

REACHING KIDS WITH HOME DELIVERY DURING THE SUMMER

Humboldt Unified School District, Prescott Valley, Arizona

It is 90 degrees and sunny at 7:30 AM in arid Prescott Valley, Arizona as school buses and vans pull into the middle school's kitchen parking lot to pick up crates of meals for home delivery. It will reach 100 today and many other days over the summer.



As summer goes on, parents don't want to come to town and kids do not want to walk to congregate sites because of the heat,"

says Jody Buckle, the Director of School Nutrition at Humboldt Unified School District, who manages an array of summer meals models across this vast district.

From the perspectives of caregivers, the convenience of home delivery is unmatched. "It's amazing, especially with our busy schedule," one mother shared. Another appreciated the ease of use.



The program is useful because it provides something that's already ready to go."



Those who live far from the center of town or with limited transportation benefit. "It's been great because we live kind of far out, so it doesn't lend itself for us to come in, so this really helped us out," reported a couple with two children who are homeschooled. Another family cited car trouble as a barrier that home delivery overcomes.

Meal deliveries arrive once a week and are handed to the caregiver or placed in a cooler participants know to have ready if they will not be home during the delivery window.

“So I have my boys help me lift the food into the truck [from the cooler] cause our driveway is a ways from the house. So we put them in the truck, and then we sort it all out and kind of have things in the refrigerator for breakfast food, and then all the fruits and vegetables and lunch food.”

The school transportation department lends buses to the home delivery program over the summer, free of charge. Buckle pays the wages for the bus drivers who, he explains, are happy to receive additional income when they are typically out of work. Members of the kitchen team also are more steadily employed over the summer to prepare meals and ride with drivers to do deliveries. The home delivery program covers its costs through reimbursements, efficient use of commodities, and grants for equipment and improving quality food. Buckle compares being able to offer both home delivery and grab-and-go to the district’s experience with congregate summer meals.



The non-congregate program has allowed us to be financially viable in the summer while getting 6 times the amount of meals to children and more hours for my employees.”

Buckle stresses the economic benefits along with expanded access to meals during the summer months in conversations with local and state stakeholders. A question from the program’s FAQ (available in English and

Spanish) tackles misperceptions many meal programs face and celebrates the economic benefits to the community of participation:



Question: Am I taking food away from another child by participating in this program?

Answer: NO! We have plenty and you are also helping to keep our employees employed during the slower summer months.

Kids enjoy being able to pick and choose among the items delivered. “They serve themselves for the older ones and then the younger ones, I let them be independent and decide. ‘Okay, today I want this’ and they know they get one of each. So, it helps them learn how to serve themselves and the things that they can’t do on their own, I help them enjoy them.” Having the food at home can make it last longer. A mother said that her two children do not eat much in a single meal, so she is able to spread out the food over a longer period of time.

The level of customer service provided also drew praise from families. “Just the people who organized the program are amazing. Anyone I talked to in food and nutrition was real quick to answer questions. And they’re always super nice on the phone and more than willing to go above and beyond for anything,” said one caregiver for six children.

Get in touch with Jody Buckle, Director of School Nutrition at Humboldt (jody.buckle@humboldtunified.com) to learn more about this model. Have you considered operating a home delivery program? Have you sponsored home delivery that is different than the one described here? Let us know at NoKidHungry.org or innovation@strength.org.