

# Rural Non-Congregate Summer Meal Programs: Understanding the Caregiver Experience

On December 29, 2022, President Biden signed the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023. The Act included a policy change for Child Nutrition programming that allows permanent, non-congregate meal service through the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) Seamless Summer Option (SSO) for rural areas with no congregate meal service.

As meal providers begin operating rural non-congregate summer meal service, we want to be able to understand and share models, messaging, and approaches that work best for families participating in the program. With that in mind, No Kid Hungry conducted site observations at three different sites in summer 2023, each of which operated a different non-congregant model (grab-and-go, mobile meals, and delivery). We interviewed thirty caregivers – ten at each site – about their experience with the non-congregate summer meals program.

Interviews with caregivers surfaced many recommendations for participant-centered summer non-congregate meal programs. In the video below, you can hear from Angela McKee Brown who conducted this research in summer 2023 and who presented findings at No Kid Hungry's Summer Nutrition Summit. In addition to the video, the attached report also summarizes findings and recommendations.

We hope that the recommendations in the report and the experiences participants shared inspire you to consider how your program can best serve



families and communities. We should note that not all of the ideas and recommendations are compatible with regulations in USDA's interim final rule.

Thanks to the participants who shared their experience and the summer meal sponsors who opened their sites to us so that we can learn from them in order to operate participant-centered non-congregate programs.

## **WATCH THE VIDEO AND READ THE FULL REPORT:**

<https://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/resource/rural-non-congregate-understanding-caregiver-experience>