



OFFICE OF COUNCIL PRESIDENT ANTHONY YOUNG

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Feeding Hungry Kids this Summer is Top Priority

By San Diego City Council President Tony Young

School is out for most of San Diego's kids. And while these young people will be out playing sports, swimming and having fun, too many of them will be experiencing something else: hunger and boredom.

For many children, summer vacation means not knowing where your next meal comes from, sitting inside all day while your parents are working hard to make ends meet, or getting into trouble because there no is one to guide your playtime.

But this summer is going to be different in San Diego. This summer, the San Diego Park and Recreation Department, San Diego Unified School District, and other government and nonprofit organizations have teamed up to make sure kids are getting what they need while they're out of school.

As Council President, I've been working with city leaders to raise awareness about these important issues. And we are starting to make progress. We've already started promoting access to food for the community and helping local nonprofits and community health organizations work with kids on educational programming.

But we need to do more. We cannot allow children in our community to go hungry – it must become a top priority for all of us to come together to solve this challenge.

According to the National Summer Learning Association (NSLA), the achievement gap between higher- and lower-income youth can be largely attributed to unequal access to summer learning opportunities and critical needs, like healthy meals. When students participate in enriching summer programs – that not only feed them and teach them, but also make them feel special -- they make considerable strides in academic performance and behavior.

In San Diego, this is a serious issue for our young people.

Some 14.8 percent, or 441,730 San Diego County residents, are considered food insecure. Food insecurity means not knowing where your next meal is coming from, not having a reliable source to access nutritious foods or living below the poverty line that does not afford healthy meal options. Nationwide, the US Department of Agriculture estimates that 17.2 million children under 18 in the United States live in this

condition – unable to consistently access nutritious and adequate amounts of food necessary for a healthy life.

But the issue is bigger than not just having enough to eat. When children don't get the food they need, they are in serious jeopardy of developmental risk in areas such as speaking, behavior, and movement, increasing the likelihood of later problems with attention, learning, and social interaction. And children of color have disproportionately higher rates of poverty and food insecurity than white children.

This is challenge crying out for a response. And this summer in San Diego, we will have a response.

But this is an issue bigger than City Hall. We need the community to come together to overcome this challenge.

Fortunately, in San Diego, there are many leaders in our community who have stepped up to take on this challenge. The San Diego Park and Recreation Department, San Diego Unified School District, San Diego Food Bank and many others are working tirelessly to bring healthy food to children in need.

This month, the Walmart Foundation also provided more than a quarter of a million dollars to help ensure San Diego children will have much-needed meals this summer. This grant has already allowed San Diego City programming to expand its summer meals to 5,700 lunches and over 6,400 snacks, with expectations to increase these numbers. San Diego Unified School District expects to serve more than 150,000 lunches and snacks at 36 community sites with the capability of serving hot food and offering meals to adults.

By working with local partners, nonprofits, schools and corporations like Walmart, we are going to beat the summer heat by putting food in our kids' mouths and hope in their lives.

And that's what summer vacation should be about.

Young represents San Diego's 4th Council District.