



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 21, 2018

Contact: Nancy Parello | (908) 399-6031 | nparello@acnj.org

New text number steers NJ kids to summer meals

As the school year ends for children across New Jersey, the USDA has announced a new text number that parents and other caregivers can use to find free meals for children this summer.

People can text "summer meals" to 97779 or visit fns.usda.gov/summerfoodrocks to find local sites. Both the text number and website provide locations, meals served and times meals are served, based on a person's zip code.

"This is an easy way for parents and other caregivers to find meal sites," said Adele LaTourette, director, New Jersey Anti-Hunger Coalition. "We are also encouraging community organizations, schools and local government to publicize this resource in their communities."

More than 1,300 New Jersey communities will be serving meals to help fill the summertime nutrition gap, especially for children who rely on school meals during the academic year.

Funded through the federal government, these meals are provided free to children 18 and under. At "open" sites, where enrollment in a program is not required, children can simply go to a location and receive a meal. Parents do not need to provide identification or proof of income for their children to be eligible.

In addition to providing free, healthy meals, these programs also offer an opportunity for children 18 years and younger to play together, engage in enrichment activities, hone their academic skills and be better prepared when they return to school in September, LaTourette said.

New Jersey has made strong progress in serving meals to more children. A recent national report ranked the state 6th in the U.S. for serving more meals to children - up from 12th last year.

In July 2017, New Jersey communities served nearly 1.5 million lunches to children and teens across the state - a 32 percent increase over 2016, according to the Food Research & Action Center's (FRAC) annual ***Hunger Doesn't Take A Summer Vacation: Summer Nutrition State Report.***

On an average day last July, 101,138 New Jersey children ate lunch at hundreds of sites across the state, including parks, libraries, pools, camps, schools and other places where children congregate in the summer.

"We are hoping that we will reach even more kids this summer," said Cecilia Zalkind, president & CEO, Advocates for Children of New Jersey, co-leader of the New Jersey Food for Thought Campaign. "We are encouraging communities to spread the word so parents know where to find meals for their children. It's a win-win for parents, children and communities as a whole."

To learn more, visit njsummermeals.org.

[View summer meals outreach tools](#)

