

Perceived Benefits and Barriers to Free Summer Meal Participation Among Parents in New York City

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To examine perceived benefits and barriers of summer meal participation among lower-income families who participate in school lunch programs during the year.

Design: Semistructured phone interviews were conducted with parents of elementary-aged children, including both participants and nonparticipants in summer meals.

Setting: Queens, Bronx, and Brooklyn, NY.

Participants: Participants were lower-income, racially/ethnically diverse parents of elementary-aged children. Of 20 participants, 17 were minorities (85%), 16 were women (80%), and 11 had an annual household income < \$30,000 (55%).

Phenomenon of Interest: Interviews explored parents' experiences with summer meals programs, the impact on food provisioning in the summer, and benefits and barriers.

Analysis: Interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed thematically.

Results: Five themes emerged, including 3 benefits of summer meals: reducing stress for parents, fostering social support and connection, and the opportunity to develop healthier eating habits; and 2 barriers to participation: lack of cultural inclusivity and lack of widespread knowledge about summer meals.

Conclusions and Implications: The main purpose of summer meals is to reduce food insecurity, but the programs also provide social and psychological benefits valued by lower-income families in New York, although participation barriers persist.

Key Words: child, food assistance, nutrition policy, qualitative research (*J Nutr Educ Behav.* 2019; 51:976–984.)

Accepted May 12, 2019. Published online June 8, 2019.

INTRODUCTION

Improving children's access to free meals is a growing priority across the US, especially in New York City, where universal free lunch was implemented in public schools in 2017. Yet, summer poses an especially vulnerable period for many parents with children who eat

subsidized school meals. Nationwide, 54% of participating families find it harder to make ends meet during the summer and 43% report sometimes going without sufficient food.¹ The US Department of Agriculture's (USDA) *Summer Food Service Program* and *Seamless Summer Option* program (here called summer meals) provide free meals to children at local sites

nationwide to address this gap. In states with higher rates of summer meal participation, fewer families with school-age children report summer food insecurity.² However, across all states, participation in summer meals remains low. In 2017, only 15% of US children who participated in the *National School Lunch Program* participated in summer meals.³ Despite having the third highest summer meal participation rate in the nation, in New York state, only about 30 children participated in summer meals for every 100 *National School Lunch Program* participants.³

The academic literature is limited in perceived benefits of and barriers to summer nutrition programs with 1 notable exception, which specifically focused on library-based programs.⁴ However, nonprofit and government organizations explored these topics.^{5–8} Known benefits in nationwide samples include the provision of free healthy food, enrichment activities, and a safe

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Conflict of Interest Disclosure: The authors have not stated any conflicts of interest.

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2019.05.592>

environment for children to socialize.⁴⁻⁶ Barriers to participation include a lack of awareness, geographical or temporal inconvenience, and program rules that prevent parents from accessing meals.^{5,7,9} Whereas evidence suggested that low-income families in New York City have a favorable perspective of summer meals,⁵ a rigorous assessment of the perspectives of parents of eligible children, considering both benefits and barriers to participation, does not exist. Understanding the perspectives of parents regarding decisions to participate in summer meals is necessary to improve program delivery and reduce food insecurity in the summer. To that end, this qualitative study examined the perceived benefits and barriers to summer meal participation among a diverse sample of lower-income parents in New York City.

METHODS

Participants and Recruitment

Participants included parents and guardians of children attending 6 New

York City elementary schools in high-poverty areas who had participated in a survey led by author N.L.W.W. in collaboration with Hunger Free America on summer meal participation.¹⁰ After the survey, the researchers invited participants indicating interest in a follow-up telephone interview to provide contact information. Criteria for inclusion were that participants spoke English and had at least 1 child who participated in the free school lunch program. Initial sampling by A.K. was purposively based on participation in summer meals to balance the perspectives of both participants and nonparticipants,¹¹ but to meet recruitment goals, the author ultimately contacted all parents who provided information. A researcher (A.K.) contacted parents by e-mail, phone, and text message; participants received a \$15 or \$20 gift card as compensation (compensation increased toward the end of recruitment to encourage participation).

Data Collection

To explore factors associated with parents' decisions to participate in

summer meals programs and their beliefs regarding related benefits and barriers, qualitative researchers with public health expertise (A.K. and K.L.)^{12,13} developed the semistructured interview guide (Table 1) after reviewing data collection tools from previous summer meals studies.⁷ Open-ended questions encouraged parents to compare how their own experiences with meal provision and their children's experiences eating lunch were different during the school year, during the summer when children were at home, and during a summer meals program (if applicable), to explore perceived benefits of summer meals for participating families and challenges experienced by nonparticipating families. Other questions examined awareness of and satisfaction with the programs and additional barriers to participation. Although the same domains were explored, the interview guide had some questions tailored to participants or nonparticipants (Table 1). The interview guide was pretested (n=3) and subsequently revised to improve clarity.

Table 1. Semistructured Interview Guide About Summer Meal Participation in New York City

Questions for All Interviewees

Background on summer lunch:

- Thinking back on this past summer, please describe what lunchtime was like for each of your children.
- How satisfied are you with your children's lunch arrangements during the summer? Why?
- How do you think participation in a summer meals program might (or does) influence how much food your children can eat in the summer? How healthily they eat?

Summer Meal Participants Only

Background on meal programs:

- Can you tell me more about your experience with summer meals programs?
- What do you think about the food provided at the summer meals program? How do your children feel about the meals?
- [If child attends a camp program] How important is it to you that the program provides free lunches? Would you sign up your child to attend the program if lunch was not provided?

Impact of attending summer meals:

- How does having your children eat at a summer meals program affect your experience providing food during the summer?
- [If it is more difficult to provide food when meals programs are not available] How do you deal with these difficulties?
- When your children were not at a summer meals program, what did you do differently, if anything, to make sure your children had enough food to eat? To make sure your children ate healthily?

Summer Meal Nonparticipants Only

Background on meal programs:

- Do you know of places in your community that provide free meals for children in the summer, such as parks, pools, or libraries? If so, what do you know about these programs?
- If you are interested in a summer meals program, what factors prevent you from enrolling your children?

School year to summer transition:

- In terms of food and meals, how was the transition from the school year to the summer for your family this past June?
- During the summer, how does not having your children in the school lunch program affect your children's food situation?
- How does your experience of providing food change during the summer?
- [If it is more difficult to provide food in the summer] How do you deal with these difficulties?
- This past summer, what did you do differently compared with what you do during the school year, if anything, to make sure your children had enough food to eat? To make sure your children ate healthily?

After informing participants about study goals and obtaining verbal informed consent, A.K. conducted interviews by phone from December, 2017 to February, 2018. The interviewer had no prior relationship with participants. Of 20 interviews, 19 were audio-taped with consent and transcribed verbatim; mean interview time was 30 minutes (SD, 9 minutes). One participant did not consent to audiotaping; the researcher took detailed notes on the interview. A.K. was trained in qualitative interviewing, transcription, coding, and analysis in an academic research laboratory (K.L.) and had previous experience conducting semistructured interviews via telephone.^{12,13} After the first several interviews, she listened to 2 recordings and refined the interview guide, incorporating additional probes into the interview questions. Sampling continued until thematic saturation and sufficient variation were achieved and confirmed through deliberation among the researchers.¹¹ When saturation was reached, the previous 3–4 interviews had confirmed emerging themes without offering additional perspectives and a balance of summer meals participants and nonparticipants had been achieved. Study reporting reflects Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research.¹⁴ This study was deemed exempt by the Tufts University Institutional Review Board.

Data Analysis

Researchers used deductive and inductive approaches to conduct a thematic analysis.¹¹ The preliminary codebook was developed by A.K. and was deductively based on the questioning structure of the interview guide and used it to code 2 transcripts initially (20% subsample), noting emergent codes. As data collection continued, A.K. and K.L. met regularly to review a sample of transcripts, discuss topics that arose inductively in the interviews, revise the codebook iteratively to include emergent codes, and finalize the codebook. After data collection ended, A.K. reviewed all transcripts and applied the codebook to the transcripts using NVivo software (version 11, QSR International, Melbourne, Australia; 2015), using attribute coding to capture demographic data for each

participant and pattern and focused coding to facilitate theme development.¹⁵

Coded data was reviewed by A.K. together as well as separately for participants and nonparticipants in summer meals and compared them along demographic strata such as income, education level, and race. Because there was a single coder, interrater reliability was not assessed; rather, the research team confirmed analysis by meeting repeatedly to deliberate and review findings, organize codes into themes, and refine themes until consensus was reached.¹⁶

RESULTS

Twenty semistructured telephone interviews were conducted with parents and guardians in Brooklyn, Queens, and Bronx, NY; 11 of these families participated in a summer meals program whereas 9 did not. Sixteen participants were women (80%) and 11 had an annual household income < \$30,000 (55%). Participants were racially and ethnically diverse: 7 were Hispanic or Latino (35%), 6 were black or African American (30%), and 4 were Asian (20%). Table 2 lists participant characteristics. Although parents were required to have at least 1 child who ate free school lunches to participate in the study, 4 parents revealed during the interviews that their children did not consistently do so. After discussion among the research team, their transcripts were included in the analysis because these parents offered valuable insight into barriers to accessing meal programs in general.

Summer meal participants reported that their children ate free meals at camps, schools, libraries, parks, and pools. Among those who were familiar with the programs, including both participants and nonparticipants, satisfaction with meals varied. Whereas some parents were satisfied with meal quality and variety, especially the inclusion of healthy foods such as fruit and milk, others thought that meal quality needed improvement and some stated that meals were unappealing to their children. Some parents were satisfied with the amount of food served, whereas others stated that their children ate more when at home and

wished that they could take multiple servings at meal programs.

Themes and Subthemes

Five themes emerged. Three related to the perceived benefits of summer meals: reducing stress for parents, fostering social support and connection, and the opportunity to develop healthier eating habits. The Figure demonstrates that the benefits were of varying efficacy: they were not just nutritional but also social and psychological, supporting not just the child but also the family and the greater community. In addition, 2 themes emerged regarding perceived barriers: a lack of cultural inclusivity and a lack of widespread knowledge about summer meals. Themes transcended distinctions based on race/ethnicity, education level, and employment status, although the sample was diverse in these regards.

Reducing Stress for Parents

Reducing psychological stress. Many parents explained that summer meals relieved psychological stress by assuring them that their children would always eat during mealtimes. One participant stated that

Knowing that they will get that meal in my absence is kind of soothing . . . [When I] pack a meal, maybe they'll share it, or maybe they'll take it, or maybe someone else will take it; everyone gets a meal, and it makes it a lot easier on my spirit, because they will be fed, regardless of if I'm there or not.
(male participant)

Another participant appreciated that meals were available for her son even when she was preoccupied:

If I'm busy doing something, I don't have to worry . . . knowing that he's going to have a good lunch that's going to fill him up and everything, definitely just eases my mind a lot.
(female participant)

A nonparticipant who had participated in summer meals before moving to New York focused on the danger of having children prepare food on their own:

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of New York City Parents, Including Both Participants and Nonparticipants in Free Summer Meals Programs (n = 20)

Characteristic	Interview Participants, % (n)
Participation status	
Participant	55 (11)
Nonparticipant	45 (9)
Gender	
Female	80 (16)
Male	20 (4)
Employed Adults in Household, n	
0	10 (2)
1	60 (12)
2	25 (5)
Employment status among employed adults	
Part-time (0–34 h)	25 (5)
Full-time (35–80 h)	65 (13)
Retired	5 (1)
Other	5 (1)
Race/ethnicity	
White/Caucasian	10 (2)
Black or African American	30 (6)
Hispanic or Latino	35 (7)
Asian	20 (4)
Chose not to answer	5 (1)
Annual household income (US dollars)	
\$0 to \$9,999	10 (2)
\$10,000 to \$19,999	25 (5)
\$20,000 to \$29,999	20 (4)
\$30,000 to \$39,999	10 (2)
\$40,000 to \$49,999	5 (1)
\$50,000 to \$59,999	10 (2)
≥ \$60,000	10 (2)
Chose not to answer	5 (1)
Education level	
Less than high school	5 (1)
High school graduate	15 (3)
Some college	25 (5)
College graduate	30 (6)
Graduate degree	25 (5)

I knew that they would eat at the summer program, and I didn't have to worry about my child being burned at home trying to prepare food for them to eat in the summer, and it was just easier (female nonparticipant)

Parents primarily spoke about the cognitive stress of preparing daily food or ensuring that children were eating, rather than the stress associated with having enough food in the household at a given time.

Reducing financial stress. Parents also spoke about the increased financial

stress of feeding children in the summer. Eight parents, 7 of whom had annual household incomes of < \$30,000, described difficulty regarding providing food in the summer. One nonparticipant said that the previous summer, “I did have to waste more money to feed him . . . he likes to only eat out and stuff . . . it gets pricey” (female nonparticipant). Another nonparticipant stated that having children in the house all day, eating whatever they wanted, made providing food at home more expensive:

It was very hard because . . . when you're not there to supervise, you

[don't] know how much everyone takes . . . The kids since they're home doing nothing, they eat the food all day long, so it's very expensive. (female nonparticipant)

Because of the financial stress that summer presents, parents viewed summer meals as cost-saving. For example, 1 female participant explained that it was “really helpful for us to have [the] option” of attending a summer meals program and that it “definitely makes it easier and less of a financial strain.” Another participant whose son attended a school-based summer meals program added that these cost savings could be applied to other important expenses in the household:

If he's able to eat lunch at the school and I'm not having to buy the bread and the cheese and the fruit . . . then that savings either goes into buying other groceries or even helping to pay for MetroCard fares . . . or maybe it gives us that little bit of extra to take him somewhere he wants to go. (female participant)

When considering the financial benefit, parents often framed summer meals as supplemental rather than integral to their ability to support their family. One participant stated that “For us, it's added to being able to provide for them, but for other people in the community, it's [essential]” (male participant).

Fostering Social Support and Connection

Safety net for greater community. Despite whether they experienced financial hardship in the summer, parents suggested that they were always able to provide enough food for their family, but several said that they knew families in their community who could not. For those families, they believed summer meals were crucial. When asked how important it was to her that her child's summer camp provided free lunch, 1 parent responded with other families in mind:

I feel like it's something that's really important, because there are some students that don't have money at

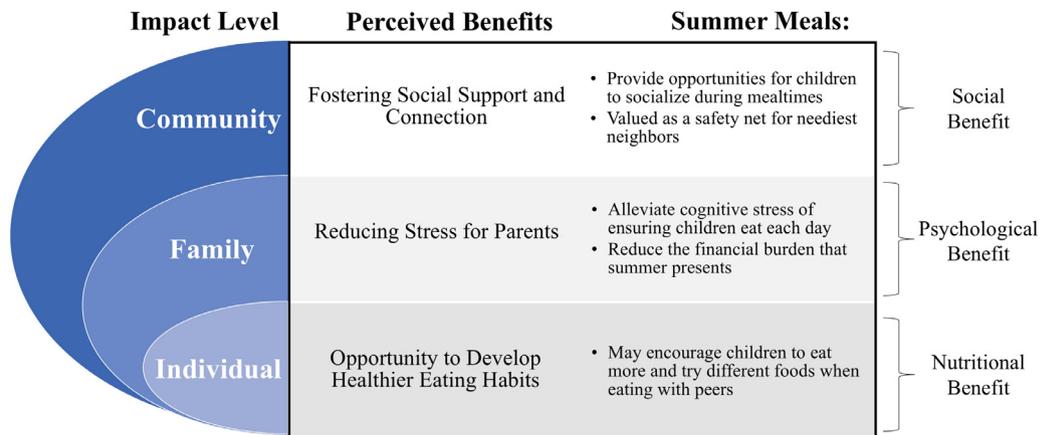


Figure. Various types of benefits and beneficiaries of free summer meals programs in New York City. Summer meals programs affected the well-being of children and also their families and the greater community. Whereas they have the potential to provide a nutritional benefit, they also provide psychological and social benefits.

all, and they can't afford to bring lunch, because they don't even have food in the cabinet. (female participant)

Several other parents also explained the essentiality of the programs in terms of the security that they provided for other community members. One nonparticipant explained that

We are [providing] her food. ... But I think so many kids, they [don't] have food in [the] summer. ... Parents are not home, they are not taking care, so if you are providing food in [the] summer ... it's very important. (female nonparticipant)

Socialization with peers. Parents also highlighted that summer meals programs allowed children to meet new people and find a sense of community around mealtimes. One participant who attended a library-based program said that

We did make quite a few friends at the library and ... we would all get together, you know, come around at the same time, and then we would meet new people as well. (female participant)

Another parent noted that the programs let her children interact with other kids, and when asked why that was important to her, she stated that eating together

shows them how to socialize with people; I'm big on respect, I want

them to have friends, interact, not to be shy. (female participant)

A parent whose daughter and niece attended camp- and school-based meal programs explained that socialization at meals was something the programs provided that she could not give at home. When the children were at the programs with friends,

They eat together; so, in the house we don't really [eat] together, it's like one person eats and then the other person eats. They don't have that quality time that they have with their friends. (female participant)

When the researcher asked her why that was important, she expressed that "they should have a sense of belonging" at mealtimes.

Opportunity to Develop Healthier Eating Habits

Several parents hypothesized that by eating near other children in a summer meals program, their child would improve his or her eating habits compared with eating at home, in addition to having opportunities for socialization. One nonparticipant explained that

She is much too choosy; she is just 5, and she [doesn't] eat much. But I feel if she will eat with the other kids, she will eat a bit more. So, it will ... [be] good for her, I think so. A little bit more, so she will be

more healthy. (female nonparticipant)

Another nonparticipant referenced his daughter's pickiness with food: "I would think that [if] she sees what her peers are eating, she may want to eat that" (male nonparticipant). One parent spoke specifically about her child's willingness to eat healthy foods:

They try to give a little bit of healthier stuff, and with him seeing other people eating it, like, other kids eating, he'll eat it. Yeah, so it would impact, because if he's only with me, then you know, he wants to eat what he wants to eat. (female nonparticipant)

Notably, this theme arose among nonparticipants interested in the benefits that the programs could provide, rather than participating families. Participants were split when asked about the influence of the meals themselves on their child's consumption: some were satisfied with the quantity and quality of the food their children ate at summer meals, whereas others thought that their child typically ate more and healthier at home.

Overall, summer meals programs provided psychological and social benefits to families and interested nonparticipants perceived an additional nutritional benefit. Parents thought that the programs reduced stress for them, provided socialization opportunities for their children,

and might promote an environment at mealtimes that encouraged healthier eating habits.

Lack of Cultural Inclusivity

Although in the current sample, access to meals was not a concern for most families that were aware of the programs, some participants explained that because of dietary restrictions related to cultural or religious beliefs, they were unable to make use of school and summer meals fully and suggested that the meals should have greater variety. One Muslim parent who observed halal explained that her children ate far too little at school and camp:

Sometimes they say 'Oh Mama, we didn't eat anything because everything was not halal, like veggie or fish or pizza, so that's why we are hungry. We didn't eat anything.' So, it should be a variety, but if you are not eating meat, there should be a veggie, so they can take [an] alternate. (female participant)

She added that

If there is a sandwich, they take off the meat or chicken from that and just eat the bread. And bread is too small. Not enough for them.

In addition, when 1 nonparticipant was asked whether she would be interested in summer meals for her family, she answered

Yeah, definitely. But my main problem is, if I send [her] somewhere ... [the] summer meal is non[vegetarian], but my problem is, we are vegetarian. (female nonparticipant)

She agreed that a vegetarian option would make the meals more accessible to her children.

In addition, a few families indicated that they would like to see summer meals programs offer a greater variety of ethnic foods. For example, 1 parent stated that

It would be nice if they served a variety of Spanish food, let's say 1 day in a month, 1 time a month, you know? She'll dig in that plate and she'll start going more.

'Cause she loves Spanish food. (male, nonparticipant)

Offering different types of ethnic foods, even if infrequently, was seen as a way to increase the appeal of the meals for children from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Lack of Widespread Knowledge About Summer Meals

For the 9 nonparticipants in summer meals, there were varying levels of knowledge about local summer meal offerings. Two parents indicated that they were unaware that summer meals programs existed, and 1 had participated in summer meals before she moved to New York City but did not know of any in her current area. Other parents knew about school-based summer meals programs but were not familiar with other types. For example, 1 father stated, "I'm aware that there's a school that you can take her to," but after the interviewer explained that there were also summer meals in community spaces such as parks and pools, he said, "No, I haven't seen that around" (male nonparticipant). When discussing these community-based meal sites, another parent said,

I'm not aware of it ... it's the first time I'm hearing it, that they have a summer meal option there. I never heard of it. (female nonparticipant)

Whereas 2 nonparticipating parents stated that they did not seek information about summer meals because of a lack of need, others were interested in learning more.

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrated that meal programs reduced stress for parents and alleviated some of the increased financial burden of providing lunch in the summer. Parents saw the meals as a valuable safety net for others in their community and recognized that they offered children an opportunity to socialize with peers. Nonparticipants interested in the programs perceived eating with peers as a way to encourage healthier eating habits for their children. In some cases, barriers

such as the lack of culturally diverse options or general unawareness about summer meals programs prevented families from accessing them.

Children who eat free and reduced-price lunch at school are at risk when the school year ends. Their families experience increased food insufficiency rates during the summer compared with the school year, whereas families of eligible nonparticipating children do not.¹⁷ Children in families experiencing food insecurity and insufficiency have poorer academic, health, behavioral, and psychosocial outcomes than their peers.^{18–20} Accordingly, the intention of the USDA's *Summer Food Service Program* is to fill a nutritional gap for low-income children that exists when school is not in session.²¹ Therefore, its purpose as a federal nutrition program is to provide free food for children and consequently save low-income families money. However, this study identified that some of the summer meal benefits that parents appreciated most were more intangible yet still had a role in improving parent and child well-being. As demonstrated in the *Figure*, some of these benefits were psychological or social, with impacts extending past the individual and rippling to the greater community. Whereas previous summer meals research^{5,6,8} identified some of the more concrete benefits, such as cost savings and socialization opportunities, which this study confirmed, in-depth interviewing allowed for more intangible benefits such as stress reduction to be identified as well.

First, parents thought that the programs relieved cognitive stress because of the knowledge that children would eat every day even when parents were not there to prepare meals. Studies on another federal nutrition program,^{22,23} the *School Breakfast Program*, also identified reduced stress for parents as a perceived benefit of participation. One contributor to this stress is limited time: time scarcity for meal preparation is recognized as a challenge for low-income working parents and is thought to affect food provisioning practices and confidence in one's ability to provide healthy food.^{24,25} Parents also described feeling that

having summer meals available allowed them 1 less thing to worry about. Past research suggested that poverty-related concerns consumed mental resources and reduced the attention and cognition that could be applied to other tasks, reducing cognitive capacity for some low-income individuals.²⁶ Accordingly, summer meals may relieve some of the stress associated with time scarcity and living with limited means, and improve parents' ability to focus on other pressing needs in their lives. Therefore, the current findings demonstrate how a food provisioning program may have an impact on the mental health of those it serves.

Second, summer meals both demonstrated and fostered the development of social networks in the community. Parents' appreciation of summer meals owing to its role as a safety net for their neighbors demonstrated an element of social support already existent in the community. The programs offered opportunities to develop social networks further by bringing families together, often in public community spaces such as parks, pools, and libraries. A previous study⁴ on a library-based summer meal program similarly found that parents appreciated the opportunity for them and their children to develop social networks with other community members and attributed this benefit to the open, welcoming nature of the library and the enrichment activities it provided.

These benefits may have an important role in promoting children's well-being and nutritional practices. Neighborhood factors such as social networks and social cohesion are associated with improved health indicators such as reduced body mass index²⁷ and may function as protective factors against household food insecurity.²⁸ In addition, parents' perception that eating with peers may encourage better habits in their children is supported by work²⁹ that suggested that friends and peers influenced children's consumption: children eating with friends were found to consume substantially more than were children eating with unfamiliar peers,³⁰ and positive peer modeling of novel foods increased consumption for children.³¹ Although these

findings demonstrate several summer meal benefits that parents appreciate, future research could go further to examine which benefits are most influential in parents' decisions to participate in the programs.

Strengths of this study included the diversity of the sample. Although they were a predominantly low-income sample, participants were diverse in terms of race and employment status. The sample included both participants and nonparticipants in summer meals and captured both female and male perspectives.

Limitations included a small sample size and convenience sampling, which resulted in limited generalizability. Because interviews took place in the winter and asked participants to reflect on a summer program, recall bias might have influenced responses. The study also had wider eligibility criteria than most summer meal studies that focused on individuals with traditional school meal eligibility ($\leq 185\%$ of the federal poverty level). Owing to New York City's universal free lunch program, not all participants were low-income, although most were. In addition, over half of participants had at least a college degree and 5 had a graduate degree (25%), so the sample may have represented a disproportionately highly educated group of low-income parents. Finally, the study excluded individuals who spoke only Spanish. Although 19.5% of participants in the initial summer meals survey completed it in Spanish,¹⁰ the interviews did not include Spanish-only speakers.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Barriers such as a lack of cultural inclusivity and unawareness of meal programs represent areas for improvement in summer meal administration and reflect the urban setting of the sample, because issues of geographical convenience predominate in rural settings.⁹ Meal coordinators might consider the demographics of their community population and who may not be able to access their meals owing to their religion or culture. Accordingly, sites could improve

meal options by including a vegetarian, kosher, or halal option if necessary. Further research is needed to understand the cost-effectiveness for meal sites to increase variety in the foods they serve. Meanwhile, coordinators could continue to strategize innovative ways to advertise summer meals, especially non-school based programs, because lack of awareness is a widespread issue for summer meals programs.^{7,8} Finally, satisfaction with meal quality was mixed within this sample. Further research is needed to clarify perceptions regarding summer meal quality and its influence on participation.

In strategizing ways to expand participation in summer meals, it will be important to capitalize on the benefits acknowledged by eligible families. In the past decade, the USDA piloted several demonstration projects to address low summer meal participation and summer food insecurity, including Electronic Benefit Transfer cards, meal delivery, meal backpacks, incentives for extending length of site operation, and incentives for providing activities.³² Because parents recognize the value in having opportunities to socialize and in enrichment activities at summer meals programs, financially incentivizing meal sites to provide activities may be a promising strategy to increase the programs' appeal to families. There is limited preliminary research on the effectiveness of this strategy;³³ thus, further study may offer a greater understanding of the impact of activity incentives on summer meal participation.

Although summer meals programs remain underacknowledged and underused, they have a range of benefits that extend past helping individual families access food. Financial, psychological, social, and nutritional benefits of summer meals help parents meet their own and their children's needs during what may be a difficult time of the year for lower-income families. Because participation barriers persist for some families, further work might move beyond identifying barriers and explore best practices in increasing community awareness of summer meals and expanding accessibility of programs.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors gratefully acknowledge the guidance and contributions of Dr. Shalini Tendulkar of the Tufts University Department of Community Health. The authors also gratefully acknowledge the Tufts Undergraduate Research Fund for providing funding to compensate study participants for this qualitative study. The authors acknowledge that Hunger Free America provided financial support for a separate quantitative study that permitted access to individuals interviewed in this qualitative study. However, Hunger Free America did not directly fund the qualitative study, nor was the research design influenced by Hunger Free America or its supporters. Finally, the authors acknowledge that the data in this article were also used in a senior thesis paper at Tufts University.

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Call for Topics: SNEB Position Papers

Position papers provide a comprehensive discussion of SNEB's policy on one or more topics. Containing extensive background information and analysis, the position paper provides a more complete understanding of the issues and the reason behind the position(s) set forth by the organization.

To have a topic considered for next year, send a proposal with the following information:

- Statement of position (in one or two sentences)
- Background and rationale for proposed position (~1.5 pages, single spaced)
- Objectives (e.g., to provide evidence for effectiveness of school cafeteria-based interventions on increasing fruit and vegetables intake among children and youth.) Typically, multiple objectives are submitted targeting major segments of the proposed topic.
- Key points (to serve as an outline for the position; accompanying peer-reviewed citations for each point should be included)
- Reference list
- Suggested authors
- Collaborating organizations and type of collaborations, if applicable (e.g., joint development with another society)

to JNEB's Editor-in-Chief, Karen Chapman-Novakofski, PhD, RDN (editor@jneb.org) by **October 1, 2019.**