



Florida Should Use a Special Session to Accept Federal Dollars to Feed Hungry Children This Summer*



Introduction

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) began a new program last year to feed children during the summer, when school meals are not available. The Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer Program for Children (Summer EBT) provides \$120 per child, loaded onto a debit card parents can use to buy groceries. For a state's families to benefit, its leaders must opt into the program.

Florida was [one of only 13 states](#) that rejected federal dollars to feed children in the summer of 2024. If the state had participated in the program, it would have received \$259 million in federal dollars to increase the food buying power of thousands of Floridian families. According to Florida government officials the money [wasn't needed](#), because their past approach to serving children was successful without the need for any additional federal dollars.

There's still time for Florida to claim these federal dollars, if our leaders act quickly. Even though Florida has already missed two deadlines, the Governor can and should call a Special Session for the Legislature to opt into this year's Summer EBT. Last year, federal officials let states sign up for summer EBT as late as February, and the same is likely to be true this year as well.

However, data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse [Survey](#) (HPS), show, as explained next, that Florida's decision to reject Summer EBT left nearly 800,000 Florida children without enough food to eat during the summer.

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Almost 800,000 Florida children do not have enough food to eat during the summer

Contrary to state officials’ assertions, Florida’s food programs have not prevented widespread childhood hunger during the summer. On average, 755,000 Florida children do not have enough food to eat during the summer months (Table 1).

Summer food deficits harm children of all races and ethnicities. Among Florida’s children who do not have enough food over the summer, **32%** are Latino* (243,000), **33%** are Non-Hispanic Black (247,000) and **30%** are Non-Hispanic white children (228,000) (Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution by race and ethnicity of Florida children without enough food to eat (Summer 2023-2024)

Race/ethnicity	Number of children who did not have enough food to eat	Distribution by race and ethnicity of children who did not have enough to eat
Latino	243,000	32%
Non-Hispanic Black	247,000	33%
Non-Hispanic white	228,000	30%
Other	28,000	4%
Unspecified	10,000	1%
Total	755,000	100%

Source: UnidosUS analysis of Household Pulse Survey (HPS) data from cycles 6-8 for 2024 and cycles 58-61 for 2023.

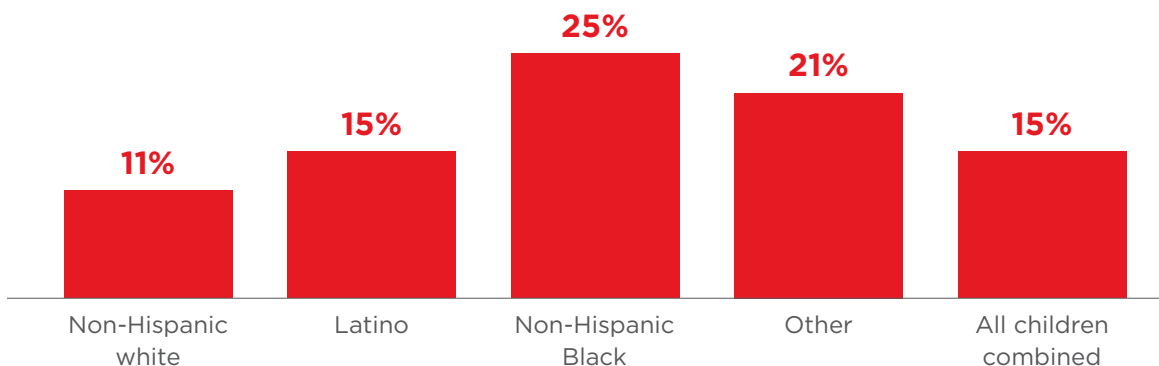
Note: Sums may not total because of rounding. Latinos are Hispanics of all races.

Note: Fielded roughly once a month, HPS asks parents whether their children had enough food to eat during the seven days before the survey. Based on data from summer 2023 and 2024, we estimated the average number of Florida’s children who do not have enough food to eat when school is out for summer.

* The terms “Hispanic” and “Latino” are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and throughout this document to refer to persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish and other Hispanic descent; they may be of any race.

Children of color are particularly likely to experience hunger. 15% of all Florida children lack sufficient food during the summer, but the proportion varies greatly by race and ethnicity: 15% of Latino children and 25% of Non-Hispanic Black children do not have enough food to eat when school is out, compared to 11% of Non-Hispanic white children (Figure 1).

Figure 1. In each racial and ethnic group, the percentage of all Florida children who did not have enough food to eat (Summer 2023-2024)



Source: UnidosUS analysis of HPS data from cycles 6-8 for 2024 and cycles 58-61 for 2023.

Note: Latinos are Hispanics of all races.

Florida’s children, families and businesses have suffered from the state’s rejection of federal dollars to feed hungry children in the summer

Children without enough food to eat can experience serious harm. Holding all other factors constant, researchers [report](#) that household food insecurity increases children’s asthma rates by 19%, emergency department visits by 26% and depression by 28%. When school is not in session, children lose access to the nutritious meals provided at school. This gap in nutrition can harm their health as school meals can be one of the healthiest sources of food for children and, for some children, the only meals they have all day.

Turning away federal food money hurts Florida’s small businesses. Families facing financial hardship have less disposable income to spend on food each month, which cuts revenue for farmers, grocers, corner bodegas and other retailers.

Accepting federal food money will boost the state’s overall economy. Grocers and farmers use some of their revenue from increased sales to buy other goods and services from Florida businesses, producing a “multiplier effect” across economic sectors. According to the nonpartisan [Food and Research Action Center](#), Florida’s acceptance of federal food money for summer EBT would generate between \$388 million and \$466 million in additional economic activity, increasing state and local revenue and growing jobs.

Florida’s return on investment (ROI) from participating in the summer food program would be extraordinarily high. To draw down \$259 million in federal food dollars, the state would need to spend only \$13 million in administrative costs, providing a 20 to 1 ROI. In fact, the return would be even higher if Florida applied for and received [supplemental federal grants](#) to pay for administrative costs required to modernize the state’s outdated computer system.

Conclusion

Food prices in Florida remain among the highest in the **nation** and unaffordable for far too many Florida families.

Four years after the pandemic depths of March 2020, the price of eggs has risen by 50%, flour costs by 36% and canned fruits and vegetables by 32%. At such a time, Florida's leaders should be doing everything in their power to help families pay for groceries. Instead, Florida's leaders turned away millions of dollars that the state's families could have used to pay for food this past summer. That decision hurt children, farmers, grocers and the state's overall economy.

Florida can still qualify for federal funds to feed the state's children this summer. Florida missed the first two deadlines, August 15, 2024, and January 1, 2025, to claim summer 2025 money. USDA has welcomed other states that were late to signal interest, and Florida could still meet a future February 15 deadline. If Florida acts now through a special session, it can change course to support hardworking families during the summer.

Florida's children deserve to have enough food to eat, no less than children from the [37 states](#) that have already implemented the Summer EBT. It's time for state officials to finally accept federal dollars that will help Floridians cope with high food prices and feed their families during the summer, when children cannot get meals at school.



About UnidosUS

UnidosUS is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that serves as the nation's largest Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization. Since 1968, we have challenged the social, economic and political barriers that affect Latinos through our unique combination of expert research, advocacy, programs and an [Affiliate Network](#) of more than 300 community-based organizations across the United States and Puerto Rico. We believe in an America where economic, political and social progress is a reality for all Latinos and we collaborate across communities to achieve it.

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