



April 1, 2026



Global Learning Initiative, Inc. Prepares to Serve

As preparations for summer feeding programs ramp up across Georgia, we learned how Global Learning Initiative, Inc. is getting ready to serve children through Happy Helpings, Georgia's Summer Food Program.

Planning ahead is essential to ensuring children across Georgia receive the best possible nutrition during the summer months.

"We are looking forward to providing meals for children this summer through Happy Helpings," said Tyler Braxton, Program Manager for Global Learning Initiative, Inc.

She added, "We work closely with our sites before the summer to understand what types of meals will be best received by participants. By offering meals that are nutritious and appealing, we can increase participation and reduce waste.

At the end of the program, we gather feedback through a brief survey to learn what worked well and to help strengthen next year's program."

Nutrition Services appreciates Happy Helpings sponsors for their continued dedication to serving children and strengthening communities throughout the state.



New Deadline to Submit SFSP Applications

May 15, 2026

Nutrition Services announced that all SFSP applications must be submitted by May 15, to participate in Happy Helpings for FY2026.

The reasons for changing the deadline include:

1. There is a more time for your application to be approved before you start operations.
2. It will give you an opportunity to focus more on program operations than on working on the application.
3. It gives Audits and Compliance more time to conduct reviews during program operations.

If you have any questions about this change, contact your application services representative.

Updated SFSP Reimbursement Rates Announced

2026 Reimbursement Rates Effective January 1, 2026 – December 31, 2026



Maximum Rate per Meal (In Whole or Fractions of U. S. Dollars)

All States except Alaska and Hawaii		
Per Meal Rates in whole or fractions of U. S. dollars	Rural or Self-prep Sites	All Other Types of Sites
Breakfast	3.1975	3.1375
Lunch or Supper	5.6000	5.5100
(Supplement) Snack	1.3250	1.2950

The 2026 reimbursement rates are presented as a combined set of rates to highlight simplified cost accounting procedures. Section 738 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2008, Pub. L 110-161, enacted on December 26, 2007, extends these procedures to all States.

As of January 1, 2008, reimbursement is based solely on a “meals time rates” calculation, without comparison to actual or budgeted costs.

Sponsors receive reimbursement that is determined by the number of reimbursable meals served multiplied by the combined rates for food service operations and administration. However, the combined rate is based on separate operating and administrative rates of reimbursement, each of which is adjusted differently for inflation.

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

Gearing Up for SFSP: *Tasks for the Month of April*

Providing summer meals is a year-round effort. At any point during the year, you can take the following steps to prepare for a successful summer.

During April

- Review site locations to confirm operational hours, staffing, and monitoring schedules.
 - Consider how meals will be delivered and estimate the number of meals to be served.
 - Complete pre-operational site visits.
 - Ensure administrative staff are properly trained.
 - Complete all application and renewal forms.
 - Contract with a Food Service Management Company (FSMC), if applicable.
 - Check with DECAL to identify areas that lack sponsors or sites, and consider expanding services to meet those needs.
-

Navigating the SFSP Application:

Tips for Success

Tips for Completing the Application

- To minimize confusion and delays, only the program contact and/or authorized representative should communicate with the application reviewer.
- The program contact is responsible for entering all information into the online application system, GA ATLAS.
- Complete all forms in their entirety.
- Submit a signed Food Service Permit Inquiry Form for each county where meals will be served prior to submitting the application to DECAL.
- If using (or acting as) a Food Service Management Company (FSMC), ensure Questions 42 and 43 on the institution application are completed accurately.

Board of Directors Section

- Ensure all required sections are completed for each board member.
- Any changes to the Board of Directors (BOD) must be supported with board meeting minutes.
- Confirm the “Delegation of Authority” form is signed by a board officer (as defined on the form).

Budget

Specific Prior Written Approval (SPWA) Submission and Approval Process

- Sponsors with emergency requests are required to email the SPWA request form, along with supporting documentation, to Gwendolyn.Howard@dec.al.ga.gov within 24 hours of purchase. A budget revision must then be submitted to include the cost.
- For all other requests, sponsors must submit a budget revision including the cost, upload the SPWA request form and supporting documents to the Attachments List section in GA ATLAS, and notify the budget team via email at Nutritionbudget@dec.al.ga.gov at least three days before to making the purchase.
- DECAL will review the request and provide written approval or denial, including any special considerations or reasons. The approved SPWA will be signed and uploaded to the Attachments List section in GA ATLAS.

Site Application

- Site changes, including add-a-sites, must be approved before making changes to an approved budget.
- Indicate any days the site will not serve meals during normal operating dates in question #14.
- If the site is outdoors (e.g., park, driveway, pool), provide a detailed plan for serving meals indoors when answering question #28.

Maximum Meal Count (MMC)

The standard threshold for the Maximum Meal Count (MMC) is 100 meals per site.

Sponsors requesting an MMC above this threshold before initial site approval must submit written justification to their assigned Application Specialist explaining the need for the increase.

Acceptable justification may include:

- Enrollment or registration documentation for closed enrolled sites
- Letters of authorization for sites located at unaffiliated schools or apartment communities, which may also include justification for higher meal counts

A justification letter is not required if:

- You are requesting the same MMC previously approved, or
- The requested MMC is below a previously approved threshold.

Requests that appear unreasonable or unsupported will not be approved.

Requesting an Increase After Operations Begin

Sponsors who begin operations and later need to increase their MMC must:

- Submit written justification to their assigned Business Operations Specialist
- Provide three consecutive days of Daily Meal Count (DMC) forms

If additional children request meals after all available meals have been served, this must be documented on the DMC form.

Sponsors are not required to serve meals beyond the approved MMC listed in the site application.

Important:

If DECAL does not approve the requested MMC increase, the sponsor is responsible for the cost of any meals served above the approved limit.

All MMC increase requests must be reviewed and approved by DECAL before submitting the claim for the operating month.

Determining The Correct Form To Use For Excess Funds

Excess funds are any amount of reimbursement remaining at the end of the previous program year that exceeded a sponsor's expenditures. Excess funds must be retained and spent solely for food service operations or improvements. When requesting to use excess funds for the FY2026 Happy Helpings program, an institution must submit a Pre-Award Cost Form or an Excess Funds Use Request Form. Here's how to determine which form to submit:

Pre-Award Costs are incurred in preparing for the Happy Helpings Program when prior year funds are available and have been reconciled. **The request to use funds should be received before the application is submitted.** Email the [Pre-Award Cost Request Form](#) and supporting documentation to Gwendolyn.Howard@decalfga.gov for review and approval. These costs will be approved before the application is approved and should be used before to the start of the program. Costs are used for administrative labor and food costs needed to prepare for the upcoming program operation.

Excess Funds Costs are incurred during the operation of the program when prior year funds are available and have been reconciled. The [Excess Funds Use Request Form](#) should be uploaded with supporting documentation to the Attachments List in GA Atlas when the application and budget have been submitted. **These costs will be reviewed and approved when the budget is approved and should be used after the program is in operation.**

Supporting documents include invoices, quotes, allocation methods & Specific Prior Written Approval (SPWA) where applicable.

Requesting Advance Payments

Sponsors can request advance payments to help cover costs of operating Happy Helpings before receiving their reimbursement. Payments are intended to assist with cash flow and ensure that sponsors can provide meals timely without financial strain. Advance payments are reviewed once the sponsor's application has been approved.

The review will determine the approval amount based on meeting the eligibility criteria. Once sponsors submit claims for the month in which they requested an advance that was approved, the amount of the advance will be recouped before the sponsors receive the reimbursement.

To be eligible for second or third advance payments, sponsors must certify they are operating the number of sites for which the budget was approved and their projected costs do not differ significantly from the approved budget amount.

Except for School Food Authorities (SFAs), sponsors must conduct training sessions before receiving the second advance payment. Sponsors must certify they have held training sessions on program requirements for site and sponsor personnel before the release of the second or third month's advance payment.

Certification will require the completion and submission of the second [Advance Request Certification Form](#).

For additional details, refer to [SFSP #18- Advance Payments in the Summer Food Service Program](#) or contact NutritionBudget@decal.ga.gov.

Resources to Market Meal Sites

Nutrition Services offers several resources to help sponsors promote Happy Helpings meal sites.

SPONSORS

Branded Marketing materials are available on the [DECAL.ga.gov](#) website to promote meal sites. The materials can be downloaded under Happy Helpings Participant Information and Posters and Flyers.

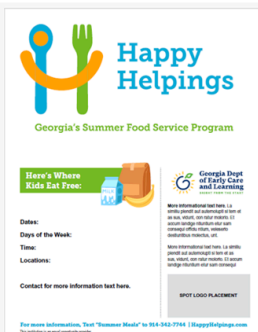
Password protected: Flyer

Editable Posters (11 x 17) (on right)

Editable Flyer (8 1/2 x 11) (on right)

Social Media Graphics

Flyers to promote how to locate a meal site are available by request. Translations are available in Arabic, French, Spanish and Swahili.



DECAL

Billboard Campaign for South GA

MARTA Bus Advertising

Geofencing (banner ad when utilizing an app on a mobile phone within a target zip code.)

Social Media





Sponsors can download any of the editable resources above from the [DECAL.ga.gov](#) web site.

DECAL promotes the USDA's Meal Site Finder through an advertising campaign that starts from the end of May through the first week in August.

Target Counties for Summer 2026

One of Nutrition Services' goals is to have a meal site in every county of the state. Last summer, you played a crucial role toward meeting that goal by expanding meal service to 109 counties in 2025. Thank you.

If your organization has the capacity to expand your meal service in 2026, consider serving meals and snacks in any of the following target counties:

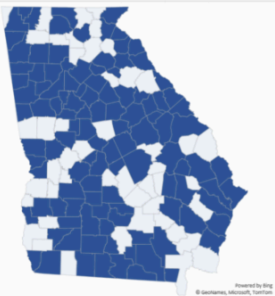




FY26 Target Counties: 50 Counties

1. Bacon	11. Dawson	21. Johnson	31. Pickens	41. Towns
2. Banks	12. Dodge	22. Jones	32. Pierce	42. Treutlen
3. Berrien	13. Early	23. Long	33. Pike	43. Troup
4. Brantley	14. Evans	24. Marion	34. Pulaski	44. Union
5. Calhoun	15. Forsyth	25. Meriwether	35. Quitman	45. Webster
6. Camden	16. Gordon	26. Miller	36. Schley	46. Wheeler
7. Charlton	17. Grady	27. Montgomery	37. Screven	47. White
8. Coffee	18. Hall	28. Murray	38. Stewart	48. Wilkes
9. Crawford	19. Jeff Davis	29. Oconee	39. Taylor	49. Wilkinson
10. Dade	20. Jenkins	30. Oglethorpe	40. Telfair	50. Worth

Blue: Counties where HH meals were available in FY25;

White: Counties where meals were not available in FY25





Georgia Dept of Early Care and Learning
BRIGHT FROM THE START

Working Together to Feed Georgia's Children

No Kid Hungry Summer Grant Available

No Kid Hungry is offering grants to schools and community organizations serving rural communities through non-congregate summer meals. Grants support new or expanded programs in high-need areas to reach more children.

Who's eligible: Communities with high child hunger, poverty, or at least 60% of students eligible for free/reduced-price meals.

Next step: Complete the inquiry form. We'll follow up in a few days.

Interested in a Summer Grant?

- Do you serve rural non-congregate meals?
- Are you interested in the rural non-congregate program?

Scan this QR Code!



Scan the QR code to fill out our inquiry form as a first step!



Note: Completing the form does not constitute an automatic invitation to complete a No Kid Hungry grant application. Funding availability differs greatly by state and how organizations align with funding priorities.

Nutrition Services is Hiring

The Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) is seeking a **Financial Reconciliation Specialist** to join its Nutrition Division. This exciting career opportunity is open to all qualified applicants.

Interested candidates can apply online through the link below.

Applications must be submitted by Friday, April 3, 2026.

[Click here](#) to apply for this position.

This position will also be listed on DECAL's website for additional visibility.

Upcoming Training

April 9, 2026

Budget Readiness 2

1:00 - 3:00 pm

Are you preparing to begin the budget process? This informative webinar will provide guidance on starting the budget process, preparing and developing a comprehensive budget, and creating an effective system for maintaining budget-related records. Participants will also review required forms and key policies to ensure proper documentation and compliance. Strengthen your financial management practices and gain practical tools to support your program's success by attending this webinar.

[Register Now](#)

April 28, 2026

Tuesday Tip: Identifying Common Allergens on Food Packaging

1:30 - 2:15 pm

Food allergies affect millions of Americans, including one in 13 children. SFSP operators play a key role in creating a safe eating environment during summer meal service. Reading labels carefully, preventing cross-contact, and making sure staff know how to respond to allergic reactions help protect children with known allergies.

Food Allergy Resources for Program Operators:

- [Food Allergy Research & Education | FARE](#)
- [FDA Food Allergy Information](#)

[Register here](#)

April 28, 2026

NEW! Nutrition Education and Physical Activity Office Hour

2:15 - 3:15 pm

Drop in for a Q&A with DECAL's registered dietitian and nutrition education and physical activity specialists. This open office hours event will take place immediately after our Food Allergy training on April 28, 2026.

Drop in to ask questions about food allergies and meal accommodations, gardening, physical activity ideas, and more.

Microsoft Teams meeting

Join [here](#)

Meeting ID: 295 522 818 385 58

Passcode: L6Kn7ac2

If you have a question related to nutrition education or physical activity but aren't available during the office hours, reach out to Monica.Griffin@decalfga.gov.

May 12, 2026

Tuesday Tip: Farm to Summer: Incorporating Georgia's Bountiful Summer Harvest

1:30 - 2:00 pm

Are you ready to support farmers and serve fresh foods that are locally grown?

Join this webinar to learn:

- Tips for increasing Georgia grown produce on your menus,
- Ways to engage children through hands-on food & ag education, and
- Ideas for increasing garden-based education.

BONUS: Learn about USDA's Turnip the Beet Award and how to become involved.

Participants can earn one-half [0.5] state-approved hours for attending this training in its entirety.

[\[Register Now\]](#)

May 18, 2026

Memo Monday: Best practices for delivering nutritious meals in rural settings

10:00 am - 12:00 pm

Do you need a review of best practices for serving quality meals during rural non-congregate meal service?

This webinar will provide a review of the following DECAL Memorandums,

- [Rural Non-Congregate Meal Services in the Summer Food Service Program, January 8, 2025](#)
- [Non-Congregate Meal Service in Rural Areas: Questions and Answers #3, January 10, 2025: Questions and Answers #3, January 10, 2025](#)

[\[Register Now\]](#)

May 28, 2026

PALS Session 5: Goal Setting and Action Planning

1:00 - 2:00 pm

Would you like to review your self-assessment, best practices note and identify some areas for improvement physical activity?

Join this session where action steps will be developed to meet goals. Participants will leave with a plan to improve their physical activity practices.

Participants can earn one [1.0] state-approved hour(s) for attending this training in its entirety.

[\[Register Now\]](#)

Notes:

This is a two-step process:

- **Step 1:** After registering in GA ATLAS, you will receive a Training Confirmation email *immediately* from Georgia DECAL Help Desk - helpdesk@cnpus.com with a registration link to attend the webinar (**check your spam/junk folder**).
- **Step 2:** You must then register for the training using the link provided on the Training Confirmation e-mail.
- If you have an issue with registering, contact Leslie Truman before to the day of training.
- [Click here](#) if you need a refresher on how to register for training in GA ATLAS.

Note: Only the Program Contact (PC) can self-register within GA ATLAS. If an additional person will be attending, contact Leslie Truman, Administrative Assistant, at (404) 657-1779 for assistance.

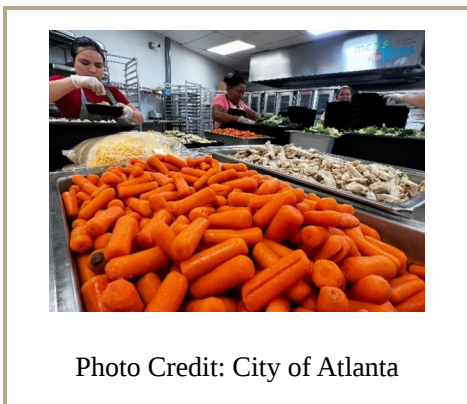
Training Resources

In Case You Missed It: Webinar Recordings Now Available!

If you missed a webinar, visit the [Training and Technical Assistance](#) webpage for previously recorded webinars.

This month's training highlight is the [Happy Helpings Reconciliation Training](#) webinar. It discussed detailed information on the annual Year-End Reconciliation process, how to complete the Reconciliation Form, documents required for submission, and potential next steps.

Menu Planning Tips for a Nutritious & Successful Summer



Summer is approaching, making this a great time to start planning nutritious and appealing meals for your Happy Helpings sites.

Well-planned menus support children's health, energy, and development while helping them build lifelong healthy eating habits.

As you plan, remember that menus must meet [SFSP meal pattern requirements](#).

Focus on whole, nutrient-dense foods, like fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, lean meats and meat alternates, and milk.

Follow these best practices to create meals children enjoy and support a healthy summer:

Start With the Basics

- Keep menus balanced with a mix of colors, textures, and flavors.
- Serve foods that are age-appropriate and culturally relevant.
- Offer both hot and cold options for variety.

Lean Into Seasonal Georgia Produce

- Use fresh, local items like strawberries, blueberries, peaches, watermelon, cucumbers, tomatoes, corn, peppers, and leafy greens.
- Aim for at least 50% fresh fruit and vegetable offerings weekly.
- Use simple scratch-made touches, like fresh salsa, lightly seasoned roasted veggies, or homemade vinaigrettes, to highlight seasonal Georgia produce.

Make Fruits & Veggies Fun for Kids

- Try fruit kabobs, veggie wraps, smoothies, or conduct a taste test.
- Offer a variety of **vegetable subgroups** throughout the week.
- Make one of the snack components a fruit or a vegetable (e.g., apple slices with peanut butter, mango with yogurt, or cucumbers with cheese).

Mix Up Your Protein Options

- Serve a variety of proteins throughout the week: lean meats, poultry, seafood, beans, lentils, eggs, seeds, nuts, cheese, and yogurt.
- Limit processed meats (hot dogs, bologna, lunch meat, pepperoni, sausages) to no more than once per week.

Choose Smart Grains

- Offer at least two servings of whole grains daily.
- Make simple swaps like whole wheat bread, whole grain pasta, or brown rice.
- Select cereals with the lowest added sugar.

Limit Sodium, Solid Fat & Added Sugars

- Select fresh, minimally processed ingredients whenever possible.
- If fresh produce isn't available, choose frozen or canned fruits in 100% juice or water, or vegetables labeled "no salt added" or "low sodium."

Engage Kids in the Process

- Gather feedback through surveys or taste tests and adjust menus to incorporate preferences.
- Use fun names, themed days, or simple nutrition activities to build excitement.

Menu Planning Resources

- [Happy Helpings Cycle Menu](#)
- [Summer Meals Nutrition Guide](#)
- [Summer Food, Summer Moves Resource Kit](#)
- [SFSP Sample Menus](#) (California Department of Education)
- [SFSP Montana Made Cycle Menus](#) (Montana Office of Public Instruction)

We'd love to feature your Happy Helpings program in our next newsletter or on social media. Share your stories and pictures with Nutrition Education Specialist Morgan Chapman at Morgan.Chapman@dec.al.gov.

Physical Activity Corner

Promoting Physical Activity in Mixed-Age Groups

Spring has arrived, making it the perfect time to explore new ways to bring physical activity into your Happy Helpings program.

Check out these ideas for keeping mixed-age groups moving and active:

Outdoor Movement and Play:

- **Fitness Trails:** Mixed age teams can run, skip, frog jump, crab walk, or balance an item while moving from point to point.
- **Nature Adventure Bingo:** Brainstorm things you might see outdoors, like leaves, rocks, and bird sounds, complete a **Nature Bingo Card**, and go hunting.

- **Team Cone Dash:** Spread out cones or markers. Children race to collect, sort, or color match cones into different piles.



Indoor Movement and Play:

- **Fitness Dice:** Write movements on a paper cube (jumping jacks, squats, arm circles, jogging in place). Children will roll the dice and move together.
- **Follow the Beat:** Play dance music with a changing beat. Prompt children to adjust their movement speed to slow, medium, and fast while staying in control.
- **Hallway Challenge Stations:** Set up mini stations like cornhole, bean bag toss, egg and spoon relay, jump rope, tunnel race, and hula hoop.
- **Parachute or Sheet Waves:** Hold the edges of the cloth to make waves, lift high/low, switch sides, or run under when colors are called.

If you participate in rural non-congregate, share this handout from Nemours for fun ways families can be active with children indoors and outdoors.

Activities for Families with Young Children

We'd love to feature your Happy Helpings program in our next newsletter or on social media. Share your stories and pictures with Physical Activity Specialist Tina McLaren at tina.mclaren@dec.al.gov.



Eat Healthy and Live Active

Georgia Early Care and Education Harvest of the Month 2025-2026 Calendar

The Georgia Early Care and Education Harvest of the Month is a collaborative campaign between Quality Care for Children, Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, Georgia Department of Human Services, and Georgia Organics. The campaign encourages healthy eating habits by promoting different local, seasonal fruits or vegetables each month.

Visit [EatLearnGrowGA](https://www.EatLearnGrowGA.org) to access classroom activities aligned with the Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS), recipes, book lists, family newsletters, and more to help you incorporate a new vegetable or fruit each month in the classroom, kitchen, and home.

For school-age children resources, visit the Georgia Department of Education's Harvest of the Month [webpage](#).

Dates to Remember

DATE	EVENTS
April	Harvest of the Month: Strawberries
April 3	State Holiday: Good Friday
April 5	Easter Holiday
April 9	Budget Readiness 2 - Webinar
April 28	Tuesday Tip: Identifying Common Allergens on Food Packaging - Webinar
April 28	Nutrition Education and Physical Activity Office Hour- Virtual
May 12	Tuesday Tip: Farm to Summer: Incorporating Georgia's Bountiful Summer Harvest - Webinar
May 15	Deadline to Submit SFSP Application
May 18	Memo Monday: Best practices for delivering nutritious meals in rural settings - Webinar
May 25	State Holiday: Memorial Day
May 28	PALS Session 5: Goal Setting and Action Planning - Webinar

On the next ...
DECAL Download
 New Episodes Every Wednesday!

This Week's Topic:
**Meet GPB VP of Education
 Laura Evans**

Laura Evans
 VP of Education, GPB

Georgia Dept of Early Care and Learning
 READY FROM THE START

DECAL Download

Meet GPB VP of Education Laura Evans

High-quality educational programming plays a critical role for children from birth to age five, as these early years are foundational for brain development, language acquisition, social-

emotional growth, and the establishment of lifelong learning habits.

Today we're excited to welcome back Laura Evans, Vice President of Education at Georgia Public Broadcasting who has spent more than a decade developing and sharing free, high-quality digital learning resources for Georgia's educators, students, and families.

Listen to the episode [here](#).

Happy Helpings Resources:

The following documents were covered in previous newsletters:

- [Adding New Sites After Application Approval](#)
- [Updates to Federal Micro-Purchase and Simplified Acquisition Thresholds for Procurement](#)
- [Updated Federal Procurement Thresholds](#)
- [Revised Product Formulation Statement \(PFS\) Templates and Samples](#)
- [Authorization Letter Requirements for Meal Sites at Schools and Apartments](#)
- [Transitioning from Happy Helpings to CACFP At-Risk Afterschool Meals](#)
- [Happy Helpings Summit Training Videos](#)
- [Resources to Promote Meal Sites](#)
- [Excessive Heat and Air Quality Advisories](#)
- [New Supplier Change Request](#)
- [Advance Payment Requests Update](#)
- [Updates to SFSP Procurement Templates](#)
- [Procurement Methods At-A-Glance](#)
- [Have You Determined this Summer's Food Cost & Procurement Methods?](#)

- [Check you Email Messages in GA ATLAS](#)
- [And Justice for All Posters](#)

How was my Customer Service?

Provide feedback on your experience with the Nutrition Team



Click on the icon on the right to participate in the customer service survey. Responses are anonymous.



Nutrition Division

Marketing & Outreach

**Cindy Kicklighter
Joann Kilpatrick**

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

[Nondiscrimination Statement: English](#)

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