

MICRO-REPORT

Celebrating Ten Years of Afterschool Meals: Looking Back and Looking Ahead

Introduction

On December 13, 2010, the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act was signed into law. With that, afterschool meals became permanently available to nourish children nationwide. Ten years later, there is much to celebrate, but gaps remain: as of 2019, there was still only one afterschool meal served for every 17 free or reduced-price lunches going to eligible students. There are also many lessons learned to help chart a brighter future for this program and the children it serves. In light of the coronavirus pandemic and its economic fallout, these lessons are even more critical to ensure an equitable recovery. With millions of kids currently facing food hardship, afterschool meals will be more important than ever over the next ten years.

This micro-report highlights some of the key information presented in our [full report](#).



As of 2019, only

1 afterschool meal

was served **for every**

17 free or reduced-priced lunches

Program Overview and History

Children need healthy food to fuel their growth, learning, and play after school. The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) helps to meet this need through its At-Risk Afterschool Meals component, referred to in this report as the Afterschool Meals Program. This program provides funding for healthy meals and snacks served to kids and teens who attend school or community-based enrichment programs in areas where at least half of students are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.

The CACFP was established in 1968 and now serves a variety of populations in a range of settings. Over the years, Congress took steps to add kids in afterschool programs, starting with a demonstration project in 1994. In 1998, this was made permanent as the CACFP At-Risk Afterschool Snacks component. At the same time, Congress authorized [Area-Eligible Snacks](#) through the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), a parallel option for schools and school-sponsored sites. In 2000, Congress approved a pilot for afterschool programs to receive funding for full meals through the CACFP. The option for CACFP At-Risk Afterschool Meals became permanently available nationwide in 2010.

The CACFP is administered at the federal level by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and in each state and territory by a designated agency. For more details on how the program works, see [How Afterschool Meals Reach Kids](#).

The availability of meals through the CACFP allowed afterschool programs to choose the right amount of food for their participants: a snack only, a meal, or both. This was timely given the 2008 recession and subsequent spike in the rate of food insecurity, which only returned to its pre-recession level in 2018. In a [2013 survey](#) of parents with low incomes, 25 percent worried their child did not have enough to eat between lunch at school and breakfast the next day. An extra meal could keep their child full and focused for afterschool activities and also stretch a tight food budget. With unprecedented rates of food insecurity now due to the coronavirus pandemic, afterschool meals will again be critical in helping families recover.

A Decade of Growth: Afterschool Meals Data and Trends

The number of suppers served annually through the Afterschool Meals Program has grown by more than 600 percent since the option became available nationwide.¹ In federal fiscal year (FY) 2011, there were fewer than 29 million suppers served across the country. By FY 2019, the last full year of data available before the coronavirus pandemic, there were more than 212 million suppers served. Growth was most rapid from 2011 to 2016 and more modest from 2016 to 2019. Similarly, the gap between suppers and free or reduced-price school lunches narrowed quickly from 2011 to 2016 and more slowly from 2016 to 2019.

The number of suppers served annually through the **Afterschool Meals Program** has grown by **more than 600%**

In FY 2011, there was less than one afterschool supper served for every 100 free or reduced-price school lunches. By FY 2019, there were nearly six suppers served for every 100 school lunches.

The number of NSLP afterschool snacks peaked in 2012 and has stayed flat or declined each year since.² The number of CACFP At-Risk Afterschool snacks continued growing until 2016 but has also declined since. Still, the early growth in suppers easily offset any losses in NSLP snacks through 2016. Since then, the overall growth has continued but slowed.

Total Afterschool Suppers & Snacks Served Annually

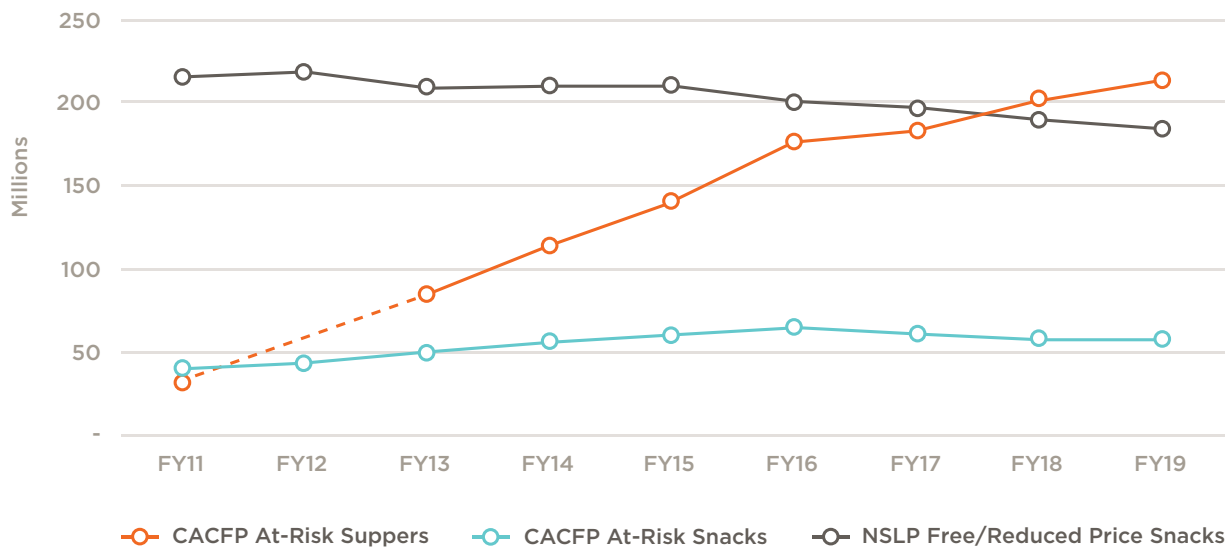


Figure 1[†]

¹ Supper is the most common type of meal served in the Afterschool Meals Program, followed by snack. Sites that operate on non-school days may serve breakfast or lunch, but totals are very low. For clarity regarding the data used, this section refers to suppers specifically instead of meals. The data do not include lunches or breakfasts. Totals reflect the 50 states and the District of Columbia only.

² This includes free or reduced-price NSLP afterschool snacks, including but not limited to NSLP Area-Eligible Snacks.

³ Data reflects national total of state data obtained from the USDA with the exception of Massachusetts and Nevada CACFP data for FY2013-FY2015, which was obtained from the state agencies. No CACFP At-Risk Afterschool supper data is available for FY2012 as the USDA transitioned to permanent reporting systems.

Afterschool Meals and Coronavirus Response

This report does not include data from FY 2020, which would usually not be available until 2021. Moreover, FY 2020 data will not fit with past trends due to the pandemic. Organizations could operate the Afterschool Meals Program during school closures in the spring of 2020 as they can during any non-school day during the school year. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that many organizations initially operated the summer meals programs only. This was likely due to the timing of waivers and guidance from the USDA as well as capacity limitations. Many have now started utilizing the current waivers and serving afterschool meals this school year to offer additional meals to kids in need.

Early growth was likely driven by non-profits and schools that previously offered only snacks adding suppers or switching to suppers. The additional food and higher funding amount for suppers probably also encouraged new organizations to start. The slowing growth since 2016 likely reflects the end of early adopters as well as the gradually improving economy, which could have led to fewer areas qualifying as eligible and reduced a sense of urgency to start. The economic fallout of the pandemic will lead to greater urgency and more widespread eligibility, but structural changes will also be needed to attract new organizations.

Trends at the national level obscure several important state-level data points and trends. Growth rates have varied dramatically by state, as has the total reach of the program. Some states perform much better than the national average, with ten, 12, or even 20 suppers served for every hundred free or reduced-price school lunches. Others still have less than one. These trends are likely due to differences in the availability of afterschool programs, administrative practices, and outreach measures.

The table at the end of this report includes 2019 supper data and a ranking of the program's reach in each state. For more discussion of national and state data trends, see the [full report](#).

Promising Models and Strategies

Over the past decade, organizations have implemented innovative strategies to connect kids with afterschool nutrition. These include finding ways to reach kids where they are, like serving meals at [libraries](#) that offer a place to study, providing meals along with health education at clinics in rural tribal communities, and bringing activities and meals to apartment complexes.

Many strategies center on reaching students at school, where students start the afternoon and where many afterschool programs are held. No Kid Hungry tested two models that showed promise for reaching more students at school: the Umbrella Model, in which afterschool meals are actively promoted to all students, not just those participating in particular activities, and Supper in the Classroom, which involves students eating together in their classroom before leaving school. For more on how these models work and how they can boost participation, see the [Umbrella Model](#) and [Supper in the Classroom](#) pilot reports and implementation guides.

Opportunities to Expand and Enhance the Afterschool Meals Program

The Afterschool Meals Program has seen immense growth and success in its first decade. This time has also exposed areas where change could help to maximize its reach and effectiveness.

Federal Policy

- **Integrate the Afterschool Meals Program as part of the summer meals programs.**
Creating a seamless, year-round out-of-school time nutrition program for non-profits and schools would streamline the application process and eliminate confusing differences across programs, enhancing efficiency and integrity.
- **Improve state application and data reporting systems.**
Providing funding and support to simplify the application process would facilitate better access to the program, and integrating application and data reporting systems would allow for more robust analysis that can drive further program improvements.
- **Support funding for out-of-school time programs.**
Less than one in five kids participated in afterschool programs in [2020](#). For each who did, three wanted access. The unmet need for programming limits access to meals.
- **Improve area eligibility.**
Allowing the same options to determine eligibility as there are in the summer meals programs and lowering the area eligibility threshold from 50 to 40 percent would better align with federal funding for out-of-school time programming. This would also help reach children in rural communities or smaller pockets of poverty, which struggle to qualify with just the school data permitted now.





State and Local Policy

- **Address health and safety standards.**
Clarifying health and safety standards, creating standards tailored to afterschool programs, or discounting necessary permits or certifications could drive expansion.
- **Streamline program administration.**
Directing the state agency to adopt all available streamlining measures, simplify the application process, or cooperate with other agencies as needed would support organizations that do not yet offer afterschool meals due to the administrative burden.
- **Promote participation.**
States can take steps to raise awareness and invite community engagement. Maine requires school districts with eligible schools to offer afterschool meals unless the board, after a public hearing, votes against it due to financial or logistical barriers.
- **Support afterschool programming and ensure coordination.**
Beyond providing state funding for afterschool programs, states can ensure that state or federally-funded afterschool programs are aware of the Afterschool Meals Program.

Research

There has been little formal research on the impact of afterschool meals in children's lives. To guide future work, it would be helpful to have research that examines how afterschool meals influence participation in afterschool activities, the extent to which afterschool meals reduce food insecurity, and whether afterschool meals improve student health or academic outcomes.

Equity

The Afterschool Meals Program holds great promise for addressing inequalities caused by systemic racism. It can mitigate the high rates of food insecurity among Black and Hispanic children while supporting enrichment programs that can reduce disparities in educational outcomes. However, there is room for operators and stakeholders at all levels to more deeply consider whether policies, procedures, and outreach tactics contribute to equitable access or empower communities. There are also opportunities to better engage with communities, families, and kids to put them at the center of work to expand the Afterschool Meals Program.

Conclusion

There has been extraordinary growth and innovation in the Afterschool Meals Program in its first decade. To ensure future success and meet the unprecedented level of need in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, it is critical to respond to the lessons learned over this time. By promoting strategies like the Umbrella Model, better engaging communities in program design and delivery, and pushing for structural changes that will make the Afterschool Meals Program simpler and more effective, the next ten years can be just as bright.

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Share Our Strength is a national organization working to end childhood hunger in the United States and abroad. Through proven, effective campaigns, Share Our Strength connects people who care to ideas that work. Share Our Strength's No Kid Hungry campaign works to ensure that children from low-income families get the healthy food they need.

CACFP At-Risk Afterschool Supper Data by State for FY 2019

| State | Total Suppers Served | Suppers as a Percentage of Free or Reduced-Price School Lunches | Rank According to Percentage |
|----------------------|----------------------|---|------------------------------|
| Nationwide | 212,827,513 | 5.92% | N/A |
| Alabama | 4,882,675 | 7.77% | 7 |
| Alaska | 240,080 | 3.70% | 26 |
| Arizona | 2,333,430 | 2.96% | 32 |
| Arkansas | 2,148,894 | 5.39% | 16 |
| California | 55,532,484 | 12.56% | 2 |
| Colorado | 873,327 | 2.39% | 40 |
| Connecticut | 971,128 | 2.94% | 33 |
| Delaware | 811,156 | 7.80% | 6 |
| District of Columbia | 1,546,687 | 20.72% | 1 |
| Florida | 19,546,350 | 7.88% | 5 |
| Georgia | 3,964,974 | 2.68% | 36 |
| Hawaii | 38,476 | 0.35% | 50 |
| Idaho | 258,451 | 1.81% | 44 |
| Illinois | 5,180,713 | 3.94% | 25 |
| Indiana | 1,791,091 | 2.37% | 41 |
| Iowa | 175,630 | 0.56% | 48 |
| Kansas | 744,101 | 2.53% | 37 |
| Kentucky | 2,967,072 | 4.28% | 21 |
| Louisiana | 2,929,018 | 4.02% | 22 |
| Maine | 194,975 | 2.08% | 43 |
| Maryland | 3,122,361 | 6.15% | 12 |
| Massachusetts | 1,623,717 | 2.89% | 34 |
| Michigan | 3,007,140 | 3.28% | 28 |
| Minnesota | 1,726,413 | 3.98% | 23 |
| Mississippi | 726,388 | 1.46% | 46 |
| Missouri | 3,738,643 | 6.42% | 11 |
| Montana | 257,154 | 3.23% | 29 |
| Nebraska | 630,415 | 3.03% | 31 |
| Nevada | 2,201,829 | 7.06% | 9 |
| New Hampshire | 181,897 | 3.20% | 30 |
| New Jersey | 3,743,318 | 5.02% | 18 |
| New Mexico | 1,119,733 | 3.96% | 24 |
| New York | 15,515,049 | 6.76% | 10 |
| North Carolina | 2,675,636 | 2.41% | 39 |
| North Dakota | 26,641 | 0.49% | 49 |
| Ohio | 2,486,703 | 2.44% | 38 |
| Oklahoma | 2,778,866 | 5.79% | 14 |
| Oregon | 2,397,683 | 7.58% | 8 |
| Pennsylvania | 4,030,191 | 3.50% | 27 |
| Rhode Island | 447,226 | 5.08% | 17 |
| South Carolina | 2,733,761 | 4.47% | 20 |
| South Dakota | 128,164 | 1.69% | 45 |
| Tennessee | 4,645,368 | 5.82% | 13 |
| Texas | 37,238,221 | 8.27% | 4 |
| Utah | 584,569 | 2.20% | 42 |
| Vermont | 407,345 | 9.70% | 3 |
| Virginia | 3,394,836 | 4.57% | 19 |
| Washington | 1,387,741 | 2.41% | 39 |
| West Virginia | 1,349,837 | 5.68% | 15 |
| Wisconsin | 1,347,832 | 2.82% | 35 |
| Wyoming | 42,124 | 1.07% | 47 |