



Owen County Case Study

Owen County Schools, located in Kentucky's Golden Triangle (between Louisville, Lexington, and Cincinnati), serves 1,700 students across four schools. In 2025, Owen County Schools received a grant from No Kid Hungry that helped them start serving rural non-congregate summer meals - marking the district's first year serving their own summer meals. This profile provides a behind-the-scenes snapshot of how Owen County Schools began operations for summer 2025 to serve an average of over 9000 meals to 650 students per week.

About Owen County

When Danielle Perkins became Director of Food Services at Owen County Schools in 2022, she knew that the district's food service team was capable of serving students high-quality foods beyond the school year. She also wanted to help support the financial sustainability of her school nutrition budget and knew that additional meals served during the summer would do just that. In 2024, aware of the new rural non-congregate flexibilities, otherwise known as SUN Meals to Go, Dani enlisted the help of Miranda Cook, School Nutrition Program Coordinator at Owen County Schools, to develop a plan to make summer meals happen. With Owen County being entirely rural and their district-wide participation in the Community Eligibility Provision, Dani and Miranda knew that congregate meals that needed to be eaten on-site each day were a tough burden on their staff and community and would ultimately reach only a limited number of students. Instead, they reasoned parents and guardians would be receptive to once weekly, drive-through pickups of 14 meals (seven days' worth of breakfast and lunch for each child).

Planning & Site Selection

Planning for this summer started early. In October 2024, they surveyed the district's families to understand interest in the program and create a starting point for the number of meals they would need to serve each week. In the spring, they sent a second survey to fine-tune their numbers and start to create their menus. Their menus rotated on a three-week cycle, offering variety to families while also creating consistency and familiarity with the meals that their kids receive during the school year. When considering entrees, they chose options that would be simple enough for kids to warm up themselves in the microwave. They also looked at their current inventory, to minimize waste. They also tested out new items with breakfast, which were a big hit and many are being brought into the rotation for this school year. The team also regularly looked at Facebook comments from parents, noting which meals were most popular with families.

Delivery Design

Their drive-through distribution site, at the Lower Elementary School, was open from the first week of June until the end of summer vacation, making sure that families had access to nutritious meals the whole summer long. In their school year surveys, the team offered several options for pick up days and times, and chose the one that met the needs of the most families. To make things run smoother, their team created an index card with key household information for families to keep in their car and show in the distribution line each week.

BY THE NUMBERS

NEED

1 in 6

KIDS IN OWEN COUNTY FACES
HUNGER

1,542

FREE OR REDUCED-PRICE
ELIGIBLE CHILDREN IN OWEN
COUNTY SCHOOLS

16%

OWEN COUNTY CHILD
FOOD INSECURITY RATE

89,460

TOTAL SUMMER MEALS SERVED
IN OWEN COUNTY

9000

NON-CONGREGATE SUMMER
MEALS SERVED PER WEEK

650

CHILDREN FED PER WEEK
WITH SUMMER MEALS

OWEN
IMPACT

Overcoming Challenges

Staffing was another hurdle to ensuring their program was available all summer. To staff their summer meals programs, they hired school nutrition staff who were looking for summer jobs and offered a slightly higher pay differential as an incentive. Dani and Miranda also expanded outside of their School Nutrition Department and worked with custodial staff. They played a key role in assisting on distribution days, which helped to build relationships between the custodial and food service teams. Looking forward to next summer, they hope to add more staff and engage student volunteers.

Advice

When asked what advice they would give to other school districts considering rural non-congregate summer meals, they encouraged anyone curious to reach out to other non-congregate programs to see how their operation works, and to ask for advice. Danielle and Miranda said “It’s doable. It’s busy. If you like [...] to work hard, it’s very rewarding.”



Launching the Summer Feeding Program in Owen County has been one of the most meaningful efforts we’ve taken on this year. Seeing so many children, from toddlers to teens, come through and benefit from this program has been incredibly rewarding.

– Dr. Reggie Taylor, Superintendent

