Healthy Children, Healthy Lives: Barriers to Participation in the At-Risk Afterschool Meals Program in Washington State

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This report examines the obstacles that current and potential nonprofit organizations at the sponsor level face in their effort to participate in the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program. While limited in its scope, the report seeks to identify areas that would benefit from targeted attention from nonprofit and state agencies by documenting the experiences of current and potential sponsors via qualitative interviews. Findings illustrate that lack of organizational capacity and administrative barriers are the most limiting factors for current and potential sponsors. Near the end of this report, programmatic and policy recommendations are proposed that seek both to address these barriers and expand participation on a statewide level.
The Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellows Program

The Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellows program is an 11-month fellowship created by the Congressional Hunger Center for emerging leaders that are dedicated to fighting poverty and hunger. Fellowship participants are placed into local as well as national organizations, where they carry out specific anti-hunger or anti-poverty work.

Montae Langston has been placed at the Children’s Alliance in Seattle, Washington working on the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program and other related projects.

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary

1. Introduction

2. Background Issues

3. Overview of the At-Risk Afterschool Meals Program
   - Programmatic Elements
   - Program Capacity to Combat Hunger and Racial Disparities in Health

4. Landscape of Washington State — Rates of Food Insecurity and Afterschool Programs
   - Food Insecurity among Children in Washington State
   - Afterschool Programs in Washington State

5. Goals of Report

6. Methodology

7. Constraints of Report

8. Results of Qualitative Interviews: Benefits and Obstacles to Program Participation

9. Recommendations

10. Conclusion

11. References

12. Appendixes
Healthy Children, Healthy Lives: Barriers to Participation in the At-Risk Afterschool Meals Program in Washington State

Executive Summary

Introduction

The expansion of the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program brings new and exciting opportunities for the state of Washington. The At-Risk Afterschool Meals program not only offers the ability to make important inroads in the fight against hunger, but also the chance to improve the strength of afterschool programs. However, because of the newness of the program for the state, there are numerous roadblocks that nonprofit sponsors face, which hamper efforts to increase participation on a statewide level.

This report looks at the barriers that current and potential sponsors face in their efforts to participate in the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program in Washington. Through the use of qualitative interviews with selected non-profit organizations that are operating or wish to operate at the sponsor level, key recommendations were developed. These recommendations serve to: (1) address the barriers that current and potential sponsors experience; and (2) to introduce strategies that seek to augment participation in the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program.

Findings

Overall, the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program offered numerous benefits to program sponsors. The At-Risk Afterschool Meals program allowed programs to serve federally reimbursed nutritious meals, which freed afterschool programs to use their funds to increase the quality of their afterschool programming. In addition, the serving of meals increased the marketability of their programs to students and parents. Current and potential sponsors did however face numerous barriers. These barriers included:

- **Operational Difficulties of Serving Meals** – Both current and potential sponsors remarked that the process of serving snacks is easier than serving meals. Snacks as opposed to meals, did not require a large number of organizational resources or preparation time. However, serving meals, according to current sponsors, requires the need to deliver food to sites on a more frequent basis, a possible need for vendors or cooks, and a need for larger storage space, which organizations may not have the resources to acquire.

- **Difficulty Acquiring Health, Safety, and Fire Inspections** – Due to the various food, safety, and fire inspection procedures across the different counties, interested organizations faced many difficulties. Overall, current and potential sponsors faced significant barriers when trying to determine where to even begin with health and safety inspections let alone fulfilling the actual requirements for the inspection in their county.

- **Administrative Paperwork Problems** – The administrative paperwork needed for participation in the program coupled with paperwork required for completing claims consumed large amounts of time, especially among current sponsors who were relatively new to the overall CACFP At-Risk program. Moreover, filling out all the required forms for admission into the program as well as ensuring that the proper claims were completed often proved daunting for smaller sponsors and potential sponsors.
Executive Summary (Cont.)

- **Lack of Staffing Capacity** – Sponsors made multiple remarks about their inability to increase staffing in order to serve meals. In many cases, current sponsors found themselves in situations where staff had to limit face-to-face time with their afterschool program participants in order to adequately serve meals to their students. Current sponsors also had difficulty relaying all of the training information back to their staff persons, especially when staff and volunteers were spread across multiple sites.

In order to address these barriers and increase program participation, Washington State should create a comprehensive plan that includes or promotes:

- Transition to a Fully Online Application and Reimbursement Claims System.
- Have Weekly instead of Monthly Reimbursements
- Adopt a Standardized Food Safety Evaluation and Inspection Form
- Grant Support for Sponsors to Pay for Health and Safety Inspections and Equipment
- Encourage the Participation of School Districts via the Involvement of Food Service and School Business Directors.
- Maintain and Expand Outreach Efforts that Promote the Number of Large Sponsors Who Partner with Community Based Afterschool Programs.

**Conclusion**

With these recommendations as a foundational starting point, it is hoped that non-profit organizations and state agencies can further increase access to this program for Washington’s children.
Healthy Children, Healthy Lives: Barriers to Participation in the At-Risk Afterschool Meals Program in Washington State

I. Introduction

In December of 2010, President Obama signed the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act into law, which, among other things, expanded the at-risk afterschool meal program to all states.\(^1\) Washington is one of the recently eligible states that began administering the program upon its expansion. Although relatively new to the state, policymakers and child advocates alike have expressed widespread enthusiasm for the program’s ability to not only support the health and wellbeing of afterschool program participants, but also for the program’s capacity to fight hunger and support afterschool programs. However, advocates and program administrators in Washington face numerous obstacles in the effort to expand participation on a statewide level.

This report provides an examination of the obstacles and barriers that current and potential sponsors face in their effort to participate in the At-Risk Afterschool Meals component of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) in Washington State. Throughout the course of this report, the perspectives and experiences of community level non-profit organizations are analyzed. While not authoritative, the survey results establish important context for advocacy organizations and state agencies for their continued work to increase participation in the CACFP At-Risk Afterschool Meals Program. Healthy Children, Healthy Lives also includes recommendations to help address the barriers current and potential sponsors have encountered.

II. Background Issues

The At-Risk Afterschool Meals component of the Child and Adult Care Food Program provides federal reimbursements to afterschool programs that serve meals to children located in low-income communities. With an estimated 20.2 percent of children living in families that are food insecure nationally, and as many as 1 in 4 children in Washington living in food insecure households, anti-hunger advocates see the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program as an incredible opportunity to make important strides in the fight against food insecurity.\(^2\) Many policymakers and advocates for the

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program also note the numerous benefits of the program, particularly the program’s ability to combat obesity among school aged children as well as promote a healthy lifestyle.³

Nevertheless, the program faces roadblocks, especially for states such as Washington who are new to the program. New states face obstacles that range from lack of experience with the program to insufficient funds for statewide outreach campaigns or grants to cover startup costs. In addition, many new states are also grappling with inadequate technical assistance for interested non-profit organizations. Another issue that affects newly eligible states include whether states will have the necessary resources to address barriers to participation in the program given state budget shortfalls and federal budget battles over the national debt and deficit. These issues and concerns provide a background context for the various programmatic and policy options aimed to address the obstacles to participation in the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program in the Washington.

III. Overview of the At-Risk Afterschool Meals Program

The At-Risk Afterschool Meals component of the Child and Adult Care Food Program, administered through the United States Department of Agriculture’s Food Nutrition Service, provides reimbursements to afterschool programs located in attendance area of schools where 50% or more of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch.⁴ The goals of the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program are two-fold:

- (1) To improve the health of children in afterschool programs by providing them with a nutritious meal;

  and,

- (2) To involve children in supervised enrichment activities during the academic school year.

Unlike the National School Lunch program where “some children pay a reduced or full price, afterschool meals are provided free of charge to all students.”⁵ As noted above, the USDA’s Food Nutrition Service runs the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program on a national level and state agencies administer the program on a state level, usually the Department of Education, Department of


Agriculture, or another agency designated by the state. The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) administers the program for Washington State.

Until recently, only 13 states and the District of Columbia (Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, Nevada, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wisconsin) were authorized to receive federal reimbursement for meals served during afterschool time. However the passage of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 expanded eligibility for reimbursement to all 50 states. A legislative time-line adapted from the United States Department of Agriculture At-Risk Afterschool Meals Handbook is provided below, detailing its first introduction in 2000 to the program’s recent expansion to all 50 states in 2010.

Expanded the "at-risk" afterschool component of CACFP to allow reimbursement for meals for children through age 18 in afterschool programs in the following States: Delaware, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Missouri. Two additional States, New York and Oregon, were selected by USDA on a competitive basis out of a pool of 10 applicant States.

Authorized meal reimbursement for afterschool programs in Illinois.

2008: 2008 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 110-161)
Authorized meal reimbursement for afterschool programs in West Virginia.

2009: The Fiscal Year 2009 Omnibus Appropriations Act (P.L. 111-8)
Authorized meal reimbursement for afterschool programs in Maryland and Vermont.


Expanded meal reimbursements for at-risk afterschool programs in all States.

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7 Ibid.
i. Programmatic Elements

There are a number of programmatic elements of the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program that are important to note in order to gain a deeper understanding of the program itself and the barriers that non-profit organizations face.

Eligibility

For an afterschool program to start serving suppers, afterschool programs must meet a number of requirements. An afterschool program must:

- Be organized with the primary goal of providing out of school time care for school aged children
- Be located in the attendance area of a public school where 50% or more of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch
- Meet state or local health and safety requirements
- Provide an educational or enrichment activity
- Operate either after school, on weekends, or on school vacations during the academic year; and,
- Serve youth who are age 18 or under at the start of the school year.\(^9\)

Reimbursement

Eligible afterschool programs in Washington State receive $2.77 for every meal served through the CACFP At-Risk Afterschool Meals program\(^10\). CACFP also provides cash in lieu of commodities, which provides an additional $.22 cents per meal, bringing the total potential reimbursement rate to $2.99.\(^11\) Reimbursement claims are submitted to OSPI, and upon approval, OSPI then distributes reimbursements to the sponsor or independent center.

Allowable Costs/Expenses\(^12\)

The At-Risk Afterschool meals reimbursement covers the food service cost of serving afterschool meals, including:

- Food and food service supplies,
- Staff time for preparation, including menu planning and purchasing food and supplies
- Staff time preparing and serving meals
- Clean Up
- On site supervision of food service, including serving the meal

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\(^11\) Ibid.

\(^12\) Oregon Department of Education, CACFP Handbook, October 2006
Up to 15% of reimbursement dollars can be used to cover administrative cost including:

- Developing management plans, budgets and staffing plans for a CACFP Afterschool meals site
- Recruiting, hiring and training staff
- Negotiating contracts and procuring facilities and equipment
- Attending trainings
- Compiling daily records for reimbursement claims
- Any printing costs associated with CACFP

For more information about allowable costs for CACFP in Washington State, contact OSPI Child Nutrition Office.

Nutritional Requirements

Meals served through the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program must meet the nutritional requirements set by the United States Department of Agriculture. An afterschool meal must include the following components:

- 1 serving of milk,
- 2 servings of fruit and vegetables,
- 1 serving of a grain and 1 serving of a protein.13

States also have the option of allowing school districts that participate in the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program to use the meal pattern requirement of the National School Lunch program instead of the CACFP meal pattern.

ii. Program Capacity to Food Insecurity and Racial Disparities in Health

The Program’s Ability to Fight Food Insecurity

According to statistics released by the USDA, there were 16.2 million children that resided in food insecure households in 2010, up from 12.4 million children in 2007.\textsuperscript{14,15} This means that more and more children living in families that are struggling with hunger. The expansion of the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program offers a new opportunity to lessen the increased food insecurity rates among children.

According to statistics released from the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), approximately 19 million meals were served via the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program in 2009.\textsuperscript{16} By the year 2015, CBO estimates an increase of 21 million meals, with 29 million afterschool meals served by the year 2020.\textsuperscript{17} Now that all states are able to participate in the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program, more children in low-income areas and food insecure households can eat nutritious and healthy meals. In conjunction with other nutrition and food assistance programs, including the National School Lunch and Breakfast program, the Women Infants and Children (WIC) Nutrition Program and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program has the potential to decrease the high food insecurity rates among food insecure children both on a national as well as state level.

The Program’s Ability to Alleviate Racial Disparities in Health

The At-Risk Afterschool Meals program has the potential to reduce racialized health disparities. As studies illustrate, lack of nutrition and access to healthy foods are one of the largest contributors to health disparities, especially for communities of color.\textsuperscript{18} Research shows that children of color are more likely to reside in food insecure households, and consequently are more likely to have poor health outcomes, higher rates of obesity, and are more susceptible to chronic diseases such as high blood pressure in later adulthood when compared to their peers.\textsuperscript{19} As statistics show in Washington

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Office of the Surgeon General. (2007). The Surgeon General's Call To Action To Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity. Accessed December 15, 2011:
\end{itemize}
Now that afterschool programs can offer federally subsidized, nutrient rich meals, the afterschool program can play a key role in addressing disproportionate health outcomes early in a child’s life. In fact, with the expansion of the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program in 2011, more children of color will have greater access to nutritious and healthy foods that can have positive implications for their health. As Johnson and Theberge (2007) argue in their article, “addressing disparate risk and conditions in early childhood health is an important way to reduce disparities affecting low-income and minority adults.” However, in order for the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program to have the potential to address racial disparities in health, children of color must:

- (1) Have access to afterschool programs; and,
- (2) The afterschool program must participate in the CACFP programs

Extrapolating from national data on afterschool program participation rates from the National School Alliance on Afterschool, we see a large demand for afterschool programs among families of color. In 2009, only 24% of African American children and 21% of Hispanic children participated in afterschool programs. In addition, only 16% of Native Americans and 25% of Asian American children participated in afterschool programs. Although the figures show that a sizable fraction of children of color are accessing afterschool programs, statistics show a rather large unmet demand. 61% of African American parents and 51% of Native American parents conveyed that their children would participate in an afterschool program if one were nearby in their community. Similarly, 47% of Hispanic and Asian American parents reported a demand for afterschool programs in their community compared to 32% among Caucasian parents.

With such large unmet demands for afterschool programs among families of color, the ability for the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program to have the opportunity to tackle racialized health disparities are small. Nevertheless, the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program does have the potential to alleviate health disparity rates among children of color. Yet, in order to do so, children of color must have greater participation rates and access to afterschool programs that participate in the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program.

http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/topics/obesity/calltoaction/fact_adolescents.htm
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
IV. Landscape of Washington – Rates of Food Insecurity and Afterschool Programs

Food Insecurity among Children in Washington State

Food insecurity, as defined by USDA, “is a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food.” Food insecurity among children is a significant issue in Washington State. 

Washington ranks 11th in the nation among states with high rates of food insecurity. Since the start of the recession, rates of high food insecurity have nearly doubled in Washington, with an estimated 160,000 households experiencing high food insecurity, up from 88,000 in 2008. Food insecurity rates among children are up as well. Statistics show that there are 382,860 children in the state who are food insecure, with a vast majority of the children living in families with incomes less than 200% of the federal poverty line. During the recession, economic conditions have further increased rates of food insecurity and hunger.

Afterschool Programs in Washington State

In Washington State, there are 336,345 K-12 children that are in self-care during the after school hours, meaning that they are not supervised by an adult or in an organized afterschool program. Only 12% of Washington’s K-12 children, approximately 134,098, actually participate in an afterschool program. While Washington State increased that number up from 8% in 2004 to 12% in 2009 with the help of non-profit organizations, participation rates of children in afterschool programs are still low. Studies have also revealed 27% of children not in an afterschool program would be likely to participate if one were available in their community.

The severe need for afterschool programs in Washington poses many consequences for Washington’s children. Afterschool programs are vital to ensuring the healthy development of Washington children who would otherwise spend time unsupervised. Given that many children who are unsupervised are left vulnerable during the hours after school and miss out on the numerous benefits afterschool programs can have on children, such as improved academic performance, increasing participation in

29 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
afterschool programs is critical. In addition, afterschool programs have the real potential to fight the child obesity epidemic and improve the health of their students through the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program. As noted by the Afterschool Alliance, the program gives schools and community organization time to “reinforce nutritious food choices and encourage involvement in physical fitness activities.”

Students that are enrolled in an afterschool program that participates in At-Risk Afterschool Meals program also benefit enormously from the meals that are served because of their high nutritional requirements. At-Risk meals also help afterschool programs because the program reimburses them for higher quality food than they would be able to serve otherwise.

V. Goals of Report

The goals of this report are to understand the barriers and obstacles to participation in the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program among current as well as potential sponsors. More specifically, the goals are:

- To understand why organizations wish to participate in the program and the significance of the program to the overall success of their organization and the services they offer.
- To acquire a more nuanced understanding of the challenges that current and potential sponsors face from participating in the afterschool meals program.
- To know more about what types of resources or technical assistance current and potential sponsors can benefit from when applying to participate in the program or while in the program.
- To gain knowledge of the areas that can benefit from policy change, administrative advocacy, or program expansion.

VI. Methodology

The data in this report comes from qualitative interviews conducted with current and potential sponsors as well as data received from OSPI. Sponsors are defined as public or private non-profit organizations approved by OSPI to operate the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program at the afterschool programs they oversee. Sponsors sign an agreement with OSPI and receive federal reimbursements to cover the operational costs of serving the meals to the eligible children at the supervised sites. Afterschool programs do not need to have a school district sponsor to participate in the program and may participate in the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program as an independent center. Both the study and the report focus on current and potential sponsors.

36 Ibid.
In this report, potential sponsors are organizations that currently participate in the At-Risk Snack program, but have yet to transition to serving afterschool meals. These sponsors were chosen because they were more likely to have some knowledge of the program and because these organizations would have the easiest transition to offering At-Risk Meals organizations given that they already participate in CACFP.

Current and potential sponsors are the focus of this report because they offer the greatest opportunity to increase wide scale participation in the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program. Many of the sites often sponsors more than 2 or 3 sites and serve hundreds of children at a time. In some cases, large sponsors serve over 10,000 meals in a single day. Delving into the barriers that current and potential sponsors face here in Washington will also provide insight into the obstacles that independent centers face as well since many of the obstacles are shared.

The types of nonprofit organizations selected to participate in the study ranged from Boys and Girls Clubs to religious organizations to dedicated afterschool child enrichment programs, with the organizations hailing from different parts of the state. Interviews were approximately 25 minutes in length. The interviews were later transcribed and the reoccurring themes that arose were used as a basis for forming the programmatic and policy recommendations.

VII. Constraints of Report

The major limitations of this report centers on the relatively small sample size of current sponsors available to participate in the study due to the newness of the program. Another limitation is the fact that only programs that already associated with CACFP were studied. There are many more potential sponsors in Washington, such as school districts for example, that were not studied. A more expansive study on the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program in Washington by program advocates or OSPI in the future would provide better insight into what barriers sponsors are facing.

VIII. Results of Qualitative Interviews: Benefits and Obstacles to Program Participation

Benefits of the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program

The At-Risk Afterschool meals program offers numerous benefits to their afterschool programs according to current and potential sponsors. Current and potential sponsors stated that they all recognized the immediate need for high quality nutritious meals both in their community and in their program. The fact that their program participants were often not eating at home, or coming to their afterschool program hungry, motivated program sponsors to participate in the program because they could now offer meals to their students at little to no cost to the afterschool program:

“We recognize that a lot of children are not able to go home and have quality meals with their families and so we wanted to meet that need for the children that we were serving. So we are now serving a supper and that happens right after school.”

By serving meals, afterschool programs noticed that their program participants were able to focus more on the enrichment activity and had a better overall demeanor. Program sponsors also stated
that serving meals helped the quality of the afterschool programming that they offered by creating a more family atmosphere, which enhanced their enrichment activities. Additionally, serving meals attracted parents to enroll their students in the afterschool program because the parents knew that their children were receiving a meal:

“But now that we are doing a snack and a supper, I know a lot of parents appreciate that. And they said that it is nice for them because when they get home they can just make a little snack. They do not have to worry about their kids because they know that they got a full meal.

The ability to offer federally reimbursed meals further helped with marketability because parents enjoyed the idea of their child receiving a meal at the afterschool program and the kids, as noted by sponsors, in general enjoy the food that is served at the program. Comparatively high reimbursement rates for the meals additionally helped afterschool programs focus on improving the enrichment activities that they offered instead of focusing their financial resources on meals. The reimbursement rate could allow them to simultaneously serve high quality meals and provide better enrichment activities.

Operational Difficulty of Serving Meals

Current and potential sponsors have voiced issues around the operational difficulties of serving meals to their afterschool program participant. Before they began participation in the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program, current sponsors remarked that they had relative ease in serving snacks. Snacks usually were easy to serve to their program participants, did not require cooks, and organizations could purchase snacks on a large-scale without the use of vendors. However, serving meals proved more difficult. Organizations stated that meals need much more preparation time beforehand and the nutritional requirements outlined in the CACFP program for meals made the task more time-consuming. In addition, serving meals, according to current sponsors, requires more frequent food delivery and larger storage space, which organizations may not have the resources to acquire:

“We go to Costco to get most of our food, which can be time consuming on people’s part to have to go shopping for it, bring it home, bring it back to your site, mark it, date it, put it away, and all of that. We do not want to solicit in having a food service distributor deliver to us as it is just too expensive.”

Keeping track of the regulations around serving meals also created problems, as the rules are more complicated than the At-Risk Snack program. Potential sponsors also expressed how the organizational resources required to participate in the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program were beyond their organization’s capacity. These strains according to current sponsors have prevented them from moving quickly with regarding to serving more meals to different sites.

Difficulties Acquiring Health, Safety, and Fire Inspection Documentation
To participate in the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program, non-profit organizations, whether private or public, must meet local or state health and safety requirements, unless otherwise noted. In Washington State, there are 39 counties, each with a different process for organizations to fulfill food safety inspection requirements. Unlike some states where non-profit organizations have to only meet a statewide requirement; Washington requires that sponsors meet the requirements of the county they are located in. Although the process may seem straightforward, the actual undertaking of acquiring food service permits presents many difficulties for interested organizations.

Current and potential sponsors had great difficulty obtaining health and safety inspections. Many sponsors found it difficult to understand what office or agency to approach for inspections and experienced further confusion when they attempted to make programmatic changes to meet health and safety requirements. Each county has a different set of requirements and costs making it difficult for advocates and state agency program specialists to support potential sponsors through the process of obtaining the necessary inspections. As one program sponsor reiterated throughout the interview, health and safety inspections have been a real obstacle for their organization, which has prevented them from offering meals at sites they wish to expand to:

“I would say sanitation inspections are really challenging. Just no one seems to know what in the world that is. Almost ever building that has had one initially has no idea where their paperwork is. No one really knows what that is. So it is really hard to get that information. It is kind of unclear when you talk to the different health departments.”

Similar to health and safety inspections, current sponsors also faced challenges around how to obtain a fire safety inspection or who to contact for such information in their county. The challenges related to health, safety, and fire inspections mostly related to current sponsors who wished to expand their sponsorship services to additional sites that did not already have their inspections completed beforehand. Health and safety inspections are likely to be an even greater barrier for community-based sponsors that are not already participating in CACFP.

Administrative Paperwork Problems

Over the past year, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction and program advocates have made concerted efforts to reduce the amount of paperwork needed for participation in the program. However, potential and current sponsors still related how much the administrative paperwork, although not a completely limiting factor, acted as a stumbling block. The administrative paperwork needed for participation in the program coupled with paperwork required for completing claims consumed large amounts of time, especially among current sponsors who were relatively new to the overall CACFP At-Risk program. Filling out all the required forms for admission into the program as well as painstakingly ensuring that the proper claims were completed often proved daunting for smaller sponsors and potential sponsors. Past experiences with child nutrition programs such as the Summer Food program and CACFP were the only things that made it possible for some sponsors to navigate the program:

“I think for me it has not been that difficult because I had already been doing the Summer Food Program for four years. The programs are very similar as far as the claims are the same process. In the summer you have to do monitoring and that is almost kind of exactly
Current sponsors did however state that training played a crucial role in alleviating any confusion about what to submit to become a sponsor and how to receive reimbursements.

**Staffing**

Issues around staffing also arose as a major roadblock for current and potential sponsors. Sponsors made multiple remarks about their inability to increase staffing in order to serve meals. In many cases, current sponsors found themselves in situations where staff had to limit face-to-face time with their afterschool program participants in order to adequately serve meals to their students. A representative from one organization observed that the requirements needed to serve meals can take away the capacity of their volunteers and staff to form relationships with the youth in their program:

> “You have such limited volunteers and it requires a lot of man-power. If your program is not really designed for that, it can take away the volunteers from building relationships with kids and tie them up. Like our late night programs, it would pull more volunteers away from being with kids.”

The larger sponsors repeatedly commented on their organization’s size and number of staff members as the one of the most important reasons why they were able to participate in the afterschool meals program. Without the level of support in their organization, particularly with regards to the dedicated cooks and nutritional staff, these sponsors noted that staffing would become a major issue. Several of the potential sponsors related that the extra tasks required to offer meals, despite the enormous benefits to their program participants, were too much of a barrier to participation in the program.

Another theme that emerged centered on the training of staff, especially for the large sponsors. Current sponsors had difficulty relaying all of the training information back to their staff persons, especially when staff and volunteers were spread across multiple sites. Some sponsors found it difficult to train the teachers who served meals. Teachers already had many demands on their time, including their existing responsibilities to their students and providing high quality afterschool programs and enrichment activities. Often times there is only one person responsible for training staff members putting additional strain on the sponsoring organization.

**IX. Recommendations**

The recommendations listed below are designed to address the barriers related to participation in the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program and are based on the findings discussed above. Although the programmatic and policy options listed below can help to alleviate some of the barriers to participation, they cannot, in and of themselves, solve the barriers that impede participation in the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program. The recommendations must be employed together in order to increase participation in this program.
Transition to a Fully Online Application

The move towards a fully online application system will help to facilitate easier participation in the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program. As seen in states such as California, non-profit organizations have been able to significantly benefit from an online application process. Sponsors can easily update new information related to their afterschool program, submit their application immediately to OSPI for review and approval, and save time when reporting the adding of additional sites. The state agency can also experience benefits, especially with regards to the reducing the redundant work of processing, copying, and distributing paper applications. An online electronic application system can provide more consistent application tracking information and assist in the long-term evaluation of the program since information about a program is already in an electronic format. An online electronic application system could also offer the feature of pre-populating information if a sponsor already participates in a similar child food nutrition program such as the National School Lunch Program.

OSPI has already taken steps to reduce the administrative barriers related to participation in the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program. The move towards an online electronic application process will further help to reduce the administrative barriers. California’s Department of Education serves as a useful model because they recently moved to a fully online application process for their At-Risk Afterschool Meals program. Programs wishing to participate in the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program in California contact a program specialist via phone where they then complete a prescreening questionnaire to make sure the program is eligible. Once the specialist has reviewed all the appropriate information, the program is granted access to their online application system where they have the opportunity to submit an online application. This model can serve as an appropriate example for Washington. OSPI already has an online reimbursement claims system for child and adult care centers who participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program.

Weekly Rather than of Monthly Reimbursements

Currently, sponsors receive reimbursements on a monthly instead of a weekly basis, which presents many difficulties for small community based sponsors. School districts and larger sponsors normally operate with very large budgets, and as a result, can more easily operate under a monthly reimbursement system. However, for smaller sponsors, this is regularly not the case. Smaller sponsors face constraints around their capacity to pay for the costs of food items and related issues such as staffing because of their smaller budgets. Increasing the frequency of reimbursement could have the effect of increasing participation in the program, by giving smaller sponsors the increased ability to address issues around staffing and up-front costs. Program advocates should seek to work with OSPI administrators to show the benefits of a weekly reimbursement system as a first step in this process.

Arkansas recently transitioned to a weekly reimbursement system for both the Summer Food Service Program and CACFP. Weekly reimbursement, along with other streamlining and technology upgrades, has made the monitoring process simpler and decreased the size and frequency of adjustments in payments. Program staff are able to work with programs to correct any
issues with claims more immediately and mistakes only affect a week’s worth of claims rather than a month.  

 Adopt a Standardized Food Safety Evaluation and Inspection Form

The varying regulations and rules around how to obtain a health and safety inspection in Washington State can prove very confusing for potential sponsors. To lessen the burden, Washington State should adopt a standardized food safety evaluation and inspection form, which can significantly improve the capacity for sponsors to participate in the program. Oregon’s state agency for the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program, the Oregon Department of Education, worked in conjunction with local county health departments to produce a consistent statewide health and safety requirement. After school programs submit a standardized form to their county health departments in Oregon, and the local health and safety inspection officer proceeds to conduct the inspection.

Although there are potential roadblocks for Washington, particularly with gaining the cooperation of the 39 Counties and the Washington State Department of Health, the benefits are immense. Potential and current sponsors can submit request forms for a health and safety inspection to their respective health departments, without worrying about the various regulations on how to request such an application. A standardized food safety evaluation and inspection form will also help to create a more uniform process for food safety evaluation, which will significantly help during the process of recruiting and supporting sponsors.

The Children’s Alliance has curved counties to find not only about a county’s health and safety inspection procedures, but also whether a county would benefit from such a standardized form. Plans are to have information about each particular county’s health and safety inspection available in a summarized format on the School’s Out Washington website. A critical component to moving towards a more standardized food safety inspection procedure centers on educating local county health departments about the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program. A partnership between OSPI, the Children’s Alliance, and the Washington State Department of Health would help with this process. The standardized forms developed through the Oregon Department of Education and the Food Research Action Center’s Afterschool Meals guides on reducing administrative barriers are also useful.

 Grant Support for Sponsors to Pay for Health and Safety Inspections and Equipment

The costs associated with health and safety inspections and equipment to serve meals are major barriers for program sponsors. In particularly large counties the cost of obtaining a food safety inspection can run as high as $340.00 not including the costs associated with purchasing additional equipment. Grant support for programs where food safety inspections are not affordable can go a long way in supporting sponsors in their mission to serve meals to afterschool program participants. In future outreach grant support to the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program, non-profit organizations may want to consider including setting aside funds to help pay for health and safety inspections and equipment.

37 Kim Caldwell, Share Our Strength Center for Best Practices, interview 2/14/2012
 **Encourage the Participation of School Districts**

With approximately 295 local school districts in Washington State, school districts offer a great opportunity to significantly increase participation rates in the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program. OSPI and program advocates should direct outreach efforts towards a school district’s food service director and seek to gain their involvement in offering meals to afterschool programs in their local community. In addition, targeting outreach to a school districts business director would also provide immense benefits. If program advocates can educate a school district’s business director about the financial benefits of the program and gain their support, this may provide an additional avenue to encourage school district participation.

To accomplish these goals, outreach to school district food service and business directors should communicate the benefits of the program (both financial and nutritional) and expand upon efforts already underway in the state. Nonprofit organizations in Washington have already begun to seek the involvement of school districts in the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program. The Children’s Alliance also convenes an At-Risk Afterschool Meals workgroup composed of members of the Children’s Alliance Food Policy Team, staff members of OSPI, and other nonprofit organizations and stakeholders. The workgroup works on a number of issues related to participation in the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program and has recently begun working with organizations to recruit school districts. The workgroup is a great vehicle to utilize, especially to targeting school district’s business directors. To further expand the capability and reach of the Afterschool Meals workgroup, recruitment efforts must target organizations in different geographical areas that are doing similar work. In addition, completing the NSLP addendum so that NSLP sponsors do not have to complete a new application will also help to increase participation.

 **Maintain and Expand Outreach Efforts that Promote the Number of Large Sponsors Who Partner with Community Based Afterschool Programs**

In order to increase statewide participation in the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program advocates and OSPI must maintain and find cost-effective ways to expand outreach efforts. Outreach efforts should target eligible school districts and large sponsors as they offer the greatest potential to increase participation in the program on a large scale.

To increase outreach levels in Washington in a cost-effective or cost-neutral manner, it is recommended that partnerships be developed with organizations that already have the capacity to promote the program. Many nonprofit organizations already have existing networks and the ability to promote the program to organizations in their local community. Potential partnership organizations include, but not limited to, United Ways, the Washington Regional Afterschool Project, School’s Out Washington, local food banks, and religious organizations.

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X. Conclusion

The Child and Adult Care Food Program’s At-Risk Afterschool Meals program provides many benefits for the State of Washington. The At-Risk Afterschool Meals program can help to alleviate the high food insecurity rates among children, assist in combating the obesity epidemic, and play a critical role in decreasing racial disparities in health.

Nevertheless, similar to other states, current and potential sponsors in Washington face many obstacles related to participation. However, with the adoption of the programmatic and policy recommendations stated above, more Washingtonian children can not only have access to a healthy life, but a healthy future as well.
References


Appendix A: Survey for Current and Potential Sponsors

Before Survey Interview Begins:

- Identify myself and affiliation
- Explain the goals of the interview and intended outcomes of the project
- Discuss if tape recording can occur during interview so that interviewer does not have to take notes and can use the recordings for quotes in report
- Ask if the current or potential sponsor has any questions before the interview begins

Questions by Topic:

Motivation(s) for Participation or Interest in the At-Risk Afterschool Meals Program

Current Sponsors

- How do you see the effects of childhood hunger in your community?
- Do you currently participate in the At-Risk Afterschool Meals Program? Tell me how you got involved in this program?
- Why did your organization become a sponsor?
- Do you participate in any other federal child nutrition programs?
  - Standard CACFP
  - Summer Meals
  - School Meals (NSLP and SBP)

Potential Sponsor

- Has your organization considered sponsoring an afterschool program to participate in the At-Risk Afterschool Meals Program? What are your organization’s reasons for wanting to participate in the program? If no, what are your reasons for not wanting to participate in the program?
- Do you have any experience with federal child nutrition programs?

Perceptions and Awareness of OSPI and CACFP Outreach Efforts

- The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) Child Nutrition Services administers the program in Washington and employs Program Specialists across the state that can help you determine if your program is eligible and assist you in completing the program application. Are you aware of these services?
- How have these services affected your ability to be a sponsor in the afterschool meals program?

Barriers and Obstacles

Current Sponsors

- Can you tell me a little more about your program? Where and when do the kids eat? What foods do you serve? What activities do the kids in your program do?
• How has the afterschool meal program improved or affected the afterschool programming you offer?
• What aspects of sponsorship have your organization found particularly challenging? Have you experienced challenges with:
  o Administrative Paperwork for the Program
  o Health and Safety Inspections
  o OSPI Field Staff
  o Menu Planning
  o Meeting Nutritional Requirements
  o Financial Barriers/Fiscal Health
• Under the newly released reimbursement rates, organizations can receive, in many cases $2.99, for every reimbursable meal served. How has the higher reimbursement rate for meals changed your experiences with the program?
• What tools have you found particularly helpful when facing these barriers?
• Have any of these barriers prevented your organization from expanding your sponsorship to include additional afterschool programs?

Potential Sponsors
• Are there any challenges or barriers that you foresee which may or may not affect your ability to participate as a sponsor in the afterschool meals program?
• Under the newly released reimbursement rates, organizations can now receive $2.99 for every reimbursable meal served. How will these new developments, if at all, affect your participation in the program?
• Are there any additional challenges that will impact your ability to becoming a sponsor?
• Have you begun the process of becoming a sponsor? If yes, at what stage in the process are you in? Is the process going well?

Suggested Areas of Improvement

Current Sponsors
• What would make it easier to remain a sponsor and/or expand sponsorship services?
• Do you see any areas where OSPI can improve their outreach and services?

Potential Sponsors
• What would make it easier to become a sponsor?
• Do you see any areas where OSPI can improve their outreach and services?

Conclusion of Interview Survey
• Do you have any closing comments or questions?
• Gather contact information for potential follow-up.
• Reiterate importance of the survey. Thank the interviewee for their time.
Appendix B: Resource List for Parties Interested in the At-Risk Afterschool Meals Component of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)

CACFP At-Risk Afterschool Meals Program Guidance:

- United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) At-Risk Afterschool Meals A Child and Adult Care Program Handbook. In this handbook you will find: “eligibility requirements, how to apply to participate in the program, meal patterns and food service requirements, reimbursement, recordkeeping requirements and monitoring requirements.” Available at: http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/care/Publications/pdf/At-Risk_Afterschool_Handbook.pdf.

- USDA At-Risk Afterschool Meals Brochure. An easy to read brochure about the At-Risk Afterschool Meals Program and how one can participate in the program.

- Food Action Research Center (FRAC) Afterschool Meals Guide. Provides resources for sponsors, afterschool programs, school districts, and anti-hunger advocates who have an interest in the At-Risk Meal Component of the CACFP. Available at: http://frac.org/about-the-guide/.

- FRAC’S Outreach Materials. A series of available outreach materials related to the afterschool meals program. Many of the outreach materials are also made available in Spanish. Available at: http://frac.org/federal-foodnutrition-programs/afterschool-programs/outreach-materials/.


- Partners for a Hunger Free Oregon Afterschool Meals Guide. This guide provides an in-depth description of the afterschool meals program, how organizations can determine their eligibility for the program, and offers an assessment tool to help programs better determine their needs as well as next steps. Available at: http://oregonhunger.org/afterschool-guide.

CACFP Meal Planning Resources:
