

April 24, 2014

Dear Colleague:

Children are America's greatest treasure and ensuring they have the proper nutrition to learn, grow up healthy, and reach their full potential is one of our most important duties as community members, educators, and leaders. Nearly 50 years ago, President Lyndon B. Johnson declared the *War on Poverty*, a set of initiatives that continues to expand educational opportunities, secure economic equality, and provide nutritious meals to those in need. Our nation has a long and impressive history of ensuring that its needy citizens, especially children, have enough food in order to thrive. Your leadership can help to ensure that those same children do not go hungry in your community this summer.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) summer meal programs that are available to schools include the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the Seamless Summer Option of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). These programs operate in partnership with the federal government, state agencies, and local organizations to serve free meals to children age 18 years and younger. USDA provides reimbursement for meals; state agencies administer the program; and local organizations, including schools, nonprofits, parks and recreation departments, libraries, and faith-based groups serve the meals. Summer meals programs are critical to children in need because we know that only a portion of students participate in summer meal programs compared to those that participate during the school year. During the 2012-2013 school year, approximately 21 million children were served free and reduced-price meals, while only approximately 3.5 million children participated in a meal program during the summer 2013.

We need your leadership and assistance to help feed hungry children this coming summer. There are many ways you can assist, but specifically, you can encourage superintendents and principals to assist in the following ways:

- **Provide children in your community with meals at your schools this summer.** Local schools are the best sites for summer feeding efforts. Children and parents are familiar with local schools, and schools are known for providing nutritious food in a safe environment. Even if your school will not be offering summer school, if it is located in a low-income area, it can be a summer feeding site and fill that important meal gap for students so that they are ready to learn when they return to school in the fall.
- **Ask teachers and staff in your schools to share information about nearby summer meal sites, whether the site is at your school or at other locations in your community.** School leaders can find local feeding sites by calling 1-866-3-HUNGRY or 1-877-8-HAMBRE or [visiting the Why Hunger website](#). Schools communicate regularly and effectively with the families of children in your community. You can help reach out and connect these families with summer meals before the school year ends and continue to make a difference in the lives of your students throughout the summer.
- **Be a champion in your community.** As a recognized leader, you have many opportunities to meet with other community leaders and organizations that have an interest in ensuring children have resources to succeed. Take the time to discuss summer meals programs and how others can get involved by becoming a sponsor or site that serves meals.

To learn more about the USDA summer meal programs, [visit the USDA Summer Food Service Program website](#). In addition, the Food and Nutrition Service regional office staff is available to provide technical assistance and answer any questions you may have on USDA summer meal programs. [Visit the Food and Nutrition Service Regional Offices website](#).

Thank you, as always, for your dedication and commitment to our children. By working together, we can be sure our children have the food and nutrition needed to continue to grow and succeed.

Sincerely,

Thomas J. Vilsack  
Secretary of Agriculture

Arne Duncan  
Secretary of Education