

Kids' Summer Meal Sites Open

Program supports good nutrition

BY DREW RAFAELLA DAKESSIAN
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

For many students who attend Portland Public Schools, going to school isn't just a place to learn, but also to eat.

With school out for the summer, students across the country who rely on the school system for support will have to look elsewhere. But luckily, here in Portland, parents have some options.

Forty nine percent of students in the district qualify for free- and reduced lunches, says Portland Public Schools spokesman Matt Shelby. For these kids, school meals are their primary source of nutrition. During summer break, these students are in danger of going hungry when they should be going outside to play. Starting this week, however, they'll be able to do both.

Hunger pangs are gripping large swaths of the country. President Barack Obama has made it his goal to end childhood hunger by 2015, and it looks like he has his work cut out for him. A report by the Food Research and Action Center found that one in four respondents in households reported having trouble feeding themselves.



PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER
Kids from the Gateway neighborhood of northeast Portland enjoy healthy snacks and sandwiches at the Gateway Park Apartments thanks to Project Summer, a child nutrition program.

In Portland, there is help for these families. This summer will mark the seventh year that kids can participate in supervised activities and eat a good meal at community locations throughout the city in what is known as Project Summer

A collaborative effort between the school system, Portland Parks and Recreation and various non-profit organizations, Project Summer is part of the Summer Food Service Program for Children, a 1916 federal initiative that provides funds

to serve nutritious meals to low-income children when school isn't in session.

By and large, Project Summer seems to be thriving: Last year, almost a thousand kids participated in the Summer Food Program on an

average day, says Annie Kirschner, Child Nutrition Outreach Coordinator for the non-profit Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon.

However, this accounts for only 29 percent of students who relied on a subsidized school lunch during the year. So actors in Project Summer are now making outreach a priority.

"We send out information to every student's household at the beginning of the summer," says Shelby. "A flyer is being sent out this week that lists summer opportunities."

Informing families of the opportunity is only half the battle. Getting around is another problem.

"During the summer it's a bit...of a challenge because people have to get to the parks, and that can be challenging for folks that don't have transportation," says Shelby.

Kirschner says that there is help for cash-strapped families, so that getting around isn't a barrier to their kids getting a good meal. Financed transportation is available so that children who want meals can get them regardless of limited means, she said.

"Especially in rural areas, [families] look to the private sector to provide transportation to the kids," adds Kirschner. Since federal reimbursement only accounts for \$3.25 per lunch served, "Churches and other private groups have really stepped up."



PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Good in the Neighborhood

Youth and their adult mentors from the Leisure Hour Junior Golf Club participate in Saturday's Good in the Neighborhood Parade, part of last weekend's annual multicultural music and food festival held at King School Park.

Charles Ford Service Friday

Longtime community activist and African-American elder Charles Ford died June 24 at age 80.

Ford was active in the federal Model Cities program of the early 1960s and 1970s, was a longtime board member of the Boise Neighborhood Association, and represented that group on the board of the Northeast Coalition of Neighborhoods for more than 20 years, starting with its inception in 1975. He received a Spirit of Portland award in 1988.

Born in Hickory, Miss., he graduated from Rust College in that state. He moved to Portland in 1951.

A public service will be held at 11 a.m. Friday, July 2, at Maranatha Church of God, 4222 N.E. 12th Ave.

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