



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

ROD R. BLAGOJEVICH - GOVERNOR

# NEWS

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## **Gov. Blagojevich and State Board of Education encourage participation in summer food programs**

*Programs fill nutritional gap for children; Summer Food Service Program Week highlights awareness and need throughout the state and the nation*

SPRINGFIELD – Governor Rod R. Blagojevich and the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) are encouraging all students to take advantage of free, nutritious meals and snacks available this summer at more than 1,600 summer food service program sites, statewide. This announcement is being made during Summer Food Service Program Week, which runs through Sunday, June 8<sup>th</sup>.

“Here in Illinois, we are working together to make sure that no children go hungry this summer while schools are closed,” said Gov. Blagojevich. “This week gives us a great opportunity to get the word out to our hard-working families, who can benefit from our summer food programs.”

Summer Food Service Program Week is designed to both promote and raise awareness of summer food programs nationwide and to increase the numbers of children receiving summer meals and snacks. Summer food programs work by providing free meals and snacks to low-income children through age 18 when school is not in session. People over age 18 who are enrolled in school programs for persons with disabilities may also participate. Summer food programs typically operate in June, July and August, but can start as early as May and can go into September.

“Summer food programs fill an important role for both parents and children. As educators, we know that nutrition is a critical prerequisite to learning,” said State Superintendent of Education Christopher A. Koch. “However, learning does not stop when the school year ends, and neither does the need for a nutritious meal.”

Last summer, more than 100,000 low-income Illinois children ate free meals through both summer food programs. However, that’s only 15.3 percent of the roughly 653,000 children who ate free or reduced-priced meals during the 2006-2007 school year. Nationally, the U.S. Department of Agriculture reports that more than 17 million children received free or reduced-price school meals during the 2007 school year, but only 3.3 million children received summer meals.

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ISBE administers two federally funded summer food programs – the USDA’s ‘Simplified Summer Food Service Program for Children’ and the federal National School Lunch Program’s ‘Seamless Summer Option.’ Both programs are designed to bridge the summer nutrition gap by offering free nutritious breakfasts, lunches or snacks to children age 18 and younger.

Local governments, school districts and non-profits can all sponsor summer food sites, which may include schools, parks, recreation centers, housing projects, migrant centers, churches, summer camps, and others. Most summer food program sites are open to all children in the community. These “open sites” are also eligible for federal funds, if the site is located in an area in which at least 50 percent of the children are from households that would be eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. All children 18 years of age or younger who come to an approved open site may receive meals.

In addition to this, more students under the age of 18 in low-income areas will have greater access to summer food programs this summer, thanks to the new summer food mandate. Under Public Act 95-0155, signed by Gov. Blagojevich in August 2007, all schools in which 50 percent or more of the student population is eligible for free or reduced-price meals and have a summer program, must operate a summer breakfast and/or lunch program that is open to the community.

Because of the new mandate, school-based summer feeding sites open to the community have already significantly increased in 2008. Most of the increases have occurred outside the city of Chicago. In Chicago alone, more than 1,000 sites are expected to be open this summer, with nearly half of them open to the community. Many more sites are expected to open across the state as summer continues, with additional site applications being approved on a daily basis.

To locate an open site summer food program in Chicago, contact the Illinois Hunger Coalition’s Hunger Hotline at 1-800-359-2163 between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. The hotline is available in both English and Spanish.

An interactive map of the state’s summer food program sites can be found online at: <http://webprod1.isbe.net/NutSvc/>.