

Share Our Strength Summer Meals Survey



March 2013



Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
Background	4
Methodology	5
Key Findings	6
Recommendations	8
DETAILED FINDINGS	9
Summertime Challenges	10
Interest in Summer Meals	14
Summer Meals Awareness	18
Summer Meals Offerings	22
Barriers to Participate	27
Summertime Behaviors	34
Information Sources	38
APPENDIX	41
Baltimore	42
Colorado	43
Arkansas	44
Demographics	45



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background & Objectives

As part of its No Kid Hungry campaign, Share Our Strength (SOS) is working to increase utilization of the USDA's Summer Meals Program. To further understand the perceived value of the Summer Meals Program and inform SOS's national goals for increasing participation, SOS engaged APCO Insight to conduct a quantitative survey.

Specifically, the research objectives include:

- Gauge current summertime food/meal behaviors of low-income families
- Determine impact of the loss of school meals and how families cope
- Measure awareness of the Summer Meals Program
- Validate barriers to participation uncovered in the qualitative focus groups
- Assess interest and willingness to participate
- Evaluate importance of specific program initiatives
- Validate the best communication channels and messengers for outreach
- Capture newsworthy data points for potential media coverage

Methodology

APCO Insight, the opinion research division of APCO Worldwide, designed and conducted the 2013 Summer Meals Survey. The research surveyed low income families in the United States.

Online, landline and mobile telephone samples account for 45%, 41% and 14%, respectively, of the total completed interviews. Quotas were placed during interviewing and data have been weighted to ensure a representative balance by region, income level and race according to available census data for this population.

Eligibility	Poverty Income Ratio (PIR) \leq 185% At least one child between 2 and 18 living in their household Household decision makers	
Sample Size & Margin of Error	900 national interviews 100 interviews in Baltimore 100 interviews in urban & suburban Colorado 100 interviews in Arkansas counties of focus*	(\pm 3.3% at 95% confidence interval) (\pm 9.8% at 95% confidence interval) (\pm 9.8% at 95% confidence interval) (\pm 9.8% at 95% confidence interval)
Data Collection	Computer Aided Web Interviewing (CAWI) Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI)	
Average Length of Interview	16-20 minutes	
Field Dates	February 5-20, 2013	

*Pulaski, Benton, Crawford, Faulkner, Garland, Lonoke, Saline, Washington

Key Findings – The Landscape and Initial Barriers

- **Summer brings added hardships to low income families**, particularly for those most in need (i.e. lower income levels and food insecure). Families try their best to make ends meet by shopping and cooking more wisely, but some inevitably feel pushed to buy less healthy, cheaper food, visit food pantries and even eat less/skip meals.
- **Most low income families are interested in Summer Meals.** With such difficulties, it is perhaps not surprising that parents would express interest in the program. Families that are food insecure and participate in food assistance programs show greatest interest.
- **However, among a subset of families, there is a perception that they do not need Summer Meals and therefore won't participate.** Many recognize it as a noble program, but for others, not themselves. Families that are food secure, do not currently participate in food assistance programs, and live in rural areas are most likely to show a lack of interest and agree that its not something they need.
- **Being away from home or dissatisfied with Summer Meals do not appear to be real barriers.** The vast majority of parents say their children spend time and eat lunch at home during the summer; those who have participated seem overwhelmingly satisfied with the program.
- **A lack of awareness can be partially blamed for Summer Meals' low participation rates, but not all.** Indeed, the majority of low income families aren't aware of free summer meal sites in their community. Still, even among those that know of a free meal site in their community, only 1 in 4 say they have participated.
- **To raise awareness, there are a variety of options.** Parents welcome a wide range of information sources and communication channels. They most prefer learning about Summer Meals from their children's school and via mail. Online and SNAP/WIC offices may also help to reach the most interested families.

Key Findings – Program Needs and Incentives

- **For any meal site, safety and trust are key.** To participate, the vast majority of parents say the programs must be held in a safe, local place and that they will not send their children to a site if they are unfamiliar with the organization and/or its staff.
- **For parents, healthy meals pique interest and are seen as a crucial offering.** Healthy food is mentioned unaided as a reason for interest in the program, a reason to recommend the program and is considered a must for participating by 3 in 5 parents.
- **For kids, fun activities and a place to socialize are the biggest draws.**
- **Location is a factor.** The site needs to be convenient and within 5 miles. In urban areas, most want a meal site within 1 mile. A quarter of parents say free transportation is a must and is even mentioned unaided as a reason for lack of interest.
- **Mobile meals provide promise for certain families.** About half of families living in poverty, with food insecurity, who lack transportation, and/or live in urban areas believe a mobile meal truck would definitely increase participation.
- **Most parents say that two hours of operation is reasonable.** Staying open an additional two hours (four hours total) could capture an additional 1 in 5 families.

Recommendations - The Bottom Line

- There is clearly a need for the Summer Meals Program and families express interest. While the need is widespread, focusing efforts in those areas where families are hardest hit – urban areas and communities with a high density of food assistance, low income levels and food insecurity - will likely find the greatest uptake in participation.
- Awareness levels need to be raised. Schools, mail, online, SNAP/WIC offices and food banks can help to reach those most in need and most interested in the program. With such high satisfaction rates, enlisting past participants to spread the word will help to raise awareness levels and may also push those who know of the program to give it a try.
- Partnering with trusted community centers, schools, and staff is essential. Focusing recruitment efforts to within a five mile radius in suburban/small town areas and a one mile radius for urban areas should prove to be the most effective use of resources. Ideally, sites should be open for at least two hours; four hours where possible. To get parents excited, communicate all the above points and that meals served are healthy/nutritional.
- To get kids excited, provide and communicate that meal sites have fun, recreational activities, sports and are a place to socialize.
- Consider using mobile food trucks in urban, high need areas to help increase participation rates.



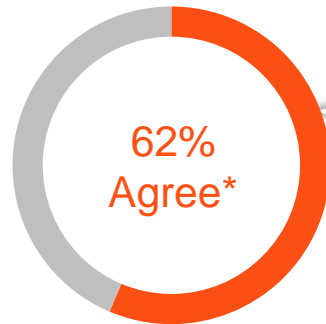
DETAILED FINDINGS



SUMMERTIME CHALLENGES

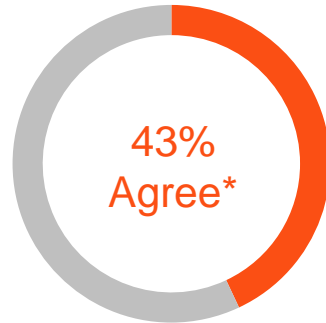
Summer takes a toll on many low income families' already tight budgets

We spend more on food during the summer than during the school year

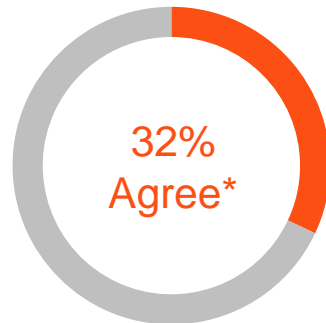


For families that spend more in the summer, 47% report spending an additional **\$300+** in groceries each month

It is harder to make ends meet during the summer than during the school year



We sometimes find ourselves without enough money for food during the summer



*Strongly or somewhat agree

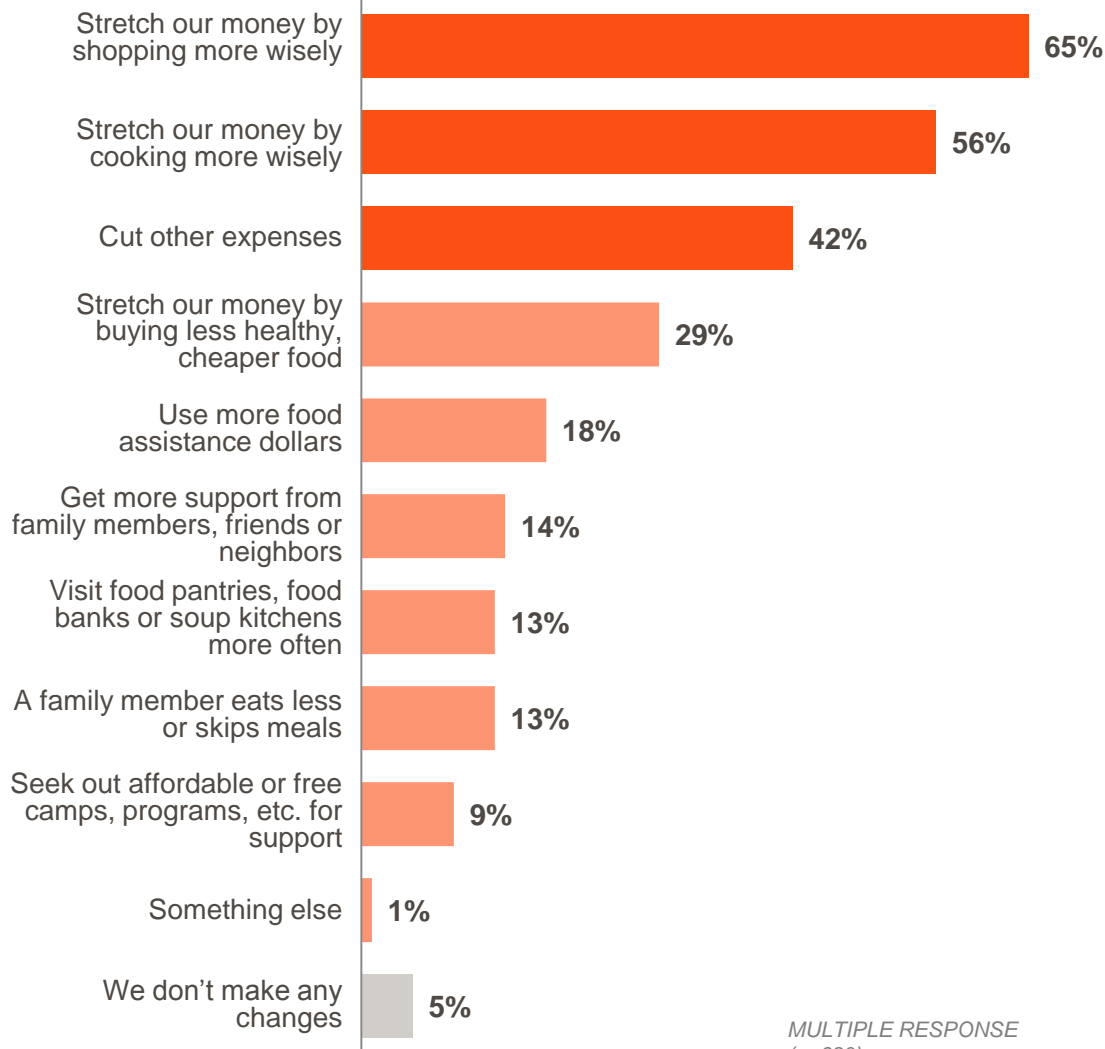
- Summer hardships become more acute as PIR, food security decreases and number of children, participation in food assistance programs increases.
- After adjusting for outliers, families that spend more in the summer say, on average, their grocery bills are \$316 higher per month.
 - As the number of children in a household increases, so do the extra expenditures.
- 43 percent of families who rely on free or reduced price meals say they find themselves without enough food in the summer.

Q4a. Below are a few ways that some parents have said summer impacts their families. When it comes to your family, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements.

Q4b. During the summer, on average, how much more would you estimate your family spends on groceries each month?

Families have an array of coping mechanisms to make ends meet

Common Coping Mechanisms



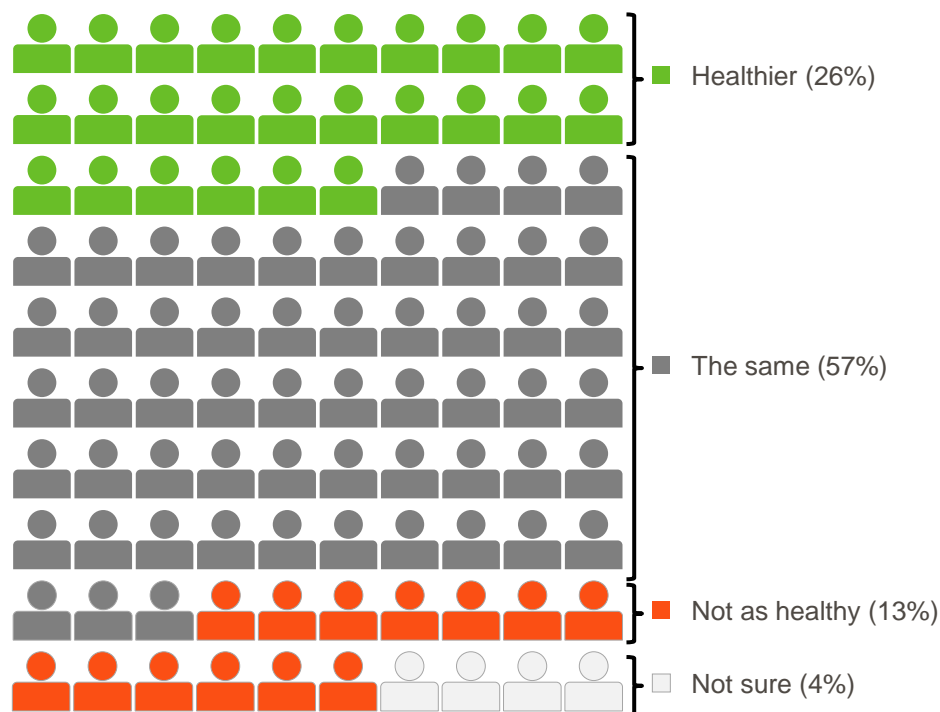
MULTIPLE RESPONSE
(n=630)

- More than half report stretching their money by shopping and cooking more wisely.
- 3 in 10 families admit to buying less healthy, cheaper food to cope with the added pressures of summer.
 - In fact, 1 in 2 families (48%) with very low food security use this coping mechanism.
- 1 in 5 families (18%) living under the poverty line acknowledge that sometimes a family member eats less or skips a meal.
- There does not appear to be a significant correlation between coping methods used and extra money spent in groceries each month.

Q5. And what changes, if any, does your family make to deal with increased food costs and/or tighter budgets during the summer?

Most parents say their children's diets do not differ nutritionally between summer and the school year

During the summer, my children eat...



- As food security decreases, so does likelihood to eat nutritionally in the summer - 19 percent of families who classify as food insecure say their children do not eat as healthy in the summer.
- Similarly, those families who report experiencing summer hardships are more likely to say their children do not eat as healthy in the summer (17%).

Q3b. Think a moment about what your children eat while at school during the school year and what they eat during the summer when school is not in session. Would you say that, during the summer, your children eat:



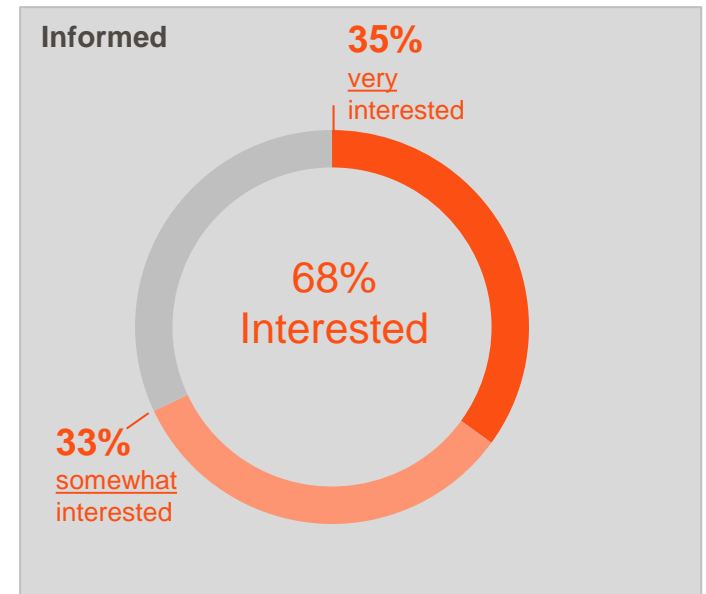
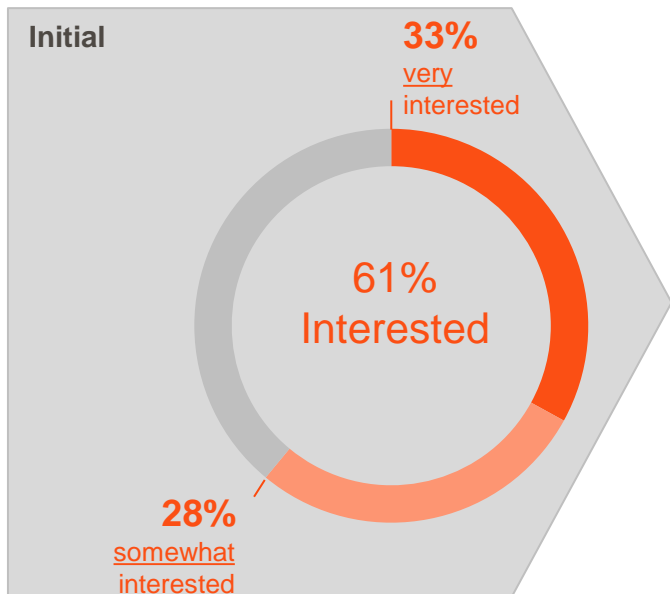
INTEREST IN SUMMER MEALS

Low income families express interest in the Summer Meals program

- Initially, and with little detail on the program, the majority of families (61%) say they are interested in Summer Meals.
- Once more information is revealed, interest increases +7 percentage points (to 68%).
- Interest is strong with at least 1 in 3 saying they are *very interested*.
- Among uninterested families, 66 percent of those who report their PIR as between 130% and 185% also say they do not participate in free or reduced price meals.

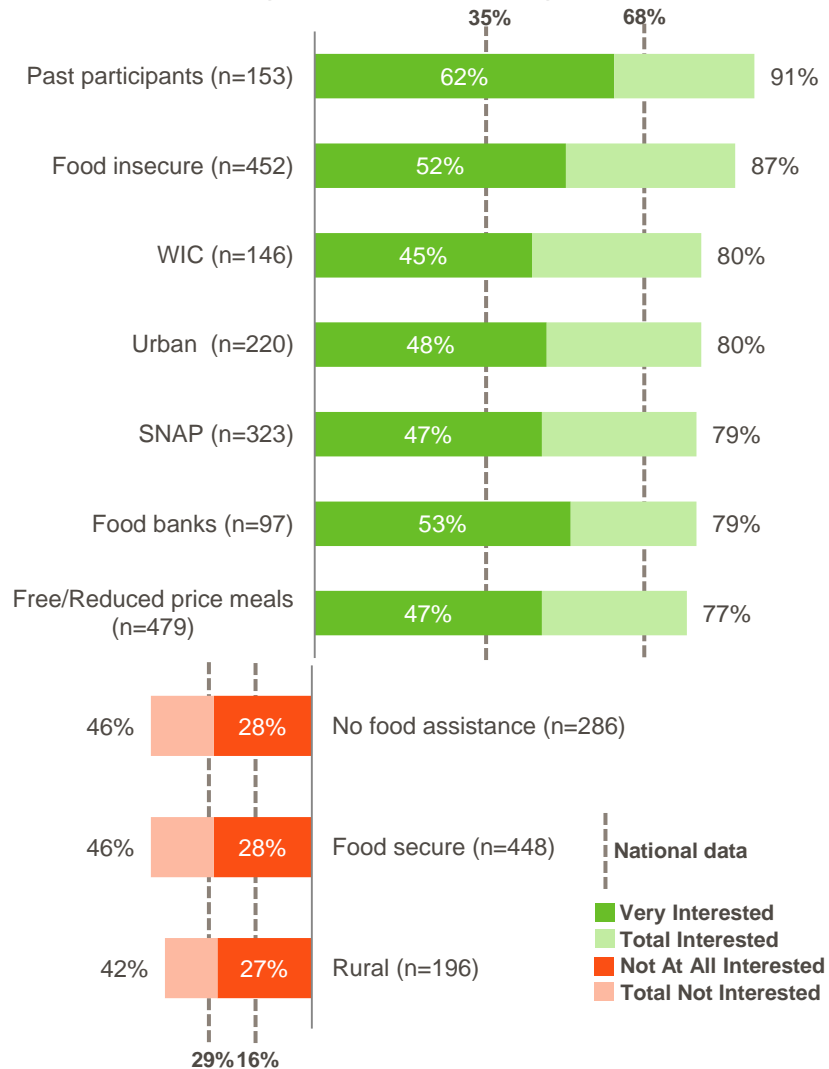
Description

On weekdays in the summer, free meals are available to kids and teens ages 18 and younger at hundreds of summer meals sites across your state. Many sites offer fun learning and recreational activities so kids and teens can stay active and spend time with friends while enjoying healthy meals. Sites are organized by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and are held at safe local places like schools, churches, parks and recreation centers, and community centers. Meals served are tasty, follow USDA nutrition guidelines and help families save money.



Certain family types and demographics are more likely to show interest in Summer Meals

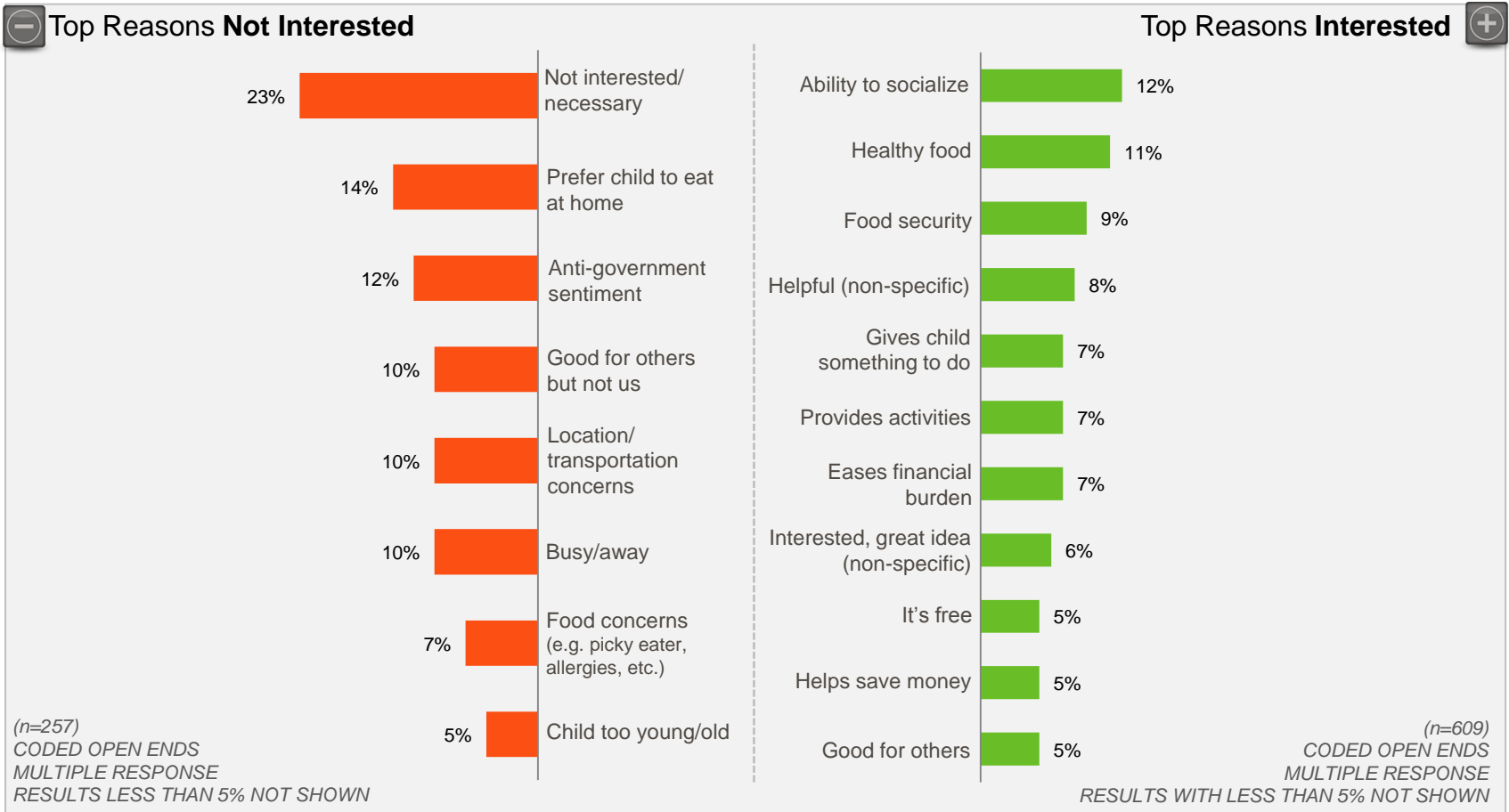
Family types that report significantly higher or lower interest against national average



- A deeper look into the data reveals differing levels of interest in Summer Meals.
- Past participants are most interested in the program, with more than 3 in 5 families saying they are *very interested*.
- Similarly, there are also families that are less likely to show interest, namely those who do not participate in food assistance programs, are food secure and live in rural areas.
 - Lack of rural interest appears to be related both to the higher likelihood of these families to say they are food secure (56% of rural families), as well as more location/transportation concerns (19%) and reporting that they are busy/don't have time (13%).

Open ended responses reveal positive reactions to social and extracurricular activities, healthy and free food

- Among those who report a lack of interest, unaided responses reveal a perception that they don't need it (23%) and/or prefer their child to eat at home (14%).



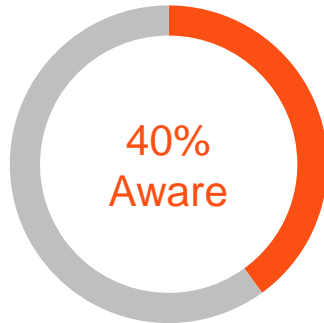


SUMMER MEALS AWARENESS

The majority of parents do not know that free summer meals are available; participation is low

- While awareness certainly appears to be part of the issue, it is not the whole story - there seems to be a disconnect between those that know of Summer Meals and those that have participated. In fact, only 1 in 4 (28%) who say they are aware of free meal sites also say they have participated.

Aware of locations for free summer meals



- As families participate in more food assistance programs, awareness increases.
- Urban families have higher levels of awareness (48%).

Received a free summer meal



- Participation rates are highest in urban areas (25%), among families living below the poverty line (23%), those who are food insecure (21%), and those who report a summer hardship (20%).
- The more food assistance programs used, the more likely to have participated in Summer Meals.

Those who are aware of free summer meals closely associate them with schools and lunch

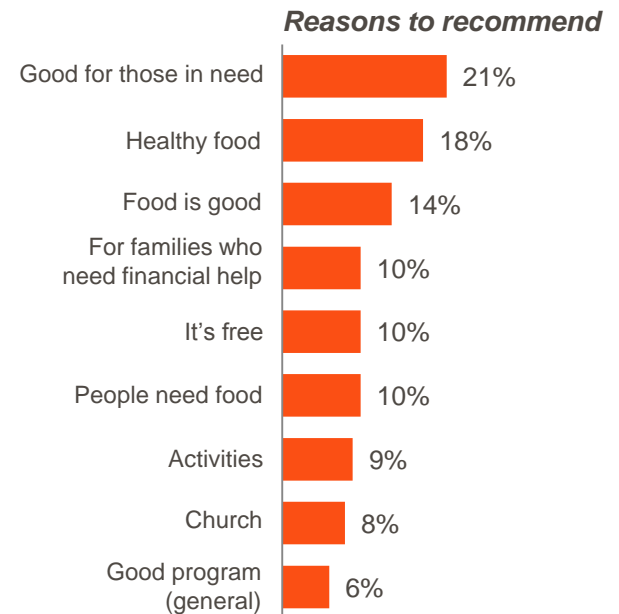
- 28 and 13 percent, respectively, mention schools and lunch unaided.
- There also seems to be a keen understanding that these programs are for children under 18 (mentioned by 11% unaided)



Overwhelmingly, past participants say they would recommend Summer Meals to others

- More than 9 in 10 families who have participated in a Summer Meals program would recommend it to others, citing its ability to help those in need and positive reactions to the food (“healthy” and “good”).

Recommend this free meals site to others
(n=153)



(n=142)
CODED OPEN ENDS
MULTIPLE RESPONSE
RESULTS LESS THAN 5% NOT SHOWN

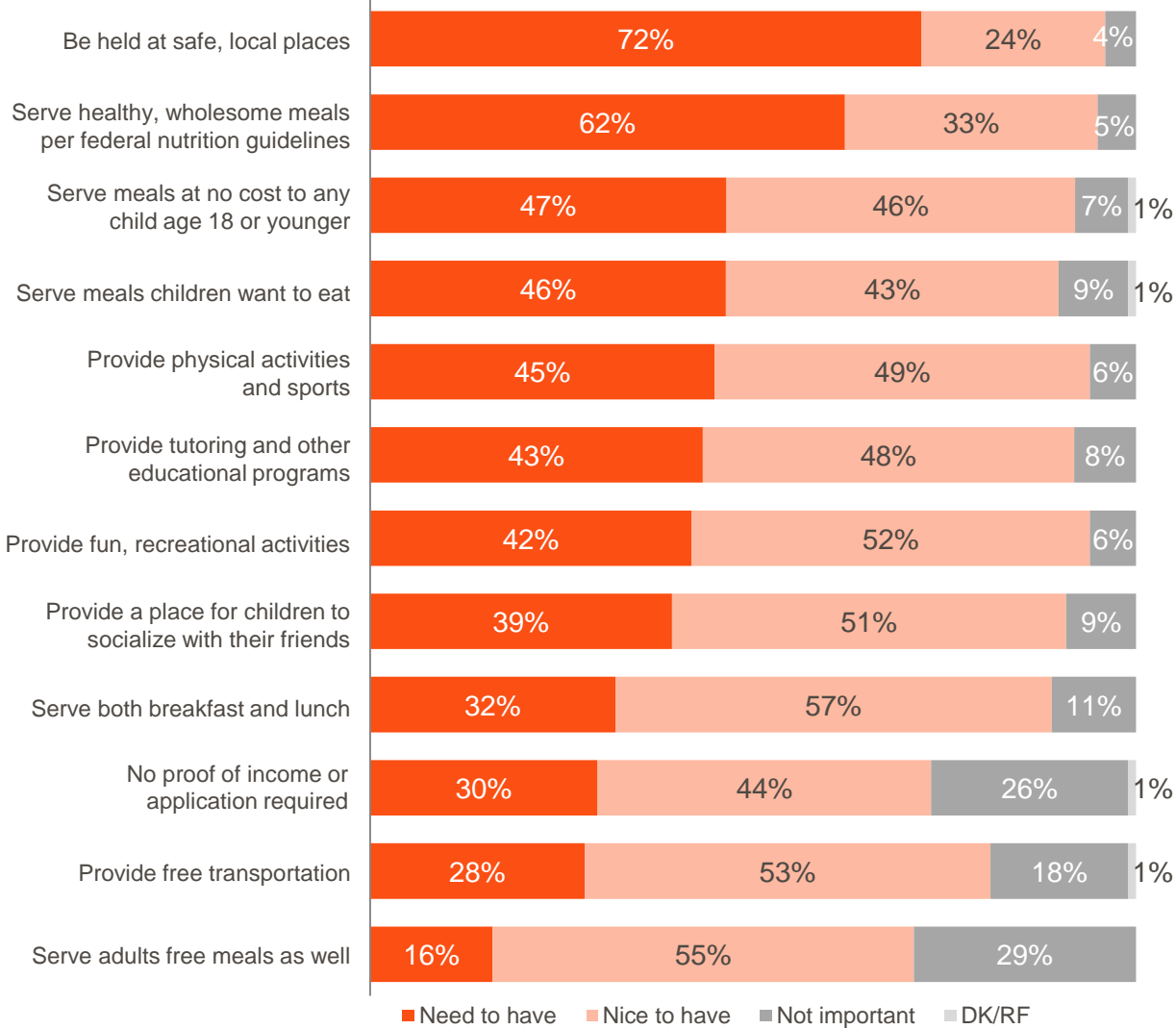
Q7b. Would you recommend this free meals site to others?
Q7c. Why do you say [INSERT ANSWER FROM Q7b]?
Q7d. Why do you say you are unsure?



SUMMER MEALS OFFERINGS

Safety and health are of utmost importance; free, tasty meals and extracurricular activities are strong incentives

Importance of services offered by Summer Meals

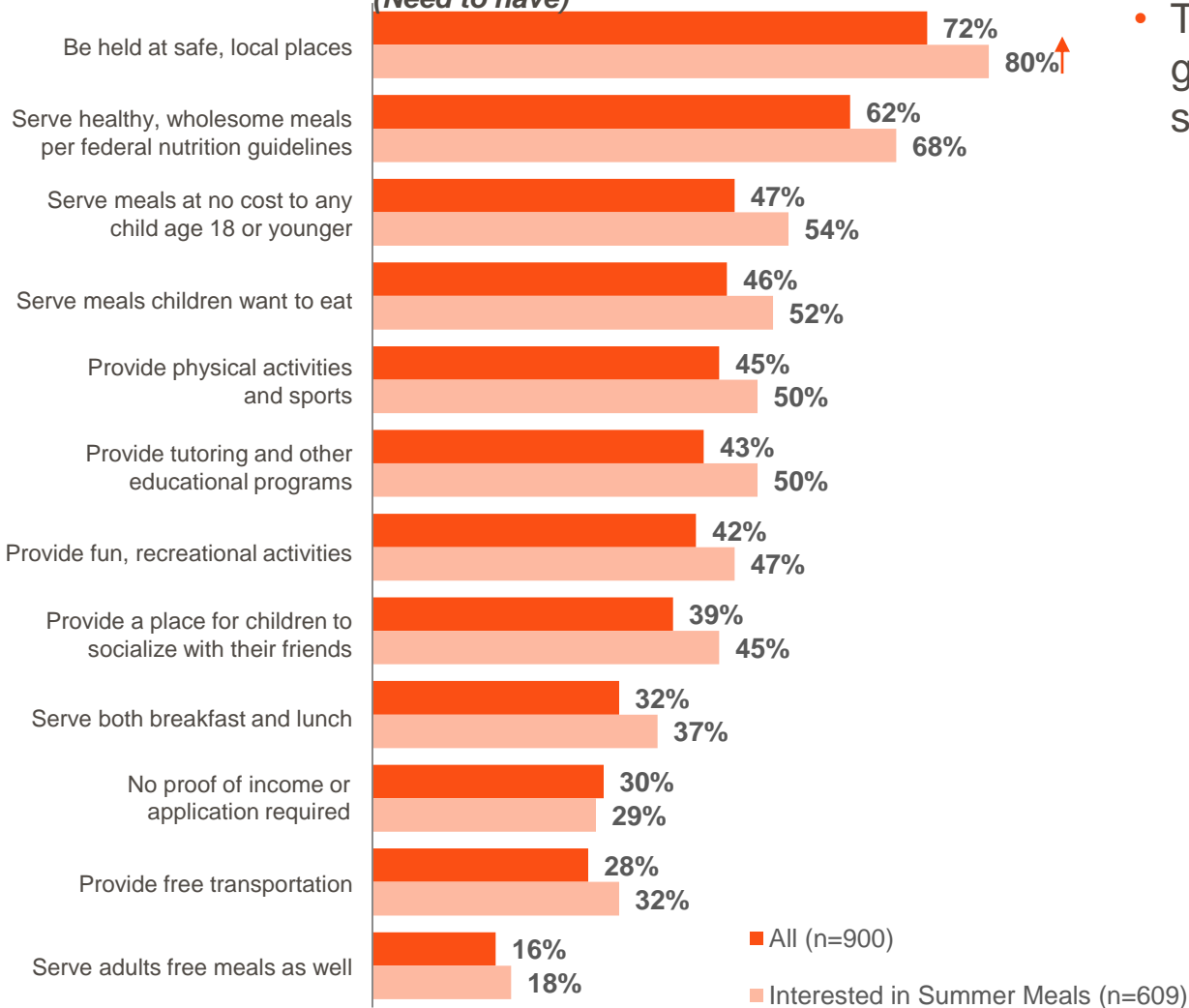


- To participate, parents say the programs must be held in safe, local places (72%) and serve healthy, wholesome meals (62%).
- Providing free meals (47%) and food that children want to eat (46%) is a must for close to half of families.
- Extracurricular incentives such as physical activities and sports (45%), tutoring (43%) and fun and recreation activities (42%) are also viewed as a must by at least 4 in 10 parents.
- Serving adults free meals (29%) and not requiring proof of income (26%) are most commonly seen as unimportant offerings.

Q11a Do you consider each of the following to be not important, something that would be nice to have offered by the program, or something the program would need to offer for you to consider having your child/children participate?

Some families place greater importance on offerings than others

**Importance of services offered by Summer Meals
(Need to have)**



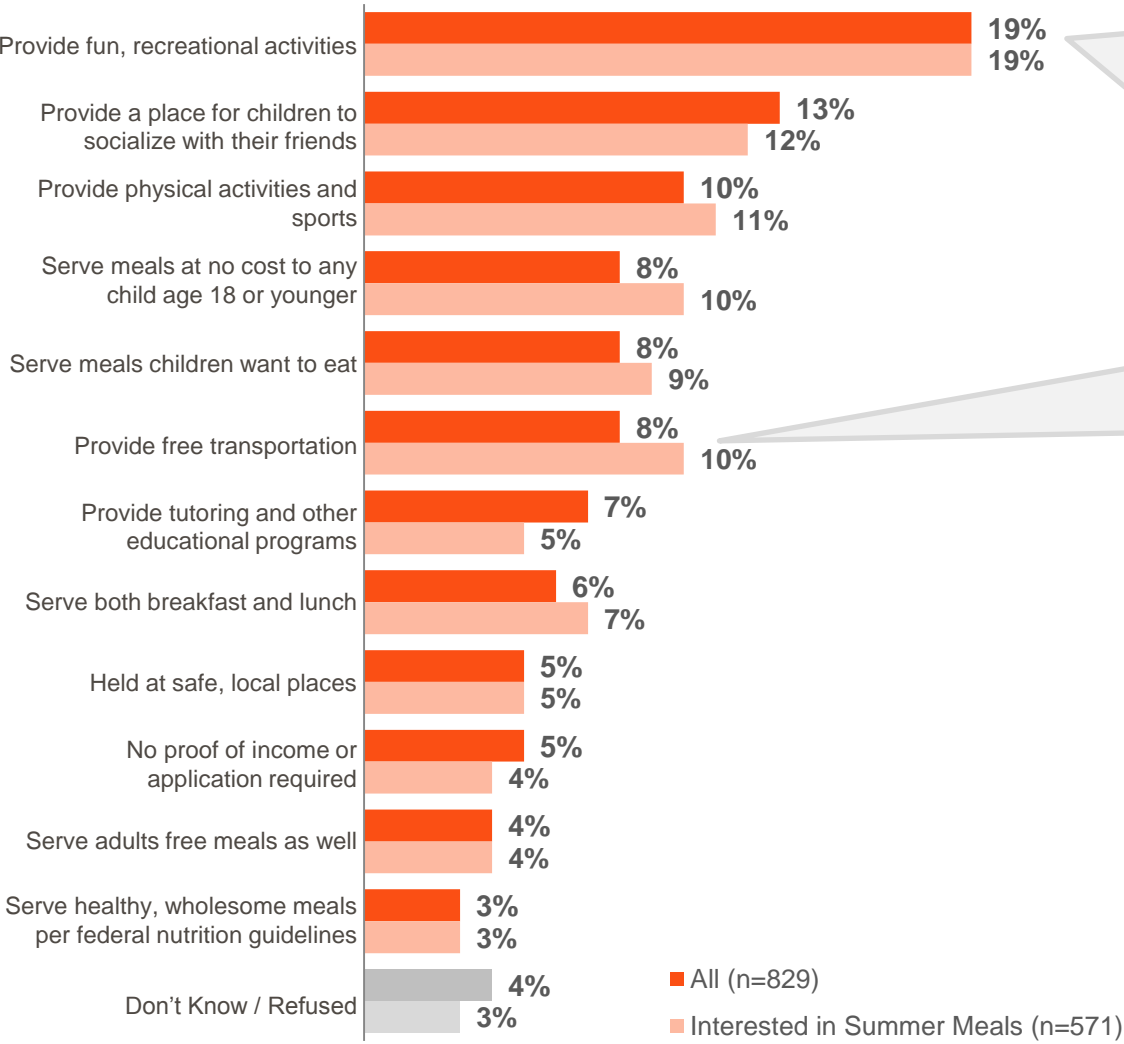
↑ Statistically significant difference

Q11a Do you consider each of the following to be not important, something that would be nice to have offered by the program, or something the program would need to offer for you to consider having your child/children participate?

- The following family types place greater importance on multiple summer meal program offerings:
 - Families living below poverty
 - Families with food insecurity
 - Families participating in one or more food assistance program(s)
 - Urban families
 - Families who lack transportation
 - Families who experience summer hardships

When thinking from their child's perspective, providing a place for fun activities, socializing are the biggest draws

Offering that is most likely to increase participation



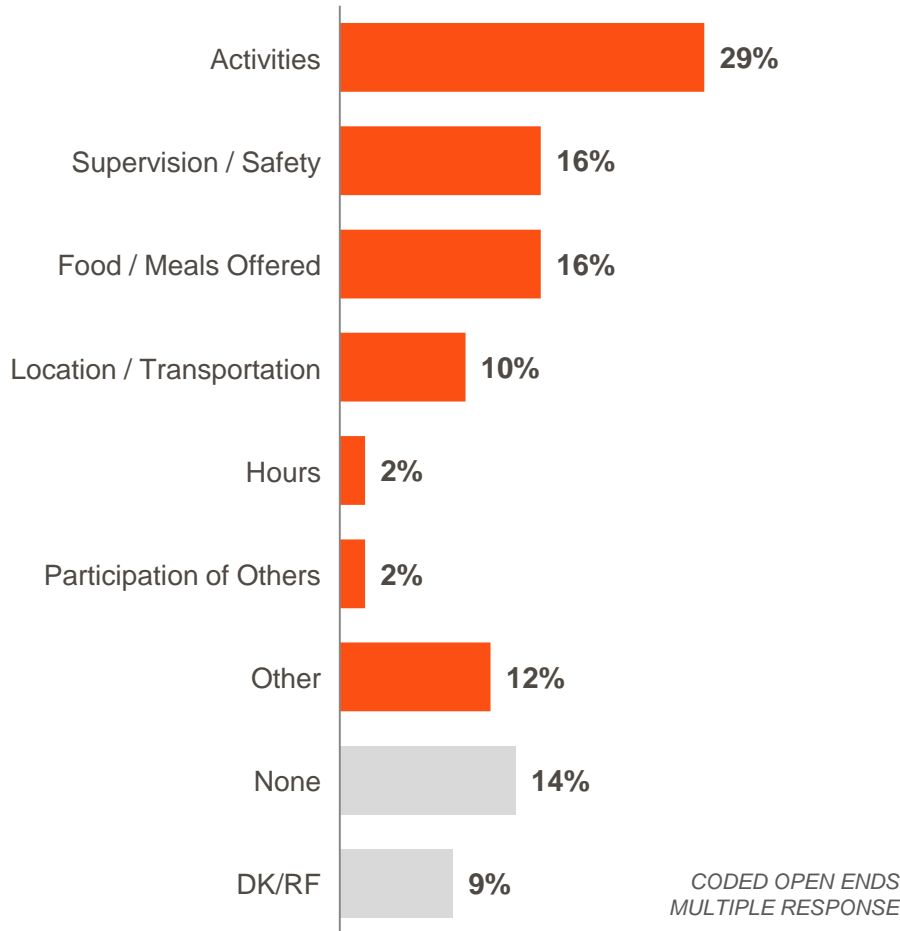
- Significantly more families with children between 2 and 8 years of age see fun, recreational activities as the best incentive (26%).

- Families that are aware of Summer Meals are more likely to report providing transportation as the best incentive (11%).

Q11b Of the offerings which you consider nice for the program to have, which do you see as most likely to get your child/children to participate?

When asked for other program needs and incentives, parents emphasize already mentioned offerings

What else would be important?



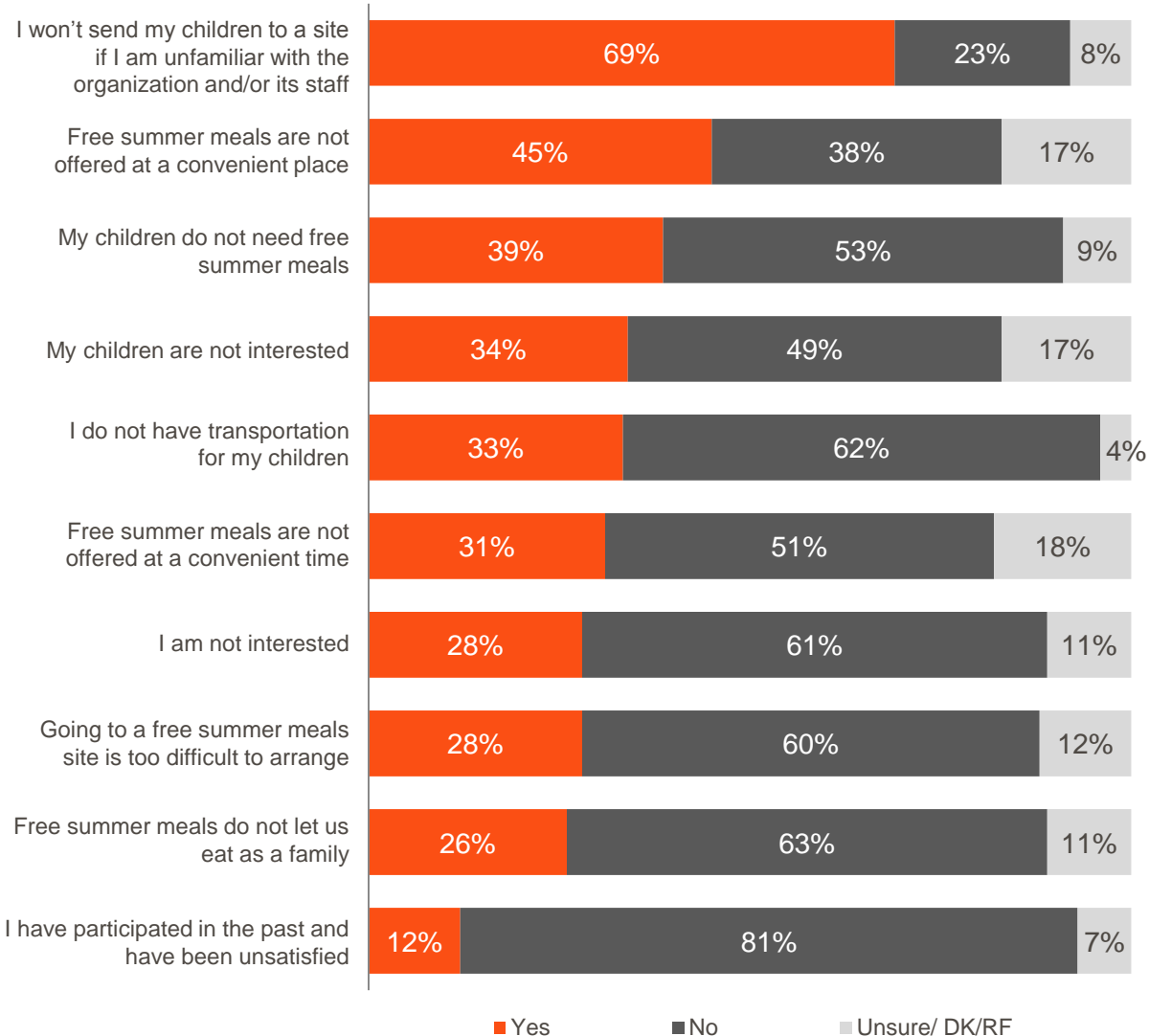
- Again, we see that activities, supervision and safety, healthy, tasty meals, and convenient locations with transportation are seen as important.



BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATE

Again, safety concerns are a significant barrier

Reasons preventing participation

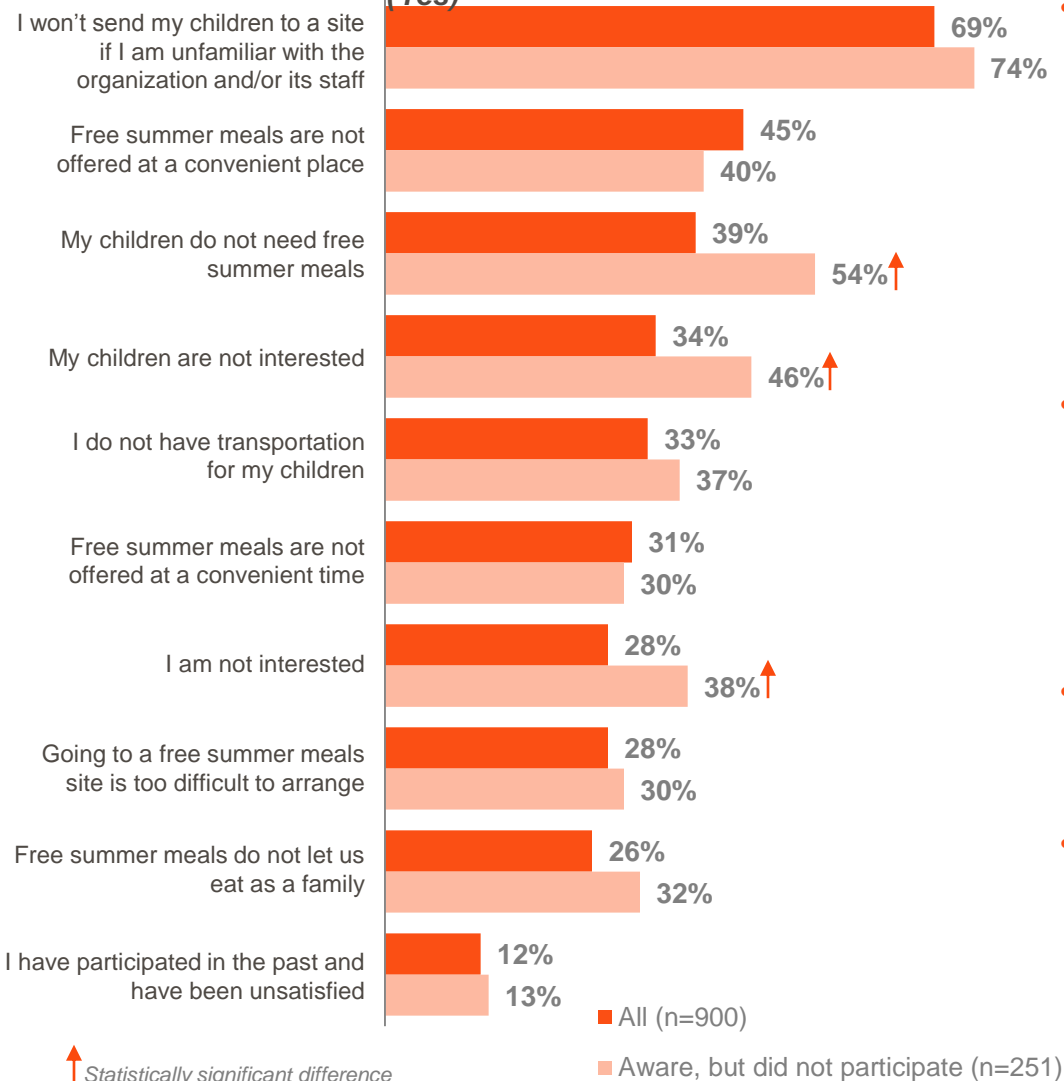


- 7 in 10 families agree that they need to be familiar with an organization and/or its staff before participating.
- A plurality also report inconvenient locations as a barrier to participation.
- At least 1 in 3 parents say they do not need free summer meals (39%), their children aren't interested (34%) or they do not have transportation (33%).
- Dissatisfaction does not appear to be a significant factor – a finding consistent with the high recommendation rate.

Q13 For each, do you see it as a reason that would prevent your child/children from participating?

In most cases, the greater the need the smaller the obstacle

Reasons preventing participation (Yes)

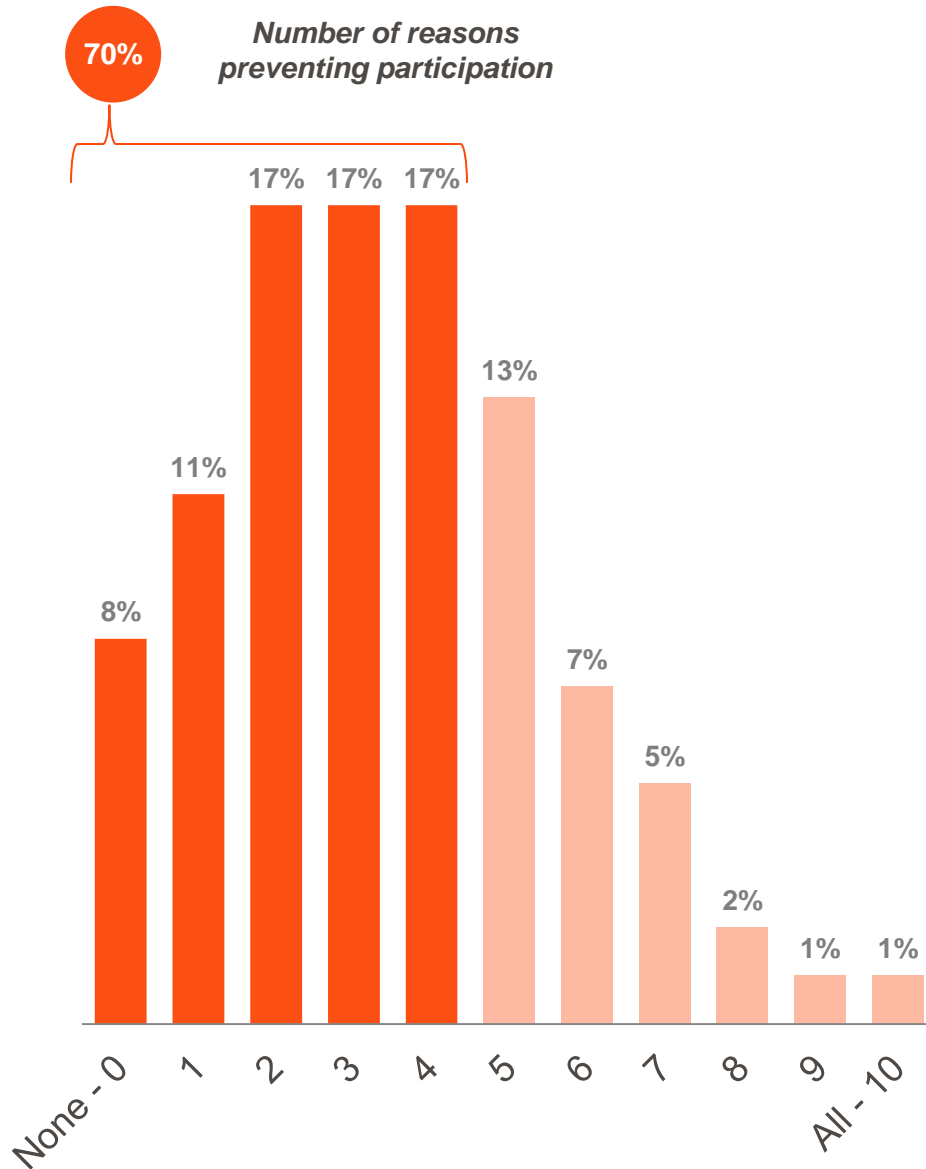


↑ Statistically significant difference

- Families who are food secure and/or do not currently rely on food assistance are more likely to agree with the assessed barriers.
 - The exception is location. Food insecure families are more likely to report transportation as a barrier (40%), which likely impacts their higher agreement that inconvenient sites prevent them from participating (53%).
- Interestingly, families who say they are unaware of Summer Meals are more likely to cite convenience of location as a barrier, implying that because they don't know about it, they assume there isn't one near them.
- Urban families are least likely to agree that they don't need Summer Meals (27%).
- Those who are aware of free meal sites, but have not participated are more likely to site a lack of interest and need.

Q13 For each, do you see it as a reason that would prevent your child/children from participating?

Most families cite fewer than five reasons that would keep them from participating

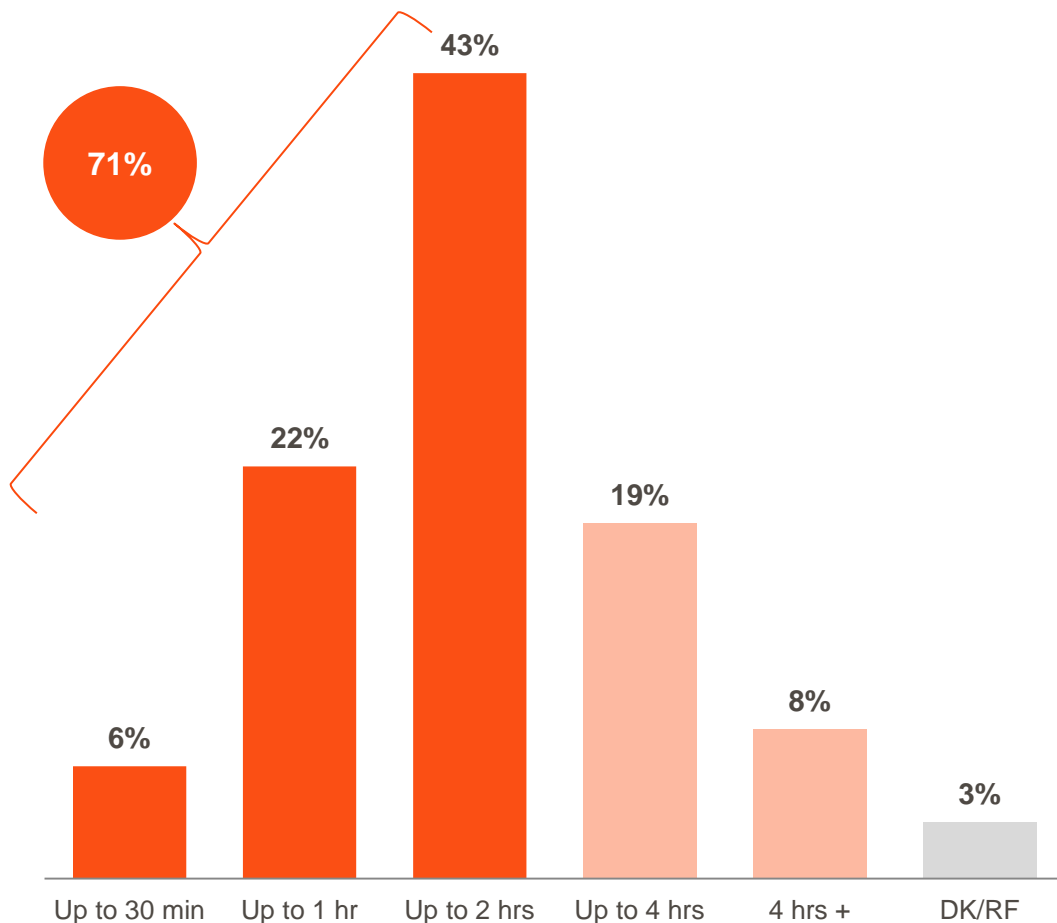


- There are correlations in effect between all of the assessed barriers.
- However, only two have a strong correlation—having summer meals in an inconvenient location and at an inconvenient time.

Q13 For each, do you see it as a reason that would prevent your child/children from participating?

To participate, the vast majority say the meal site should be open for up to two hours

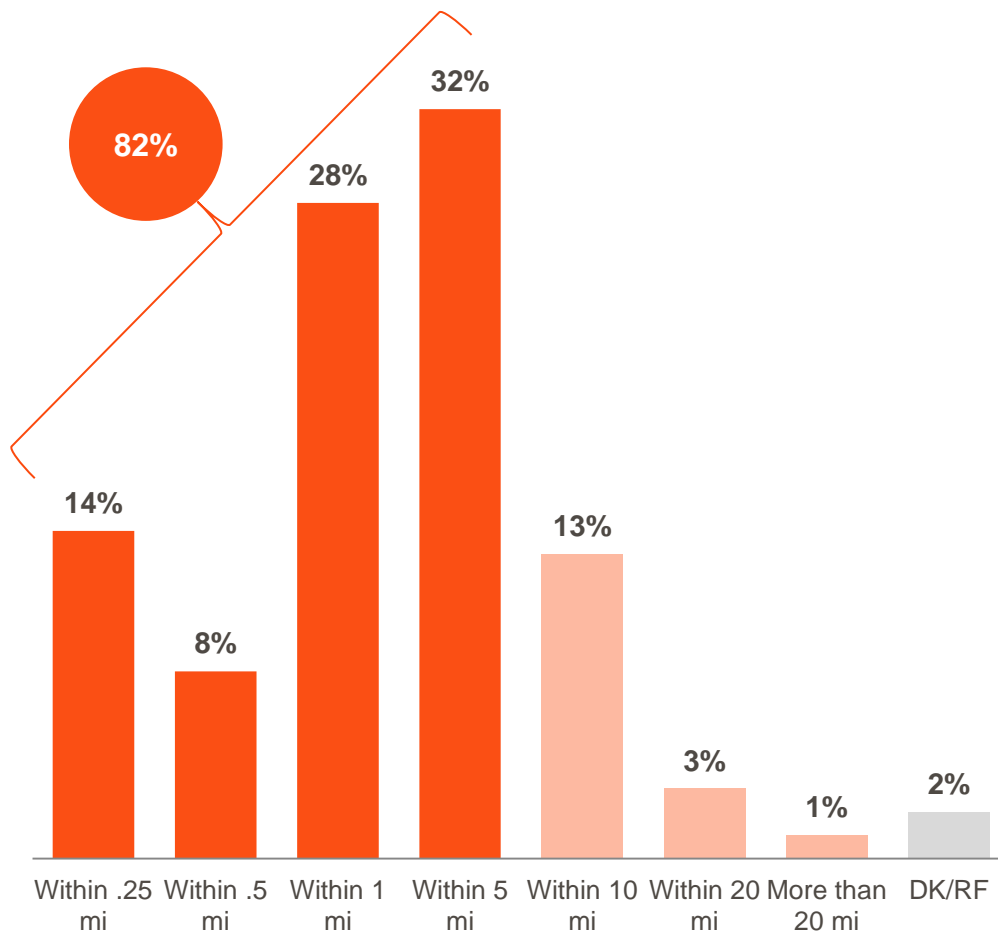
How long would the meal site need to be open in order for your child to participate?



- 7 in 10 families (71%) say being open for 30 min to 2 hours is sufficient.
- Staying open for an additional 2 hours captures another 1 in 5 families.
- Findings are similar for those who cite “inconvenient program times” and “being too difficult to arrange” as barriers.

Within five miles is a reasonable distance for most

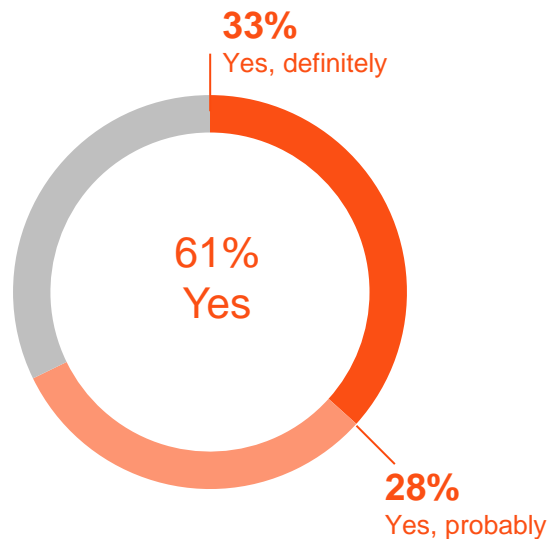
How close would the location need to be in order for your child to participate?



- 8 in 10 families (82%) need the meal site to be located within 5 miles.
- 1 in 3 urban families (33%) need to have the site within .5 mi of home (compared to 22% nationally).
- Those who cite lack of transportation and inconvenient locations as barriers share national sentiments.

1 in 3 parents are confident that a mobile meal truck would make their children more likely to participate

Will a mobile meal truck increase likelihood to participate?



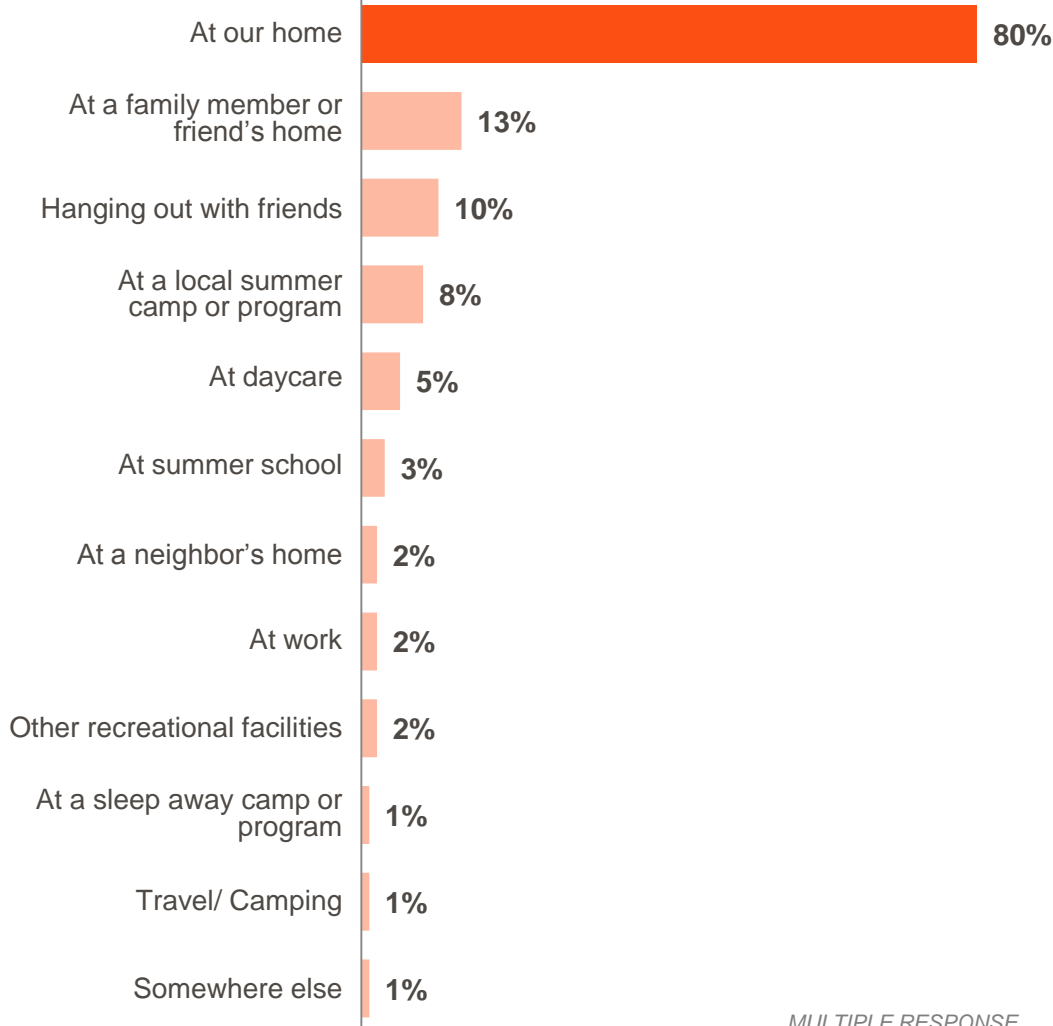
- A mobile food truck is particularly attractive to:
 - Food insecure families (45% say definitely)
 - Families who say transportation is a barrier (44% say definitely)
 - Families below poverty (42% say definitely)
 - Urban families (69% say yes)
- Those who cited barriers such as convenience of location, time and making arrangements have a similar level of heightened interest to national data.
- Mobile trucks may even improve participation among those who lack interest. 2 in 5 families (40%) who say they aren't initially interested believe a mobile food truck probably (26%) or definitely (13%) would make their child more likely to participate.



SUMMERTIME BEHAVIORS

By and large, low income children are passing their summer days at home

During the summer, my children spend most of their time...



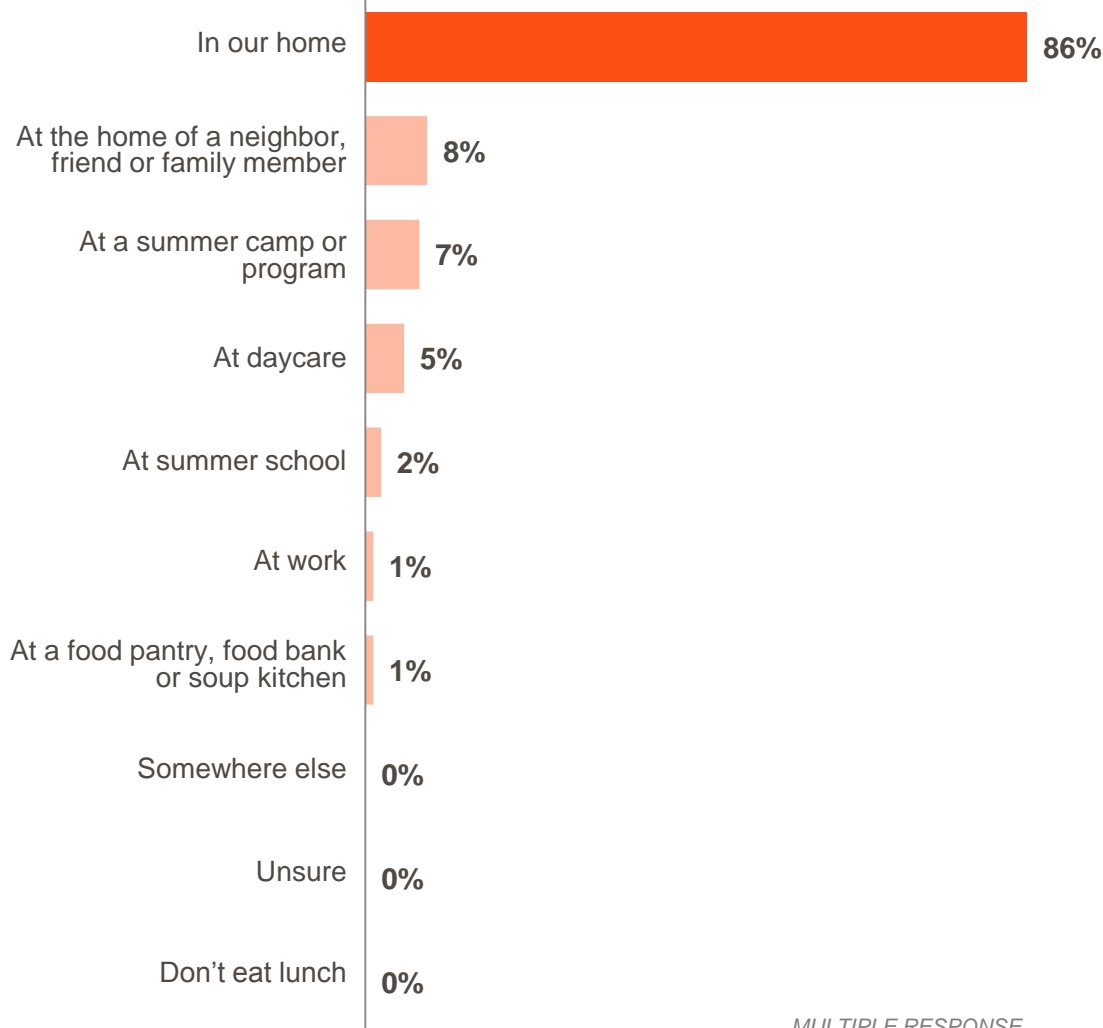
MULTIPLE RESPONSE

- Across all examined subgroups, at least 2 in 3 families say their children are home during the summer.
- Teenagers are more likely to spend their summers “hanging out with friends” (17%) or “at work” (5%) than those younger than 13.
- Single parents (21%), urban families (21%) and parents under 30 (21%) rely more on help from their family and friends.
- Children in urban and suburban areas are more likely to be at a local summer camp or program (10%).

Q1. During summer weekdays, when your children are not attending school, where does he/she spend most of his/her time?

And it's in their homes that most are eating lunch

During the summer, my children most often eat lunch...



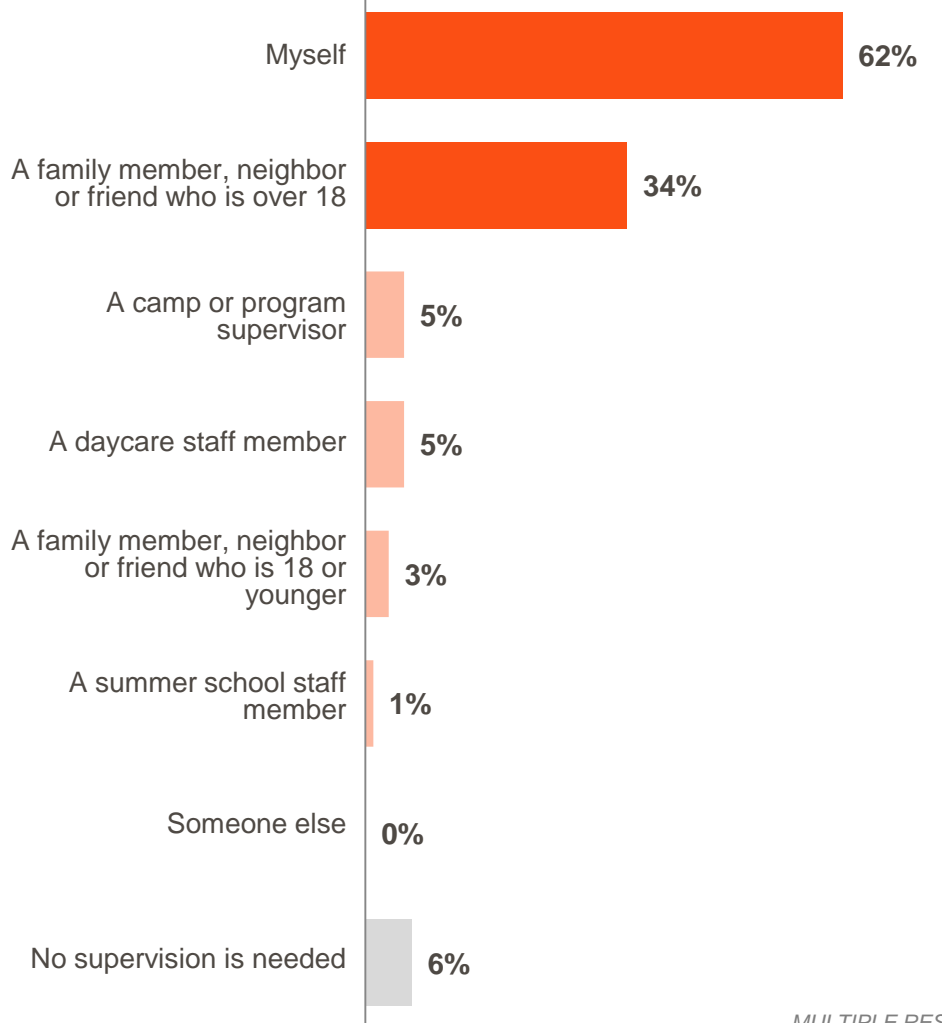
MULTIPLE RESPONSE

- Across all examined subgroups, at least 7 in 10 families say their children eat lunch at home.
- Households with 3+ children are most likely to have lunch at home (93%).
- Recipients of SNAP as well as free/reduced price meals report similar data to national numbers – 88 percent say their children eat summer lunches in their homes.

Q3. On weekdays during the school year, most children eat lunch at school. During the summer, where do your children most often eat lunch?

While at home, children are supervised by their parents or another trusted adult

During the summer, my children are most often looked after by...



MULTIPLE RESPONSE

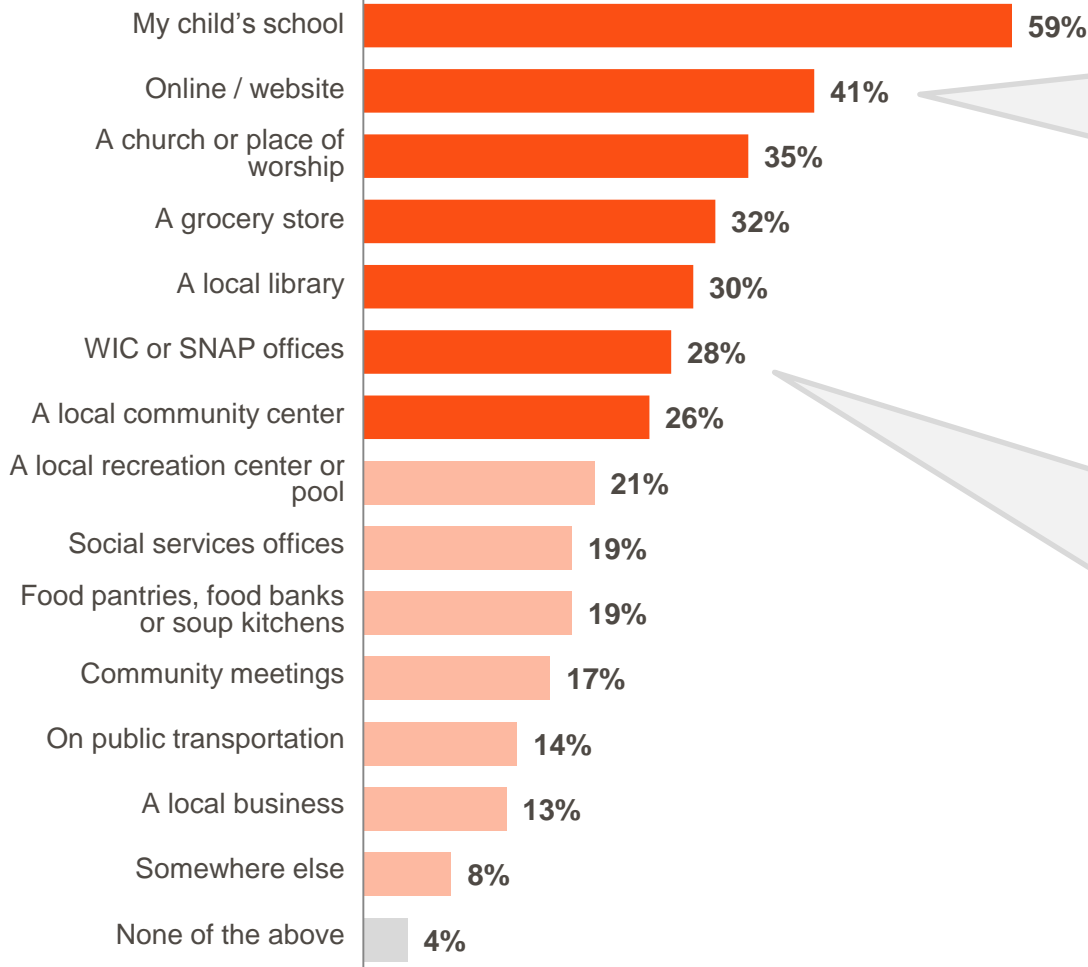
- Since children are at home, it makes sense that they would not be supervised by camps, daycare, school staff, etc.
- Instead, 2 in 3 parents say they look after their children themselves.
 - Parents that cite not needing Summer Meals as a barrier are more likely to supervise their children themselves (67%).
- And, 1 in 3 report child care support from a family member, neighbor or friend (over 18 years old).
 - Families that cite inconvenient times (41%) and locations (40%) as a barrier are more likely to rely on friends, family, etc. to look after their children in the summer.



INFORMATION SOURCES

Parents welcome a variety of information sources; their children's schools are preferred messengers

Where would you want to learn about Summer Meals?



- Urban (57%) and suburban (52%) families are more likely to rely on online/internet than those in small towns (29%) and rural areas (27%).

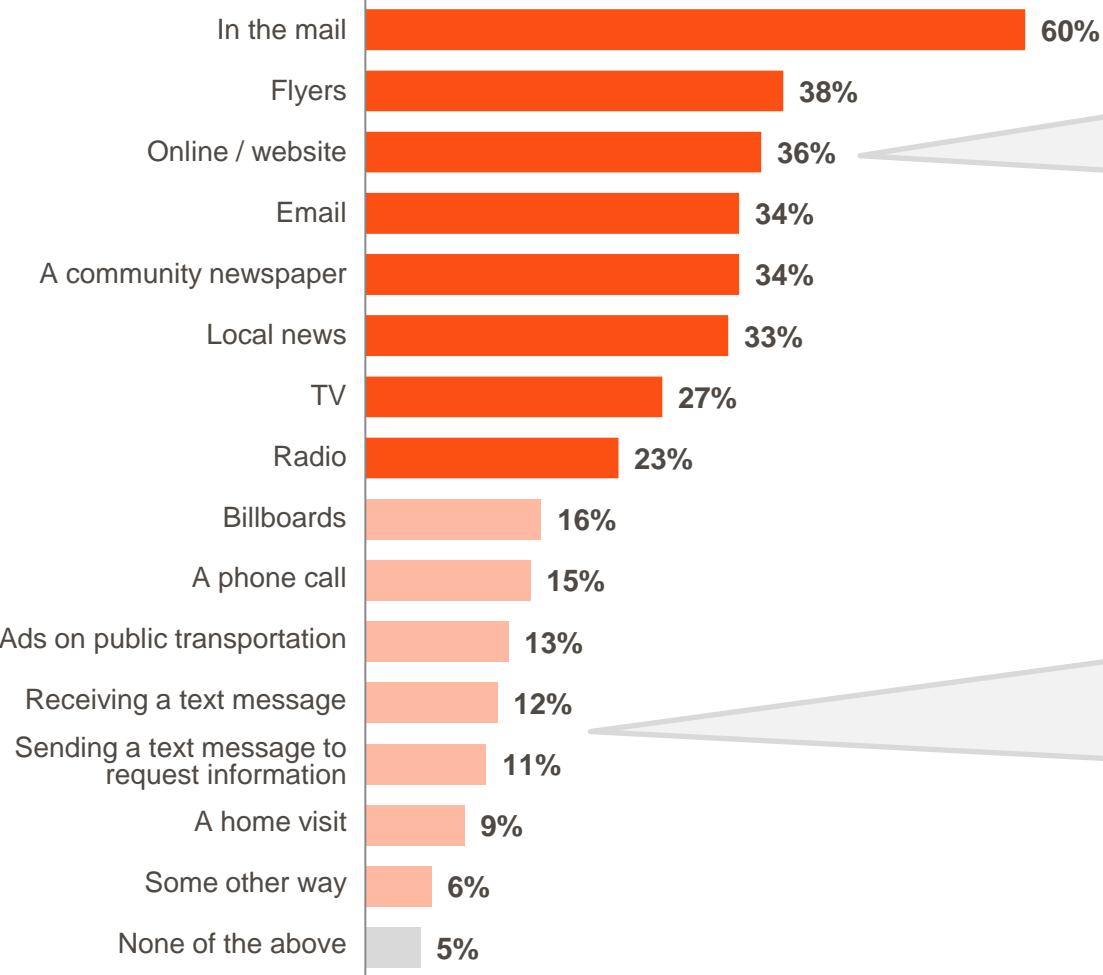
- WIC recipients (67%) and those with children under 4 (44%) appear to rely and trust their WIC office for this type of information; SNAP recipients too (37%) though not to the same extent.

MULTIPLE RESPONSE
(n=441)

Q17 Let's say that the free summer meals program wanted to get information about their program to you. Where would you want to learn about summer meals programs?

Similarly, parents are comfortable with a wide range of communication channels; mail is most preferred

How would you want to learn about Summer Meals?



- Parents under 50 are more receptive to online/website communication (43%) than those 50+ (20%).

- Sending and receiving text messages is acceptable for about 1 in 10.
 - Of all the assessed subgroups, past participants (21%) and African Americans (19%) seem most open to the idea of receiving a text.

MULTIPLE RESPONSE
(n=459)

Q18 Let's say that the free summer meals program wanted to get information about their program to you. How would you want to learn about summer meals programs?



APPENDIX

BALTIMORE FINDINGS

- **The city is quick to recognize Summer Meals' value and has stronger interest in the program.** 1 in 2 Baltimore families (50%) say they are very interested, significantly higher than national data (35%). Here, families are also less apt to say the program is not needed (28% compared to 39% nationally).
- **Awareness levels underperform against national data.** 3 in 10 families (30%) in Baltimore say they are aware of a free meals site in Baltimore. Nationally, awareness is 4 in 10 (40%). Only 8 percent recognize the Super Summer Program, though respondents are from the greater Baltimore metro area (not simply the areas that were targeted during canvassing, etc.) which may explain this very poor awareness level.
- **There are some differences in perception of what a program must and should offer.** In Baltimore, parents are more likely to see fun, recreational activities (60%), tutoring (55%), serving breakfast (51%) and providing free transportation (44%) as a “must have.” They are also more likely to say serving adults is the best incentive (11%).
- **Location is a bigger issue here.** At least 1 in 2 families cite an inconvenient location (60%) and lack of transportation (49%) as barriers (compared to 45% and 33%, nationally). Those who are aware of summer meal sites but did not participate last summer cite this as the biggest barrier.
- **They also want longer programs.** Families in Baltimore tend to want programs to last closer to 4 hours and even 16 percent say it should be more than 4.
- **Lastly, there are some differences in summertime behavior.** In Baltimore, parents report a higher likelihood for kids to be at a local summer camp or program (16% to 8% nationally). They are also more likely to cope with summer hardships by getting support from family members, friends and neighbors (25% to 14%)

COLORADO FINDINGS

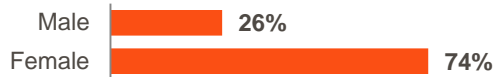
- **In Colorado, awareness is higher, but participation remains on par.** In CO, 1 in 2 (54%) say they know of a location in their community where children can go for free meals in the summer.
- **Here, more parents believe their children aren't interested** in a Summer Meals program (45% compared to 34% nationally), which might be explained by a slight skew of older children.
- **They are also more likely to see many offerings as a “nice to have” rather than a “must.”** This includes recreational activities (29% say it's a must), tutoring (20%), a place to socialize (27%), serving breakfast (23%), providing free transportation (19%) and serving adults free meals (9%).
- **Those interviewed in CO report that they are more likely to visit food pantries** (27% compared to 13% nationally). Using these locations to help build awareness and interest may be promising in Colorado.

ARKANSAS FINDINGS

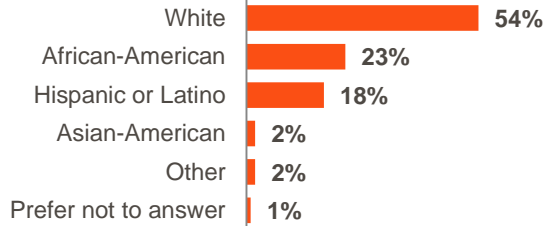
- Overall, Arkansas is the area of focus which appears to most closely mirror national attitudes and perceptions. Awareness levels, behaviors and perceived barriers are very similar. Still, some items of note:
 - All 19 past Summer Meals participants would recommend it to others.
 - Directionally, both initial (70%) and informed (75%) interest is higher in Arkansas (61% and 68% nationally).
 - Mobile meals are thought to have an even bigger impact here. 3 in 4 families (73%) believe it would increase likelihood to participate.

DEMOGRAPHICS (NATIONAL)

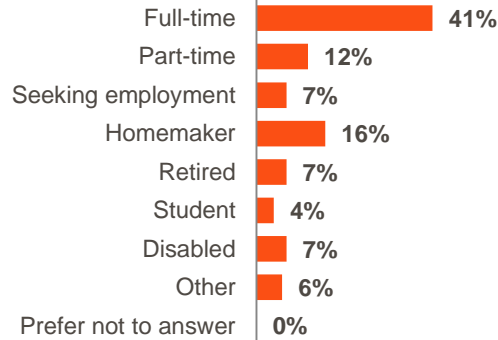
GENDER



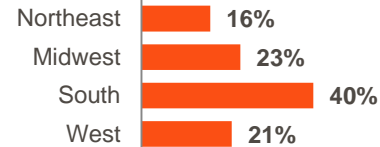
ETHNICITY



EMPLOYMENT



REGION



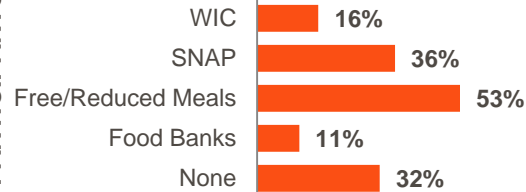
COMMUNITY TYPE



POVERTY INCOME RATIO



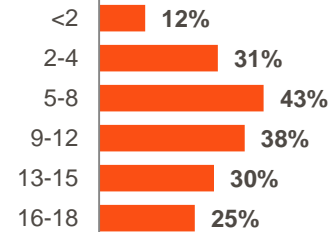
FOOD ASSISTANCE PARTICIPANTS



FOOD SECURITY



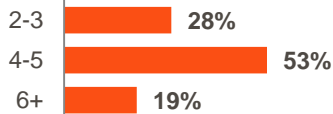
CHILD'S AGE



OF KIDS



IN HH



%	WIC	SNAP	FRPM	NONE
Secure	43	38	40	67
Low	34	30	31	21
Very Low	23	32	28	13