

BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY

The Heller School

FOR SOCIAL POLICY AND MANAGEMENT

SHARE OUR STRENGTH: MARYLAND 2012 ENHANCED SUMMER FOOD OUTREACH EFFORTS EVALUATION REPORT

March 2013

Prepared for:
Share Our Strength
Washington, DC

Prepared by:
Lawrence Neil Bailis, PhD
bailis@brandeis.edu

Amanda Koppelman Milstein, MPP
amandamilstein@gmail.com

Brandeis University
Waltham, Massachusetts

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the numerous people who provided support to complete this assessment. In particular, we would like to thank:

- The Share Our Strength team for their time in providing us with important background information, access to data, and facilitating our visits to Baltimore. We are particularly grateful to Courtney Smith and Kumar Chandran for their overall guidance; Brian Alexander for answering myriad questions and giving us a real sense of what the summer outreach had been like; Alok Kommajusula for his help with site visits; and D’Juan Hopewell for his assistance planning, designing, and administering the canvassing survey;
- The Maryland Governor’s Office for Children, particularly Mark Scott and Christina Drushel;
- The United Way of Central Maryland, particularly Sandra Bond;
- Maryland Hunger Solutions, particularly Valerie Zeender;
- Maryland State Department of Education, especially Sarah Trist;
- The Baltimore Family League, particularly Katherine Klosek;
- Noah Bers from Baltimore City Public Schools;
- Jay Parker and April Bain from the Archdiocese of Baltimore; and
- All of the many staff of organizations, site sponsors, parents, and youth that shared time and data with us.

We hope that this report is helpful to all of them as they work together to eliminate child hunger in Maryland.

March 2013

Executive Summary

- During the summer of 2012, No Kid Hungry Maryland invested in extensive outreach efforts to promote greater utilization of the free summer meals in the state. While the outreach was statewide, the most concentrated efforts were in Baltimore city. In particular, the Baltimore city outreach linked free summer meals with “Super Summer,” an initiative advertising and rebranding summer school, recreation, and summer reading programs.
- In addition to the forms of outreach used in previous years, there was door-to-door canvassing in the neighborhoods that included 50 summer food sites that were thought to have the capacity to serve more young people. These sites were designated as being open to walk-ins. No registration or participation in a program was required to receive a meal.
- A survey of families who were canvassed provided positive feedback on the major approaches to outreach that were adopted by No Kid Hungry Maryland. In particular, the survey suggested that flyers, radio, television, and canvassers were all effective ways of letting people in the appropriate demographic know about the free summer meal programs. According to callers to the Governor’s Office for Children and 211 hotlines, the most useful forms of outreach in terms of making people aware of free summer meals or triggering them to call the hotlines included flyers, particularly backpack flyers given to children, materials distributed at government agencies, and television.
- There is some evidence that the Baltimore city-focused outreach did play a positive role in promoting the utilization of free summer meals, but it is far from definitive. For example, while the number of free summer meals served in Maryland went down 3% statewide, it only went down 0.2% among the seven summer meal sponsors primarily based in Baltimore city.
- Findings from visits to six sites that serve free summer meals to Baltimore youth showed that they had varying levels of ability to accommodate additional walk-ins. This suggests that utilization of free summer meals might be increased through efforts to ensure that the sites that are listed as “open” are welcoming of walk-ins and have the capacity to serve them.

Introduction

Share Our Strength is committed to increasing participation in free summer meals programs throughout the country through its No Kid Hungry campaign, which has branches in seventeen cities or states. The Partnership to End Childhood Hunger in Maryland, led by Share Our Strength's No Kid Hungry Maryland campaign and the Governor's Office for Children, is working to end childhood hunger in Maryland by 2015 through a variety of efforts, including enhanced outreach for free summer meals.

The 2012 summer food outreach in Maryland was focused on Baltimore city. It involved an intense effort to make families aware of the availability of meals and where they could be accessed. This was linked with publicity for other summer programs, such as summer school, camps, and reading programs. Summer meals were advertised as part of "Super Summer", a Baltimore city effort to publicize programs including camps, summer school, summer reading programs, and free summer meals. This study analyzes the outreach done by the Partnership to End Childhood Hunger in Maryland and the No Kid Hungry Maryland campaign.

In the spring of 2012, Share Our Strength engaged two Brandeis University researchers to carry out an evaluation of No Kid Hungry Maryland's outreach for free summer meals. The study was designed to answer several key questions:

- What were the key elements of the enhanced outreach in Maryland?
- What could be learned from hotline callers and those who were canvassed with material about "Super Summer" about what forms of outreach were most effective?
- What were the effects of the enhanced outreach on participation in free summer meals in Baltimore?

Methodology

In order to answer those questions, information was sought from a variety of sources. In preparing this report, we:

- Visited six Baltimore summer meal sites in order to learn more about how the enhanced outreach was impacting them and interviewed children, parents/guardians, and staff.
- Conducted a review of available data pertaining to telephone calls placed to the Baltimore 211 hotline and a statewide hotline, both of which distributed information about free summer meals.

- Participated in, observed, and analyzed the results of an ambitious canvassing effort by No Kid Hungry Maryland resulting in at least 22,037 “door knocks.”¹ The research involved accompanying canvassers, reviewing internal reports about the summer canvassing effort, and then designing and analyzing the results of over 250 surveys given to people who were canvassed at the end of July and in early August.
- Spoke with staff at additional sites listed as being open to walk-ins via telephone to discuss participation.
- Analyzed data provided by the Maryland State Department of Education, the Baltimore Family League, the Governor’s Office for Children, the United Way of Central Maryland, Baltimore City Public Schools, and the Archdiocese of Baltimore, and No Kid Hungry Maryland.
- Held conversations with site sponsors and key partners and attended meetings of the Partnership to End Childhood Hunger in Maryland over the entire study period.

Key Findings about Extent and Impact of Outreach in the Summer of 2012

During the summer of 2012, there were extensive outreach efforts to promote greater utilization of the free summer meals in Maryland. While the outreach was statewide, the most concentrated efforts were in Baltimore city. In particular, the Baltimore city outreach linked free summer meals with “Super Summer,” an initiative advertising and rebranding summer school, recreation, and summer reading programs. In addition to forms of outreach used in previous years, there was extensive door-to-door canvassing in the neighborhoods near 50 summer food program sites that were designated as being open to walk-ins (“open sites”). By definition, at open sites, any child can receive a free meal just by showing up, and no registration is required.

This study concludes that the outreach was well-conceived and well-executed, but it was not followed by increases in utilization of free food programs. The report explores this paradox, and includes ideas about ways to further strengthen outreach and other aspects of the program in the future.

Exhibit 1 below provides an overview of the No Kid Hungry Maryland outreach in 2011 and 2012 and presents summary comments and assessments of each form of outreach.

¹ Data obtained from D’Juan Hopewell’s internal report. The total of “knocks” includes 7,040 knocks on doors that were selected using a system that is commonly used for political campaigns called “VAN”, where one knock might be counted as multiple knocks depending on how many people lived in the household. The canvassers placed 14,997 knocks on individual doors after the canvassers stopped using the VAN system.

Exhibit 1: Overview of Maryland Outreach in the Summers of 2011 and 2012²

Type of Outreach	Summer of 2011	Summer of 2012	Assessment
Yard Signs	100 yard signs.	300 yard signs.	Unknown.
Backpack postcards	442,000 students received backpack postcards.	385,000 students received backpack postcards. Fewer postcards were distributed in 2012 due to enhanced targeting. Baltimore county asked for fewer postcards, and the cards were not distributed in counties that did outreach for summer meal sites independently. Schools without nearby sites did not receive postcards. ³	Many people told hotline operators that they were calling because they received information through backpack postcards or flyers.
Bilingual business cards	More than 45,000 business cards distributed.	Roughly 40,000 business cards distributed.	Residents cited this as something they thought was effective in the canvassing survey.
Radio and television ads	Extensive PSAs or commercial radio ads on 22 radio stations.	Extensive PSAs on a variety of radio stations, as well as 505 television ads and several television PSAs. There were no commercial radio buys.	One of the few parents whom we were able to interview thought that radio ads would be an effective way to reach his community.
Canvassing	2 canvassers worked to recruit more sites.	24 youth canvassed door-to-door in target neighborhoods from late June through early August to let people know about "Super Summer." There were approximately 22,000 door knocks and 15,000 phone calls made as part of the canvassing effort. Share Our Strength staff canvassed for two days. There were additional canvassing days throughout the state.	This was a central element in the enhanced outreach strategy but it ran into several unexpected challenges. In Baltimore, approximately 80% of people were not home when canvassers came to their doors. (The canvassers left outreach materials when no one was home.) Based on surveys of people who were canvassed, it appears that the canvassing may have raised awareness about free summer meals.

² Data from Brian Alexander.

³ Ibid.

Exhibit 1 continued

Type of Outreach	Summer of 2011	Summer of 2012	Assessment
Print ads	Ads featured in Spanish-language newspapers.	Ads in the <i>Baltimore Times</i> .	There are no data about the effectiveness of the print ads.
Youth Ambassadors	3 youth ambassadors.	3 youth ambassadors.	The youth ambassadors helped add capacity to the Governor's Office for Children hotline.
Direct mail	Not utilized.	Sent to 20,000 families twice using the VAN system, which is used primarily for political canvassing.	An internal No Kid Hungry Maryland report concluded that the VAN system was poor at correctly identifying households with children. ⁴
Facebook Ads	None.	Ads on Facebook led to over 4,000 clicks the Youthbmore.org website.	This seems like an effective form of outreach based on the number of clicks that it generated.

Key Findings about Perceived Effectiveness of the Publicity

A survey of families who were canvassed provided positive feedback on the major approaches to outreach that were adopted by No Kid Hungry Maryland. In particular, the families told us that flyers, radio, television, and canvassers were all effective ways of letting people in the appropriate demographic target group know about free summer meals. According to hotline callers, the most effective forms of outreach in terms of making people aware of free summer meals or prompting them to call the hotlines included flyers, particularly backpack flyers given to children, materials distributed at government agencies, and television.

It is difficult to be sure about the impact of the efforts to drive families to the internet-based sources of information about free summer meals in Maryland, but there is some evidence that it has been successful. There were thousands of website hits to pages giving information about free summer meals, and a Facebook ad buy that drove people to click through to a summer meals website.⁵ A texting system was only lightly advertised due to a relatively late release of summer meal site information, and so it was used minimally.

In terms of encouraging people to call hotlines that provided information about free summer meals, Super Summer outreach directed people to a website and to call a Baltimore-

⁴ D’Juan Hopewell.

⁵ 505 TV ads aired about free summer meals, and 16% of callers to 211 mentioned them as the way that they had found out about the hotline. While data were available about how callers found out about the hotline, no data are available to us about how people found out about the website beyond ads on Facebook.

specific 211 hotline. There was an increase in calls made to the 211 hotline.⁶ However, there was a larger decrease in calls to the statewide Governor’s Office for Children hotline, yielding an overall decline in use of hotlines. Given that participation declined as well, we believe more efforts should be made to encourage people to call the hotlines, which can give updated information about which sites have the capacity to accept walk-ins.

Exhibit 2: Reported Effectiveness of Different Ways to Promote Awareness of Free Summer Meals in Maryland⁷

Type of Outreach	Percentage of 211 callers who cited this as the reason for the call	Percentage of Governor’s Office for Children hotline callers who cited this as the reason for the call	Percentage of people who answered the question on the canvassing survey who heard about free summer meals through that form of outreach ⁸
Previously went to summer meal program/knew about program from last year	10%		1%
Government Agency	19%	11%	
Flyer	33%	75%	19%
Television	16%		9% ⁹
Word of Mouth	10%	7%	7%
Internet	3%		2%
Radio	3%	1%	9% ¹⁰
Bus Ad	2%		2%
Billboard	1%	1%	
School or camp			10%
Church		1%	
Business card		1%	
Library		1%	
Canvasser – had heard about it before			12%
Canvasser – was learning about it now			48%
Other	3%	3%	6%

⁶ There were 711 calls placed to a state-wide hotline giving information about free summer meals, down from 1,282 the previous year, and 144 calls placed to a Baltimore-specific hotline that was heavily promoted by No Kid Hungry Maryland, up from 18 calls in 2011. The website received 4,576 hits between June 8 and July 8, 2012, and if people were receiving their information from the site instead, it could explain some of the drop.

⁷ Canvassing survey, data from 211, data from Governor’s Office for Children.

⁸ People could cite more than one form of outreach when they answered survey questions.

⁹ Radio and television combined.

¹⁰ Radio and television combined.

Key Findings about the Canvassing

One of the main foci of the enhanced outreach in Baltimore this summer was door-to-door canvassing designed to spread the word about free summer meals. Our research included accompanying No Kid Hungry Maryland canvassers for part of a day and analyzing data collected for us by the canvassers. No Kid Hungry Maryland had 24 youth workers who canvassed on weekdays during working hours, focusing on housing near “open” free summer food sites in Baltimore. The track record of the first year of free summer food program canvassing in Baltimore has provided many ideas about possible avenues for improving the effectiveness of similar efforts in the future. In particular, around 80% of the homes that were canvassed throughout the summer were empty at the time of the canvass. When canvassers came to a house/apartment that had no one home, they left a postcard about the “Super Summer” program that included information about free summer meals. This suggests that efforts should be made to explore whether the canvassing could be expanded to include other time periods when people are more likely to be home.

The No Kid Hungry Maryland canvassers initially used a system typically used for political campaign canvassing in order to target specific households, but switched to knocking on all doors in a given neighborhood after two weeks because the system directed canvassers to a low percentage of households with children. Alternative approaches could be tried to identify and then pilot-test other ways of finding households that are most likely to benefit from free summer food programming. In addition to problems in targeting knocks, canvassing was also interrupted by hot weather that prevented canvassers from working and absences by members of the canvassing team.¹¹

The data on the impact of the canvassing is mixed. We did not find a clear pattern of increases or decreases in participation when we analyzed data from 2011 and 2012 in a sample of sites targeted by canvassing and nearby open non-targeted sites.

Our efforts to assess the impact of the canvassing included telephone calls to some of the sites that the canvassers had targeted. We wanted to see if they had experienced an increase in participation in the weeks following additional canvassing done during Share Our Strength staff’s canvass day on July 16. Not all sites were reachable, but the site staff at four of the ten sites that might have reasonably experienced an impact (Cecil Elementary, Harford Elementary, Sinclair Lane, and Chick Webb Recreation Center) all reported that there were no noticeable increases in walk-ins during the weeks after the Share Our Strength staff canvassing.

¹¹ D’Juan Hopewell.

Analyses of the Results of Canvassing Surveys

No Kid Hungry Maryland staff worked with the evaluation team to develop a survey that would shed light on the impact of the canvassing activities. On July 31 and August 1, under the direction of No Kid Hungry Maryland, Baltimore YouthWorks members administered a total of 266 surveys to adults in Baltimore households while canvassing. The surveys covered a wide variety of topics, but there were issues¹² that made the data gleaned from them less reliable than originally hoped. Nevertheless, roughly 85% of the surveys were filled out in a way that afforded reasonable conclusions about whether the family knew about summer meals.

¹² For example, several of the surveys were very similar to ones that were stacked near them – it is unclear if they were given to multiple people in the same household, people living close to each other answered very similarly, if there was some problem in how the data were recorded, or if it was coincidence. In addition, survey responses often did not make sense internally – several respondents said they had never heard of free summer meals, and then that they had learned about them from a flyer they saw somewhere in their neighborhood. Except when noted, percentages are given out of the total number of people who answered any given question. It is our assumption that the survey was given prior to a person being canvassed on that day, thus leading to substantially fewer than 100% of individuals stating that they had not heard of free summer meals.

Exhibit 3: Findings from Analysis of Canvassing Data

Finding	Conclusion/Implication
<p>Less than half of the Baltimore households were aware of the free food programming. 43% of those who filled out the surveys in a consistent manner appear to have heard of free summer meals.</p>	<p>This is a substantial proportion of the target households but indicates that more outreach would still be useful.</p>
<p>Roughly three in every eight respondents (37%) had heard of the “Super Summer” program.</p>	<p>This relatively high number could speak to the effectiveness of the outreach done by No Kid Hungry Maryland and other groups throughout the summer, since “Super Summer” was a new way of branding summer activities. These numbers could be used as benchmarks for similar surveys in the future.</p>
<p>Targeted Baltimore residents cited a variety of forms of outreach that they thought would be effective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 40% thought distributing flyers, postcards, and business cards were effective ways of letting people know about free summer meals. • 20% suggested ads on the TV or radio, 9% suggested posters on buses, and 11% suggested door-to-door canvassing. • People also suggested working with churches, daycare centers, and holding block parties. 	<p>Those who plan outreach campaigns should consider advertising sources rated highly by canvassers as well as face-to-face opportunities to spread knowledge about programs. If canvassing is repeated in the future, it would worthwhile to explore the possibility of expanding the effort to include evenings and weekends. Sites that are advertised through canvassing could be consistently checked to ensure they were still welcoming walk-ins. Further assessment is needed about the value of flyers left at doorsteps since they are easily discarded, ignored, or left unread.</p>
<p>People’s reasons for not using summer meal sites varied widely. They included sites not having air conditioning, sites being far away, and not knowing what the nearest sites were. Many people were also not in the appropriate life stage to use the meals—i.e. they were childless or had children who were too old or too young.</p>	<p>Those who plan future summer meals programming in Baltimore should take these findings about locations and amenities at the sites in mind.</p>
<p>A small proportion (6%) of families said they did not use the meal sites because they said they had sufficient good food.</p>	<p>A canvassing program will naturally find some people who have no need of the program –but they still might tell their friends and families about free summer meals.</p>

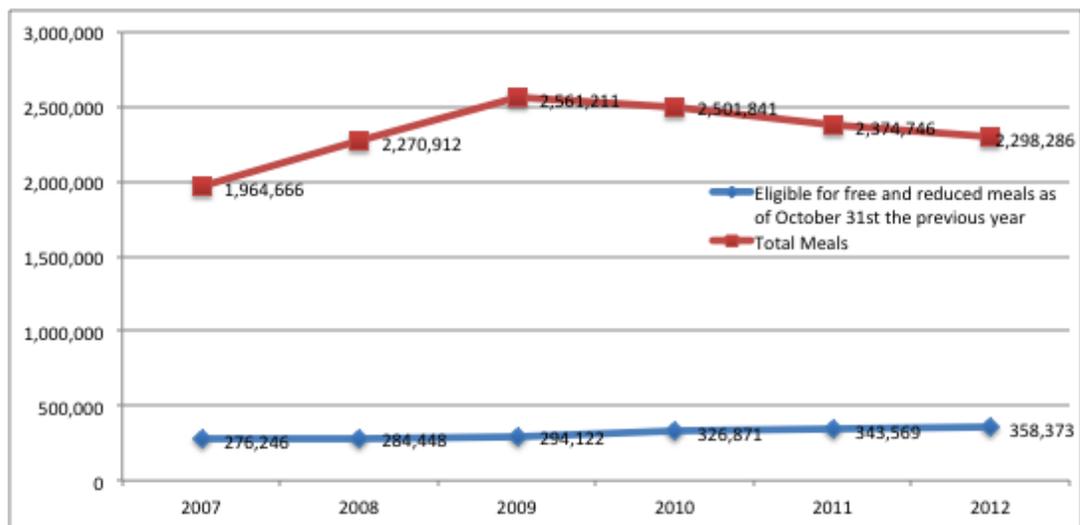
Analyses of Overall Trends in Participation in Free Summer Meals in Maryland and Baltimore City

The number of free summer meals served in Maryland in 2012 went down slightly compared to the previous year, even as the number of children eligible for free and reduced price lunches increased. Participation data over time shows that the number of meals served has been declining since 2009, but the decline was less steep from 2011 to 2012 (-3%) than from 2010 to 2011 (-5%). The study did not address the possible explanations for this continued decline, but the question that needs to be answered is “Did the No Kid Hungry outreach increase the level of participation above what would have occurred without the heightened outreach?”

The decline can not be explained by reductions in need for the program because the number of young people eligible for free and reduced price meals increased from 343,569 on October 31, 2010, to 358,373 on October 31, 2011, a 4% increase.

The decline in participation has been continuous since the 2009 dramatic increase, despite modest increases in eligible for free and reduced price lunches. We are not aware of any research that has adequately explained the trend. The chart below shows the number of meals served decreasing since 2009, but not returning to 2008 levels. Nevertheless, this finding helps put the 2011-12 decline in a broader context, suggesting that we might more properly interpret the data by saying that the enhanced outreach in the summer of 2012 did not halt the ongoing declines that had been occurring for three years, but, as discussed below, may quite possibly have slowed down the decline.

Exhibit 4: Summer Meals in Relation to Free and Reduced Price Meal Eligibility



Further Analyses of Changes in Summer Meal Participation in the Summer of 2012

Our comparative analyses of differences in trends in utilization of free summer meals in different locations provides some support for the understanding that the No Kid Hungry Maryland enhanced outreach was making a positive impact, but is far from definitive on this point. In particular, the participation rates went down less among the Baltimore city providers, where extensive outreach took place, than elsewhere in the state of Maryland. While free summer meal participation in Maryland went down 3%, it only went down 0.2% among the sites operated by the seven sponsors primarily based in Baltimore city.

Similarly, as is shown in Exhibit 5 below, when the trends in utilization from 2011 to 2012 in the seven primarily Baltimore-based sponsors are compared to the other 34 sponsors that also had data available from both 2011 and 2012, we see that participation declined less in Baltimore city than outside Baltimore city.

Exhibit 5: Meals Served and ADP for Baltimore City-Based and Other Site Sponsors¹³

Sponsors with sites predominantly...	Sponsors	Meals served			Average Daily Participation (ADP)		
		2011	2012	Change	2011	2012	Change
In Baltimore City	7	1,252,699	1,252,507	-0.02%	17,384	15,567	-10%
Outside Baltimore City	34	1,092,899	1,010,166	-8%	17,635	14,156	-20%

These findings are consistent with the conclusion that the outreach had been helpful in getting more people to meal sites than would have happened otherwise. But there are many other possible explanations. For example, the meals could have been more convenient to access or more needed in Baltimore city than in other parts of the state.

A number of people working on the No Kid Hungry Maryland campaign suggested that the declines may have been caused, at least in part, by unusually hot weather in Baltimore and the surrounding areas in the summer of 2012. Our analysis of the data suggests that temperature itself has probably not been a major factor. In fact, the summer of 2012 was slightly cooler than the summer of 2011.¹⁴

There were, however, more “code red” days, when some sites were closed due to high temperatures, in 2012. In 2011 there were 12 code red days, two of which were on weekends, whereas in 2012 there were 16 code red days, 3 of which were on weekends.

¹³ Maryland State Department of Education and Brian Alexander’s revised ADP Calculations.

¹⁴ According to data from NOAA, National Climatic Data Center. *Local Climatological Data*, referring to the Baltimore Washington International Airport, the average maximum daily temperature for July 2011 was 92.9 compared to 91.7 degrees in July 2012.

Participation was also impacted by the June 29th *derecho*, a severe storm that caused the temporary – or permanent – shutdown of some sites, as well as a delay in outreach activities, such as canvassing. This may, in fact, be partially responsible for a pattern seen in the data in which average daily participation (ADP) in the free summer food program increased somewhat in June and then declined in July relative to the same months in 2011.¹⁵

Forty-one of the total of 45 site sponsors in Maryland were operating in both 2011 and 2012. Of those 41 sponsors, 18 (44%) of them had average daily participation rates that went up, two (5%) had average daily participation rates that stayed the same, and 21 sponsors (51%) had average daily participation rates that decreased.

Analysis of changes in participation from site to site for each sponsor would have been the best source of insights into the effectiveness of the enhanced outreach since then it could be determined which sites would have been most affected by the canvassing and other geographically-based outreach. However, site-specific data from 2011 were not available from a sufficient number of sponsors to perform these analyses.¹⁶

In-depth data were available from Baltimore City Public Schools and the Archdiocese of Baltimore. Analysis shows that the Average Daily Participation (ADP)¹⁷ for the entire summer for the 35 sites that were targeted as canvass sites rose from 77.2 meals in the summer of 2011 to an average ADP of 82.8 in 2012, a 7.3% increase. Twenty of those 35 sites (57%) had an increased ADP in 2012. Among the 26 sites that were open sites as of July (some sites changes status during the summer) the average ADP in 2011 was 80.6, which rose to 87.8 in 2012—an 8.9% increase.

As in the prior case, it is possible that this increase could be attributable to any number of causes, including canvassing, “Super Summer” outreach efforts, or other factors.

Some of the sites targeted for canvassing were located extremely close to open sites that were not canvassing targets. This allowed us to make comparisons to see how the canvassing may have impacted a sample of nearby targeted and non-targeted sites using data obtained from the Baltimore City Public School system. There were not clear trends in examining sites that were the targets of canvassing and nearby sites that were not the targets of canvassing—some did better, while others did worse.

¹⁵ Revised ADP calculations from Brian Alexander.

¹⁶ The study team contacted all sponsors with significant numbers of sites in operation during the summer of 2012 to see if they might be able to share site-by-site information with us from the summer of 2011, and what could be learned from that information to help us in analyzing the effects of No Kid Hungry Maryland outreach. Complete data were obtained from the Baltimore City Public Schools, the Baltimore Archdiocese, and Frostburg State University Upward Bound.

¹⁷ This report followed the Maryland State Department of Education methodology of calculating ADP by dividing the meal with the highest attendance by the number of days the site was open and rounding down.

Findings from Site Visits

Visits to free summer food sites provided opportunities to observe how the programs were being implemented as well as to talk with program staff, participating youth, and, at times, their families. Therefore, we visited six sites in Baltimore, including camps, housing authority sites, and a public school.

Our visits to six sites that were registered as open to walk-ins revealed major differences in ability and willingness to serve additional eligible young people. For sites that could not accommodate additional walk-ins, even the most effective outreach might not result in the kinds of increased participation that supporters of free summer meals would hope for. This suggests that it might be productive to couple future enhancements to outreach with efforts to ensure that the sites to which young people are directed are adequately vetted, i.e., their staffs have been trained and they are monitored to see that they are open to additional walk-ins. If publicity drives families to take their children to a free summer meal site and staff either do not have enough food for them or are not aware that it is their responsibility to serve food to all young people, regardless of program enrollment status, walk-in families are unlikely to return.¹⁸

Managers at two of the six sites explicitly stated they did not have the capacity to serve additional children if they were to come for a meal, and a third manager told us that there was only limited capacity to serve more children. For example, staff at one site said there were often children they turned away due to not stocking enough meals to serve all possible children on high traffic days. The staff at a second site said that demand for free food sometimes exceeded supply, and when this situation arose, staff would often pay for food out of their own money for the additional children who came. We do not know if these sites are representative of all of the sites in Baltimore, or even more broadly in Maryland. However, as noted in our conclusions below, it would be worth exploring whether future efforts to increase the numbers of youth being served should include components that deal with capacity and flexibility issues – perhaps considering ways to move food from site to site as demand changes – as well as enhancing outreach.

Overall, the study team saw very few walk-ins while at site visits. A variety of sites were contacted to see if they would be a good place to visit in the future, and some reported that they did not, in fact, accept walk-ins, or had no walk-ins come to their site even though they were listed as “open” sites. A No Kid Hungry staff person further confirmed that many walk-in sites were not aware that they were responsible for serving meals to anyone who asked for one – he found that his canvassers were turned away relatively frequently from “open” summer meal sites.¹⁹

Most young people who were partaking of free meals during site visits found out about the meals through the program that they were attending, through a relative, or because of a friend of the family. However, a small number told us that they had learned due to flyers left

¹⁸ Site visits, D’Juan Hopewell, Brian Alexander.

¹⁹ D’Juan Hopewell.

at their house, a sign in front of the building, or due to other instances of organized outreach. This demonstrates the value of pervasive outreach that spreads knowledge of free summer meals, rather than just targeting families with young children, as any number of family friends or relatives could become a source of information about the meals.

Exhibit 6: Overview of Sites from Site Visits

Type of Site	Walk-ins Permitted	Walk-Ins Present	July ADP	Has the Capacity to Serve Additional Meals
Camp	Yes	Yes – in another room	60	Yes – a limited number
Public Housing	Yes	Yes – because of the nature of the program it was hard to determine who was a walk-in	48	Not at present, might be able to adjust meal order if higher demand persisted
Public Housing	Yes	Yes – all walk-ins	26	Yes
School with camps	Yes	No	100	Yes
Public pool	Yes	Yes – all walk-ins	120	Not at present
Camp at a church	Yes	Yes – around half walk-ins and the rest were children who stayed after camp ended	57	Yes

Conclusions

No Kid Hungry Maryland and its partners worked hard to enhance outreach efforts aimed at informing families about the availability of free summer meals. Many of the data that we have assembled suggest that, without those efforts, participation in the free summer meal program would have been lower. But the available data are not sufficient to eliminate alternative explanations for the patterns that we have documented, and hence to prove that it is the enhanced outreach that has caused these patterns to appear.

The Partnership to End Childhood Hunger in Maryland team developed an outreach strategy that reflects widely accepted best practices in the field and plans to refine these elements in the future. Moreover, the Maryland Department of Education started collecting data about participation at the site level this year. Therefore, we believe that there will be an enhanced capacity to assess the impact of enhanced outreach and other changes in the program by engaging in site-by-site analyses in the future.

In addition to this, as noted earlier in this report, we believe that efforts to promote increased utilization of the program should go beyond enhancements to program outreach. In particular, we feel that additional attention should be paid to analyses of capacity and willingness to serve additional youth at “open sites”, followed by steps to ensure that the sites are indeed welcoming of additional young people who could benefit from the program.

Recommendations

Our study findings and conclusions strongly suggest that No Kid Hungry Maryland should continue the basic approaches that they have taken in the past, including continuing to hold canvassing days and advertising free summer meals through a variety of types of media, business cards, and flyers.

However, there is room for improvement in several aspects of the outreach work. One of them is making sure that the sites that are listed as “open” are indeed welcoming of walk-ins and have the capacity to serve increased numbers of young people. For example, the Governor’s Office for Children hotline makes an effort to direct families to sites where they think they will have a positive experience. Therefore, if similar efforts are adopted next summer, the sites that children are directed to should be vetted, and staff or volunteers from No Kid Hungry Maryland partner agencies should return periodically to ensure that they welcome walk-ins throughout the summer.

Another option would be sending youth workers or other volunteers on random checks to ensure that open sites are aware throughout the summer that they should be serving meals to all people under 18 who wish to eat them. These workers could be trained to identify sites that are capable of increasing their capacity to serve additional walk-ins and would be optimal targets for canvassing. No Kid Hungry Maryland could use some of its resources to encourage sponsors and the Maryland State Department of Education to train sites appropriately, and to visit and call a subsample of sites to make sure they accept walk-ins. If open sites are not operating as such, a mechanism is needed to direct families to more welcoming sites.

Our analyses of the canvassing also suggest areas for improvement. In particular, we believe that the small proportion of families who were reachable when someone knocked on their doors suggests that No Kid Hungry Maryland should explore alternatives to canvassing during the workday, such as canvassing on weekends or evenings (if it is safe to do so) so that more families can be reached. Youth workers and participants in most summer jobs programs are generally available only during weekday working hours, but No Kid Hungry Maryland might explore whether it is possible to hire interns or find volunteers from other programs who can canvass during higher-impact times. They could also consider beginning canvassing while school is still in session, to give families more time to plan.

We believe that No Kid Hungry Maryland should explore the costs and benefits of hiring someone to see whether more could be done with community organizations such as churches to help increase participation – or help the staff learn additional reasons why more young people are not attending the meals. No Kid Hungry Maryland is currently working to identify leaders within each county to help publicize free summer meals. A community organizer would allow further work to be done to connect with members of existing organizations who can spread the word about the meals.

Trying to increase food program participation by promoting enrollments at camps, recreation programs, and other activities such as the Baltimore “Super Summer” seems

effective, as it puts more children in a situation where they are likely to receive free summer meals. If the resources exist, these efforts should be continued and expanded. Staff at many sites reported few or no walk-ins, whereas those enrolled in programs are extremely likely to eat the free summer meals whenever they are served. Making enrollment in programs cheaper and easier provides the same sort of “captive audience” for free meals that children get when they are students during the school year, in addition to giving children the benefit of having access to high quality summer programming and child care.

Appendix A: Detailed Description of Site Visits

Chick Webb Recreation Center

The Chick Webb Recreation Center runs a camp that incorporates free summer meals, including breakfast, lunch and dinner. However, there is a fee to attend the other camp programming. Share Our Strength had canvassed in the neighborhood in order to direct more families to Chick Webb, but we were told that families that arrived as a result of the canvassing were generally confused and were interested in free camp, which is not something the site offered. We were told that these families would often eat one free meal if they arrived in time for breakfast, and then not come back in the future.

According to the person to whom we spoke, there were usually 50 young people eating meals at the center, and the person in charge of the summer meals said that he believed he could feed about 10 more people per day. It was difficult to estimate the number of young people participating in the free meals program on the day of the site visit. Conversations with the children at lunchtime revealed that most of them had heard about the meals through the camp, and others heard about it through people connected to their families.

Albemarle Square

At Albemarle Square, volunteers and youth workers operate a site where children can come and play, as well as receive free meals. The volunteers said that they sometimes have more kids than they have meals, in which case they will pay for food with their own money. Site staff reported that they also sometimes cook or provide food for children to take home on weekends.

Most of the children we spoke with said they found out about the meals from the program manager, but some said they learned about it from a flyer that was distributed – perhaps by No Kid Hungry Maryland-supported canvassers – to their apartments. Most of the children lived a very short walk away – the site was located in a public housing complex and mostly served children who lived there. The site provides activities until a bit after noon on code red days and still provides food, and has programming until 2 PM or so on days with more moderate temperatures.

Pleasant View Gardens

Pleasant View Gardens is also located in a housing development. Only five young people – two youth workers and three others – participated in free meals on the day of the visit. The site manager told us that participation in the free summer meals was significantly lower than usual that day, and had decreased this summer from the numbers in previous years. She provided several explanations for the lower attendance throughout the summer. First of all,

she believes that discounts in camp prices allowed more families to send their children to camps away from the housing site – where they would also get free summer meals. She also reported that the 10 youth workers who generally ate free summer meals had just received a paycheck the previous Friday, so only two youth workers ate a free summer meal.

One of the three other children was a walk-in, and the other two were with a program where some of the children came to eat the meals. The three children with whom we spoke all suggested that the meals would be more popular if people had the opportunity to win prizes in exchange for attendance. One of the three said she found out about the meals from a flyer mailed to her house.

Cecil Elementary School

Most of those eating free summer meals at this site are summer school students for whom the availability of free summer meals is not the primary reason for coming.²⁰ The only walk-ins who regularly attend this site are Baltimore Youth Works participants who canvass for No Kid Hungry Maryland.

Nevertheless, the site manager said that the children like the many kinds of food that she provides for meals, and that if walk-ins come to the site after she is officially closed for the day, she will still feed them. A No Kid Hungry Maryland staff person told us that at the beginning of the summer she was not even aware that she was part of a site that accepted walk-ins, but she offered food to them anyway, even if they came after the official lunch period had closed. Unlike many of the other sites, the site manager said they had the capacity to feed more walk-ins if they were to arrive.

Druid Hill Park Pool

At the Druid Hill Park Pool, site managers report that they often get between 600 and 1,200 people each day – and that the numbers tend to be at the higher end of these estimates when it is especially hot outside. Despite these large numbers, they serve only about 120 summer meals per day, in part due to limitations in capacity. The managers say that 120 meals is all that they are able to store, and they know that they will be able to serve this number even if there is bad weather. We were also told that not everyone coming to the site is interested in a meal, as many camps that provide meals to their participants also bring children to the pool.

Very few people were partaking of the free meals at the time of our mid-day site visit – the weather was rainy and we were there before meal demand was said to peak, after 3 PM. We

²⁰ At lunchtime, the students are led in a combination of chants and silence contests as they eat, which made it difficult to interview children at this site.

only saw about five to eight children eating free meals, including a caregiver with two small children, ages two and eight, and a group of young boys.

The managers report that they often get more than 120 people who want a meal, but they are hesitant to order more due to a concern about wastage on days with bad weather. The only caregiver that was present when we were there suggested that it would be helpful if the pool posted hours that lunch was available and let people know about the meals when they called to find out what time the pool would be open.

St. Veronica's Church

St. Veronica's Church has a number of free meals options. It runs a dinner program that accepts walk-ins, but it also provides breakfast, lunch, and snacks to campers as an enrollment-only ("closed") meal site. Due to supplemental funding from the United Way, parents can eat at the site, as well as children, which makes it more appealing for families. (This approach has been shown to be a successful way of increasing attendance by a No Kid Hungry summer food program in Colorado.)

Site managers told us that the site typically shows a movie or offers craft activities during dinner, but such activities were not offered on the evening of the visit – perhaps so as to allow us to conduct interviews more easily. During the visit, we spoke to two large families of walk-ins. In the first, we were told that both the mother and father and their children come in nearly every day for dinner. They said their children are extremely eager to come and start reminding them about the meals at 4 PM. They say the meals are extremely easy for them to access – they live down the street – and that if people they tell about them don't come it is because they are lazy. They found out about the meals through the sign on the front of the church and they spoke to their pastor about it. They thought other people in their neighborhood could be reached by radio advertising.

When one of the four families that usually attend dinner did not come, the site director called them to see if they were on their way to make sure he could feed them if at all possible.

Appendix B: Canvassing Survey

Expanded Questions for canvassers, to be given out to those who seem receptive and appear to be willing to speak in person or on the phone after initial contact.

Do you mind if I ask you another few questions about free summer meals in Maryland?

Share Our Strength is working to see how effective our efforts to promote free summer meals are, and they have asked us to gather data from a sample of people who have heard about free summer meals. Children might receive free meals at camp or summer school programs, or at sites they go to just to obtain the meals.

The information you share will be totally anonymous and confidential—we will not record your name or address with the survey—and it will be used for only one purpose, creating a report for Share Our Strength and its partner organizations who are working to increase the number of young people who get free summer meals.

Answering any of these questions is completely optional—you don't have to answer anything and it will not affect your eligibility for benefits for any programs.

*If they agree to answer more questions, go through the rest of the sheet. **Do not read out the answer choices**, but check the box or boxes that give that answer. If they do not give one of the answers indicated below the question, please write in whatever the person says in the blank.*

Please ask the person relevant questions as indicated in italics—everyone should be asked the first questions, and at the end some questions are only for people who knew, or did not know, about free summer meals.

Finally, please make additional notes or comments if you feel they will be helpful to the researchers. If you have any questions or comments about the survey, or would like to see changes made to make it more useful, please email amandamilstein@gmail.com. We would like the survey to be easy to give and yield useful information.

For the interviewer: Please check the following box to let us know if the person agreed to answer any more questions.

- Person agreed to answer the questions
- Person did not agree to answer the questions

Are you aware of any summer camps, summer schools, or other programs that give kids in your neighborhood free meals?

- Not at all
- Somewhat
- Yes

Do you have a child in summer camp, summer school, or another program who you think receives or received free summer meals this summer (for example, at a school or camp program)?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Have one or more of your children taken advantage of the free summer meals at camps or summer schools in previous summers?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

What would be a good way for people to let families like yours know about programs like free summer meals?

- Distribute flyers/postcards/business cards
- Posters on buses
- Posters in other places (please say where: _____)
- Radio/television
- Word of mouth
- Friends or family
- My child's school
- A summer program my child was attending
- People knocking on my door to tell me about it
- A phone call telling me about it
- Advertising through the internet (Facebook, twitter, a website, etc.)
- Some other way: _____

Have you heard of Baltimore's Super Summer program?

- Yes
- No

Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about free summer meals for your family?

Can we give you more information about how to get free summer meals? Do you know about the 211 hotline, the website with information about the meals, and that you can text to get more information about local sites?

If the family has used or heard about free summer meals, please ask the following question:

If you know that free meals were available at programs such as summer schools and camps, how did you learn about them? (please check all that apply)

- I did not know about them until you came
- From the school or camp
- I heard about them from talking to you
- I knew about them from last year
- I saw a flyer/postcard/business card in my neighborhood
- I saw a flyer/postcard/business card somewhere else in Baltimore
- I saw a poster on a bus stop/on a bus
- I saw a poster in another place (please say where: _____)
- I heard about it on the radio/television
- Someone I did not know told me about them
- I heard about it from friends or family
- I heard about it from my child's school
- I was told about it at a summer program my child was attending
- Someone knocked on my door to tell me about it
- Someone left a notice about it at my door when they came by but I was not home
- I received a phone call letting me know about the program
- I received information in the mail
- Through the internet (Facebook, twitter, a website, etc.)
- Some other way: _____

If the family had NOT used free summer meals, please ask the following two questions:

Why have you not sent your child to eat free summer meals (i.e. at a camp or summer school)?

(Please list all that apply)

- I don't have any children
- I didn't know where to go
- The hours didn't fit my or my childrens' schedule
- The site is not nearby
- My child didn't want to go because he/she heard the food was not good
- My child didn't want to go for some other reason
- My child is not living at home this summer
- My child is doing something else this summer
- We have enough good food at home
- Other: _____

Is there anything that might make you want to bring your child to free summer meals or encourage him or her to go? (please include all that apply)

- If the site had activities, such as camp, sports, or summer school
- If there was an easier way to get my child to the meal site
- If the site felt safer
- If the food was more appealing
- Other: _____

For the interviewer: Please record the respondent's zip code, the name of the closest open summer meal site to their home, and today's date

Zip code:

Closest summer meal site:

Date of conversation:
