

Deseret News

Fewer hungry children getting free summer meals

By Mary Clare Jalonick

Associated Press

Published: Wednesday, June 30, 2010 12:00 a.m. MDT

WASHINGTON — Hungry children looking for a free meal this summer may not be able to find one.

States and cities have cut funding for summer meal programs as need has skyrocketed, according to a new report from an anti-hunger group that tracked the program in 2009.

Budget woes that have left many families hungry also are affecting local governments that find themselves without the needed dollars to feed children while they are out of school.

"Low-income children across the country clearly bore the brunt of budget cuts," said Jim Weill, president of the Food Research and Action Center, which compiled the report released Tuesday.

Summer nutrition programs aim to feed children who get most of their nutrition — or sometimes their only real meal of the day — at school.

The food research group measures the effectiveness of those summer programs by comparing the number of low-income children receiving meals during the summer with those receiving free and reduced-price school meals during the school year.

The group's data, collected from the Agriculture Department and a survey of state child nutrition officials, show that during the summer of 2009, only 16 percent of students who ate free or reduced-cost lunches during the school year were fed when school was out. The figure was 17 percent in the summer of 2008 and 21 percent in 2001.

California had a significant decrease, as did Louisiana, South Carolina, Kentucky, Hawaii and Utah.

Data for meals served statewide in Utah this summer aren't available, though Charlene Allert, assistant nutrition director for the state, said she believes this summer will show more students participating than last summer.

San Juan School District canceled the program last year, which might account for the fact that the study shows a decrease in Utah participation.

Of the districts and meal sites remaining, however, many are seeing sharp increases so far.

Kelly Orton, director of child nutrition for the Salt Lake City School District, said the district was serving more than 13,000 meals a day just two weeks into the program, when last year it was only serving about 10,500 at that time. That district is able to pay for the program exclusively with federal funds.

Contributing: Molly Farmer, Deseret News

© 2010 Deseret News Publishing Company | All rights reserved