

D.C. Hunger Solutions

fighting hunger in the nation's capital



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OVER 27,000 DC CHILDREN ATE HEALTHY MEALS DURING SUMMER 2005

NEW STUDY RANKS THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA'S
SUMMER MEAL PROGRAM FIRST IN THE NATION

ADVOCATES CITE MAYOR WILLIAMS SUPPORT AS KEY TO SUCCESS

(Washington, D.C.) JULY 13, 2006 – D.C. Hunger Solutions congratulated Mayor Anthony Williams, District of Columbia government agencies and community-based groups today for their efforts to provide free healthy meals to additional low-income children during the summer months and called for new steps to reach as many children as possible through the federally-funded DC Free Summer Meals program, formerly known as the Summer Food Service Program.

The District of Columbia was recognized for feeding daily 27,575 low-income children and youth last July, or 77 for every 100 reached in the regular year school lunch program—the highest Summer Food participation rate in the United States according to a new report released today by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC). The report “Hunger Doesn’t Take a Vacation” found that on average across the U.S. only 18 children receive a lunch during the summer for every 100 who receive a free or reduced-price school lunch in the regular school year, but the comparable District ratio in summer 2005 was 77 per 100. The District of Columbia outperformed all fifty states. Meals are served in schools, recreation centers, libraries, summer camps and housing complexes.

The District’s success in recent years is a rebound from a period of declining program participation. In 2002 only 14,848 District children and youth received a free nutritious lunch during the summer and the City missed out on millions of dollars in potential federal funding. As a result, Mayor Williams created a Blue Ribbon Task Force on Child Nutrition to provide a public voice for community providers. The Task Force developed a blueprint to increase the number of free meal sites, repair administrative problems and dramatically scale up public awareness of the program. The State Education Office, the agency responsible for administering the program, responded to the challenge by implementing the Blue Ribbon Task Force’s recommendations and renaming the program last year with a kid-tested title: D.C. Free Summer Meals.

“We applaud the District’s commitment to ensuring that when school is out, children and youth can still have access to healthy meals that fight hunger and obesity while enjoying enrichment activities all summer long” said Kimberly Perry, Founding Director of DC Hunger Solutions.

“Reaching all that are eligible will mean: (1) increasing the number of sites in underserved areas like District Ward 8 in Southeast, (2) retaining existing sites and sponsors; and (3) improving food quality by serving more fresh fruits and vegetables,” advised Ms. Perry, who also serves as Vice Chair of the Mayor’s Commission on Food and Nutrition. “The District can stay ahead of the curve by bringing high-quality meals to new partners, like D.C. Public Libraries, apartment complexes and faith-based institutions, but we need to make sure every site that participated in the program last year is planning on serving children and youth again in 2006.” Site retention has remained a concern for advocates who worry that while aggressively courting new meals sites, the District may miss opportunities to retain experienced program sponsors.

FRAC’s report ranks states by assessing their performance in reaching needy youngsters with either Summer Food Service Program or National School Lunch Program summer meals, compared to regular school year meals. FRAC released its report on Summer Learning Day 2006, celebrated by the Center for Summer Learning (www.summerlearning.org). “Summer meals and summer learning go hand in hand. Summer meals draw children into programs that are critical for development, health and well-being while their parents are working,” said FRAC Senior Policy Analyst Crystal Fitzsimons, principal author of the FRAC report. “We applaud the many groups that make summer learning a reality.”

The report can be found at www.frac.org

D.C. Hunger Solutions, a project of the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), is dedicated to fighting hunger and obesity and improving the nutrition, health and well-being of children, youth and families in the District of Columbia.