



MEDIA RELEASE

Press release for Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance. For immediate release.

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Decline in Summer Meals Participation in Arkansas Putting Children at Risk

LITTLE ROCK, AR (June 18, 2018)— The Food Research and Action Center released [*Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation*](#), its annual summer nutrition status report for 2017. Despite efforts by the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance and Arkansas No Kid Hungry campaign stakeholders to increase the number of sponsors, sites and children participating in the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Summer Food programs, the percentage of children who participated fell from 12.6 percent to 10.7 percent. That suggests more than 90% of students who receive free or reduced-price school meals during the school year may not have gotten adequate nutrition in the summer, putting them at risk for summer learning loss or *summer slide*. The report uses average daily participation rates in the National School Lunch Program as the point of comparison for the Summer Meals program. Further, the report showed that 155,660 fewer summer meals were served to Arkansas children in 2017 than the previous year. There were also fewer sponsors and sites in 2017 relative to 2016, and 23.9 percent fewer children participated in the program in 2017.

Year	Meals Served	Sponsors	Sites
2016	940,713	116	574
2017	785,053	92	382

In 2017 we did see more schools participating in the USDA summer meals programs through the Arkansas Department of Education's Seamless Summer Program—a trend we expect to continue—however, due to the rural nature of the state and lack of funding for transportation to non-school meal sites or for negotiating mobile feeding options, there were more than a dozen counties without meal sites. Additionally, our focus has been on helping sponsors build sustainable programs that build on their progress year-to-year and ultimately become year-round programs. While proposed cuts to federally funded programs that support summer and afterschool programming and Congressional foot-dragging on child nutrition reauthorization policy changes cast further doubt on whether expanding summer meals into high need counties or increasing the overall number of meal sponsors in Arkansas will be possible, the Arkansas No

Kid Hungry partners remain dedicated to helping more Arkansas kids access this vital nutrition program.

Summer can be an especially challenging time for families and their children who receive free or reduced priced school meals during the school year. Economically stressed families must find money for additional food to feed children who are not in school and must often pay for child care programs to provide supervision for children during the summer. In short, that's a lot of extra money for low-income budgets to support. The 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, the largest source of federal funding for summer and afterschool programs, provided grant dollars to 82 programs in Arkansas in 2016. Targeted for elimination by the current administration, loss of funding will further reduce the availability of crucial summer meals programs for Arkansas children in high poverty areas, especially in rural parts of the state.

We invite inquiries and discussion with members of Congress to find solutions that will increase the percentage of Arkansas children in need who participate in the Summer Meals programs.

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About Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance

Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance, lead partner in Arkansas for the No Kid Hungry campaign, is a non-profit collaborative network of more than 500 hunger relief and advocacy organizations across Arkansas. Our founding members include the Arkansas Foodbank in Little Rock, the Food Bank of Northeast Arkansas in Jonesboro, Harvest Regional Food Bank watin Texarkana, Food Bank of North Central Arkansas in Norfolk, Northwest Arkansas Food Bank in Bethel Heights and River Valley Regional Food Bank in Fort Smith. The Alliance is dedicated to reducing hunger through direct relief, education and advocacy. We invite you to visit www.ARhungeralliance.org for details on hunger relief programs, donor and volunteer opportunities.

About the Arkansas No Kid Hungry campaign

The No Kid Hungry campaign connects kids in need with effective nutrition programs like school breakfast, summer and afterschool meals and teaches their families how to cook healthy, affordable meals on a budget. The campaign works across the nation and in Arkansas to surround children with healthy food where they live, learn and play. The Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance is the lead partner for the No Kid Hungry campaign in Arkansas. Visit <http://www.arhungeralliance.org/programs/no-kid-hungry/> for more information.