

Key Finding

The Umbrella Model shows the potential to increase participation in the Afterschool Meals Program by more than 50 percent over historical totals at middle and high schools that promote the availability of meals to all students.

Overview: The CACFP Afterschool Meals Program

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) is a federal entitlement program that provides funding to help offset the cost of providing healthy meals to infants, children, teens, and adults in a variety of care settings. In December 2010, the At-Risk Afterschool Meals Program was authorized as a permanent part of CACFP that could be implemented nationwide. The Afterschool Meals Program allows educational or enrichment programs in eligible low-income areas, whether school or community-based, to receive funding for up to one meal and one snack each day. This meal is crucial to children in need who may not have access to nutritious food in the evenings. In addition, children and teens need fuel for long hours of afterschool activities that keep them active and learning.

The Need

Increasing access to the CACFP Afterschool Meals Program is critical to ending childhood hunger. Currently, only a fraction of the children who receive a free or reduced-price lunch at school have access to a meal or snack after school. In a nationally representative survey of low-income parents, 59 percent reported that tight household budgets made it difficult to provide food for their kids after school, and a quarter were worried that their children did not have enough to eat between lunch and breakfast the following day.¹

From a Community School Coordinator in Maryland:

“The most valuable piece for me was recognizing that a lot of students are hungry. They said, ‘This is a blessing because I was hungry,’ or ‘I don’t have food at home.’ I’m seeing all those students stay after to eat.”

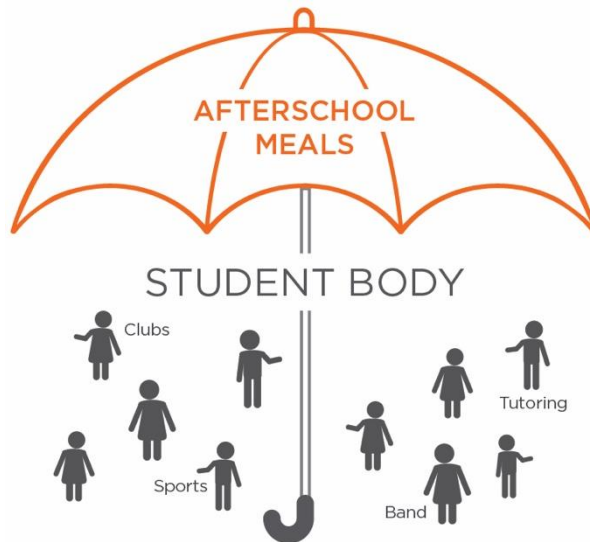
As a relatively new program that can fill an unmet need, the CACFP Afterschool Meals Program has great potential for growth. This growth could come from the number of sponsoring organizations that administer the Afterschool Meals Program, the number of locations serving meals, and the number of children receiving meals at each location. Because it is a new program, many schools and organizations do not know about it or may need support in starting or expanding the program. Moreover, there has so far been little research to determine best practices for implementing an effective and accessible program. With this in mind, the No Kid Hungry campaign has invested in testing promising models in order to identify and promote tactics that will expand access to this vital resource.

¹ No Kid Hungry Center for Best Practices in partnership with APCO Insights (2014). “National Afterschool Meals Program Survey Findings.” <https://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/afterschool/afterschool-meals-survey-findings>.

The Umbrella Model

One afterschool meal delivery model that shows promise for reaching more kids is the Umbrella Model. The Umbrella Model refers to a meal program that is open both to children participating in a range of activities, as well as those who choose not to participate in formal activities. This is in contrast to a meal program that operates solely for children enrolled in or attending a specific enrichment activity.

To be eligible for the Afterschool Meals Program, each serving location must provide an educational or enrichment activity. Consequently, there is a pervasive perception that CACFP meals are intended only for activity participants. However, several memoranda and guidance materials issued by the United States Department of Agriculture clarify that as long as eligible enrichment programming is available, meals can be offered freely to all eligible children and teens.² This eligibility extends to student athletes; a school could not operate the Afterschool Meals Program exclusively for its athletes, but they may receive meals if there is an open enrichment program on site. While attendance records are required, the regulations specifically state that participants do not have to be enrolled in the afterschool program. For participating schools, the children do not even need to be enrolled students. So, for example, siblings who attend another school could join their brother or sister for a meal.



Meals may be served in a central location, such as the cafeteria or multi-purpose room, or throughout the building, including wherever children participate in activities.³ For the Umbrella Model, meals are typically served in a central and easily accessible location. However, schools that offer tutoring or study hall as an open-to-all enrichment activity may choose to offer meals in the same place, like the library.

To date, the Umbrella Model has most commonly been observed in school-based settings where many activities may occur throughout the afternoon while also remaining open to non-participating students. This model may also be expanded to community-based sponsors. For example, multiple afterschool programs could operate or begin in a central location, like a library or recreation center, with programming and meals available to all.

Innovation Pilot Testing

To better understand how effective the Umbrella Model is at expanding access to the Afterschool Meals Program, Share Our Strength conducted a small-scale experiment in four schools during the spring of 2015. This experiment showed that the model had the potential to increase participation in the Afterschool Meals Program, even if the school only made the meals available to students in additional activities rather than the entire student body. In the fall of 2015, we conducted a larger pilot test in 16 schools. The pilot study included middle and high schools because older students are likely to have more

² US Department of Agriculture (July 2015). "At-Risk Afterschool Meals: A Child and Adult Care Food Program Handbook," pages 8-10. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/atriskhandbook.pdf>.

³ US Department of Agriculture (July 2015). "At-Risk Afterschool Meals: A Child and Adult Care Food Program Handbook," page 41. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/atriskhandbook.pdf>.

control over how they spend their afterschool hours. In contrast, younger students are more likely to be enrolled in formal aftercare programs or go straight home as soon as school ends.

The schools selected to participate in the Umbrella Model pilot test received small incentive grants of \$1,500 for current CACFP participants and \$2,000 for new participants. Pilot schools were responsible for:

- Allowing all students, regardless of participation in afterschool activities, to receive the afterschool meal;
- Promoting the meal to all students in at least two different forms (e.g., announcements over the school’s public address system and signs in the cafeteria); and
- Reporting participation data to Share Our Strength through use of a sign-in sheet on which students identified whether they were participating in an activity or just coming for the meal.

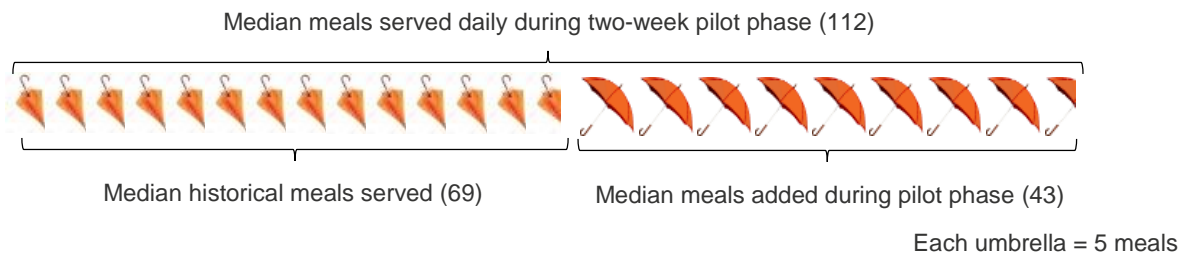
It is not a CACFP requirement to identify or track whether students participate in any activity; it is only important to document that a child was present with a roster, sign-in sheet, or other approved means of recording daily attendance. However, for the purpose of this pilot test, it was important to know how many students would not have received a meal under a closed model in which the meals were only available to students participating in certain activities.

Key Findings

Of the 10 fall pilot schools that had historical data, there was a **median 53 percent increase in participation during the pilot period** over prior participation. On average, 18 percent of the students eligible for free and reduced-price meals were eating an afterschool meal during the pilot period.

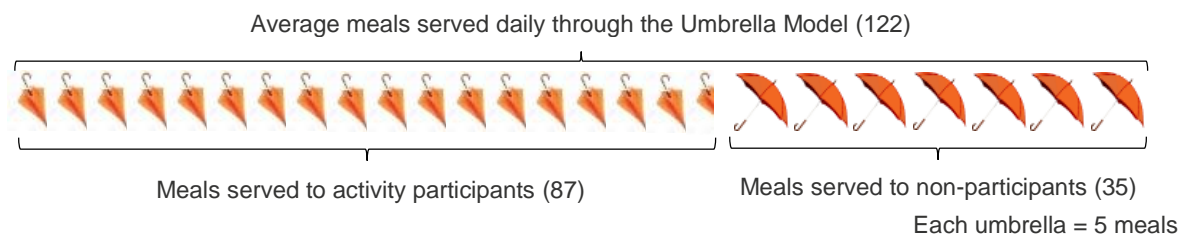
In the pilot schools that truly opened the Afterschool Meals Program to all students, not just to the students participating in activities, an average of 28 percent of students who received a meal indicated that they were not participating in an activity. These students likely would not have received a meal if the Afterschool Meals Program had operated under a closed model.

Increase in Average Meals Served per School: Historical Data vs. Umbrella Model Pilot Data



Increased participation was also observed in four schools that did not fully implement the Umbrella Model as described due to implementation barriers. Instead, the schools made meals available to students in additional existing activities, or more actively promoted the program to students participating in activities.

Impact of the Umbrella Model: Meals Served to Activity Participants vs. Non-Participants



The daily participation under the Umbrella Model varied widely by school, as might be expected depending on a variety of factors including school size, level of need, number and popularity of afterschool activities, and transportation options for students staying after the final bell. On average, 35 students per school indicated that they stayed for the meal only, resulting in approximately **\$115 per day in additional reimbursements and commodities**.⁴ For a school that serves afterschool meals Monday through Thursday during the school year, that increase in participation nets over \$16,000 in additional reimbursements and commodities.

Key Lessons

There were several important lessons learned from the pilot schools that can help to inform future adoption of the Umbrella Model.

Concerns over potential discipline problems are a barrier to adoption, but none of the schools reported behavioral issues during implementation.

A common perception during the recruitment process was that the Umbrella Model would lead to discipline issues due to more students staying after school, especially students who are not specifically engaged in an activity. However, following the pilot phase, **schools reported that they did not experience any additional discipline problems.**

Still, it is crucial to have the support of the school's administration as well as any staff members or volunteers who stay after school. The food service staff often has limited influence over other staff members, and with potentially few, if any, food service staff members present during the afterschool meal service, the afterschool staff may feel that the burden of addressing problems will all fall to them. Support from the administration can assuage fears, build acceptance among all staff members, and help with an

From a Food Service Director in Texas:

"I got calls from parents thanking me for starting [the Afterschool Meal Program]. Their child has activities afterschool, and now they can have something to eat until they can get home."

implementation plan that will keep students adequately supervised and positively engaged. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the availability of the meal may actually encourage more students to stay afterschool and take advantage of optional, drop-in programs like tutoring or study hall, which could have further-reaching benefits while reducing immediate behavior concerns.

Champions play a key role in a successful program.

The Afterschool Meals Program is most successful when someone takes the lead on coordinating the efforts of the food service, afterschool programs, athletics, and custodial staffs. This leader, or champion,

From a Food Service Director in California:

"The principal and the child nutrition director both have to be on board. It's not strong enough to have just any one person representing a cohort of students. Change is so hard at the school level. We work with people who have a lot on their plates and it's difficult for them to imagine taking on anything more."

⁴ The "free" reimbursement rate for lunches and suppers from July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2016 is \$3.07 per meal. An additional \$0.2375 in commodity foods or cash-in-lieu of commodities is also provided for each meal served.

may be an administrator or someone else with the enthusiasm and influence needed to organize stakeholders.

The champion can facilitate conversations and cooperation between groups so that all staff members feel involved and invested in the program. These interactions can also lead to solutions that make the meal service run smoothly and successfully, such as changing the timing of the meal, serving students in shifts based on activity schedules, changing the location of the meal service, or determining the most efficient way to collect and submit required records. The champion is also important for promoting the program among staff members. Athletic and activity staff can encourage participation and make the meal a part of their afternoon schedule, so their awareness and assistance are essential. The champion can also explore other means of promotion that would be most effective.

School-wide announcements and word-of-mouth advertising appear to be the most effective communication strategies.

The participating schools indicated that consistently **promoting the afterschool meal through the morning and afternoon school-wide announcements was the best way** to get the students' attention. They felt that the announcements via the public address system also led to word-of-mouth conversations that further promoted the program. In addition, schools found it helpful to have supportive afterschool activity staff who encouraged their groups to get a meal before or during their activity. Less common approaches that some schools found helpful included news coverage, social media announcements, and special promotions, like raffles. One school found it beneficial to have a food service staff member out in the foyer after school announcing the availability of meals in person.

Procedures for tracking attendance may need to be adapted in order to meet CACFP regulatory requirements, but there are numerous ways to achieve compliance.

According to the CACFP regulations for the Afterschool Meals Program, the basic daily records that must be maintained at each location include:

- Dated daily attendance records that show each child's name, such as a roster or sign-in sheet;
- Dated daily meal count records that show the number of meals and/or snacks served to eligible children (and, if applicable, to food service staff);
- Dated daily records that show the number of meals prepared or delivered; and
- Dated daily menus.

Schools may rely on the attendance records already being maintained for the afterschool activity to reduce the record keeping burden. Under the umbrella model, the method of taking attendance would need to be modified to capture the students who do not participate in an activity.

At participating schools during the pilot test, all students who received a meal recorded their name on a sign-in sheet. Schools may find this method easier than collecting and compiling attendance records from numerous activity coordinators, especially if they are not accustomed to maintaining attendance records.

Schools that have access to an electronic point-of-service system may find it most effective to use it for the afterschool meal in addition to lunch. Students can swipe their ID card or enter their ID number as they would for lunch, but the student would not be charged for the meal regardless of their reimbursement rate eligibility category. Because this method ties the meal count to a specific student, some state agencies may allow this to count for both the attendance and the meal count record.

Another option would be to print a roster of the student body and have students check off their name for each day they attend. While this requires more printing than a blank sign-in sheet, there are fewer concerns with legibility, and it keeps the line moving faster.

As with all changes to record keeping methods, contacting your state agency prior to implementing a new system is strongly recommended.

Conclusion

The Umbrella Model shows great promise for ensuring that more kids across the country have access to nutritious meals afterschool. For more information about the Afterschool Meal Program, please visit the No Kid Hungry Center for Best Practices [website](#).



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