

Connecticut's Summer Meal Program 2019-2023

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Background

- Summer nutrition programs have been crucial in reducing childhood food insecurity over the summer for over 50 years.
- Meals are provided through the Summer Food Service Program and the Seamless Summer Option of the National School Lunch Program



Pandemic-Era Waivers

- The federal government issued regulatory waivers in 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to allow more sponsors to offer summer meals.
- Waivers also provided flexibility in meal times, non-congregate meal distribution, and parent/guardian meal pickup.
- Although waivers were technically available in 2022, Congress did not extend them until late June of that year - far too late for most sites to implement these changes.

Table 1. Statewide Totals and Averages Across July from 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023

Year	School districts (n)	Participating sponsors (n)	Sites (n)	Meals distributed (n)	Average meal count per sponsor (M)	Average meal count per site (M)
Breakfast in July						
2019	35	51	438	493,699	9,680.37	1,127.17
2020	65	76	507	1,087,458	14,308.66	2,144.89
2021	75	104	702	936,829	9,007.97	1,334.51
2022	45	61	491	502,521	8,238.05	1,023.46
2023	40	53	436	475,479	8,971.30	1,090.55
Lunch in July						
2019	37	53	566	702,129	13,247.72	1,240.51
2020	66	77	520	1,113,906	14,466.31	2,142.13
2021	76	105	740	1,085,478	10,337.89	1,466.86
2022	48	64	547	662,325	10,348.83	1,210.83
2023	41	55	503	631,224	11,476.80	1,254.92

Note. Meals distributed includes open and closed sites.

■ Breakfast ■ Lunch

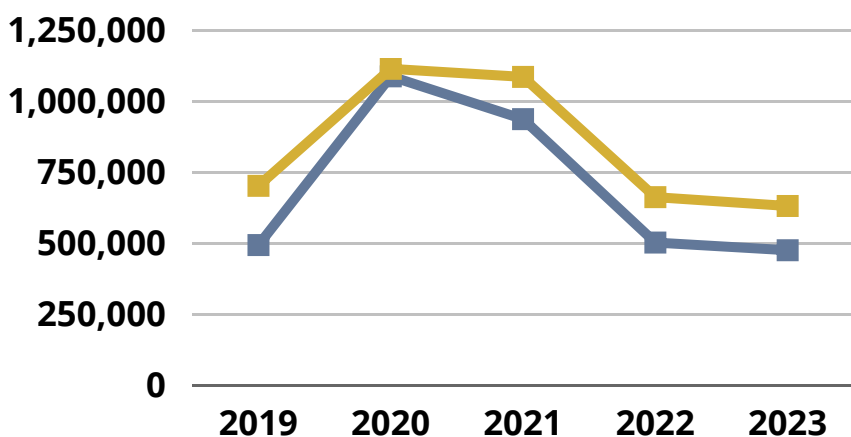


Figure 1. Meals Distributed Statewide in July across Time.

Key Finding #1:
The overall number of meals distributed statewide dramatically increased in 2020 and 2021, and then decreased in 2022 and 2023 to pre-pandemic levels.

Table 2. Total meals distributed in July by districts that participated in all five years

	Number of districts	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Breakfast	34	467,435	916,777	699,981	456,637	391,290
Lunch	34	654,215	933,668	817,854	599,026	530,860

■ Breakfast ■ Lunch

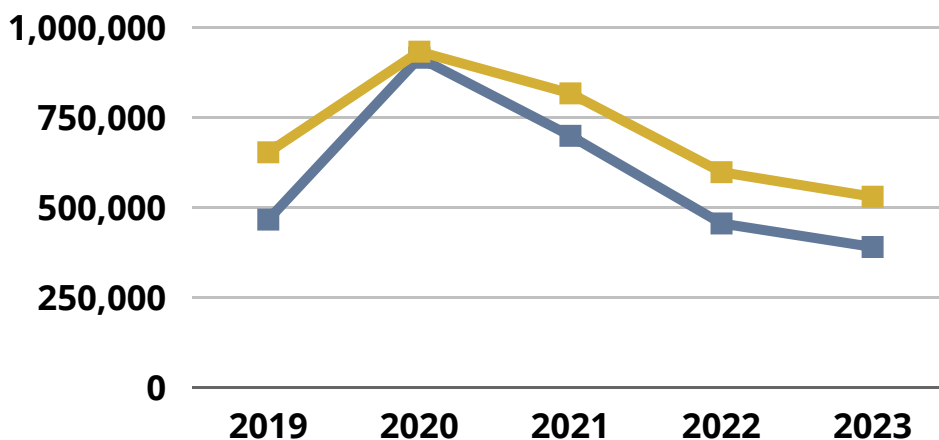


Figure 2. Total Meals Distributed in July by Districts Participating All Five Years.

Key Finding #2:

Among district sponsors that operated all five years, the pattern was the same: significantly higher meal distribution in 2020 and 2021, followed by a drop in 2022 and 2023.

Conclusions

- The pandemic-era waivers led to a significantly greater number of children being fed during the summers of 2020 and 2021.
- The lessons learned over the past four years about how to maximize summer meal access should be used to make permanent changes to the program.

