

Auburn School District Summer Meals Evaluation



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SUMMER MEALS BACKGROUND

- The purpose of the summer meal programs is to provide nutritious, free meals to children aged 18 and younger in low income during the summer months.
- Individuals and families with low income struggle to purchase necessities such as food. The inability to purchase adequate food due to limited resources is known as food insecurity. Food insecurity is linked to adverse health outcomes and poor academic performance, and food insecurity is more prevalent for children and families in the summer months.
- By providing free meals to children in the summer, the summer meal program aims to alleviate food insecurity while also improving academic and health outcomes in children.
- About 8000 more free and reduced meals are served per day during the school year than free meals served per day during the summer months at Auburn. This difference demonstrates room for growth of the summer meal program.

The purpose of this evaluation is to understand motivations and barriers to use of the summer meal program and to make recommendations to reach more children with summer meals in the Auburn school district.

TYPICAL AUBURN SCHOOL MEALS

- Serve about 9000 free and reduced-price meals per day in the school year

PAST AUBURN SUMMER MEALS

- Served meals at 39 locations in summer months
- Served about 1000 meals per day in previous summers

CURRENT COVID19 MEALS

- Serving meals in 66 locations
- Serving about 3500 meals per day

METHODS

A survey with 8 questions was created and released via social media and email to better understand the strengths and barriers to summer meal programming for families and children in the Auburn school district. The types of responses included multiple choice, choose as many as apply, and write-in. These responses were analyzed and coded to determine themes.

PARTICIPANTS

After 10 days, the survey had received 276 responses. Nearly 75% of survey respondents were **caregivers for a child or a youth who participates/has participated in summer/COVID19 meals**. Participants most commonly pick up meals at **bus stops**, and most participants use the meal program **five days per week**.

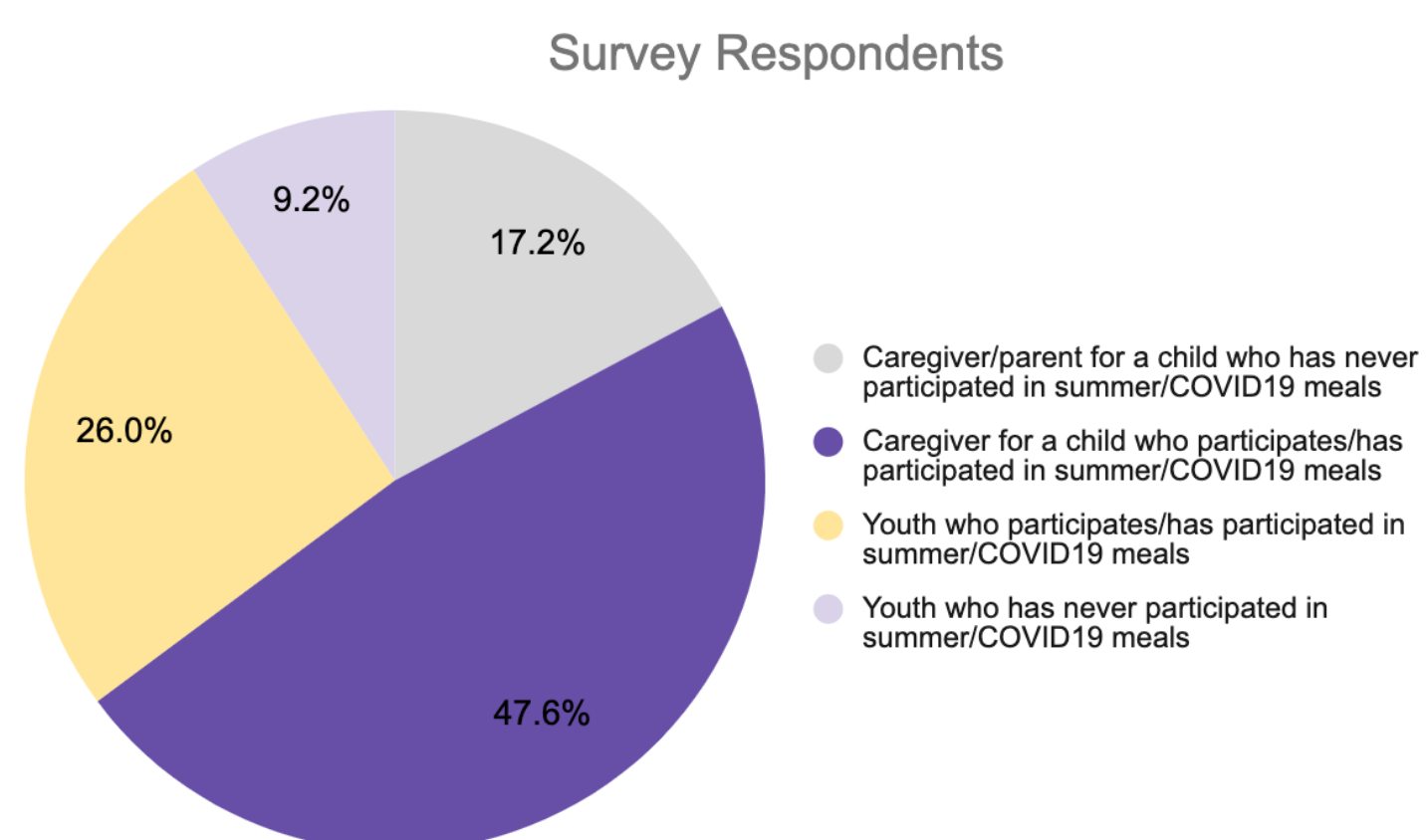


Figure 1. The distribution of survey respondents by their role and current or past participation in summer/COVID19 meals.

FINDINGS - Motivations

The main motivations, chosen from pre-written responses, to use the program by respondents are described in **Figure 2** with the most common reason being that the meals were easy to pick up. Themes from coded responses are summarized in **Table 1**.

Reasons for Participating in Summer/COVID19 Meals

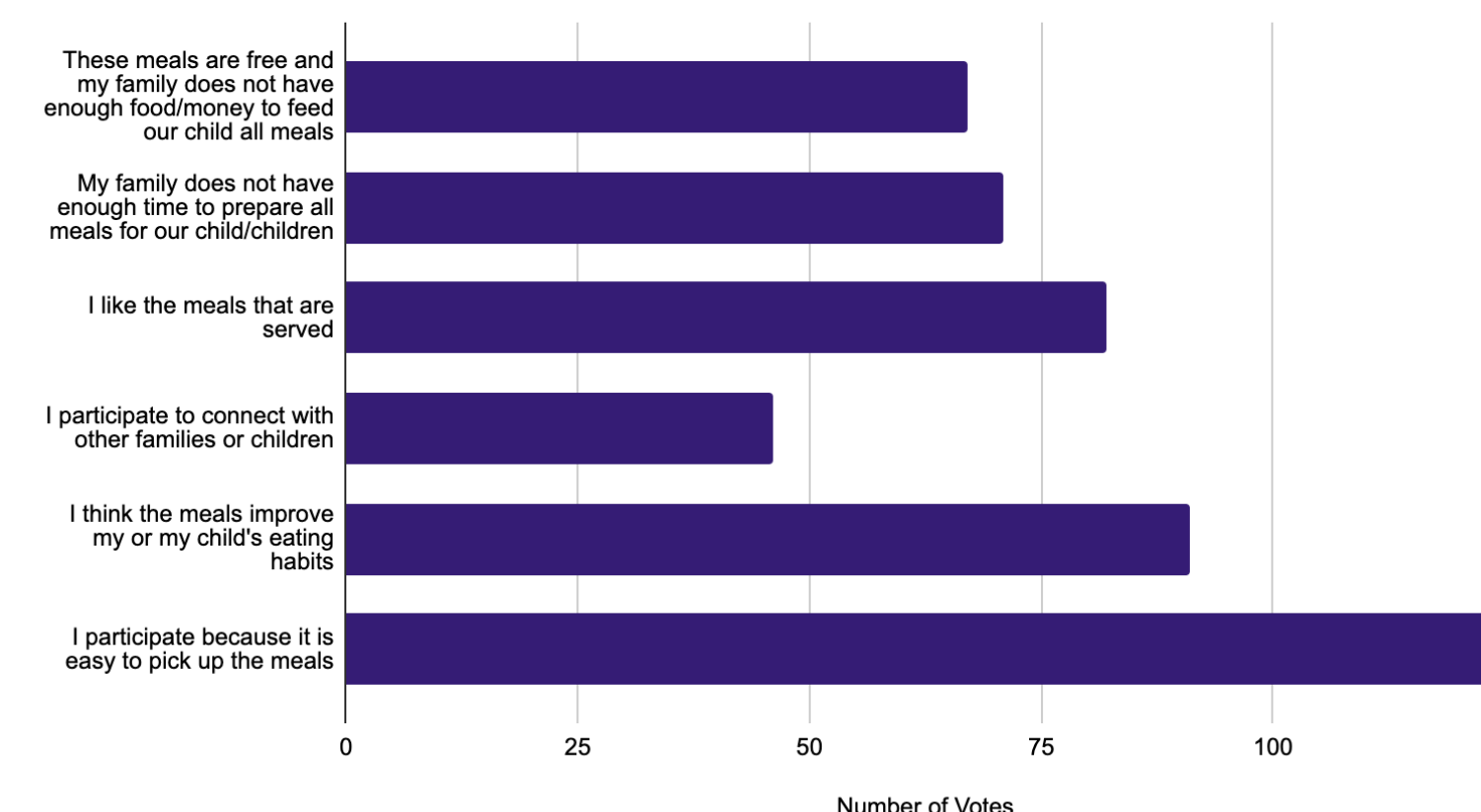


Figure 2. Summary of votes for pre-written reasons for using the summer/COVID19 meal program.

Table 1. Coded themes of reasons respondents participate in the summer/COVID19 meals

Variety of foods
Socialization with other families/children
Children liked the meals
Opportunities to go outside
Helped stretch resources further
Relieved stress
Reduced trips to the grocery store
Added structure to the day
Ensured healthy and consistent intake

FINDINGS - Barriers

The most common reason for not participating in the summer/COVID19 meals was **families had enough food/money to feed their children all meals**. Themes from a few written responses are described in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Coded themes of reasons respondents do not participate in the summer/COVID19 meals

Meals were too far away
Children were not satisfied with meals
Not enough variety in the meals
Wanted to leave meals for others
Fear of coronavirus exposure

FINDINGS - Suggestions

The respondents made written suggestions for improvement or ways to increase reach of the program. These suggestions included changes to **food choices**, better **social distancing and COVID19 precautions**, more **available information about the meal locations and times**, changes in **logistics of meals**. Many respondents **thought that they were not eligible to receive meals**. Some made suggestions for **meal-times and location changes**, and a few respondents **disagreed** with the summer/COVID19 meal program.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide information to the public about the meal program.
- Clarify meal eligibility and federal guideline requirements.
- Offer options at meals and hot meals when possible.
- Continue grab and go meals and bus stop delivery.
- Ensure safe social distancing practices at sites.

Thank you to the Auburn School District Child Nutrition Services department and all the caregivers and youth that responded to the survey.

