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Monday, July 02, 2007

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Free meal service feeding more kids

More families taking part in summer program; increased awareness, sagging economy cited.

Jonnelle Marte / The Detroit News

LaTisha Goulbourne's kids love french fries and chicken nuggets, but she knows that taking them to McDonald's every day could hurt their health and dig a hole in her wallet.

So for the past five years, she has taken advantage of a free program to feed her kids during their summer break. And lately, more Michigan families are doing the same.

Participation in the Summer Food Service Program, which provides free meals to kids in low-income areas, has been on the rise for the past two years, following a decline in 2004, and some local sponsors expect to feed even more mouths this summer.

"Especially with the economy going the way that it is," opportunities like the Summer Food Service Program are important, said Sharon Quincy, a dietitian for the Detroit Department of Health and Wellness, the state's largest SFSP sponsor. "Those that are participating in the summer lunch programs are able to utilize their money somewhere else instead of purchasing a meal."

About 1.9 million meals were handed out statewide in 2006, about 121,000 more than the year before. Program officials say 15 percent of eligible kids in the state used the program last year, up from 9 percent in 2005.

They credit the increase in participation to the state's sagging economy, increased awareness and the recent simplification of the reimbursement process for the federally funded program.

"We are seeing that there is an interest growing, partly because I think more organizations are finding out about the

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program," said Jerry Sedick, associate director for family and community services for the Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency, which is preparing to hand out 9,000 more lunches this year in Pontiac than it did last year.

The Goulbournes expect to save about \$50 a week by using the program. "The kids liked the food, plus it was a major saving for us," Goulbourn said.

The summer lunch program is a continuation of the National School Lunch Program that provides free and reduced meals to about 645,000 low-income Michigan children during the school year.

Children 18 or younger can eat at parks, schools and churches throughout the state. Most sites will be open through August.

A typical lunch contains milk, meat or an alternative, bread and two servings of fruit or vegetables.

The recent participation boost came after a decline in 2004, when Michigan kids' participation fell 10 percent from the previous summer, according to a report by the Food Research and Action Center. Some program organizers blamed the drop on lack of awareness and responded by promoting the meals more aggressively.

Also contributing to the increase is the selection of Michigan in 2005 as one of 19 states to test the Simplified Summer Food Program, which eliminates previous accounting requirements and allows sponsors to file for the maximum reimbursement rate for each meal they hand out.

"Whereas in the past individuals have had difficulty calculating their budgets ahead of time and trying to predict their expenses, now you don't have to worry about that because it's just a flat rate per meal," said Angela D. Moore, assistant executive administrator for Commonwealth Community Development Academy.

But some program organizers say the program is still critically underused. About 45 percent of eligible children can't participate because not enough kids in their neighborhoods qualify, said Gloria Zunker, consultant for the statewide program at the Michigan Department of Education.

Feeding sites can only be opened in areas where at least 50 percent of the children receive free or reduced lunch.

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David Guralnick / The Detroit News
 "The kids liked the food, plus it was a major saving for us," says LaTisha Goulbourn, with husband Duane and children DuJuan, left, DuShawn and DuNae. [See full image](#)

Meals for kids

Contact your local Summer Food Service Program sponsor to find your nearest feeding site.

Wayne County: Access, (313) 842-4752; Commonwealth Community Development Academy, (313) 336-9470; Detroit Department of Health, (313) 876-4554; Gleaners Community Food Bank, (313) 923-3535; Highland Park School District, (313) 957-3002; Lincoln Park Public Schools, (313) 383-5950; Marvin L. Winans Academy of Performing Arts High School, (313) 365-5578; Melvindale Northern Allen Park Schools, (313) 389-4664; River Rouge School District, (313) 297-9600; Salvation Army Detroit-Temple, (313) 897-2914; Salvation Army-Brightmoor, (313) 532-1281; University of Detroit Mercy, (313) 993-1700; Wayne County Health Department, (313) 727-7107; Westwood Community School District, (313) 565-0288.

Macomb County: Anchor Bay School District, (586) 648-2500; Fitzgerald Public Schools, (586) 757-8845; Mount Clemens Community Schools, (586) 469-6100; Van Dyke Public Schools, (586) 758-8331; Salvation Army-Warren, (586) 754-7400.

Livingston County: Detroit Rescue Mission Ministries, (517) 548-1736.

Oakland County: The Salvation Army Eastern Michigan, (248) 628-3108; Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency, (248) 209-2650; Yeshivas Darchei Torah, (248) 357-3560; Yeshivath Beth Yehudah, (248) 557-6750.

For a complete list of sponsors in Michigan, visit www.michigan.gov/sfsp and click on Summer Food Directory.

- [High School Sports](#)
- [Homestyle Blog](#)
- [Laura Berman Blog](#)
- [Lions/NFL Blog](#)
- [Moms Blog](#)
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