

## **WA Parents Scramble to Find Summer Activities, Meals for Kids**

### **Local News**

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In Washington, kids have fewer summer learning options this year - even though education experts consider the summer months critical for many students, who need to stay caught up on reading and math skills in order to succeed in the following school year. For kids from poor families and in rural areas, the problem is funding: School districts and community groups cut summer programs first when budgets are tight. Many are funded with a combination of grants, donations and fees to parents - all of which are affected by the economy.

Danielle Baer, communications and grants manager for School's Out Washington, says some programs can only stay afloat if parents share the cost.

"A lot of programs do charge a fee. That can become a barrier for families who are low-income and don't have the resources to pay for programs. In general, that's a challenge: Finding the funding sources to support the programs and make them affordable for kids."

Baer also points to fewer summer meal programs, which go hand-in-hand with learning activities. Only 11 percent of Washington kids who get free or reduced-price meals during the school year also receive them in the summer.

"A lot of the sponsors of the summer feeding service program can't afford to run the program; it runs at a loss for them. While they're being reimbursed, it's not enough to make it sustainable, so they just don't have the money to keep the summer food program running."

Baer says almost 80 percent of Washington parents in a recent survey think some public money should be available for summer learning. The survey was conducted in 2009 by the Afterschool Alliance.

According to the National Summer Learning Association, without these opportunities, most kids fall two months behind in math, and lower-income children fall two to three months behind in reading skills - achievement gaps that are not always possible to overcome in the classroom.