341,010	1,043,964	297,046
When children attend such programs, the program provides meals and/or snacks			
Yes, free meals and snack are provided	66.3	64.9	70.9
Yes, as part of the program fee	20.9	20.6	21.8
Yes, available for purchase	4.5	4.7	4.1
No	8.3	9.8	3.2
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,077	871	206
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,199,696	929,019	270,677

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with participant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Table A-4. When caregivers find out about the summer program at the sampled site, by site type

When caregivers find out about the program	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
When caregivers first find out about the program			
This year	56.2	57.3	51.7
Last year	19.2	19.4	18.3
A few years ago	24.6	23.2	30.0
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,586	1,321	265
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,835,260	1,457,853	377,407
Month caregivers find out about the program			
January - March	7.8	7.6	8.8
April	6.8	7.2	5.1
May	26.0	27.6	19.5
June	22.3	23.1	18.7
July	10.7	9.6	15.6
August - September	21.8	20.4	27.4
October - December	4.6	4.5	4.9
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,446	1,212	234
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,616,320	1,303,250	313,070

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with participant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households.

Table A-5. How caregivers find out about the summer program at the sampled site, by site type

How caregivers find out about the program and the materials they received	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
How caregivers find out about the program			
Flyer or poster at child's school	30.7	33.5*	20.0
Staff at child's school told me about it	16.8	15.9	20.1
My friend or neighbor told me about it	15.8	15.3	17.6
My child told me about it	13.1	13.0	13.3
Mail	12.8	12.4	14.6
This survey	10.6	10.8	9.9
Internet or social media	10.0	10.5	8.2
Flyer or poster at local government or public assistance office	9.0	9.1	8.6
My relative told me about it	8.8	7.7	13.2
Flyer or poster at church or other community group	6.6	6.7	6.3
Email or text message	3.9	4.3	2.1
USDA-FNS site finder	3.9	4.0	3.2
Flyer or poster at local food bank	3.6	4.2*	1.2
Television or radio	2.8	3.5*	0.3
Poster or billboard on a bus stop/bus/train	2.5	3.0*	0.6
Toll-free hotline	0.9	0.6	2.4
Other	6.2	5.8	7.7
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,716	1,427	289
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,992,303	1,579,957	412,346
Caregiver receives program materials			
Yes	80.9	79.1*	87.6
No	19.1	20.9*	12.4
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,702	1,415	287
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,958,521	1,547,008	411,513
For those who receive materials, information the materials included			
Free meals	87.3	89.0	81.5
Program schedule (dates and times for the program)	56.6	54.9	62.4
Program locations/addresses	55.3	52.7	64.3
Program contact information	37.9	34.5	49.1
Types of activities offered	32.6	27.2*	50.7
How to apply	22.2	19.6	30.9
Child safety	18.0	14.4	30.4
Program activity fee	16.2	14.9	20.8

Table A-5. How caregivers find out about the summer program at the sampled site, by site type (continued)

How caregivers find out about the program and the materials they received	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Transportation options	13.9	9.9*	27.5
Other	1.0	0.9	1.5
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,393	1,145	248
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,583,842	1,223,277	360,565

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with participant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

* Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-6. Usefulness of program materials, by site type

Usefulness of program materials	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
For those who receive materials, the materials provide the information needed to make a decision about sending the child to the program			
Yes	87.8	87.3	89.7
No	12.2	12.7	10.3
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,364	1,120	244
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,544,579	1,190,900	353,680
For those who contact program staff, what they contact staff to get information about^a			
Free meals	51.7	54.8	39.5
How to apply	31.2	26.6	49.1
Cost to attend program (excluding meals)	28.6	24.7	44.2
Program schedule (dates and times for the program)	28.0	28.9	24.3
Types of activities offered	27.1	22.2	46.3
Child safety	16.5	17.0	14.4
Program locations/addresses	14.4	12.5	21.8
Transportation options	13.9	13.3	16.5
Program contact information	10.0	8.7	15.1
Other	6.2	7.3*	1.9
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	140	119	21
Number of caregivers (weighted)	179,135	142,619	36,515

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with participant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households.

^a Answered only by those who contacted program staff either because they did not get any program materials or because the program materials they received did not contain all the information they needed.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

* Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-7. Characteristics of the focal child, by site type

Focal child characteristics	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Number of children in the household who go to the program at the sampled site			
Average number of children who go to sampled site	1.5	1.5	1.5
Median number of children who go to sampled site	1.0	1.0	1.0
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,713	1,426	287
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,990,195	1,581,008	409,187
Gender of focal child			
Female	49.1	47.1*	56.9
Male	50.9	52.9*	43.1
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,693	1,411	282
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,976,769	1,568,948	407,821
Age of focal child			
5 - 12 years old	76.0	74.7	81.0
13 - 18 years old	24.0	25.3	19.0
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,708	1,423	285
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,984,794	1,576,683	408,111
Caregiver relationship to child			
Parent (biological, adoptive, or foster)	93.7	93.5	94.5
Grandparent	4.1	4.1	3.8
Sibling	0.2	0.2	0.2
Other	2.1	2.2	1.5
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,704	1,421	283
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,983,390	1,575,324	408,066
Race of the focal child			
Black or African American	33.0	32.1	36.6
Hispanic ^a	29.6	28.7	33.2
White	26.7	28.3	20.4
Other ^b	10.7	10.9	9.8
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,701	1,418	283
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,983,318	1,575,252	408,066

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with participant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households.

^a Hispanic includes all respondents who identified as Hispanic or Latino regardless of race.

^b Other includes Asian, American Indian or Alaskan native, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander and respondents who selected more than one race.

Note: total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

* Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-8. Attendance at other programs serving free summer meals, by site type

Attendance at other programs	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Child goes to other summer programs			
Yes	39.1	40.0	35.8
No	60.9	60.0	64.2
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,448	1,202	246
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,641,004	1,248,815	356,189
For those who go to other summer programs, those other programs provide meals and snacks			
Yes, for free	57.2	58.5	54.1
Yes, as part of the program fee	21.3	22.6	18.1
Yes, for purchase	7.2	4.3	14.4
No	14.3	14.7	13.5
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	317	253	64
Number of caregivers (weighted)	320,208	227,031	93,176
For those children who attend the identified school, they also get summer meals at the school they attend during the school year			
Yes	57.9	56.8	61.5
No	42.1	43.2	38.5
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,046	861	185
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,147,402	863,723	283,679

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with participant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households.

Note: total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Table A-9. Attendance at sampled site, by site type

Attendance at sampled site	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Persons involved in the decision to attend the program at the sampled site			
Parent (biological, adoptive, or foster)	93.3	92.8	94.9
Grandparent	6.6	6.7	6.2
Sibling	1.8	1.6	2.6
Other	4.9	5.2	3.8
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,695	1,412	283
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,969,090	1,565,096	403,995
This is the first summer the child attends the sampled site			
Yes	74.0	73.1	77.4
No	26.0	26.9	22.6
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,689	1,407	282
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,960,438	1,556,500	403,938
Child had already gone to the site at the time the survey was completed			
Yes	60.7	59.7	64.2
No, will start going later in the summer	39.3	40.3	35.8
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,642	1,366	276
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,885,032	1,489,331	395,701
Main reason for sending child to sampled site			
Meals are free	73.8	76.1*	64.7
Good location	47.3	46.1	52.1
My child can make new friends there	44.3	41.3*	56.0
Games and activities are provided	36.8	33.0*	51.7
Hours fit my schedule	32.2	29.5	42.8
My child's friends go there	30.5	31.4	27.2
My child does not want to stay home	20.0	19.9	20.2
Childcare is provided	19.1	17.2	26.6
Free transportation is provided	11.5	9.0	21.5
Proof of income is not required	6.8	7.2	5.2
Educational activities/reading program	3.7	3.0	6.5
Other	5.3	4.9	6.5
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,657	1,386	271
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,922,268	1,532,986	389,282

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with participant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households.

Note: total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

* Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-10. Traveling to and from the program site, by site type

Traveling to and from the program site	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Distance from program site			
Less than 1 mile	48.9	51.5*	39.1
Between 1 mile and 3 miles	34.5	34.6	34.2
More than 3 miles but fewer than 5 miles	9.1	8.8	10.0
Between 5 miles and 10 miles	5.5	3.9*	11.9
More than 10 miles	1.9	1.2	4.8
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,705	1,422	283
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,983,846	1,576,573	407,273
How children usually travel to and from the site			
Family vehicle	49.6	49.3	51.0
Walk	30.7	33.4*	20.8
Program provides transportation	9.3	6.5	19.7
Bike	4.7	4.5	5.3
Public transportation	4.2	4.8	2.2
Other	1.5	1.6	1.0
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,699	1,415	284
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,966,123	1,558,038	408,085
Options also available for traveling to and from the site			
Family vehicle	43.5	45.2	37.0
Walk	33.5	35.1	27.6
Bike	15.7	16.4	12.9
Public transportation	10.6	9.9	13.3
Program provides transportation	10.4	6.8*	24.2
Other	2.6	2.0	5.0
There are no other options available	14.5	14.4	14.9
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,698	1,414	284
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,975,277	1,567,669	407,608

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with participant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households.

Note: total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

*Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-11. Frequency of attendance at the program, by site type

Frequency of attendance at the program	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Your child goes to the program			
As often as you desire	84.0	82.2*	91.1
Less often than you desire	16.0	17.8*	8.9
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,684	1,404	280
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,956,672	1,558,036	398,636
Your child attends every week the program is offered			
Yes	68.5	66.0	77.0
No	31.5	34.0	23.0
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,414	1,163	251
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,572,770	1,218,352	354,418
Number of weeks your child goes to the program			
Average number of weeks attended	5.7	5.8	5.3
Median number of weeks attended	4.6	4.6	4.7
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,230	1,019	211
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,339,100	1,048,276	290,824
Number of days a week your child usually attends the program			
Once a week	14.9	16.3*	9.3
2 days each week	12.7	13.7	8.7
3 days each week	22.1	23.5	16.8
4 days each week	19.8	20.5	17.2
5 or more days each week	30.6	26.0*	48.0
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,689	1,404	285
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,966,610	1,558,389	408,222
The number of days your child goes to the program			
Was or will be about the same each week	60.9	57.1*	75.1
Varied or will vary from week to week	32.1	35.6*	18.5
Does not apply to me, my child went for 1 week or less	7.1	7.2	6.4
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,692	1,409	283
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,966,562	1,559,193	407,369

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with participant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households.

Note: total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

*Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-12. Reasons for inconsistent attendance, by site type, among those whose children do not attend every week the program is offered

Why children do not consistently attend for all weeks the program is offered and what can improve attendance	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
For those whose children do not attend the program every week it is offered, why children do not consistently attend for all weeks the program is offered			
Visiting relatives/friends	53.0	51.2	62.9
Prefer to be home some days/weeks	32.6	32.6	32.9
At other summer programs	22.7	24.4*	13.5
Do not like food served at the program	8.0	8.9	2.8
Friends not going to the program	6.8	7.9*	0.6
Not enough activities to keep the child happy	6.8	7.7*	1.9
Others might think our family cannot provide meals/snacks for our child	6.6	6.1	9.0
Did not want to stay at the site to eat the meal	5.9	6.8*	1.2
Only needy families should send children to the program every week	4.7	4.5	6.1
The location is not safe	0.8	0.8	0.9
There was no shelter from the heat or rain	0.5	0.5	0.7
Do not like times when meals are provided	0.4	0.4	0.7
Other ¹	12.1	11.3	17.0
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	720	608	112
Number of caregivers (weighted)	892,961	756,158	136,803
For those whose children do not attend every day, ways to improve how often children attend the program			
Games and activities	48.7	50.8	40.0
Free transportation	32.0	30.5	37.9
Having friends going to the program	30.4	30.1	31.4
Number of weeks the program is offered	27.1	27.0	27.7
Safe location	25.5	24.5	29.3
Number of days each week the program is offered	24.3	23.4	28.0
Daily schedule (number of hours)	23.9	24.5	21.5
Staff supervision	23.3	21.6	30.5
Being able to take the meals home or to another place away from the site	22.5	24.2	15.8
Walkable distance from home	19.7	19.8	19.3
Cost of program (not including meals and/or snacks)	19.3	18.3	23.3
Shelter from heat and rain	13.9	13.8	14.4
Other	5.1	4.6	7.1
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,091	911	180
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,296,720	1,040,960	255,760

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with participant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households.

¹ Examples of other responses include that the caregiver is too busy to take the child; work schedule does not allow for taking the child; health reasons; did not know about the program until later; and child does not always want to go.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

* Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-13. Encouraging children to eat summer meals and/or snacks more often, by site type

Eating summer meals and/or snacks more often	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
For children who had already attended the site, they ate summer meals and/or snacks at the site...			
Every day the child went	70.6	71.8	66.4
Most days the child went	16.5	16.3	17.1
Some days the child went	11.6	11.2	13.0
Never	1.2	0.6	3.5
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,097	902	195
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,145,070	893,614	251,456
Ways to encourage children to eat summer meals on all days they attend (among those who had eaten at the site, but not every day they attended)			
More variety of foods	44.2	40.7	54.9
Better tasting food	35.0	33.2	40.5
Better looking food	26.0	28.9	17.3
More hot meals	25.5	22.2	35.8
Allow child to bring meals and/or snacks home	20.0	17.9	26.2
Healthier food	19.7	17.7	25.7
Information about what foods will be provided	19.7	22.2	12.1
If breakfast were provided	15.1	16.0	12.5
Larger amount of food	13.7	14.8	10.6
More time to eat	12.4	12.3	12.5
If lunch were provided	12.2	12.9	10.2
If snack were provided	11.4	11.2	12.2
Meals for parents/caregivers	10.1	10.2	10.0
Shorter lines	7.0	6.5	8.4
If supper were provided	6.8	5.5	10.7
Shelter from heat and rain	6.7	3.2	17.4
Safe location	6.4	5.2	10.0
Information on the nutrition content of foods	6.1	4.8	10.1
Other	5.7	5.1	7.3
No change is needed; I am satisfied with the meals and snacks	16.1	19.2*	6.6
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	294	244	50
Number of caregivers (weighted)	329,613	247,961	81,652

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with participant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

*Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-14. Rating the meals and snacks served, by site type

Rating of meals and snacks by caregivers whose children had already attended the site at the time of the survey	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Rating the appearance of meals and/or snacks served			
Excellent	36.8	38.6	30.7
Good	44.8	45.1	43.7
Poor	6.1	6.2	5.9
Don't know	12.3	10.2	19.6
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,080	890	190
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,138,444	884,724	253,721
Rating the variety of foods served at meals and/or snacks			
Excellent	31.1	32.6	25.6
Good	46.1	47.0	43.0
Poor	10.3	10.6	9.1
Don't know	12.6	9.8	22.3
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,080	890	190
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,140,014	886,293	253,721
Rating overall satisfaction with the meals and/or snacks provided by the program			
Very satisfied/satisfied	76.9	81.7*	59.9
Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	11.6	8.4	22.9
Dissatisfied/very dissatisfied	4.4	5.2*	1.6
Don't know	7.2	4.8	15.6
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,080	891	189
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,140,223	886,563	253,661

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with participant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

* Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-15. Caregiver satisfaction with program children attended, by site type

Satisfaction of caregivers whose children had already attended the site at the time of the survey	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Overall satisfaction with the program			
Very satisfied/satisfied	90.2	90.1	90.6
Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	7.9	7.7	8.5
Dissatisfied/very dissatisfied	1.9	2.2	0.9
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,077	888	189
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,138,741	885,081	253,661
Likelihood you would recommend the program at the sampled site to others			
Very likely	80.2	79.9	81.3
Somewhat likely	19.5	19.8	18.7
Not at all likely	0.3	0.4*	0.0
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,074	886	188
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,130,155	879,000	251,155

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with participant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

* Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-16. How participant caregivers can stay informed about summer meals programs, by site type

Staying Informed	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Best time to send information			
January/February	11.0	10.4	13.5
March/April	36.2	36.1	36.5
May	37.7	38.1	36.4
June	7.7	7.4	8.6
July	3.1	3.4	2.1
Other	1.5	1.5	1.7
Any time	2.8	3.2	1.2
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,670	1,387	283
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,971,432	1,560,249	411,183
Best ways to provide information			
Mail	65.3	64.5	68.1
Flyer or poster at child's school	49.6	50.2	47.5
Email or text message	46.8	44.6	55.4
Internet or social media	23.1	24.0	19.6
Flyer or poster at local government or public assistance office	9.8	9.7	10.1
Television or radio	8.9	9.4	6.9
Flyer or poster at church or other community group	7.8	8.2	6.2
Flyer or poster at local food bank	7.3	7.3	7.6
Poster or billboard on a bus stop/bus/train	5.0	5.0	5.0
USDA-FNS site finder	4.6	5.0	3.2
Toll-free hotline	2.2	1.9	3.1
Other	1.2	1.1	1.6
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,704	1,417	287
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,969,261	1,560,468	408,793

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with participant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households.

Note: Caregivers selected up to three. Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Table A-17. Participants' summer meals program attendance next year, by site type

Attendance next year	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Would send child to the sampled site next summer			
Yes	91.4	90.6	94.2
No	0.5	0.6	0.3
Don't know/not sure	8.1	8.8	5.5
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,710	1,423	287
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,983,273	1,575,805	407,467
For those who would not/may not send their child to the sampled site next summer, reasons why			
Child will stay somewhere else during the day/ for the summer	26.5	24.1	38.8
Child not interested	24.9	25.5	22.3
Child will go to another program	24.0	20.6	41.2
Child's friends will not go	12.7	10.6	23.5
Activities do not appeal to the child	9.8	11.6	0.5
Inadequate supervision	9.7	10.4	6.2
No transportation	8.7	10.3*	0.8
Costs too much	4.7	5.0	3.0
Location unsafe	4.7	4.0	8.3
Meals are not of high quality	4.3	5.1	0.0
Can't take the meals home or another place away from the site	4.0	4.7	0.0
Childcare is not provided	3.6	4.3	0.2
Is not easy to get to	3.0	3.1	2.3
Doesn't provide the meals/snacks we want	2.8	3.4	0.0
Doesn't have a good reputation	2.6	2.0	6.0
Doesn't offer education or sports and recreational activities	2.3	1.5	6.2
No shelter from heat or rain	0.0	0.0	0.0
Other	8.4	8.5	7.9
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	138	109	29
Number of caregivers (weighted)	179,271	150,209	29,062

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with participant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

*Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-18. Participant food security, by site type

Food security	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Household food security			
Food secure	50.6	51.0	49.0
Food insecure	49.4	49.0	51.0
Low food security	21.8	19.9	29.1
Very low food security	27.6	29.1	21.9
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,713	1,424	289
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,986,284	1,573,609	412,675
Adult food security			
Food secure	54.5	54.2	55.6
Food insecure	45.5	45.8	44.4
Low food security	16.8	15.6	21.0
Very low food security	28.7	30.1	23.4
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,713	1,424	289
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,986,284	1,573,609	412,675
Child food security			
Food secure	68.8	67.6	73.5
Food insecure	31.2	32.4	26.5
Low food security	26.5	26.8	25.7
Very low food security	4.6	5.6*	0.8
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,713	1,424	289
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,986,284	1,573,609	412,675

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with participant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

*Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-19. Participant caregiver respondent characteristics, by site type

Respondent characteristics	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Gender			
Female	93.2	92.7	95.0
Male	6.8	7.3	5.0
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,713	1,423	290
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,980,284	1,567,553	412,731
Age			
18 to 29	18.5	19.7*	13.6
30 to 39	47.1	46.4	49.8
40 to 49	25.0	24.2	28.1
50 to 59	6.9	7.0	6.4
60 or older	2.5	2.6	2.2
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,710	1,420	290
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,977,850	1,565,118	412,731
Language spoken at home			
English	88.0	91.0*	76.4
Spanish	9.5	7.6	16.6
Other	2.5	1.4	7.0
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,700	1,413	287
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,975,437	1,564,620	410,817
Highest level of school completed			
No schooling completed/less than grade 12	13.0	14.3	8.1
12th grade	25.5	24.2	30.4
GED or alternative credential	8.5	9.4	5.0
Some college credit but no degree	30.8	30.8	30.9
Associate degree	9.3	8.8	10.9
Bachelor's degree	8.7	7.9	11.8
Master's, professional, or doctorate degree	4.1	4.5	2.8
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,712	1,424	288
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,977,794	1,565,872	411,922
Number of adults in the household			
Average number of adults in the household	1.7	1.7*	1.6
Median number of adults in the household	1.1	1.1*	1.0
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,639	1,370	269
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,884,488	1,513,717	370,771

Table A-19. Participant caregiver respondent characteristics, by site type (continued)

Respondent characteristics	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Current situation			
Employed for wages	47.0	47.1	46.4
A homemaker	16.1	16.1	15.8
Unable to work because of a disability	13.0	12.9	13.1
Out of work for more than 1 year	6.9	7.1	6.3
Self-employed	5.4	5.2	6.0
Out of work for less than 1 year	4.9	5.0	4.5
A student	3.7	3.6	4.0
Retired	0.8	0.7	1.0
Other	2.3	2.2	2.9
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,686	1,401	285
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,956,699	1,548,854	407,846
Proximity to site			
< 0.5 mile	45.7	46.7	41.9
0.5 to < 1 mile	30.2	32.7*	20.6
1 to < 4 miles	17.1	15.6	23.0
4 or more miles	6.9	5.0	14.5
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,710	1,423	287
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,986,611	1,578,426	408,186

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with participant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

* Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-20. Participant caregiver household characteristics: types of benefits received, by site type

Benefits received	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Household participation in other programs that offer meals in the past 12 months			
Free or reduced-price school lunches	77.8	77.3	79.9
Free or reduced-price school breakfasts	63.1	61.7	68.4
Food pantry, food bank, or soup kitchen	35.0	35.6	32.6
Snacks at before or after school programs	22.3	21.3	26.1
Daycare program or childcare center that provides meals and snacks at no cost	12.7	12.6	13.4
Head Start	12.2	13.2	8.6
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,521	1,271	250
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,787,519	1,426,020	361,498
Household participation in other benefit programs in the past 12 months			
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program	72.7	75.3	62.5
Medicaid	39.4	38.8	42.1
Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children	25.2	25.3	24.7
Assistance to pay electric or gas utility bills from the low income energy assistance program	24.2	24.3	23.6
Financial assistance to pay rent or housing costs	17.3	17.1	18.4
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families	13.3	12.3	17.3
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,365	1,149	216
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,637,409	1,308,325	329,084
For respondents in Missouri, Michigan, and Texas, participates in summer electronic benefits transfer (EBT) for children			
Yes	27.7	28.4	14.4
No	72.3	71.6	85.6
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	528	504	24
Number of caregivers (weighted)	580,316	550,366	29,950

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with participant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Table A-21. Participant caregiver household characteristics: employment and income, by site type

Household income	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Sources of income from the past 12 months			
Wages, salary, commissions, bonuses, or tips	67.6	69.4	60.4
Supplemental Security Income	14.0	14.1	13.8
Any public assistance or welfare payments from a state or local welfare office	10.2	8.5	17.1
Social Security or railroad retirement	9.0	9.0	9.2
Self-employment income	6.3	5.2	10.7
Retirement, survivor, or disability pensions	3.6	3.7	3.2
Interest, dividends, net rental income, royalty income, or income from estates and trusts	0.9	1.0	0.3
Any other income from sources received regularly	10.3	10.2	10.8
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,497	1,246	251
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,705,359	1,364,851	340,508
Income relative to the poverty threshold			
At or below 130% poverty	81.6	82.5	78.1
Between 130% and 185% poverty	9.2	8.8	10.7
Above 185% poverty	9.2	8.6	11.2
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,677	1,398	279
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,940,314	1,551,510	388,804
Household income last year			
Under \$10,000	41.2	40.2	45.3
\$10,000 to \$19,999	22.5	22.8	21.3
\$20,000 to \$29,999	17.3	18.6	12.4
\$30,000 to \$39,999	7.2	7.3	7.1
\$40,000 to \$49,999	4.0	3.9	4.1
\$50,000 to \$59,999	2.8	2.2	5.1
\$60,000 to \$69,999	1.6	1.4	2.6
\$70,000 or more	3.4	3.7	2.2
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,677	1,398	279
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,940,314	1,551,510	388,804
Household's current financial condition			
Very comfortable and secure	9.0	7.6	14.3
Able to make ends meet without much difficulty	17.3	18.0	14.3
Occasionally have some difficulty making ends meet	34.6	35.2	32.6
Tough to make ends meet but keeping your head above water	30.4	31.1	27.7
In over your head	8.7	8.1	11.0

Table A-21. Participant caregiver household characteristics: employment and income, by site type (continued)

Household income	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,687	1,407	280
Number of caregivers (weighted)	1,950,027	1,551,732	398,294

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Participant households are representative of all participant households.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Table A-22. Ages of children in nonparticipant households, by site type

Households with children ages 18 and younger	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Households with children...			
Less than 5 years old	33.7	33.4	35.1
5 - 12 years old	77.1	76.8	78.5
13 - 18 years old	48.5	48.1	50.5
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	2,964	2,417	547
Number of caregivers (weighted)	9,754,858	8,157,403	1,597,455
Average number of children ages 18 and younger in the household	2.3	2.3	2.3
Median number of children ages 18 and younger in the household	1.6	1.6	1.7
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	2,966	2,419	547
Number of caregivers (weighted)	9,757,211	8,159,756	1,597,455

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with nonparticipant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Nonparticipant households are representative of nonparticipant households living within 0.75 miles of an urban site or 5 miles of a rural site.

Table A-23. Where nonparticipant children spend their days in the summer months, by site type

Where participant children spend their days in summer months	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
At home with parent/guardian/sibling	79.6	80.1	77.1
At a summer camp or summer school	17.4	16.5	21.7
At a relative's/friends home	16.4	16.4	16.4
At home with another relative	12.3	13.3*	7.3
Home alone	7.3	7.4	7.1
At a childcare/daycare home or center	7.3	6.9	8.9
At a summer job	5.4	4.9	8.1
Other	2.8	2.7	3.7
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	2,947	2,405	542
Number of caregivers (weighted)	9,681,273	8,116,188	1,565,085

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with nonparticipant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Nonparticipant households are representative of nonparticipant households living within 0.75 miles of an urban site or 5 miles of a rural site. Respondents were asked to select all that apply.

*Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-24. Nonparticipant caregiver prior experience with the summer meals program, by site type

Prior experience with summer meals, by site type	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Any children in household have ever gone to a program that offers free summer meals			
Yes	35.0	36.2*	28.9
No	65.0	63.8*	71.1
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	2,871	2,342	529
Number of caregivers (weighted)	9,472,337	7,950,160	1,522,177
Average number of children in the household who have ever attended a summer meals program, when at least one child attended such a program	1.6	1.6	1.7
Median number of children in the household who have ever attended a summer meals program, when at least one child attended such a program	1.0	1.0	1.0
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	871	734	137
Number of caregivers (weighted)	2,995,936	2,596,489	399,447
For those whose children have attended a program that offers free summer meals, the age of those children when they attended the program			
5 - 12 years	88.2	87.7	91.3
13 - 18 years	21.0	21.4	18.5
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	963	814	149
Number of caregivers (weighted)	3,267,727	2,828,007	439,720

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with nonparticipant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Nonparticipant households are representative of nonparticipant households living within 0.75 miles of an urban site or 5 miles of a rural site. Note: total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

* Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-25. Reasons children do not go to the summer meal program at the sampled site, by site type

Reasons children do not go to summer meals program	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Do not know about the program at <site>	45.9	44.2*	54.5
At other summer programs	13.9	13.4	16.5
Prefer to be home some days/weeks	11.5	12.1	8.7
Visiting relatives/friends	11.1	11.1	11.1
Don't think children are eligible to receive free meals	10.3	11.0	6.4
Only needy families should send children to the program every week	10.2	10.7	7.3
Others might think family cannot provide meal/snacks for our child	4.6	4.7	3.9
Do not like the meals and/or snacks	3.3	3.5	2.4
Meals cannot be brought home	3.0	3.0	2.7
Lack of transportation to the site	2.5	2.3	3.4
Not enough activities to keep the child engaged	2.2	2.2	1.9
Friends not going to the program	2.1	2.2	1.6
Meals not provided for parents/caregivers	1.9	2.0	1.5
Do not like times when meals are provided	1.5	1.6	0.8
Other	7.7	8.3	4.8
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	2,892	2,360	532
Number of caregivers (weighted)	9,510,310	7,955,015	1,555,295

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with nonparticipant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Nonparticipant households are representative of nonparticipant households living within 0.75 miles of an urban site or 5 miles of a rural site. Caregivers selected all that applied.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

* Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-26. Features that would make it possible for nonparticipants to attend the sampled site, by site type

Features	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Games and activities	37.5	37.5	37.5
Free transportation	27.5	26.6	32.6
Daily schedule (number of hours)	20.1	20.8	16.8
Affordable program cost	19.7	17.7*	30.3
Walkable distance from home	18.4	18.3	19.0
Safe location	18.3	17.8	21.2
Having friends of children going to the program	15.9	16.5	12.6
If child could bring meals and/or snacks home	15.6	15.2	17.8
Staff supervision	14.8	14.1	18.1
Meals for parents/caregivers	12.2	12.7	9.5
Shelter from heat and rain	11.6	11.3	13.0
If meals were offered more weeks during the summer	11.2	11.2	11.1
If meals were offered more days during the week	10.0	9.9	10.7
Advertise the program more (I did not know about it.)	7.0	7.0	7.4
Other ¹	6.5	6.4	7.4
Caregiver is not interested in sending children to a summer program that offers free meals	12.2	12.8	9.1
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	2,665	2,168	497
Number of caregivers (weighted)	8,714,777	7,300,005	1,414,772

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with nonparticipant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Nonparticipant households are representative of nonparticipant households living within 0.75 miles of an urban site or 5 miles of a rural site. Caregivers selected all that applied.

¹ Examples of other responses include crossing guard; parent/child activities; field trips; guarantee of child's safety; good socialization; and better accessibility to the facility.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

* Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-27. How nonparticipant caregivers can stay informed about summer meals programs, by site type

Staying Informed	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Best time to send information			
January/February	13.5	13.4	14.1
March/April	33.5	33.2	34.8
May	37.4	38.2	33.3
June	6.9	6.3	9.7
July	3.8	3.4	5.9
Other	1.6	1.6	1.7
Any time	3.3	3.8*	0.6
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	2,888	2,359	529
Number of caregivers (weighted)	9,495,716	7,926,042	1,569,674
Best ways to provide information			
Mail	65.9	65.1	69.9
Email or text message	51.5	52.6	46.0
Flyer or poster at child's school	39.0	39.6	36.3
Internet or social media	27.0	28.2*	21.2
Television or radio	10.3	10.7	8.3
Flyer or poster at church or other community group	6.8	6.7	7.0
Flyer or poster at local government or public assistance office	6.1	5.6	8.3
Poster or billboard on a bus stop/bus/train	4.7	4.4	6.3
Flyer or poster at local food bank	3.9	4.0	3.0
USDA-FNS site finder	3.3	3.6	1.6
Toll-free hotline	1.9	1.6	3.1
Other	2.4	2.5	2.2
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	2,926	2,386	540
Number of caregivers (weighted)	9,615,825	8,042,575	1,573,250

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with nonparticipant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Nonparticipant households are representative of nonparticipant households living within 0.75 miles of an urban site or 5 miles of a rural site.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

* Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-28. Nonparticipants' summer meals program attendance next year, by site type

Attendance next year	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Would send child to the sampled site next summer			
Yes	58.3	57.5	62.5
No	9.1	9.6	6.4
Don't know/not sure	32.6	32.9	31.1
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	2,959	2,413	546
Number of caregivers (weighted)	9,741,718	8,147,264	1,594,454
For those who would not/may not send their child to the sampled site next summer, reasons why			
Child not interested	20.0	20.0	20.3
No transportation	19.8	19.7	20.2
Child will go to another program	14.1	13.9	15.4
Child will stay somewhere else during the day/for the summer	14.1	13.9	15.7
Costs too much	10.9	11.3	8.3
Is not easy to get to	10.1	10.8	6.0
Childcare is not provided	8.9	9.0	8.6
Inadequate supervision	7.4	7.6	6.4
Doesn't offer education or sports and recreational activities	7.0	6.9	7.4
Can't take the meals home or another place away from the site	6.2	6.5	4.8
Activities do not appeal to the child	6.0	5.3	10.0
Doesn't have a good reputation	6.0	6.2	4.8
Location unsafe	5.9	5.7	7.1
Meals are not of high quality	5.5	5.1	7.4
Child's friends will not go	4.6	4.7	3.5
Doesn't provide the meals/snacks we want	4.2	4.0	5.4
No shelter from heat and rain	2.5	2.5	2.1
Other	15.5	15.6	14.9
Free meals are not needed	4.7	5.2*	1.7
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	1,195	990	205
Number of caregivers (weighted)	3,880,207	3,312,202	568,005

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with nonparticipant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Nonparticipant households are representative of nonparticipant households living within 0.75 miles of an urban site or 5 miles of a rural site.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

* Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-29. Nonparticipant food security, by site type

Food security	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Household food security			
Food secure	56.2	56.0	57.2
Food insecure	43.8	44.0	42.8
Low food security	20.8	20.6	22.1
Very low food security	23.0	23.4	20.7
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	2,958	2,414	544
Number of caregivers (weighted)	9,731,328	8,134,762	1,596,566
Adult food security			
Food secure	60.2	60.1	60.5
Food insecure	39.8	39.9	39.5
Low food security	16.4	16.2	17.2
Very low food security	23.5	23.7	22.3
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	2,958	2,414	544
Number of caregivers (weighted)	9,731,328	8,134,762	1,596,566
Child food security			
Food secure	71.4	71.2	72.6
Food insecure	28.6	28.8	27.4
Low food security	23.9	24.4	21.2
Very low food security	4.7	4.4	6.2
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	2,958	2,414	544
Number of caregivers (weighted)	9,731,328	8,134,762	1,596,566

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with nonparticipant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Nonparticipant households are representative of nonparticipant households living within 0.75 miles of an urban site or 5 miles of a rural site.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Table A-30. Nonparticipant caregiver respondent characteristics, by site type

Respondent characteristics	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Gender			
Female	90.4	90.1	91.8
Male	9.6	9.9	8.2
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	2,953	2,408	545
Number of caregivers (weighted)	9,719,228	8,123,719	1,595,510
Age			
18 to 29	18.3	18.5	17.0
30 to 39	44.9	45.0	44.2
40 to 49	26.4	26.8	24.2
50 to 59	8.9	7.9*	13.7
60 or older	1.6	1.8	0.9
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	2,955	2,412	543
Number of caregivers (weighted)	9,732,640	8,137,108	1,595,532
Language spoken at home			
English	84.8	85.7	80.5
Spanish	12.3	11.5	16.3
Other	2.9	2.9	3.3
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	2,949	2,406	543
Number of caregivers (weighted)	9,665,598	8,082,293	1,583,306
Highest level of school completed			
No schooling completed/less than grade 12	12.1	11.9	12.8
12th grade	21.4	21.4	21.3
GED or alternative credential	10.5	10.7	9.4
Some college credit but no degree	28.2	28.3	27.6
Associate degree	11.6	11.4	12.5
Bachelor's degree	9.9	9.4	12.4
Master's, professional, or doctorate degree	6.4	6.8	4.0
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	2,954	2,410	544
Number of caregivers (weighted)	9,676,048	8,095,767	1,580,280
Number of adults in the household			
Average number of adults in the household	1.7	1.7	1.7
Median number of adults in the household	1.2	1.2	1.1
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	2,816	2,307	509
Number of caregivers (weighted)	9,231,632	7,739,782	1,491,850

Table A-30. Nonparticipant caregiver respondent characteristics, by site type (continued)

Respondent characteristics	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Current situation			
Employed for wages	47.4	47.8	45.7
A homemaker	16.6	17.3	13.1
Unable to work because of a disability	10.2	10.2	10.1
Out of work for more than 1 year	6.8	6.6	8.0
Self-employed	6.7	6.2	9.2
Out of work for less than 1 year	5.7	5.4	6.8
A student	3.2	3.2	3.2
Retired	1.1	1.2	0.7
Other	2.4	2.2	3.2
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	2,937	2,392	545
Number of caregivers (weighted)	9,651,292	8,054,131	1,597,161
Proximity to site			
< 0.5 mile	46.5	46.6	46.4
0.5 to < 1 mile	37.6	38.2	34.6
1 to < 4 miles	11.6	11.4	12.5
4 or more miles	4.3	3.9	6.4
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	2,959	2,414	545
Number of caregivers (weighted)	9,709,125	8,129,195	1,579,931

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with nonparticipant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Nonparticipant households are representative of nonparticipant households living within 0.75 miles of an urban site or 5 miles of a rural site.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

*Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-31. Nonparticipant caregiver household characteristics: types of benefits received, by site type

Benefits received	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Household participation in other programs that offer meals in the past 12 months			
Free or reduced-price school lunches	85.0	85.0	84.8
Free or reduced-price school breakfasts	66.9	67.7	62.8
Food pantry, food bank, or soup kitchen	24.3	25.2	19.9
Snacks at before or after school programs	16.4	15.7	19.6
Daycare program or childcare center that provides meals and snacks at no cost	9.9	9.1	13.7
Head Start	8.6	8.4	9.6
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	2,417	1,960	457
Number of caregivers (weighted)	7,774,673	6,476,354	1,298,320
Household participation in other benefit programs in the past 12 months			
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program	74.8	75.9	70.0
Medicaid	45.1	45.1	45.0
Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children	23.0	23.6	20.2
Assistance to pay electric or gas utility bills from the low income energy assistance program	20.8	18.9*	29.1
Financial assistance to pay rent or housing costs	13.3	13.8	11.0
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families	8.7	9.1	6.9
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	2,268	1,816	452
Number of caregivers (weighted)	7,256,085	5,942,742	1,313,343
For respondents in Missouri, Michigan, and Texas, participates in summer electronic benefits transfer (EBT) for children			
Yes	17.7	17.1	28.8
No	82.3	82.9	71.2
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	876	818	58
Number of caregivers (weighted)	3,595,074	3,424,861	170,214

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with nonparticipant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Nonparticipant households are representative of nonparticipant households living within 0.75 miles of an urban site or 5 miles of a rural site.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

* Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-32. Nonparticipant caregiver household characteristics: employment and income, by site type

Household income	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Sources of income from the past 12 months			
Wages, salary, commissions, bonuses, or tips	73.5	74.1	70.0
Supplemental Security Income	11.2	11.4	10.4
Self-employment income	9.1	8.4	13.0
Social Security or railroad retirement	9.0	8.8	10.5
Any public assistance or welfare payments from a state or local welfare office	7.3	6.9	9.1
Interest, dividends, net rental income, royalty income, or income from estates and trusts	2.3	2.6*	0.6
Retirement, survivor, or disability pensions	2.2	2.1	2.7
Any other income from sources received regularly	13.1	14.2*	7.3
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	2,561	2,103	458
Number of caregivers (weighted)	8,261,261	6,966,457	1,294,804
Income relative to the poverty threshold			
At or below 130% poverty	75.5	74.0*	82.8
Between 130% and 185% poverty	11.2	12.0*	7.1
Above 185% poverty	13.3	14.0	10.0
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	2,878	2,346	532
Number of caregivers (weighted)	9,485,618	7,914,847	1,570,771
Household income last year			
Under \$10,000	32.5	32.5	32.9
\$10,000 to \$19,999	22.9	22.8	23.5
\$20,000 to \$29,999	18.6	18.3	20.3
\$30,000 to \$39,999	9.4	8.9	11.7
\$40,000 to \$49,999	4.3	4.6	2.6
\$50,000 to \$59,999	2.7	2.9	1.6
\$60,000 to \$69,999	1.9	1.9	1.6
\$70,000 or more	7.7	8.1	5.8
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	2,878	2,346	532
Number of caregivers (weighted)	9,485,618	7,914,847	1,570,771
Household's current financial condition			
Very comfortable and secure	9.5	10.1	6.8
Able to make ends meet without much difficulty	20.6	20.6	20.4
Occasionally have some difficulty making ends meet	34.4	34.0	36.4
Tough to make ends meet but keeping your head above water	28.8	28.4	30.5
In over your head	6.7	6.9	5.8

Table A-32. Nonparticipant caregiver household characteristics: employment and income, by site type (continued)

Household income	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Number of caregivers (unweighted)	2,915	2,379	536
Number of caregivers (weighted)	9,569,113	8,008,214	1,560,889

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Caregiver Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all caregivers with nonparticipant children ages 5 through 18 living near a site that offered the summer meal programs. Nonparticipant households are representative of nonparticipant households living within 0.75 miles of an urban site or 5 miles of a rural site.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

* Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-33. Teen summer meal program participant characteristics, by site type

Respondent characteristics	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Gender			
Girl	45.3	41.3	69.4
Boy	54.7	58.7	30.6
Number of teens (unweighted)	186	155	31
Number of teens (weighted)	716,506	614,426	102,080
Age			
13 or 14 years old	57.9	58.2	56.0
15 or 16 years old	31.8	31.4	34.0
17 or 18 years old	10.3	10.4	10.0
Number of teens (unweighted)	186	155	31
Number of teens (weighted)	716,506	614,426	102,080
Race/Ethnicity			
Black or African American	37.5	36.2	–
Hispanic ^a	21.9	24.3*	–
White	33.3	31.2	–
Other ^b	7.3	8.4*	–
Number of teens (unweighted)	186	155	31
Number of teens (weighted)	716,712	614,632	102,080
Proximity to site			
< 0.5 mile	53.4	53.1	55.5
0.5 to < 1 mile	28.2	28.9	23.7
1 to < 4 miles	15.4	16.3	10.2
4 or more miles	2.9	1.7	10.6
Number of teens (unweighted)	189	158	31
Number of teens (weighted)	717,814	615,735	102,080

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Summer Meals Study, Teen Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all participant teens ages 13 through 18.

^a Hispanic includes all respondents who identified as Hispanic or Latino regardless of race.

^b Other includes Asian, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander and respondents who selected more than one race.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding. Results with “–” are not displayed due to insufficient sample sizes.

* Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-34. Teen program attendance, by site type

Program attendance	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Number of summers attended site			
1 summer	68.8	69.0	67.8
2 summers	18.5	17.4	24.8
3 summers	6.4	6.5	5.8
More than 3 summers	6.3	7.1*	1.5
Number of teens (unweighted)	180	149	31
Number of teens (weighted)	690,820	588,741	102,080
Number of days attended each week			
1 or 2 days	38.5	39.3	33.8
3 or 4 days	49.8	49.4	52.2
5 days	11.7	11.3	14.0
Number of teens (unweighted)	189	158	31
Number of teens (weighted)	717,814	615,735	102,080

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Summer Meals Study, Teen Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all participant teens ages 13 through 18.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

* Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-35. Reasons teens attend site, by site type

Reasons	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
My friends go there	52.9	55.7	35.9
My parents think it would be good for me	54.1	50.9	73.4
I like the food offered at this program	35.0	35.2	33.7
There are fun things to do	26.2	23.1	45.0
I like the people who work there	17.7	16.0	28.3
My school teacher thinks it would be good for me	10.2	9.7	12.8
I can get my homework done	8.8	8.4	11.1
I have nowhere else to go	7.7	8.1	5.5
Other	6.9	5.6	14.3
Number of teens (unweighted)	189	158	31
Number of teens (weighted)	717,814	615,735	102,080

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Summer Meals Study, Teen Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all participant teens ages 13 through 18.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Table A-36. Frequency that teens eat at the site, by site type

Number of days each week teens eat at the site	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
1 or 2 days	38.4	39.7	30.7
3 or 4 days	50.5	49.8	54.6
5 days or more	11.1	10.5	14.6
Number of teens (unweighted)	189	158	31
Number of teens (weighted)	717,814	615,735	102,080

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Summer Meals Study, Teen Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all participant teens ages 13 through 18.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Table A-37. Teens' views on availability of food choices, by site type

Availability of food choices	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Many food choices each day			
All or most of the time	50.8	51.0	49.5
Some of the time	36.9	35.4	46.1
Hardly ever/almost never	12.3	13.7	4.4
Number of teens (unweighted)	189	158	31
Number of teens (weighted)	717,814	615,735	102,080
Many food choices during the week			
All or most of the time	62.2	61.0	69.8
Some of the time	28.9	29.5	25.8
Hardly ever/almost never	8.8	9.6	4.4
Number of teens (unweighted)	187	156	31
Number of teens (weighted)	708,577	606,497	102,080

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Summer Meals Study, Teen Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all participant teens ages 13 through 18.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Table A-38. Teens' views of the summer foods served at their site, by site type

View of foods served	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Overall view of food			
Delicious	16.0	16.6	12.6
Pretty good	48.7	46.3	63.4
Okay	34.0	35.8	23.0
Terrible	1.3	1.4	1.1
Number of teens (unweighted)	184	153	31
Number of teens (weighted)	707,583	605,503	102,080
Food tastes good			
All or most of the time	64.7	66.7	52.9
Some of the time	28.9	26.6	42.5
Hardly ever/almost never	6.4	6.7	4.5
Number of teens (unweighted)	188	157	31
Number of teens (weighted)	709,937	607,857	102,080
Food looks fresh			
All or most of the time	73.1	72.6	76.0
Some of the time	21.4	21.7	19.6
Hardly ever/almost never	5.6	5.8	4.4
Number of teens (unweighted)	187	156	31
Number of teens (weighted)	708,581	606,501	102,080
Food smells good			
All or most of the time	74.4	71.2*	93.4
Some of the time	20.1	22.6*	5.6
Hardly ever/almost never	5.5	6.2	1.1
Number of teens (unweighted)	187	156	31
Number of teens (weighted)	708,581	606,501	102,080

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Summer Meals Study, Teen Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all participant teens ages 13 through 18.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Table A-39. Reasons teens like to eat at the summer meals site, by site type

Why teens like to eat at the summer meals site	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Teens like eating at this site			
Yes	99.7	99.6	100.0
No	0.3	0.4	0.0
Number of teens (unweighted)	184	153	31
Number of teens (weighted)	711,894	609,814	102,080
Reasons teens like eating at this site^a			
I get to eat with my friends	52.4	50.6	63.2
The food is good	37.4	30.2*	79.9
I am hungry	37.6	41.0	17.4
My parents think the food is healthy	35.5	32.7	52.4
I like the different types of food served	30.6	24.9*	64.9
I think the food is healthy	21.0	19.5	29.8
I get to try different foods	13.0	12.9	13.4
Other	4.5	5.2	0.2
Number of teens (unweighted)	182	151	31
Number of teens (weighted)	709,584	607,505	102,080

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Summer Meals Study, Teen Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all participant teens ages 13 through 18.

^a Teens selected all that applied.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

* Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-40. Teens' view of their summer meals site, by site type

View of the summer meals site	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Teens enjoy eating the meals			
All or most of the time	64.1	63.0	70.6
Some of the time	26.0	26.2	24.8
Hardly ever/almost never	9.9	10.8	4.5
Number of teens (unweighted)	186	155	31
Number of teens (weighted)	707,646	605,567	102,080
There is enough food to make teens feel full			
All or most of the time	59.0	56.5	73.5
Some of the time	24.2	24.8	20.6
Hardly ever/almost never	16.9	18.7	5.9
Number of teens (unweighted)	185	154	31
Number of teens (weighted)	702,344	600,264	102,080
The people serving the food are friendly			
All or most of the time	89.7	91.3	80.1
Some of the time	9.2	7.4	19.9
Hardly ever/almost never	1.2	1.4	0.0
Number of teens (unweighted)	188	157	31
Number of teens (weighted)	716,459	614,379	102,080

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Summer Meals Study, Teen Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all participant teens ages 13 through 18.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Table A-41. Teens recommending the summer meals program to friends, by site type

Would recommend to friends	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Yes	65.8	65.2	69.4
Maybe	33.2	33.8	29.3
No	1.0	0.9	1.3
Number of teens (unweighted)	185	154	31
Number of teens (weighted)	712,023	609,943	102,080

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Summer Meals Study, Teen Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all participant teens ages 13 through 18.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Table A-42. Participant teens would like to attend next year, by site type

Teens plan to attend program next year	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Yes	63.8	62.6	70.8
Maybe	33.0	34.4	24.8
No	3.2	3.0	4.5
Number of teens (unweighted)	185	154	31
Number of teens (weighted)	712,023	609,943	102,080

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Summer Meals Study, Teen Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all participant teens ages 13 through 18.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Table A-43. Teen summer meal program nonparticipant characteristics, by site type

Respondent characteristics	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Gender			
Girl	53.9	55.6	45.6
Boy	46.1	44.4	54.4
Number of teens (unweighted)	799	651	148
Number of teens (weighted)	6,117,183	5,076,851	1,040,332
Age			
13 or 14 years old	43.9	43.7	44.7
15 or 16 years old	33.4	33.5	32.7
17 or 18 years old	22.8	22.8	22.5
Number of teens (unweighted)	801	653	148
Number of teens (weighted)	6,129,869	5,089,537	1,040,332
Proximity to site			
< 0.5 mile	48.5	49.7	42.7
0.5 to < 1 mile	34.5	35.9	33.1
1 to < 4 miles	11.6	10.2	18.5
4 or more miles	4.5	4.2	5.7
Number of teens (unweighted)	814	666	148
Number of teens (weighted)	6,236,731	5,196,399	1,040,332

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Summer Meals Study, Teen Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all nonparticipant teens ages 13 through 18 who live within 0.75 miles of an urban site or 5 miles of a rural site.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding. Data on race not collected for nonparticipants.

Table A-44. Teen nonparticipant engagement with site, by site type

Engagement with site	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Ever gone to summer meals program at <site>			
Yes	6.1	6.5	4.0
No	93.9	93.5	96.0
Number of teens (unweighted)	811	663	148
Number of teens (weighted)	6,217,189	5,176,858	1,040,332
Among those who have ever gone to the site, number of summers attended			
1 summer	80.3	79.2	94.8
2 summers	13.0	13.9	0.0
3 or more summers	6.7	6.8	5.2
Number of teens (unweighted)	48	43	5
Number of teens (weighted)	309,901	288,827	21,075
Last time teens (who have ever gone to the site) attended the site			
Last summer	28.1	29.0	18.4
2 or more summers ago	71.9	71.0	81.6
Number of teens (unweighted)	50	44	6
Number of teens (weighted)	324,546	297,741	26,805

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Summer Meals Study, Teen Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all nonparticipant teens ages 13 through 18 who live within 0.75 miles of an urban site or 5 miles of a rural site.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Table A-45. Reasons teens do not go to the summer meals program, by site type

Reasons	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
I did not know about the program	73.1	72.2	77.5
I wanted to stay home	14.6	14.6	14.6
The summer food program is for children and teens in need	8.1	8.4	6.7
My friends don't go there	7.8	7.6	8.7
The program times did not fit my schedule	7.4	7.4	7.6
I had a job this summer	7.2	5.9	13.6
It was not easy to get there	7.2	7.4	6.4
I went to a different summer program	6.7	6.8	6.1
I didn't like the food	4.4	4.1	6.1
I didn't like the activities there	1.7	1.4	3.3
I didn't like the facility	0.7	0.8	0.0
Other	4.7	4.9	3.7
Number of teens (unweighted)	801	654	147
Number of teens (weighted)	6,176,305	5,142,988	1,033,317

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Summer Meals Study, Teen Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all nonparticipant teens ages 13 through 18 who live within 0.75 miles of an urban site or 5 miles of a rural site.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Table A-46. Nonparticipant teens would like to attend next year, by site type

Teens plan to attend program next year	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Yes	20.1	20.7	17.3
Maybe	53.7	51.4*	65.3
No	26.2	27.9	17.5
Number of teens (unweighted)	812	664	148
Number of teens (weighted)	6,233,177	5,192,845	1,040,332

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Summer Meals Study, Teen Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all nonparticipant teens ages 13 through 18 who live within 0.75 miles of an urban site or 5 miles of a rural site.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

* Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-47. Child summer meal program participant characteristics, by site type

Respondent characteristics	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed sites
Gender			
Girl	46.6	46.6	46.6
Boy	53.4	53.4	53.4
Number of children (unweighted)	763	635	128
Number of children (weighted)	2,844,837	2,209,711	635,126
Age			
5 or 6 years old	18.2	16.7	23.1
7 or 8 years old	23.0	24.6	17.1
9 or 10 years old	32.7	33.5	29.8
11 or 12 years old	26.2	25.1	29.9
Number of children (unweighted)	760	633	127
Number of children (weighted)	2,816,327	2,182,117	634,210
Race/Ethnicity			
Black or African American	30.1	29.7	31.2
Hispanic ^a	29.8	28.9	33.0
White	28.2	31.4	17.1
Other ^b	11.9	9.9	18.7
Number of children (unweighted)	760	635	125
Number of children (weighted)	2,829,934	2,195,632	634,302
Proximity to site			
< 0.5 mile	46.2	47.9	40.2
0.5 to < 1 mile	26.2	29.3*	15.7
1 to < 4 miles	19.0	16.0*	29.6
4 or more miles	8.5	6.8	14.4
Number of children (unweighted)	757	630	127
Number of children (weighted)	2,839,827	2,205,084	634,743

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Summer Meals Study, Child Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all participant children ages 5 through 12.

^a Hispanic includes all respondents who identified as Hispanic or Latino regardless of race.

^b Other includes Asian, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander and respondents who selected more than one race.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

* Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-48. Children's views of the summer foods served at their site, by site type

View of the summer foods served	Percentage of respondents		
	All sites	Open sites	Closed Sites
Overall view of food			
Delicious	28.5	28.9	26.9
Okay	66.6	65.9	69.1
Terrible	4.9	5.2	4.0
Number of children (unweighted)	759	634	125
Number of children (weighted)	2,820,869	2,205,815	615,055
Food looks good			
Yes	85.8	86.2	84.2
No	14.2	13.8	15.8
Number of children (unweighted)	760	633	127
Number of children (weighted)	2,831,697	2,196,669	635,028
Food smells good			
Yes	87.1	86.0	91.0
No	12.9	14.0	9.0
Number of children (unweighted)	759	632	127
Number of children (weighted)	2,819,500	2,192,091	627,409
Food tastes good			
Yes	86.0	86.3	84.8
No	14.0	13.7	15.2
Number of children (unweighted)	757	629	128
Number of children (weighted)	2,826,860	2,191,734	635,126
Child feels full after eating the food			
Yes	68.4	70.6	60.8
No	31.6	29.4	39.2
Number of children (unweighted)	754	629	125
Number of children (weighted)	2,802,592	2,190,859	611,734
There are different kinds of foods to pick from			
Yes	62.6	63.2	60.7
No	37.4	36.8	39.3
Number of children (unweighted)	762	634	128
Number of children (weighted)	2,831,028	2,195,902	635,126

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Summer Meals Study, Child Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all participant children ages 5 through 12.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.