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Testimony to U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, Subcommittee on Food and Nutrition, Specialty Crops, Organics, and Research

Hearing Title: Keeping Kids Learning in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program

September 18, 2024

Chairman Fetterman, Ranking Member Braun, and Members of the Subcommittee.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the School Nutrition Programs. I am Crystal FitzSimons, Interim President for the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC). We are the leading organization working to end poverty-related hunger in the U.S. by advancing bold and equitable policy solutions. We work to enact federal and state legislation to expand and strengthen the programs; conduct research on participation and program operations; partner with federal, state, and local government agencies, schools, private nonprofit organizations, and other stakeholders on the implementation of these programs to ensure that they serve the children who need them. I am proud to have worked at FRAC for over 25 years, most of that time specifically focused on the federal child nutrition programs.

According to recently released data from USDA, 47.4 million people in America live in food insecure households, including 13.8 million children. That rate is unacceptable. FRAC has worked for over 50 years to strengthen and expand the School Breakfast and National School Lunch Programs, because we know they play a critical role in reducing childhood hunger, supporting education, and connecting students to quality food from our agricultural community.

An extensive body of research highlights the positive impact that school meals have on student achievement, attendance, behavior, physical and mental health, and food security. School meals also are an important support for families, allowing them to

count on school breakfasts and lunches 5 days a week, approximately 180 days per school year, to reduce the pressure on their household food budget.

School meals are one of the federal government's most powerful tools for delivering good nutrition to children. Children who participate are less likely to have nutrient inadequacies and are more likely to consume fruits, vegetables, and milk. A recent study found that school meals offer some of the healthiest meals that children eat, and the updated school nutrition standards will further improve nutritional quality. The approach that USDA has taken to gradually implement the new standards will provide school nutrition departments and food manufacturers adequate time to make the changes.

Over the last 10 years, a growing number of high-need schools have been able to offer breakfast and lunch to all students at no charge through the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). CEP was implemented nationwide during the 2014-2015 school year, and more than 14,000 schools implemented in the first year. Participation has grown year after year as schools experienced the benefits: more students eating school meals, less administrative work, no more unpaid school meal fees, and improvements to the school culture.

It also is important to understand the impact that stigma has on participation in the School Nutrition Programs. It leads children who have been certified for free or reduced-price school meals to opt out of the program. About 29 million children are certified for free or reduced-price school meals and only 22 million participate. Research has also found that stigma is a primary reason that parents do not apply even when their child is eligible.

By the 2019-2020 school year, community eligibility participation had grown to over 33,000 schools with a combined enrollment of nearly 15 million students. About one in three schools that participated in the School Nutrition Programs was offering breakfast and lunch to all their students at no charge through community eligibility.

Then the pandemic hit. A key component of our country's response was the child nutrition waivers that allowed all schools to offer meals at no charge to all students from spring 2020 through the end of the 2021-2022 school year. This served as a pilot for a nationwide Healthy School Meals for All policy, and it was a tremendous success. In a FRAC survey of large school districts with a combined enrollment of over 5 million students, 95 percent of school nutrition directors reported that it reduced childhood hunger; 89 percent that it makes it easier for parents and guardians, 85 percent that it eliminates any stigma associated with school meals, 84 percent that it eases

administrative work, and 82 percent that it supports academic achievement. A growing body of research supports the responses of the school nutrition directors to our survey.

There is also broad public support for Healthy School Meals for All. In 2021, FRAC conducted nationwide public opinion polling and found that 63 percent of voters nationwide support legislation that would allow schools to offer meals to all students at no charge. Since then, several states have conducted their own state-specific polling and found public support numbers that are even higher. For example, eight in 10 Pennsylvanian voters support expanding the state's free breakfast program to include lunch; 81 percent of voters in North Carolina support school meals for all; and 87 percent of Ohio parents of school-age children agree that schools should provide school meals at no cost to all students, regardless of the student's ability to pay.

Not surprisingly, several states did not want to go back to pre-pandemic school meal operations when the nationwide waivers that allowed schools to offer free meals to all their students were no longer available at the end of the 2021-2022 school year. To date, California, Colorado, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, and Vermont have all passed Healthy School Meals for All policies.

The transition back to pre-pandemic school meal operations for schools whose states did not adopt a Healthy School Meals for All policy or that were unable to implement community eligibility did not go smoothly. The School Nutrition Association reported challenges getting families to submit school meal application, a significant increase in school meal debt, and students eligible for free or reduced-price school experiencing more stigma. Participation decreased, with school breakfast serving 1.2 million fewer students and lunch serving 1.8 million fewer students compared to the 2021-2022 school year.

While those eight states are showing us what is possible, there are critical steps the Subcommittee and Congress should take to enhance the reach and impact of school meals nationwide.

First, Congress can ensure that all children are hunger free and ready to learn while they are at school by allowing all schools to offer meals to all their students at no charge. The Universal School Meals Program Act (S.1568/H.R.3204) creates that path.

Second, it's important to address barriers that keep students from participating, particularly in School Breakfast, which serves just over half of the children who participate in school lunch. The way most schools currently serve breakfast—in the cafeteria before the school day starts, in fact before many of the children are at school—significantly reduces participation. Offering breakfast at no charge to all students (as

Pennsylvania does) combined with implementing an innovative service model such as breakfast in the classroom, grab and go stations, or second chance breakfast has been shown to dramatically increase participation. Congress can provide grants or additional reimbursements to increase the implementation of innovative school breakfast models.

Third, Congress should make the funding formula for the CEP more financially viable. Currently, the percentage of students who are automatically certified for free school meals is multiplied by 1.6 to determine the federal reimbursements that schools receive. These "identified students" are categorically eligible for free school meals because they participate in certain means-tested federal programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or who are homelessness, runaway, migrant, in foster care, or in Head Start. Increasing the multiplier to 2.5 would allow more schools to operate CEP without fear of losing money. Another crucial step is to allow a statewide CEP option. Senators Casey and Fetterman's School Hunger Elimination Act (S.4525) would do both.

Additionally, the threshold to participate in CEP should remain 25 percent of identified students. That requirement was set through regulations but should be added to the statute. Senator Fetterman's Nutrition Red Tape Reduction Act (S.4523) does just that.

Fourth, Congress can do more to bolster direct certification which uses data matching to automatically certify children for free school meals. Currently, states and school districts are only required to conduct direct certification for children in SNAP households. Schools should be required to automatically certify children who are categorically eligible through the other criteria that make them eligible for free school meals, such as the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, or being homeless, migrant, in foster care, or Head Start. In addition, more federal means-tested programs, such as Medicaid and SSI, should be used to directly certify children. Demonstration projects have allowed 43 states to conduct Medicaid direct certification, which also requires an income test and can be used to certify students for both free and reduced-price school meals. All states should be using Medicaid to directly certify children for school meals, and all school districts should be required to do this important data match.

Expanding direct certification would reduce school meal applications, improve program integrity, and help ensure that eligible children do not fall through the cracks.

Finally, any examination of the School Nutrition Programs should also explore the impact of losing access to school breakfast and lunch during summer break. Rates of food insecurity and food insufficiency among children are higher during the summer, and children are more likely to gain weight. The Summer Nutrition Programs are designed to replace those lost school meals, and the sites often combine the meals with

educational and enrichment programming, allowing the sites to help combat hunger and summer learning loss. In July 2023, the Summer Nutrition Programs only served one child for every seven that participated in free and reduced-price school meals during the 2022-2023 school year.

More can be done to support access to summer meals. Lowering the area eligibility threshold from 50 percent to 40 percent would allow more communities to offer summer meals. Allowing Summer Food sponsors to serve meals year-round—instead of switching the Afterschool Suppers and Snack Program under the Child and Adult Care Food Program—would reduce administrative burdens and costs, support program integrity, and increase access to meals during the summer and after school. Allowing all sites to serve a third meal, instead of just two, would better support children's nutritional needs and full day summer programs and be more consistent with the number of meals per day that children are able to access during the school day. Transportation grants would also help overcome the transportation barriers that limit participation in summer meals. The Summer Meals Act of 2021, which was introduced by Senators Gillibrand and Murkowski, included these provisions.

In addition, the new Summer EBT Program provides families $120 in grocery benefits per child eligible for free or reduced-price school meals on EBT and offers an important and complementary opportunity to combat summer hunger. Evaluations of the Summer EBT demonstration projects found that it reduced food insecurity and improved nutrition. In 2024, 37 states, the District of Columbia, all five U.S. territories, and two Tribes are participating in Summer EBT. To better support implementation and encourage all states to adopt the new program, Congress should fully cover state administrative costs.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I welcome your questions.

Appendix of FRAC Resources:

School Meals are Essential for Health and Learning (May 2021)

The State of Healthy School Meals for All (February 2024)

National Healthy Schools Meals for All Coalition Statement of Support

FRAC's Large School District Report: Operating School Nutrition Programs During the Pandemic (May 2022)

The Reach of School Breakfast and Lunch: During the 2022-2023 School Year (March 2024)

Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation: Summer Nutrition Status Report (August 2024)

Community Eligibility: The Key to Hunger-Free Schools: School Year 2022-2023 (May 2023)

Research Highlights the Benefits of Healthy School Meals for All Students: An Annotated Bibliography (July 2024)

Child Nutrition Reauthorization: Summer Meals Act of 2021

Summer EBT Impact Fact Sheet (May 2024)

Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation: Summer Nutrition Status Report (August 2024)

School Meals are Essential for Student Health and Learning

FRAC
Food Research & Action Center

Each day, millions of students fuel their minds and bodies with the good nutrition provided by the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program. There is considerable evidence of the effective role that participation in these programs plays in alleviating food insecurity and poverty, and in providing the nutrients students need for growth, development, learning, and overall health, especially for the nation's most vulnerable children and adolescents. This brief reviews the many benefits of the school meals programs, and summarizes the latest research on recent policy changes and innovative strategies that are increasing program access and improving student outcomes.

School Meals Play a Critical Role in Student Health, Well-Being, and Academic Success

More than 14.6 million students eat a school breakfast and 29.7 million students eat a school lunch on a typical school day, based on data from the 2018–2019 school year.[1] The sentence should say this: The vast majority of these students are from low-income households and receive a free or reduced-price meal.

A considerable body of evidence shows that the school meals programs are profoundly important for students, especially low-income students, with well-documented benefits.

School Meals Alleviate Food Insecurity and Poverty

School meals are a critical component of the U.S. safety net. Multiple studies find improvements in food security through participation in the school meals programs.[2,3,4,5,6] For example, school breakfast availability reduces low food security and very low food security among elementary school children.[7] For school lunch, participation is associated with a 14 percent reduction in the risk of food insufficiency among households with at least one child receiving a free or reduced-price school lunch.[8] Conversely, research shows that rates of food insecurity and food insufficiency among children are higher in the summer — a time when students do not have access to the school meal programs available during the academic year.[9,10,11]

Nationally, school lunch also lifted 1.2 million people — including 722,000 children — above the poverty line in 2017, based on Census Bureau data on poverty and income in the U.S.[12]

School Meals Support Good Nutrition

School meals support good nutrition throughout the school day. Program participants are less likely to have nutrient inadequacies and are more likely to consume fruits, vegetables, and milk at breakfast and lunch.[13,14] For school breakfast, similar dietary benefits are observed among students attending schools that provide breakfast at no cost to all students, when compared to students who eat away from school or through a traditional means-tested breakfast program.[15,16] For school lunch, researchers conclude "school lunches provide superior nutrient quality than lunches obtained from other sources, particularly for low-income children."[17] This is consistent with other studies comparing school lunches to packed lunches brought from home or elsewhere.[18,19,20]

The school meals programs also have favorable impacts on overall dietary quality, as measured by the Healthy Eating Index.[21,22] In a national assessment conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), school lunch participants and school breakfast participants consumed lunches and breakfasts of higher nutritional quality, respectively, than their nonparticipating peers.[23] In many cases, particularly for school lunch participants, these differences in overall dietary quality persisted over a 24-hour time period. Meaning, school meal participants had better dietary quality not just at school, but throughout the entire day. Similarly, there is evidence that more frequent school meal consumption has nutritional advantages for daily dietary intake: elementary and middle school students who eat school breakfast every day consume more fruits and vegetables, whole grains, dairy, fiber, and calcium per day, when compared to students who eat school breakfast less frequently (i.e., 0 to 4 days per week).[24] Students who eat school lunch daily consume more dairy and calcium per day compared to those who eat school lunch less frequently. As Frisvold and Price write, "exposure to healthier meals at school increases the healthfulness of foods acquired by children throughout the day."[25]

School Meals Improve Health Outcomes

School meals support and improve student physical and mental health, including weight-related outcomes. For instance, free or reduced-price school lunches reduce rates of poor health by at least 29 percent and rates of obesity by at least 17 percent, based on estimates using national data.[26] Multiple studies find an association between school breakfast participation and lower body mass index (BMI), lower probability of being overweight, and lower probability of obesity.[27,28,29,30,31] School breakfast, including breakfast offered at no cost to all students in a school, also has been linked with fewer visits to the school nurse, particularly in the morning,[32] and positive impacts on mental health, including reductions in behavioral problems, anxiety, and depression.[33,34]

School Meals Boost Learning

School meals programs are linked with improvements in the classroom. Students who participate in school breakfast programs have improved attendance, behavior, academic performance, and academic achievement as well as decreased tardiness, based on decades of research on the topic.[35,36,37,38,39,40] These effects also are observed when implementing innovative models to increase breakfast participation. For example, providing students with breakfast in the classroom is associated with lower rates of tardiness, fewer disciplinary office referrals, improved attendance rates, and improved math and reading achievement test scores.[41,42,43]

Improvements in student behavior have been observed with the Community Eligibility Provision* as well: multiple out-of-school suspension rates fell by about 15 percent for elementary students and 6 percent for middle school students after implementation of community eligibility in one study.[44] These reductions were even larger, at about 25 percent, for elementary school students in counties with high rates of food insecurity.

Finally, research demonstrates that the impacts of program participation can be long-lasting. In a study examining the effects of school lunch participation between 1941 and 1956 on adult outcomes, participation was associated with long-term educational attainment for men and women.[45]

*Under the Community Eligibility Provision created by the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA) of 2010, high-poverty schools and school districts can offer school meals at no charge to all students.

Updated School Meals Nutrition Standards Improve Student Dietary Intake Without Harming Program Participation

The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA) of 2010 created a process for enhancing the quality of all food and beverages served and sold in schools by empowering USDA to set new nutrition standards for school meals and for "competitive foods."[†] These new nutrition standards are vital to improving the dietary intake and health of students, especially low-income students. USDA issued a final rule on the school meal nutrition standards in January 2012. Overall, the rule required schools to offer more fruits, vegetables, and whole grain-rich foods; offer only fat-free or low-fat (1 percent) fluid milk; limit saturated fat and sodium; minimize trans fat; and limit the calories that can be offered in a meal. The lunch standards began to take effect in the 2012–2013 school year; the breakfast standards began to take effect in the 2013–2014 school year.

An analysis by FRAC in 2016 found that the revised nutrition standards have had a positive impact on the school nutrition environment as well as student food selection and consumption, especially for fruits and vegetables.[46] Research published since then supports these conclusions.[47,48,49] Perhaps most notably, USDA recently issued the first national, comprehensive assessment of school meal programs since the implementation of the updated school meal nutrition standards.[50] The nutritional quality of school lunches increased by 41 percent, and by 44 percent for school breakfasts, after the implementation of the nutrition standards. The assessment also found that serving lunches of higher nutritional quality was associated with higher school lunch participation rates, but not with higher costs per lunch.

In addition to the favorable nutrition impacts, there is growing evidence that the standards have not had a negative impact on school meal participation over time (as some had feared) and, in fact, may contribute to modest improvements in participation.[51,52] For instance, the number of students choosing a school meal (versus no school meal) increased by 13.6 percent after the implementation of improved school meal and competitive food nutrition standards in Massachusetts.[53]

In spite of widespread support, overwhelming evidence of compliance, and positive nutrition impacts, efforts have been underway to roll back the nutrition standards issued in January 2012.[54,55,56] Unfortunately, such efforts were successful with the weakening of the standards for whole grains, sodium, and milk in a final rule issued by USDA in December 2018. USDA scaled back the whole grain requirements, delayed the requirement to further lower sodium levels in school meals, and allowed low-fat flavored milk (instead of only allowing non-fat flavored milk). In response, FRAC released a statement that "USDA's final rule on nutrition standards is a step backwards for children's health and learning."[57] Regardless of this setback, FRAC will continue to work with schools and districts to implement the stronger nutrition standards issued in January 2012, since those aspects of the standards issued in December 2018 are optional for schools. On the national level, FRAC will work with allied organizations in efforts to protect the nutrition standards from rollbacks, and advocate for USDA to ensure adequate support, technical assistance, and resources for schools to continue robust implementation of the nutrition standards.

[†] The new competitive foods standards rule, known as the Smart Snacks in School rule, is a separate initiative governing foods provided or sold in schools (e.g., vending machines, food sold in competition with federal meals) other than those from the federal nutrition programs. It was issued by USDA in June 2013 and began to take effect in the 2014–2015 school year. In general, these standards promote whole grains, low-fat dairy, fruits, vegetables, and leaner protein, while limiting the calories, fat, sugar, and sodium of items.

Innovative Policies and Practices for Providing School Meals Increase Program Access

Across the country, innovative school meal policies and practices are being implemented to increase access to these critical and effective programs. For school breakfast and lunch, this includes implementing community eligibility. For breakfast, this includes providing breakfast at no cost to all students (possibly through community eligibility), and using breakfast in the classroom, "grab and go" breakfast, and second chance breakfast models. Such approaches can address common barriers to program participation, such as stigma, cost, and, for breakfast, arriving to school too late. (For more information and resources on these policies and models, visit www.frac.org.)

Research shows that these strategies are effective in increasing program participation. According to an analysis by FRAC, 28,542 schools (64 percent of those eligible) participated in community eligibility in the 2018–2019 school year, compared to 14,214 in the 2014–2015 school year when the provision first became available nationwide.[58] While community eligibility has only been implemented nationwide a few years, preliminary evidence indicates that the provision increases student participation in school breakfast and lunch,[59,60] and FRAC's analysis points to a consistent increase in the number of students enrolled in schools offering community eligibility.

The evidence is clear that programs offering breakfast at no cost to all students and breakfast in the classroom increase breakfast participation.[61,62,63,64,65,66,67,68] (Typically, breakfast in the classroom is offered at no cost to all students.) For example, in a study of North Carolina public schools, serving breakfast at no cost to all students boosted breakfast participation, including among students otherwise ineligible for free or reduced-price meals.[69] The participation impacts were larger when breakfast at no cost to all students was implemented in combination with breakfast in the classroom, second chance breakfast, or breakfast in the classroom plus "grab and go."

"Grab and go" and second chance breakfasts show particular evidence of success for middle and high school students, although these models tend to receive less attention in the research literature.[70,71] In an evaluation of a "grab and go" breakfast program in Minnesota high schools, average school-level breakfast participation

increased from 13 percent to 22.6 percent of students after implementation.[72] Among a subsample of students with irregular breakfast habits, breakfast participation increased among students eligible for free or reduced-price school meals (from 13.9 to 30.7 percent) and among students paying full price for school meals (from 4.3 to 17.2 percent).

The Case for Healthy School Meals for All

The current pandemic has underscored the importance of providing children, especially those from economically disadvantaged communities, with access to nutritious school meals. With as many as 12 million children suffering from food insecurity[73] and sharp decreases in overall School Breakfast Program (SBP) and National School Lunch Program participation rates reported from fiscal year 2019 to 2020 (drops of 16.8 percent and 24.3 percent, respectively),[74] it is crucial that school meals be offered to all students at no charge, commonly called Healthy School Meals for All or Universal School Meals/Meal Programs. Investing in this approach would ensure that all children, regardless of family income, can obtain healthy meals throughout the year and have the best chance to learn and thrive in school. Healthy School Meals for All also would build on the pre-pandemic successful efforts to increase participation in SBP. According to a recent FRAC analysis, these gains include 37 million additional free or reduced-priced breakfasts served from September 2019 to February

2020 compared to the same months of the previous school year, and a total of more than 12.6 million children who received a free or reduced-priced breakfast on an average school day during the same time period.[75]

Additional research studies that have explored the effect of Healthy School Meals for All measures across the U.S. have yielded promising results that link the approach to benefits. They show that the nutritional value of school meals and student diet quality, along with increased meal participation, improved academic performance, and lack of weight gain, are maintained when schools offer free school meals to all. For example, a longitudinal study conducted by the Maxwell School Center for Policy Research showed that New York City's Universal Free Meals program led to increases in academic performance and school lunch participation for both low-income and non-low-income middle school students.[76] No evidence was found that these programs are correlated with an increased probability of overweight, obesity, or increased average body mass index (BMI).

A qualitative study examining the impact of Vermont's free school meals for all program indicated that it was associated with increased readiness to learn among students, in addition to improved academic performance and school climate.[77] Other perceived social gains associated with Healthy School Meals for All include decreases in student stress, family financial stress,and administrator stress, and income differences being less visible. An analysis of the School Nutrition and Meal Cost study demonstrated that total costs among medium and large schools offering free school meals to all students decreased moderately for lunch, and decreased significantly for breakfast.[78] Additionally, this analysis showed that Healthy Eating Index scores were not negatively impacted by offering school meals to all students at no charge. These results suggest that offering school meals to all students at no charge can lead to reduced meal costs without compromising students' diet quality.

Studies' findings connecting Healthy School Meals for All to steady trends in student BMI and boosts in meal participation were supported by a recent systematic review examining the association between this approach and multiple outcomes.[79] Studies that evaluated the impact of the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) support the claim that there is value in administering CEP and other universal school meal provisions. For example, these studies' results reveal that CEP is linked to benefits, including better attendance;[80] increased total meal participation[81] and meal participation among low-income students;[82, 83] improvements in academic achievement[84, 85] and in favorable child health outcomes, such as an increased percentage of students with healthy body weight; and decreased average student BMI.[86]

Conclusion

Research shows that the school breakfast and lunch programs are effective in alleviating food insecurity and poverty, supporting good nutrition, and improving health and learning. In addition, recent policy changes (e.g., community eligibility, updated nutrition standards) and innovative models of program delivery (e.g., breakfast in the classroom) are connecting more students to these critical programs and producing more positive and healthier outcomes. Recent studies evaluating Healthy School Meals for All programs find that in addition to ensuring that all children have access to healthy school meals, they also are associated with many of the benefits linked to traditional school nutrition programs. Continuing to increase access to, and strengthen, the school meals programs will further their role in supporting and improving student health and well-being.

The original version of this paper was prepared by FRAC Senior Researcher in Nutrition Policy and Community Health Heather Hartline-Grafton, DrPH, RD; and was updated by FRAC Director of School and Out-of-School Time Programs Crystal FitzSimons and FRAC Research and Policy Analyst Vanessa Gomez.

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The State of Healthy School Meals for All

California, Maine, Massachusetts, Nevada, and Vermont Lead the Way

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FEBRUARY 2024

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About FRAC

The Food Research & Action Center improves the nutrition, health, and well-being of people struggling against poverty-related hunger in the United States through advocacy, partnerships, and by advancing bold and equitable policy solutions. For more information about FRAC, or to sign up for FRAC's e-newsletters, go to www.frac.org.

For more information about Healthy School Meals for All policies and campaigns, go to www.FreeSchoolMealsforAll.org.

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SCHOOL LUNCH

participation in California, Maine, Massachusetts, Nevada, and Vermont **INCREASED** during the 2022–2023 school year compared to pre-pandemic levels.

SCHOOL BREAKFAST

participation **INCREASED** in four of the five states.

The five Healthy School Meals for All states continued to have a gap between breakfast and lunch participation, showing there is still **ROOM FOR GROWTH** in the School Breakfast Program.

The response to Healthy School Meals for All policies has been **POSITIVE**, with state child nutrition agencies noting many benefits to providing school meals at no cost to all families and public opinion polling showing broad support.

Executive Summary

School meals have always played an important role in reducing childhood hunger, supporting good nutrition, and ensuring that students can get the most out of their school day. For more than two school years during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, schools were able to offer meals to all students at no charge through the pandemic-related child nutrition waivers offered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). This served as a trial run for nationwide Healthy School Meals for All, and it was a resounding success.

Students, regardless of household income, had access to nutritious meals to help them thrive at school, whether they were attending in person or virtually. Parents did not have to worry about packing lunches or paying for meals, and school nutrition professionals were able to give a meal to any child that needed one without worrying about account balances.

Several states decided they did not want to return to pre-pandemic school meal operations, which required determining children's eligibility for free, reduced-price, or paid meal categories, and introduced legislation to permanently provide free school meals for all students.

Four states — California, Maine, Massachusetts, and Vermont — passed policies to make school meals available to all students at no charge, regardless of household income. Nevada used pandemic relief funds to extend Healthy School Meals for All through the 2022–2023 and 2023–2024 school years. Four additional states — Colorado, Minnesota, Michigan, and New Mexico — have also passed Healthy School Meals for All policies that started with the 2023–2024 school year.

In total, there are eight states to date that have passed ongoing Healthy School Meals for All policies, and legislation has been introduced in many more. This report looks at participation data for California, Maine, Massachusetts, Nevada, and Vermont, the states with a Healthy School Meals for All policy during the 2022–2023 school year.

KEY FINDINGS

- School lunch participation in California, Maine, Massachusetts, Nevada, and Vermont — the five states that implemented Healthy School Meals for All policies during the 2022–2023 school year — **INCREASED** compared to pre-pandemic participation levels.

- School breakfast participation **INCREASED** in four of the five states.
- The five Healthy School Meals for All states continued to have a gap between breakfast and lunch participation, showing there is still **ROOM FOR GROWTH** in the School Breakfast Program.
- The response to Healthy School Meals for All policies has been **POSITIVE**, with state child nutrition agencies noting many benefits to providing school meals at no cost to all families and public opinion polling showing broad support.

The increase in school meal participation in Healthy School Meals for All states shows the success and popularity of the approach and highlights the need for Congress to pass legislation so that all students, regardless of where they live, have access to the nutrition they need to learn and thrive. Until Congress acts, states should continue to pass Healthy School Meals for All policies that ensure the children in their state have access to nutritious food that helps them succeed at school.

> *"Healthy School Meals for All has allowed Massachusetts to increase participation, expand Farm to School, address staff shortages, replace aging equipment and enhance scratch cooking. All of this is helping to revolutionize menus and change opinions about the nutritional quality of school meals."*[1]
>
> **— Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education**

About This Report

This report measures the reach of school breakfast and lunch in states that had Healthy School Meals for All policies in place for the 2022–2023 school year. It looks at participation data from September to May, primarily comparing pre-COVID-19 pandemic operations in the 2018–2019 school year to the first year of Healthy School Meals for All policies in the 2022–2023 school year. Information from the school years in between is included as reference points in Appendix 1. For more information on which programs are included and how data were calculated, see the Technical Notes.

School Meals Are Critical to Student Nutrition and Learning

School meals play an important role in reducing childhood hunger, supporting good nutrition, and ensuring students are ready to get the most out of their school day.

Research links participation in school meals to positive educational and health outcomes for our nation's children such as:

- **IMPROVING** academic achievement, attendance, and student behavior at school;
- **DECREASING** childhood food insecurity;
- **EATING** more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and milk; and
- **REDUCING** visits to the school nurse.

School Meals Should Not Be a Means-Tested Part of the School Day

As vital as the school nutrition programs are to ensuring children's access to nutritious meals, too many children in need miss out because of the programs' current structure. Many struggling families do not meet the federal eligibility threshold for free school meals, which required a family of three to earn less than $33,000 annually during the 2022–2023 school year.[2]

With the eligibility for free school meals set so low, many families need access to school meals but cannot afford them. Healthy food should not be a means-tested part of the school day as it is integral to student success just like access to textbooks and technology, which are standard parts of the school day.

The COVID-19 Pandemic Changed the Landscape of School Meals

To help keep child hunger at bay during the pandemic, USDA issued waivers in March 2020 to allow schools[3] to provide meals at no charge to all children, no matter their household income. Without these waivers, the alarming spikes in childhood hunger caused by the economic and health fallout from COVID-19 would have been even worse.

The pandemic highlighted the critical role that school meals play for children and acted as a trial run for Healthy School Meals for All nationwide. Students, parents, teachers, administrators, school nutrition professionals, and other stakeholders realized they did not want to go back to a tiered payment system for school meals, driving energy and support for statewide Healthy School Meals for All campaigns.

USDA waivers allowing schools to offer meals at no charge to all students expired in June 2022. Unless states had enacted a Healthy School Meals for All policy, most schools went back to normal school nutrition operations for the 2022–2023 school year: offering meals at no charge to some students; charging a reduced-price fee to some; and charging others for the cost of their meal.[4]

TIMELINE

SCHOOL YEAR 2018–2019

Pre-Pandemic Operations: Most schools offered free, reduced-price, or paid school meals to their students based on their household income. High-need schools could offer meals at no charge to all students through the Community Eligibility Provision.[5]

SCHOOL YEAR 2019–2020

Partial-Year Pandemic Waivers: Schools offered free, reduced-price, or paid school meals to their students based on their household income or used community eligibility to offer meals at no charge until March 2020, when pandemic child nutrition waivers allowed all schools to offer meals to all students at no charge.

SCHOOL YEAR 2020–2021

Pandemic Waivers: Schools were able to offer meals at no charge to all students.

SCHOOL YEAR 2021–2022

Pandemic Waivers: Schools were able to offer meals at no charge to all students.

SCHOOL YEAR 2022–2023

Healthy School Meals for All Policies in Implementing States: Most schools returned to offering free, reduced-price, or paid[6] meals to students, unless they were in one of the five states that implemented a Healthy School Meals for All policy.[7]

Benefits of Healthy School Meals for All

There are many benefits to offering school breakfast and lunch to all students at no charge to families.

- **Ensures all students are hunger-free and ready to get the most out of their school day:** It is hard for students to learn and fully benefit from educational investments when they do not have the focus or energy to concentrate because they are hungry. It only takes one hungry student who cannot pay attention to disrupt learning in an entire classroom, so everyone benefits when all students are well-fed.
- **Reduces stigma in the cafeteria:** Students from households with low incomes, particularly those in middle and high school, often worry that participating in school meals will negatively identify them among their peers. As a result, students feel shame or skip meals. When all students have access to free meals, regardless of household income, any stigma about eating school meals is reduced, and the cafeteria can be a more welcoming space for everyone.
- **Ends school meal debt:** School nutrition departments no longer need to track and follow up on school meal debt, which is a significant problem for families and schools. Dealing with school meal debt takes time away from serving high-quality nutritious meals and building a sense of community in cafeterias.
- **Supports innovative service models:** When all students can eat free meals at school, it is easier for school nutrition departments to use innovative service models such as breakfast in the classroom and grab-and-go kiosks to serve more students. As participation increases, economies of scale can allow for serving more fresh produce and quality menu items that appeal to students.

The California Department of Education noted that Healthy School Meals for All "helps to remove stigma of school meals, eliminates school meal debt, increases access to healthy complete meals, and elevates the importance of school nutrition and culinary professionals and the essential role school meals and food service has in a holistic educational programming for student achievement."[8]

- **Advances racial equity:** Healthy School Meals for All policies are critical to advancing racial equity and justice, ensuring that all students have access to the nutrition they need to succeed at school and beyond.

Public Support for Healthy School Meals for All

In 2021, FRAC conducted nationwide public opinion polling and found that 63 percent of voters nationwide support legislation that would allow schools to offer meals to all students at no charge. Since then, several states have conducted their own state-specific polling and found public support numbers that are even higher. For example, eight in 10 Pennsylvanian voters support expanding the state's free breakfast program to include lunch; 81 percent of voters in North Carolina support school meals for all; and 87 percent of Ohio parents of school-age children agree that schools should provide school meals at no cost to all students, regardless of the student's ability to pay.

State child nutrition agencies noted the following benefits of Healthy School Meals for All in their states:[9]

REDUCES childhood hunger
- California, Maine, Massachusetts, Nevada, Vermont

EASIER for parents and guardians
- California, Maine, Massachusetts, Nevada

ELIMINATES any stigma associated with school meals
- California, Maine, Massachusetts, Nevada, Vermont

EASES administrative work
- California, Maine, Massachusetts, Nevada

SUPPORTS academic achievement
- California, Maine, Massachusetts, Nevada, Vermont

ELIMINATES school meal debt
- California, Maine, Massachusetts, Nevada, Vermont

IMPROVES student behavior
- California, Massachusetts, Nevada, Vermont

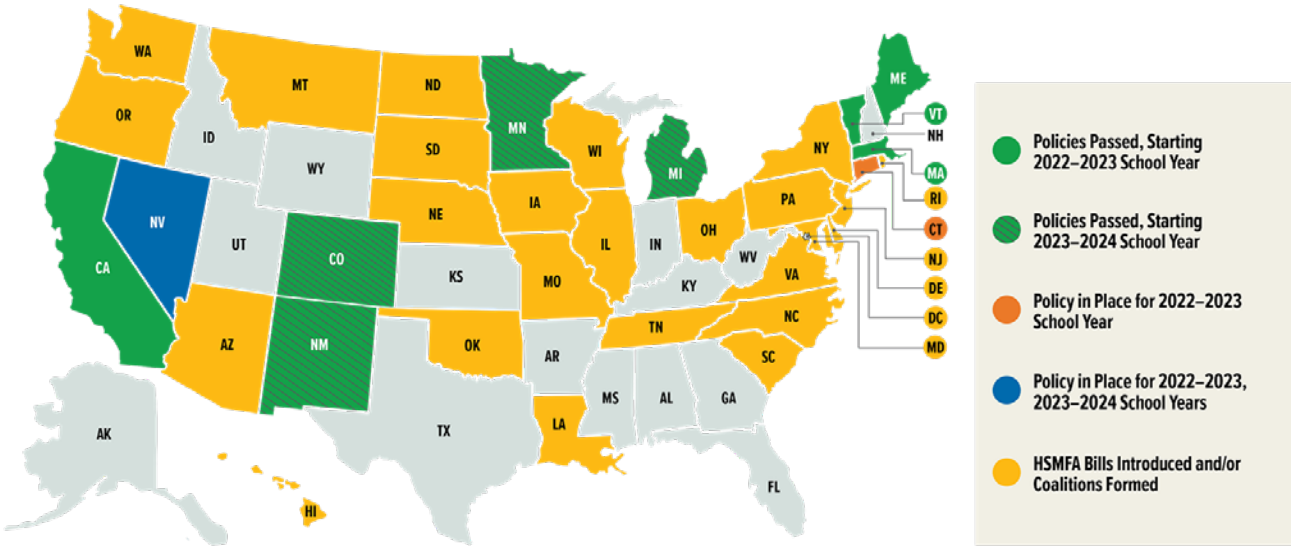
SUPPORTS Food and Nutrition Services finances
- California, Maine, Massachusetts, Nevada

INCREASES number of fruits, vegetables, and milk students consume
- California, Massachusetts, Nevada

ADVANCES racial equity
- California, Massachusetts, Nevada

IMPROVES staff morale/job satisfaction
- California, Massachusetts, Nevada

States Are Leading the Way With Healthy School Meals for All Policies



California and Maine were the first states in the country to pass Healthy School Meals for All policies in 2021.

Massachusetts and Vermont passed one-year Healthy School Meals for All policies to continue offering free meals to students during the 2022–2023 school year, after the pandemic waivers had ended. They later passed permanent Healthy School Meals for All policies that secured meals for all students at no cost.

Nevada used pandemic relief funds to offer meals at no charge for the 2022–2023 and 2023–2024 school years. Unless the state dedicates additional funds, schools will return to pre-pandemic operations in the 2024–2025 school year.

Connecticut used pandemic relief funds to provide free school meals for parts of the 2022–2023 school year.

Colorado, Minnesota, Michigan, and **New Mexico** have passed Healthy School Meals for All policies that began with the 2023–2024 school year. These states are not included in this report because the school year is still in progress and data are not yet available.

The **Connecticut legislature** allocated $30 million of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds in the 2022 legislative session to support households transitioning from meals at no cost to all students back to submitting free and reduced-price school meals applications and paying for meals according to household income for the beginning of the 2022–2023 school year. During a special legislative session, with the support of the governor, the legislature allocated an additional $60 million in ARPA funds to restart offering meals at no cost to all students resuming March 1, 2023, and through the remainder of the 2022–2023 school year.

Since there was a disruption in funding to support meals at no cost to all students, and school meals were not continuously offered to all students at no charge during the school year, Connecticut is not included in the data tables in this report.

Connecticut allocated $16 million in funding to offer free breakfasts to all students for the 2023–2024 school year. The state also eliminated the reduced-price copay for the school year, meaning that students from households between 131 percent and 185 percent of the poverty line and qualifying for reduced-price meals, can eat school lunch at no cost. Advocates in Connecticut continue to campaign for a permanent Healthy School Meals for All policy that includes breakfast and lunch.

The Community Eligibility Provision

The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) allows high-poverty schools to offer breakfast and lunch free of charge to all students. During the 2022–2023 school year, any district, group of schools in a district, or school with 40 percent or more "identified students" — children who are eligible for free school meals who already are identified by means other than an individual household application — can choose to participate. USDA lowered the eligibility threshold to 25 percent in the fall of 2023 and gave states the option to implement the new threshold during the 2023–2024 school year.

"Identified students" include those who are in two categories:

- children who are directly certified for free school meals through data matching because their households receive SNAP, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations benefits, or in most states, Medicaid benefits; and
- children who are certified for free meals without an application because they are homeless, migrant, enrolled in Head Start, or in foster care.

Reimbursements to the school are calculated by multiplying the percentage of identified students by 1.6 to determine the percentage of meals that will be reimbursed at the federal free rate. For example, a school with 50 percent identified students would be reimbursed at the free rate for 80 percent of the meals eaten (50 multiplied by 1.6 is 80), and at the paid rate for 20 percent.

School districts also may choose to participate districtwide or group schools however they choose if the district or group has an overall identified student percentage of 40 percent or higher during the 2022–2023 school year (moving to 25 percent under the new threshold announced in the fall 2023).

"[Healthy School Meals for All] has helped our family with two school-aged kids quite a bit. Inflation is making groceries quite expensive for a family of four, and free school lunch helps economically and saves us precious morning prep time."

— Connecticut parent

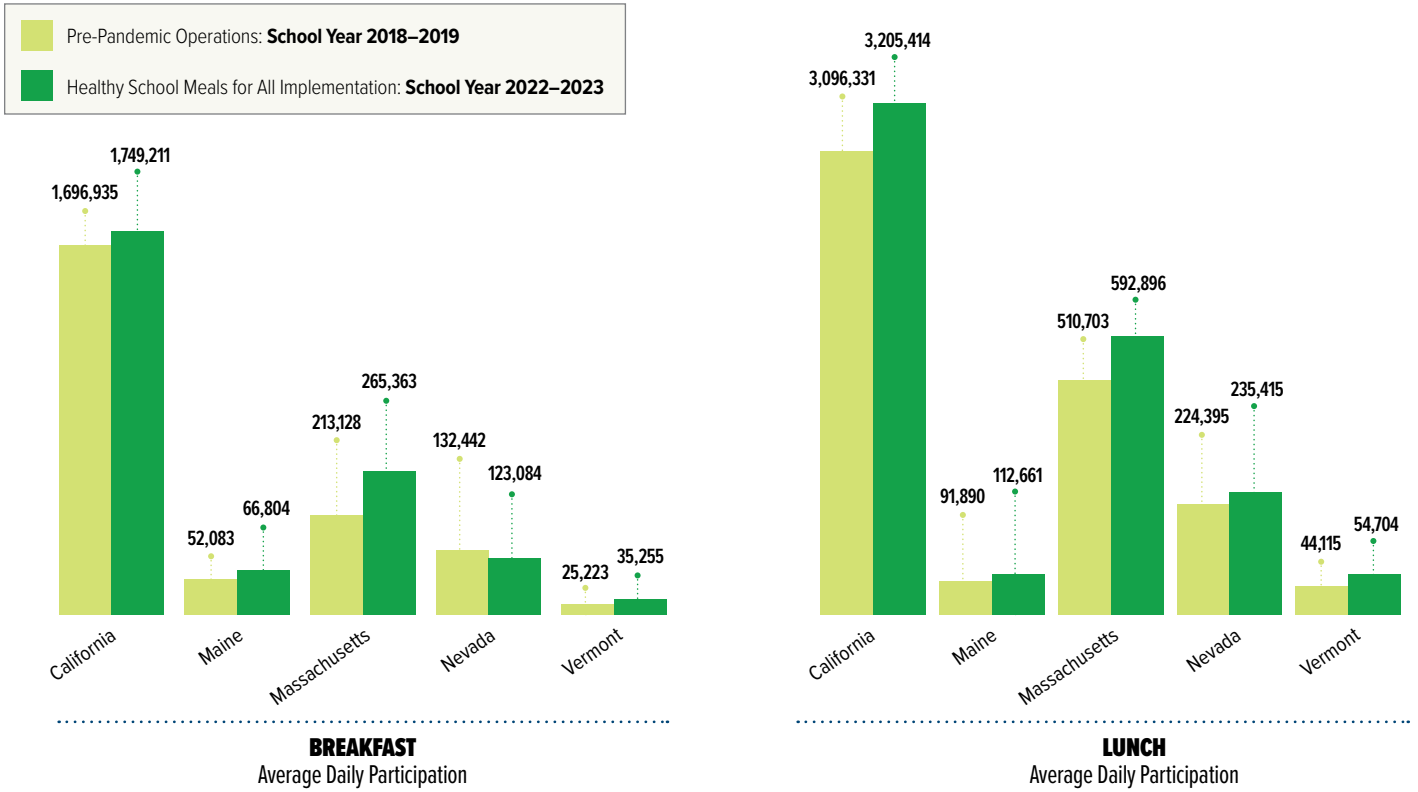
"Healthy School meals for all is essential ... throughout the [U.S.] because it shows the citizens and individuals young and old that there is a sense of belonging, together with compassion, love, kindness, acceptance and respect."

— Vermont advocate

"Prior to the pandemic, I struggled with school meal debt. ... I felt like we were drowning. Despite being a single mother, my income was relatively decent.
Therefore, [my daughter] didn't qualify for free or reduced school meals.
Yet, high housing and health care costs consumed the majority of my income."

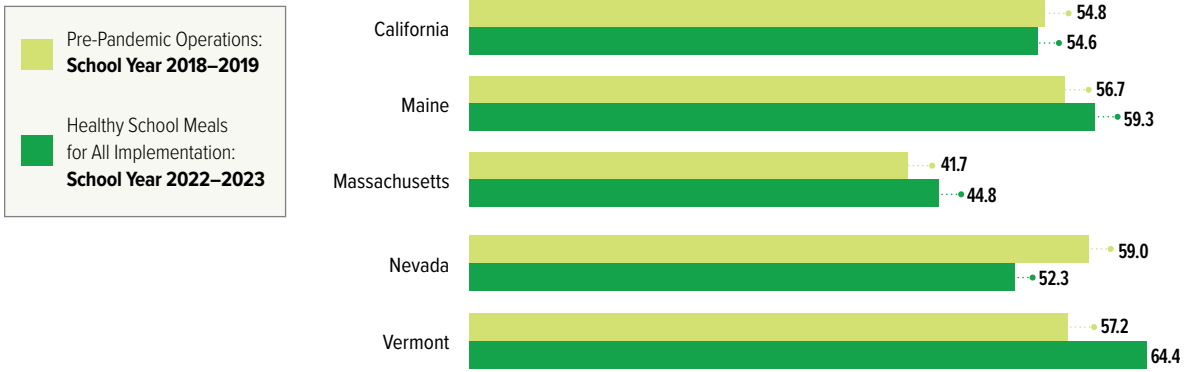
— Massachusetts parent

Chart 1: School Meal Participation in States With Healthy School Meals for All Policies



- School **breakfast** participation **INCREASED** in California, Maine, Massachusetts, and Vermont. These four states provided breakfast to a total of 129,264 more students, compared to pre-pandemic operations.
- Overall breakfast participation **INCREASED** by 6 percent, even with Nevada's drop in participation.
- School **lunch** participation **INCREASED** in all five states by a total of 233,656 students or **6 percent**, compared to pre-pandemic operations.

Chart 2: Breakfast to Lunch Participation Ratio



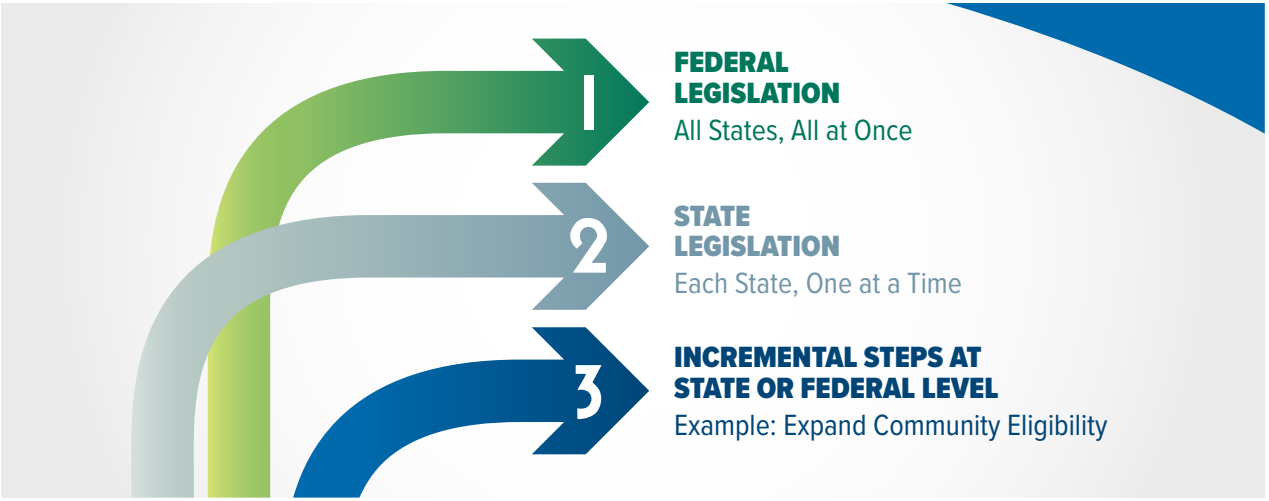
- The five Healthy School Meals for All states continued to have a gap between breakfast and lunch participation, with two states losing ground.
- California's school breakfast to lunch ratio decreased even as breakfast participation increased because the 3 percent increase in school breakfast participation did not keep pace with the state's 4 percent increase in school lunch participation.
- Nevada's school breakfast to lunch ratio decreased due to the combined impact of a drop in breakfast participation and an increase in lunch participation.

Recommendations

There are several pathways to Healthy School Meals for All, and the following strategies should be pursued to ensure all students have access to the nutrition they need:

- **Congress should pass a nationwide Healthy School Meals for All policy.** The five states that implemented Healthy School Meals for All policies in the 2022–2023 school year, along with the four states that have passed policies implemented in the 2023–2024 school year and the positive polling data, demonstrate the public support and the benefits of serving healthy meals at no cost to students during the school day. Students in all states need access to school breakfast and lunch to grow and thrive.
- **More states should continue to pass Healthy School Meals for All policies.** States often lead the way, enacting policies that support children and families that become the models for national legislation. Until Congress acts, states can continue to pass Healthy School Meals for All legislation, which to date have passed as standalone bills, have been included in budget bills, and have been approved by voters through a ballot measure. Healthy School Meals for All legislation has received bipartisan support in several states.
- **The Community Eligibility Provision needs to be financially viable for more schools.** In September 2023, USDA released a final rule that lowered the Community Eligibility Provision eligibility threshold from 40 percent to 25 percent Identified Student Percentage. This allows more high-need schools to serve healthy school meals to all students at no cost to families through community eligibility; however, the multiplier that determines community eligibility schools' federal reimbursement must be increased by Congress from 1.6 to 2.5 so that it is financially feasible for more eligible schools to participate.
- **School districts should take steps to increase breakfast participation.** The first five states to implement Healthy School Meals for All policies show that even when breakfast is offered at no cost, students still participate less than they do in lunch. There are additional barriers to breakfast participation, such as students having enough time to get breakfast in the school cafeteria before the school day begins. Innovative breakfast models, such as breakfast in the classroom, grab and go breakfast, and second chance breakfast, can help close the gap between breakfast and lunch participation.

Three Pathways to Healthy School Meals for All



FRAC supports the following federal legislation to increase the number of students with access to free meals:

Universal School Meals Program Act (S. 1568/H.R. 3204), which would create Healthy School Meals for All nationwide. The bill has been reintroduced by Sen. Sanders (I-VT) and Rep. Omar (D-MN), along with Sens. Gillibrand (D-NY) and Heinrich (D-NM) and Reps. McGovern (D-MA) and Moore (D-WI).

School Meals Expansion Act (H.R. 2567) introduced by Rep. McGarvey (D-KY), which would increase federal funding for community eligibility schools.

No Hungry Kids in School Act (H.R. 3112) introduced by Reps. Porter (D-CA) and Aguilar (D-CA), which would create a statewide community eligibility option.

Expanding Access to School Meals Act (H.R. 3113) introduced by Rep. Porter (D-CA), which would increase eligibility for free meals to 200 percent, expand direct certification, make eligibility retroactive to the beginning of the school year, and increase funding for community eligibility schools.

Technical Notes

Data in this report are collected from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and an annual survey of state child nutrition officials conducted by the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC). For consistency, all USDA data used in this report are from the states' 90-day revisions of the monthly reports. The 90-day revisions are the final required reports from the states, but states have the option to change numbers at any time after that point.

Student Participation

The student participation data in each state are based on daily averages of the number of breakfasts and lunches served through the available program options on school days during the nine months from September through May. FRAC calculated the number of children reached in each state during each school year by dividing the total number of breakfasts and lunches served by each state's average number of serving days during the corresponding school year. The pandemic impacted which federal child nutrition programs schools operated to provide breakfasts and lunches, as well as program operations. The following bullets describe the data adjustments made to each school year to account for the impact of the pandemic on the available data.

- **During the 2018–2019 school year,** average daily participation is based on the total number of breakfasts and lunches served through the School Breakfast Program (SBP) and National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and each state's average number of serving days in SBP and NSLP during the 2018–2019 school year.
- **During the 2019–2020 school year,** average daily participation is based on the total number of breakfasts and lunches served through SBP, NSLP, the Seamless Summer Option (SSO), and the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and each state's average number of serving days in SBP and NSLP during the 2018–2019 school year. While FRAC would normally use the service days from the corresponding year to determine the number of children served, disruptions to the number of traditional service days — and the transition to SFSP and SSO in many states — in those years would not provide a fair comparison. Using the 2018–2019 service days assumes that school schedules were consistent with pre-pandemic schedules. This approach was also applied to the 2020–2021 and 2021–2022 school years.
- **During the 2020–2021 school year,** average daily participation is based on the total number of breakfasts and lunches served through SBP, NSLP, SSO, and SFSP, and each state's average number of serving days in SBP and NSLP during the 2018–2019 school year.
- **During the 2021–2022 school year,** average daily participation is based on the number of breakfasts and lunches served through SBP, NSLP, SSO, and each state's average number of serving days in SBP and NSLP during the 2018–2019 school year.
- **During the 2022–2023 school year,** average daily participation is based on the number of breakfasts and lunches served through SBP and NSLP and each state's average number of serving days in SBP and NSLP during the 2022–2023 school year. California and Maine reported to USDA that they served breakfasts and lunches through SSO in the 2022–2023 school year. Those numbers are included in their participation data because meals served through SSO are included in the free category of meals served in SBP and NSLP instead of being reported separately.

Breakfasts and lunches served through SSO have historically been reported in the free category of SBP or NSLP. During the pandemic, schools were

using SSO broadly through USDA waivers. In normal years, including the 2018–2019, 2019–2020 (prior to schools closing in response to the pandemic), and 2022–2023 school years, SSO participation during the school year is outside of the regular school day, and are "summer meals," which includes meals served in September before the school year starts, during extended breaks at year-round schools, or unanticipated school closures.

Based on information from USDA, FRAC applies a formula (divide average daily participation by an attendance factor) to adjust numbers upwards to account for children who were absent from school on a particular day. FRAC uses an attendance factor of 0.927 to adjust the average daily participation numbers in breakfast and lunch for the 2018–2019, 2019–2020, 2020–2021, 2021–2022, and 2022–2023 school years.

SOURCE FOR QUOTES

The quotes from parents and community members were collected through a form on FRAC's website during the 2021–2022 school year.

Endnotes

1 The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education submitted this quote to FRAC in February 2024 in response to a school meals survey.

2 The eligibility threshold for school meals is adjusted annually.

3 In addition to schools, child nutrition waivers from USDA allowed public and private nonprofit organizations to offer free meals to all students.

4 If a student attended a community eligibility or a Provision 2 or 3 school, they were able to continue accessing no cost meals at school.

5 Schools could also use Provision 2 and 3 to offer meals to all students at no charge, but the vast majority of schools utilized community eligibility.

6 Families in the paid category pay the majority of the meal cost, however, the federal government provides a small subsidy for the meals through reimbursements.

7 High-need schools in all states can offer students meals at no cost if they participate in the Community Eligibility Provision. Schools can also use Provision 2 or 3 to offer free meals to all students.

8 The California Department of Education submitted this quote to FRAC in January 2024 in response to a school meals survey.

9 State child nutrition agencies were asked to note benefits of Healthy School Meals for All policies they observed in their states through a form sent to them by FRAC in 2023.

Appendix 1: Total Average Daily Participation in School Breakfast and Lunch in Healthy School Meals for All States, School Years 2018–2019[1] through 2022–2023[2]

State	Pre-Pandemic Operations			Partial-Year COVID Waivers			Full-Year COVID Waivers			Full-Year COVID Waivers			HSMFA Implementation		
	School Year 2018–2019			School Year 2019–2020[3]			School Year 2020–2021[4]			School Year 2021–2022[5]			School Year 2022–2023		
	Average Daily Participation in Breakfast	Average Daily Participation in Lunch	Breakfast to Lunch Participation Ratio	Average Daily Participation in Breakfast	Average Daily Participation in Lunch	Breakfast to Lunch Participation Ratio	Average Daily Participation in Breakfast	Average Daily Participation in Lunch	Breakfast to Lunch Participation Ratio	Average Daily Participation in Breakfast	Average Daily Participation in Lunch	Breakfast to Lunch Participation Ratio	Average Daily Participation in Breakfast	Average Daily Participation in Lunch	Breakfast to Lunch Participation Ratio
California	1,696,935	3,096,331	54.8	1,686,605	2,643,330	63.8	1,670,281	1,774,518	94.1	1,550,113	3,075,214	50.4	1,749,211	3,205,414	54.6
Maine	52,083	91,890	56.7	61,333	87,927	69.8	46,850	65,822	71.2	61,985	105,178	58.9	66,804	112,661	59.3
Massachusetts	213,128	510,703	41.7	195,238	404,654	48.2	224,790	307,519	73.1	237,991	571,647	41.6	265,363	592,896	44.8
Nevada	132,442	224,395	59.0	117,595	190,770	61.6	94,860	110,291	86.0	139,605	250,434	55.7	123,084	235,415	52.3
Vermont	25,223	44,115	57.2	30,651	43,052	71.2	29,272	38,541	76.0	32,779	51,267	63.9	35,255	54,704	64.4
Total	**2,119,811**	**3,967,434**	**53.4**	**2,091,422**	**3,369,733**	**62.1**	**2,066,053**	**2,296,691**	**90.0**	**2,022,473**	**4,053,740**	**49.9**	**2,239,719**	**4,201,090**	**53.3**

1 Average Daily Participation during the 2021–2022 school year includes participation in the School Breakfast Program, National School Lunch Program, and Seamless Summer Option.

2 Average Daily Participation during the 2022–2023 school year includes participation in the School Breakfast Program, National School Lunch Program, and Seamless Summer Option for September 2022 only.

3 With most schools closing in the spring of 2020 and providing meals at no charge at sites to families to take home through the pandemic waivers, lunch participation decreased in every state in the 2019–2020 school year compared to the prior year. Being able to provide breakfast and lunch at the same time reduced the gap between school breakfast and lunch in all five states, and supported Maine and Vermont in providing breakfasts to more children.

4 With many schools closed or operating under hybrid models during much of the 2020–2021 school year and providing meals at no charge at sites to families to take home through the pandemic waivers, lunch participation dropped in every state compared to the two prior school years. Being able to provide breakfast and lunch at the same time shrunk the breakfast to lunch ratio to 90:100, with Massachusetts and Vermont serving breakfast to more children than they did during the 2018–2019 school year (the last full school year prior to the pandemic).

5 Most schools returned to in-person learning during the 2021–2022 school year and were able to offer meals to all children at no charge through the pandemic waivers. With children returning to school, lunch participation increased dramatically in every state. Breakfast participation also increased in every state, but not at the same rate, and the gap between breakfast and lunch participation increased in all states compared to the 2020–2021 school year.

Appendix 2: Total Percentage Change in Average Daily Participation in School Breakfast and Lunch in Healthy School Meals for All States, School Years 2018–2019 and 2022–2023

State	Pre-Pandemic Operations		HSMFA Implementation			
	School Year 2018–2019		School Year 2022–2023		Percentage Change	
	Average Daily Participation in Breakfast	Average Daily Participation in Lunch	Average Daily Participation in Breakfast	Average Daily Participation in Lunch	Change in Breakfast Participation	Change in Lunch Participation
California	1,696,935	3,096,331	1,749,211	3,205,414	3%	4%
Maine	52,083	91,890	66,804	112,661	28%	23%
Massachusetts	213,128	510,703	265,363	592,896	25%	16%
Nevada	132,442	224,395	123,084	235,415	-7%	5%
Vermont	25,223	44,115	35,255	54,704	40%	24%
Total	**2,119,811**	**3,967,434**	**2,239,719**	**4,201,090**	**6%**	**6%**

FRAC
Food Research & Action Center

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HEALTHY SCHOOL MEALS FOR ALL COALITION

The time for nationwide Healthy School Meals for All is now.

PURPOSE

The coalition will advocate and build support for nationwide **Healthy School Meals for All** so that all schools can offer breakfast and lunch at no charge to all of their students.

STATEMENT OF SUPPORT

We know that school meals play an important role in reducing childhood hunger, supporting good nutrition, and ensuring that students are well nourished and ready to get the most out of their school day.

Research links participation in school meals to positive educational and health outcomes for our nation's children. School meals are just as important to academic success as textbooks, computers, and transportation, and all children should have access to them every school day.

As vital as the school nutrition programs are to ensuring children's access to healthy, nutritious meals, too many children in need miss out on school meals because of the programs' current structure. Many struggling families do not meet the eligibility threshold for free meals, which requires a family of four to earn less than $37,000 annually. The current structure with some children being offered free meals or meals at a reduced price, and others paying for their meals, also leads many children who are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals, particularly those in middle and high school, to choose not to participate because of stigma.

Providing free meals to all students, regardless of household income, would reduce stigma and ensure that all students have the nutrition they need during the school day. It would ease the pressure on families' household food budgets, allowing them to count on a nutritious school breakfast and lunch each school day to help make ends meet. It would reduce administrative work for school staff, allowing them to focus on preparing nutritious and appealing meals instead of processing paperwork. And it would eliminate unpaid school meal fees, helping to ensure that the cafeteria is a positive place for all students and ending the financial burden that school meal debt creates for school districts.

Providing school meals to all students is also critical for advancing racial equity and justice, helping to ensure that Black, Indigenous, and Latinx students can access the key nutrition they need to thrive in the classroom and beyond.

Schools were able to offer free school meals to all their students beginning in the spring of 2020 when the pandemic began to sweep the country. Free school meals were offered to all students no matter their learning mode — remote, in-person, or hybrid — through the 2021–2022 school year, and were ended despite the ongoing need. This trial run showed how beneficial offering free meals to all students is for children, families, and schools.

Healthy School Meals for All Coalition

AASA, The School Superintendents Association

"In order to truly teach the student, we must first meet their most basic needs. Free meals for all is the only way to ensure all students get the meals they need without stigma, administrative burden or unpaid meal debt. AASA strongly supports free school meals for all to guarantee that every student can come to class ready to learn and reach their full potential."

— David Schuler, Executive Director

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

"The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics strongly supports and advocates for healthful school meals. School meals are crucial in alleviating childhood food insecurity, and studies continue to show schools are the healthiest place in the U.S. for children to eat. School meals can have a positive impact by helping to reduce racial disparities in health and education, while also supporting learning, attendance, and behavior."

— Ellen R. Shanley, registered dietitian nutritionist and the Academy's 2022–2023 President

American Academy of Pediatrics

"Pediatricians understand the important role that strong nutrition plays in ensuring a child can grow up healthy and thrive. It is critical that all children have access to healthy and nutritious school meals. By offering free school meals to every student, it would eliminate the stigma of being singled out for receiving assistance, help reach all families who are struggling and ensure all students can benefit from healthy and nutritious meals."

— Mark Del Monte, JD, CEO/Executive Vice President

American Federation of Teachers

"In America in 2023, we should be able to ensure that no child goes hungry. Yet today, that is not the case. Kids in our public schools go hungry. It is unacceptable. We have an obligation to our children to create welcoming, safe schools where they can thrive, and that includes making sure they have everything they need to learn, be it a new book, or breakfast. We strongly support Healthy School Meals for All. It would allow tens of millions of children to get the meals they desperately need, and it makes real our commitment to our children. If we care about kids, as I have heard representatives say repeatedly these last few weeks, then Healthy School Meals for All would be passed in an overwhelmingly bipartisan manner."

— Randi Weingarten, President

American Heart Association

"Providing healthy school meals for all students is a recipe for success that reduces food insecurity, improves children's diets and academic performance, generates critical revenue for schools and decreases stigma. We must urgently continue our work toward ensuring every child across the country has access to the healthy meals at school that will help them thrive and put them on a path to a lifetime of healthy eating."

— Mark Schoeberl, Executive Vice President, Advocacy

Association of School Business Officials International

"No child should ever have to worry about going hungry, nor should any family worry about how to afford their child's next meal, especially at school. We support a universal healthy school meals program to ensure students have access to delicious and nutritious meals so that they can grow up happy and healthy and be ready to learn."

— Siobhán McMahon, CAE, Chief Operations Officer

Healthy School Meals for All Coalition

Center for Biological Diversity

"All children deserve healthy, culturally-appropriate and free school meals. Every Congressperson should be pounding down the doors to ensure students have the fuel they need to learn and grow."

— Jennifer Molidor, Senior Food Campaigner

The Center for Black Health & Equity

"The Center for Black Health & Equity (The Center) believes that access to healthy school meals is a critical step in addressing food insecurity. We are committed to addressing the social and economic injustices that have marginalized our communities and led to deep health disparities for our nation's most vulnerable populations. Far too many of our children across the United States experience child hunger. Access to school meals will better equip them to reach their full potential and thrive in and out of the classroom. The Center is dedicated to advocating for equity-centered policies that align with our commitment to end child hunger and fight for food justice."

— Delmonte Jefferson, Executive Director

Center for Science in the Public Interest

"Nationwide healthy school meals for all would eliminate stigma and guarantee that every student has access to healthy meals as part of their school day. CSPI urges Congress to ensure every child has access to free meals at school regardless of their family's income, just as they do books and transportation."

— Dr. Peter Lurie, Executive Director

Chef Ann Foundation

"The pandemic showed us that families rely on healthy meals at school for their children, and that the income requirements for the free and reduced lunch program often miss many families in need. Healthy School Meals For All ensures all our children have access to the food and nutrition they need to thrive and meet their true potential."

— Mara Fleishman, CEO

Children's Defense Fund

"It makes no sense that everything in public school is free except the food! School meals play an important role in reducing childhood hunger, supporting good nutrition, and ensuring that students are ready to learn. Every child should have access to them every day. Providing free meals to all students, regardless of household income, would reduce stigma, ease the pressure on family budgets, and let school leaders focus on nurturing youth instead of processing paperwork. Let's end the debate and feed the children, so young people grow up with dignity, hope, and joy."

— Dr. Starsky Wilson, President & CEO

First Focus on Children

"First Focus on Children is dedicated to ensuring that all children receive free, nutritious meals at school to give every child a fair shot at a healthy life. We're delighted to join the National Healthy School Meals for All Coalition to advocate for universal school meals that help kids stay full and focused throughout the school day. Food insecurity is specifically associated with poorer physical and mental health, lower school performance, and diminished psychosocial functioning. It's our duty to give children the nutrition they need to succeed."

— Bruce Lesley, President

Healthy School Meals for All Coalition

FoodCorps

"Our 2030 goal includes making sure all kids have access to nutritious school meals, free of charge. We cannot overstate the importance of allying with groups who share our vision for a more just world — one where all students know the joy and power of food."

— Dr. Robert S. Harvey, President of FoodCorps

Food Research & Action Center

"Healthy School Meals for All would be a game changer for students, families, and schools. School meals combat childhood hunger, improve children's health, and support academic achievement. By offering school meals at no charge, we can ensure that all children have access to the nutrition they need to learn and thrive. We are proud to be a member of this coalition. The time for nationwide Healthy School Meals for All is now."

— Crystal FitzSimons, Child Nutrition Programs & Policy Director

MomsRising

"School meals are essential for children's health, well-being, and ability to learn, and they relieve stress and hardship for moms and all caregivers. We need to end the stigma, cumbersome paperwork, and school meal debt too many families are experiencing and commit to ending child hunger in America. Making healthy, nutritious school meals available to all students at no charge is one of the best ways to do that."

— Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner, CEO and Executive Director

National Education Association

"No child should have to learn on an empty belly. Food insecurity can be found in every community — urban, suburban, and rural — and this crisis is particularly exacerbated in our Black, brown, and Indigenous communities. Since the USDA universal school meals waivers ended, educators across the country have witnessed an alarming rise in students going hungry. Congress can take a big step towards fixing this crisis by passing free healthy school meals for all children so they have the resources they need to grow and thrive."

— Becky Pringle, President

National Farm to School Network

"National Farm to School Network represents organizations, professionals, and community members committed to a future where all communities hold power in a racially just food system. We support Healthy School Meals for All to ensure that no child misses the nutrition they need to learn and thrive, or experiences stigma. Our partners in the cafeterias, classrooms, gardens, and farms know that how children eat, grow, and learn about food sets them up for future health and success."

— Miguel Villarreal, Interim Co-Executive Director

National PTA

"Access to healthy food options is critical to a child's well-being and academic success. And for far too many children, school meals are a necessity not a luxury and are often the most nutritious meals they receive. Students cannot learn without adequate nutrition, and no child in our nation should have to go hungry. It is urgent that Congress take action to ensure all students have access to healthy school meal programs. It is critical to their success — both in and out of the classroom."

— Anna King, President

School Nutrition Association

"With research demonstrating that school meals support children's academic achievement, health, and wellness, it's no surprise that such a broad range of organizations are speaking out in support of healthy school meals for all students. School nutrition professionals witnessed first-hand how free meal service combats stigma for students who rely on free meals, supports working-class families, reduces paperwork for staff, and fosters a sense of community in the cafeteria. SNA strongly supports offering free school meals to ensure all students are fueled for learning."

— Lori Adkins, MS, SNS, CHE, President

FRAC
Food Research & Action Center

Large School District Report

Operating School Nutrition Programs During the Pandemic

MAY 2022 | WWW.FRAC.ORG

Large School District Report

Operating School Nutrition Programs During the Pandemic

MAY 2022

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- **National Recreation and Park Association**
- **Nourishing Neighbors, a Program of the Albertsons Companies Foundation**

About FRAC

The Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) improves the nutrition, health, and well-being of people struggling against poverty-related hunger in the United States through advocacy, partnerships, and by advancing bold and equitable policy solutions. For more information about FRAC, or to sign up for FRAC's e-newsletters, go to www.frac.org.

Authors

This report was written by FRAC's Alexis Bylander, Crystal FitzSimons, and Grace O'Connor. The findings and conclusions presented in this report are those of FRAC alone.

FRAC sincerely thanks the school nutrition staff who completed our annual large district school meals survey, making this report possible and providing valuable insight into school meal operations during the 2020–2021 and 2021–2022 school years.

Photo credits: FRAC is grateful to Cobb County School District, Duval County Public School District, Fulton County School District, and Pittsburg Unified School District for submitting photos for use in this report.

FRAC
Food Research & Action Center

Executive Summary

As the COVID-19 pandemic continued during the 2020–2021 and 2021–2022 school years, school meals remained a support to students, providing them nutritious food whether they were attending school in person or virtually, and have been a critical component of our nation's response to the pandemic.

To support access to the federal child nutrition programs during the pandemic, Congress gave the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) the authority to issue nationwide waivers to provide schools, local government agencies, and private nonprofits the flexibility needed to operate the programs during the pandemic. USDA has continued to use this authority to overcome the unique challenges created by the pandemic, such as allowing schools to offer meals to all students at no charge during in-person, virtual, or hybrid learning, student quarantine periods, and school closures, and providing additional funding to schools to help cover the increased pandemic-related costs.

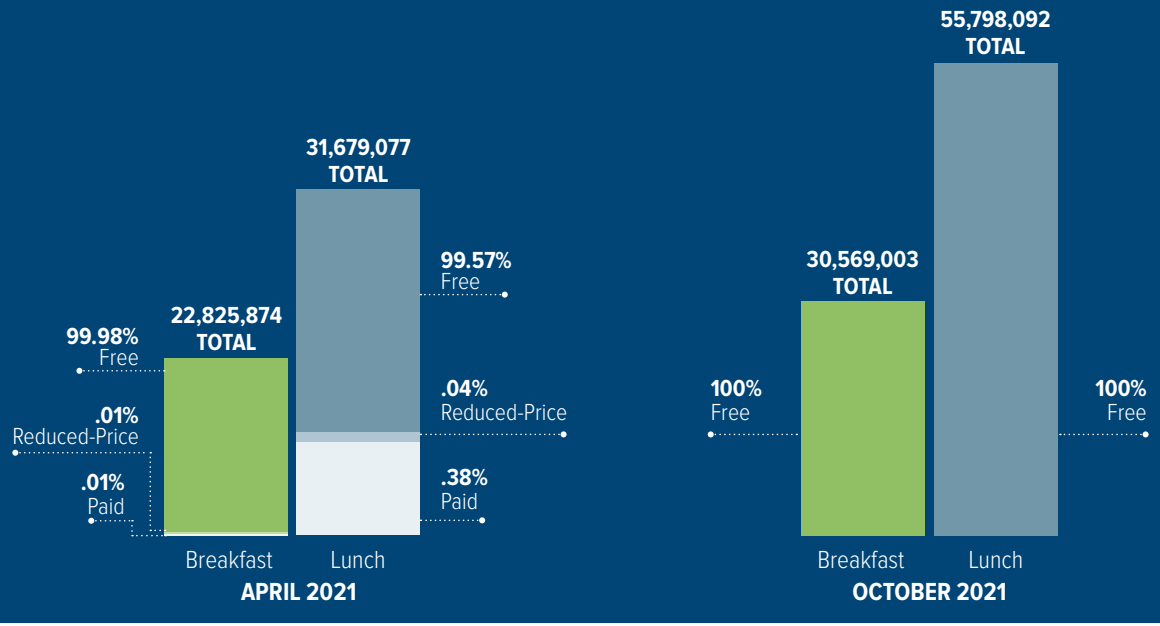
Even with most students returning to the classroom for the 2021–2022 school year, schools continued to face a variety of challenges, including supply chain disruptions, labor shortages, low participation in school meal programs, serving meals safely, and rising food prices. Waivers have been critical this school year and are needed through the 2022–2023 school year to support school nutrition as they recover from the impacts of the pandemic.

School nutrition staff have served as frontline workers during the pandemic, supporting students' access to healthy meals and playing a critical role in combating childhood hunger. They developed creative strategies for dealing with supply chain issues, and new serving models to accommodate remote learning and social distancing.

There have been lessons learned from school meal operations during the pandemic and longstanding best practices that can and should be used to increase access and participation in the School Breakfast Program (SBP) and National School Lunch Program (NSLP). This report highlights the role that the waivers have played in supporting school nutrition operations and access to school meals, the importance of extending the waivers through the 2022–2023 school year, and the path forward to ensure all children have access to the nutritious school meals they need to learn and thrive.

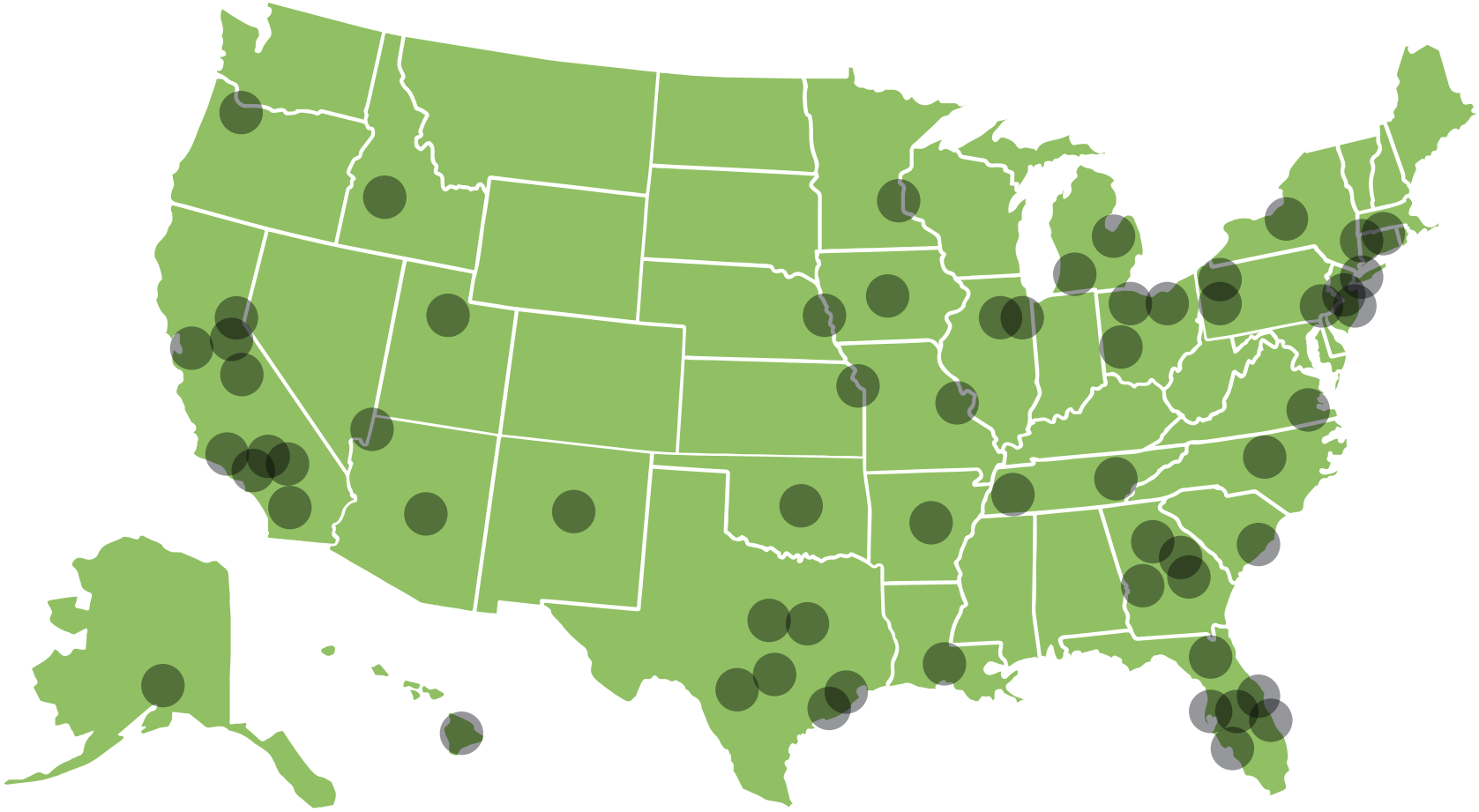
KEY FINDINGS

- The **62 districts** highlighted in this report included a total of **9,188 schools** and **5,334,085 students**.
- In **April 2021**, a total of **22,825,874 breakfasts** were served in the 62 districts surveyed.
  - **22,821,699** of the breakfasts (99.98%) were served at the **free** rate.
  - **1,243** of the breakfasts (0.01%) were served at the **reduced-price** rate.
  - **2,932** of the breakfasts (0.01%) were served at the **paid** rate.
- In **April 2021**, a total of **31,679,077 lunches** were served in the 62 districts surveyed.
  - **31,543,951** of the lunches (99.57%) were served at the **free** rate.
  - **13,763** of the lunches (0.04%) were served at the **reduced-price** rate.
  - **121,363** of the lunches (0.38%) were served at the **paid** rate.
- In **October 2021**, **50** of the 62 districts (81%) were serving **breakfast** at all of their schools, and **54** of the 62 districts (87%) were serving **lunch** at all of their schools.
- In **October 2021,** a total of **30,569,003 breakfasts** and **55,798,092 lunches** were served in the 62 districts surveyed. All of them were served at the free rate through the Seamless Summer Option.
- Average daily participation in **breakfast increased** by **over 518,000** across all surveyed districts from **1 million children in April 2021** to **1.5 million in October 2021**. Average daily participation in **lunch increased** by **approximately 1.4 million** from **1.4 million in April 2021** to **2.8 million in October 2021**.
- Broken down by school districts, **52** districts saw an **increase in breakfast** participation from April 2021 to October 2021, and **61** districts saw an **increase in lunch** participation from April 2021 to October 2021.
- The **combined reach of breakfast** among the 62 districts **trailed lunch** in **both April 2021 and October 2021**.



Survey Sample

The Food Research & Action Center surveyed large school districts to learn more about their school meals programs in April 2021 and October 2021, providing insights into participation and program operations during the 2020–2021 and 2021–2022 school years. For this report, a large district was defined as one with more than 8,000 students. Sixty-two school districts in 31 states completed surveys from December 2021–February 2022. The size of the school districts ranged from 8,204 students in San Marcos Consolidated ISD (Texas) to 1,003,199 students in New York City Department of Education (New York).



The Ongoing Pandemic Continued to Pose Challenges for School Meal Operations

Schools faced a variety of challenges as the pandemic continued to impact school nutrition operations into the 2021–2022 school year. FRAC's survey asked school nutrition staff if they encountered challenges with supply chain disruptions, labor shortages, low participation in meal programs, serving meals safely, or rising food prices. The table below shows their responses. Additional challenges school districts mentioned included menu fatigue, rising labor costs, social distancing during meal service, and obtaining supplies such as containers, trays, and utensils.

TABLE: Operational Challenges Identified by School Nutrition Staff During the 2021–2022 School Year

61 of the districts surveyed (98%) identified **SUPPLY CHAIN DISRUPTIONS** as a challenge.

59 of the districts surveyed (95%) identified **LABOR SHORTAGES** as a challenge.

55 of the districts surveyed (89%) identified **RISING FOOD PRICES** as a challenge.

25 of the districts surveyed (40%) identified **LOW PARTICIPATION** in meal programs as a challenge.

14 of the districts surveyed (23%) identified **SERVING MEALS SAFELY** as a challenge.

Child Nutrition Programs Used to Serve Breakfast and Lunch

During the 2020–2021 and 2021–2022 school years, school districts had the option to offer breakfast and lunch at no charge to all students through the child nutrition waivers. In April 2021, 60 of the surveyed districts offered meals at no charge to all students, with 30 operating the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and 30 operating the Seamless Summer Option (SSO). One district, the Hawai'i Department of Education, used NSLP and SSO to serve meals in April 2021. In October 2021, all 62 school districts surveyed used SSO to offer meals to all students at no charge.[1]

1 The waiver to operate SFSP was not made available to schools or other sponsors during the 2021–2022 school year.

Offering Free School Meals to All Students

School nutrition staff reported numerous benefits to offering meals to all students at no charge through the nationwide waivers that were available during the 2020–2021 and 2021–2022 school years.

TABLE: Reported Benefits of Serving Free Meals to All Students

59 districts (95%) reported it **REDUCES CHILD HUNGER**.

55 districts (89%) reported it makes it **EASIER FOR PARENTS AND GUARDIANS**.

53 districts (85%) reported it **ELIMINATES ANY STIGMA** associated with school meals.

52 districts (84%) reported it **EASES ADMINISTRATIVE WORK**.

51 districts (82%) reported it **SUPPORTS ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT**.

50 districts (81%) reported it **ELIMINATES SCHOOL MEAL DEBT**.

48 districts (77%) reported it **INCREASES NUMBER OF FRUITS AND VEGETABLES AND MILK** children consume.

38 districts (61%) reported it **IMPROVES STUDENT BEHAVIOR**.

36 districts (58%) reported it **ADVANCES RACIAL EQUITY**.

Offering free meals to all students during the pandemic has effectively served as a trial run for a nationwide healthy school meals for all policy.

FRAC's resource, The Case for Healthy School Meals for All, discusses in detail why free meals for all students should remain the new normal for schools across the country. California and Maine have passed state legislation to permanently establish healthy school meals at no cost to families, and many other states are considering it.

Healthy School Meals for All Through State Legislation

In 2021, California and Maine became the first states to enact legislation to offer free school breakfast and lunch to all of their students. California's legislation, led by Speaker Nancy Skinner and supported by Superintendent Tony Thurmond, was made possible through a state budget surplus. Maine's legislation, led by Senate President Troy Jackson and House Speaker Ryan Fecteau, established a Meals for Students Fund and seeded the fund with $10 million. Additional funding to successfully implement school meals for all Maine students was later secured. The California Association of Food Banks and the School Meals for All Coalition in California and Full Plates Full Potential in Maine worked with a variety of partners and stakeholders to build support and successfully enact the legislation.

For more information about FRAC's work around free healthy school meals for all, visit FRAC's Healthy School Meals for All webpage.

Learning Models During April and October 2021

In response to the pandemic, school districts utilized a variety of learning models during the 2020–2021 school year, including in-person, virtual, and hybrid (a combination of in-person and virtual). The majority of school districts reported using either a virtual or hybrid model in April 2021. Most districts reported that all or nearly all students were back in person in October 2021.

Nationwide Waivers

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress gave USDA the authority to grant nationwide child nutrition waivers, allowing school nutrition programs to adapt as necessary to changes such as school closures, virtual learning, and supply chain shortages.

The waivers remained available through the 2021–2022 school years. Every school district included in this report was using at least one waiver in April 2021 and October 2021. Below is a list of the waivers, followed by a table that describes the extent to which the surveyed districts used the waivers.

Non-Congregate Feeding
allows families to take meals home to eat by waiving the requirement that children eat the meal at the site.

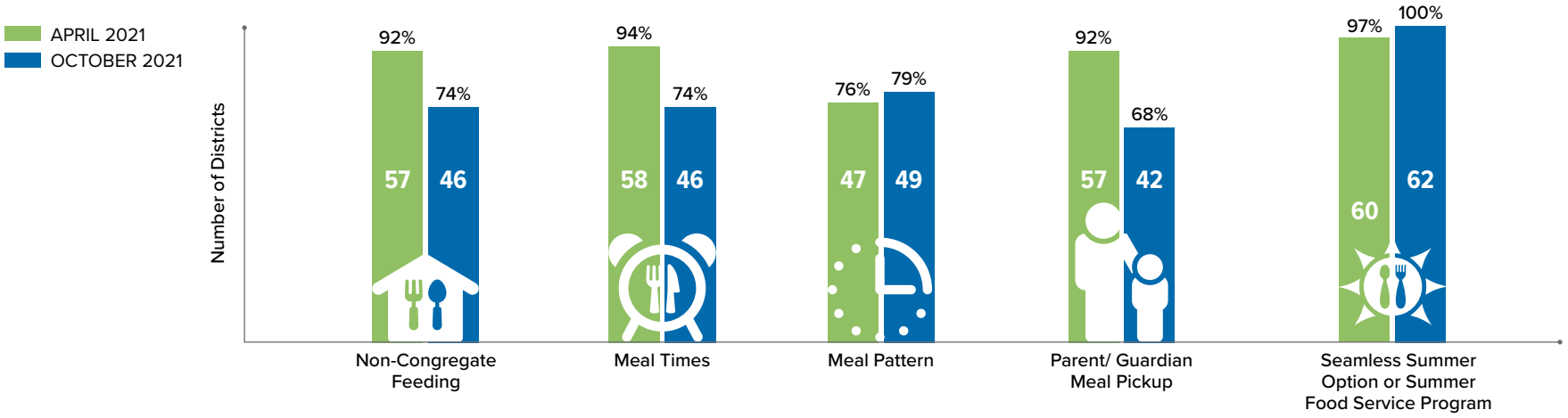
Meal Times
allows sites to provide families multiple meals—up to breakfast, lunch, supper, and a snack for one day—and more than one day's worth of meals at a time by waiving requirements for the timing of the meal service.

Meal Pattern
allows flexibility in meeting the meal patterns.

Parent/Guardian Pickup
allows parents and guardians to pick up meals for the children in the household by waiving the requirement that the child be present.

Seamless Summer Option and Summer Food Service Program[2]
allows schools to serve meals at no charge through the Summer Nutrition Programs instead of operating the School Breakfast Program and the National School Lunch Program under the normal rules for the regular school year. In school year 2021–2022, USDA issued a waiver that allowed schools to serve meals through the Seamless Summer Option, but receive the higher SFSP reimbursement rates.[3]

TABLE: Number of Districts Using Each Type of Waiver, April 2021 and October 2021



2 The total number of districts using the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) and Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) waiver includes any district that reported serving meals through either SSO or SFSP in the applicable month.

3 The waiver to operate SFSP was not made available to schools or other sponsors during the 2021–2022 school year.

School District Perspectives on USDA Nationwide Waivers

The nationwide waivers issued by USDA gave schools the flexibility they needed to respond to the changing circumstances and uncertainty the pandemic caused. School districts noted that the waivers allowed them to offer free meals to all students, provide meals to siblings, continue with operations when there were product shortages or items were delayed or canceled, made things easier for parents, reduced stigma, and alleviated stress for school nutrition staff. Norfolk Public Schools summarized it by noting that the "flexibilities allowed schools to adapt to unprecedented, ever-changing, unpredictable conditions and situations," and Floyd County Schools stated, "the waivers have given some much-needed relief."

"These waivers have helped Chicago Public Schools (CPS) support our students' nutritional needs without interruption. During times of food uncertainty, families could rely on CPS to provide meals daily. These waivers also allowed CPS to continue to seek reimbursement for all meals provided, allowing our operation to continue."

— Chicago Public Schools

"The waivers were beneficial as they eased the administrative burdens and allowed our department and our staff to focus on increasing access to quality food for all children."

— Minneapolis Public Schools

"The waivers allowed children to continue to participate in school meals when not on campus. The flexibility from the waivers ensured that families had easy access to healthy foods. Continuing the meal program allowed employees to continue working, easing financial burdens on families."

— Dallas Independent School District

"The meal pattern waiver has been immensely helpful this year as we navigate the current supply chain issues."

— Cobb County School District

"All waivers have eased administrative burdens and allowed us to focus on getting meals to students."

— Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District

"Waivers allowed us to operate a grab and go meal service at each school that was safe and accessible for parents and students."

— Salt Lake City School District

"The USDA waivers have been invaluable to our district. The ability to feed all students at no charge is a blessing to families, and it has greatly helped reduce the stigma of free lunch. These waivers have allowed us to navigate supply chain issues and labor shortages in a way that helps us continue to do what we're here to do—feed students."

— Knox County Schools

"[The waivers] helped make it possible to serve meals to our students while keeping them, our community, and our staff safe."

— Fresno Unified School District

"We found out quickly that it was difficult for parents to get to the meal sites every day while remote learning was happening. When we moved to bulk curbside meals we aligned with the district's 100% remote day so parents could pick up a whole week's worth of meals at one time. This also helped limit exposure for staff."

— Newburgh Enlarged City School District

Creative Strategies for Serving Meals During the Pandemic

School nutrition staff were frontline workers during the pandemic and ensured students had continuous access to healthy meals. They implemented a variety of creative strategies to overcome the uncertainty and changing variables the pandemic created. Through our large district survey, school nutrition staff shared how they changed their menus, serving models, and many other aspects of school meal operations to adapt to the challenging and evolving environment.

"We partnered with one of our vendors to deliver meals to homes for families that requested delivery services."

— Chicago Public Schools

"We use[d] monthly competitions to engage staff and keep them motivated through [the] pandemic to shine."

— Cleveland Metropolitan School District

"[We] provide[d] bulk items and create[d] a recipe for the families to make their own fresh meals at home with the items provided."

— San Bernardino City Unified School District

"During virtual-only learning periods, a hot meal (supper) for the current day, plus cold meals for the next day (breakfast, lunch, and snack) were distributed at the same time, at the end of the instructional day."

— Norfolk Public Schools

"Grab-n-go meals available at the serving line for quick service, then return to classroom."

— Pinellas County Schools

Policy Recommendations

In order to ensure access to school meals and to support school districts as they recover from the strain that the pandemic has placed on them over the last two years, FRAC advocates for the following policy recommendations:

- **Make free school meals available to all students:** Prior to the pandemic, 1 in 3 schools participating in the School Nutrition Programs was offering breakfast and lunch at no charge to all students through the Community Eligibility Provision. Since March 2020, all schools have been given the opportunity to do this through the Seamless Summer Option and Summer Food Service Program. Offering school breakfast and lunch to all students at no charge—also known as Healthy School Meals for All—helps ensure that all children have the nutrition they need to grow and thrive, and helps overcome the numerous participation barriers, such as the tiered eligibility system that limits access for too many children whose families are struggling to make ends meet, and the stigma associated with participating in school meals. It also helps support school nutrition finances by increasing participation, reducing administrative work, and eliminating school meals debt. While the Community Eligibility Provision remains an important opportunity for high-poverty schools to offer free breakfast and lunch to all students, moving forward, bold federal administrative and legislative actions are needed to allow all schools to offer meals to every student at no charge. Healthy School Meals for All can be accomplished by enacting legislation, such as the Universal School Meals Program Act of 2021. A more modest approach is to expand community eligibility so that additional schools are able to offer meals at no charge to all students.
- **Extend USDA nationwide waiver authority:** At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress gave USDA the authority to issue nationwide child nutrition waivers to address access and operational challenges created by the pandemic.

Breakfast After the Bell: A Proven Strategy to Increase Participation

When students are attending school in person, implementing a breakfast after the bell service model has the potential to greatly increase participation and reduce any stigma associated with eating breakfast at school. There are three primary options for serving breakfast after the bell:

- **Breakfast in the Classroom:** Meals are delivered to and eaten in the classroom at the start of the school day.
- **"Grab and Go":** Children (particularly older students) can quickly grab their breakfast from carts or kiosks in the hallway or the cafeteria line to eat in their classroom or in common areas.
- **Second Chance Breakfast:** Students are offered a second chance to eat breakfast after the school day starts. Many middle and high school students are not hungry first thing in the morning but are ready to eat breakfast after their first class of the day, helping them to focus on their classes until lunch time.

Without these waivers, the child nutrition programs would not have been able to adequately respond to the fallout from COVID-19. The authority to provide nationwide waivers that increase program costs in response to the pandemic has only been extended to June 30, 2022. Without Congressional action, waivers cannot be provided beyond the 2021–2022 school year. The loss of the waivers means that this summer SFSP and SSO sponsors will be forced to stop serving meals at some sites or shut down all together, limiting children's access to healthy summer meals. The June 30 expiration also means that USDA will no longer have the ability to respond to supply chain, operational, and access challenges that have been driven by the pandemic, and schools will no longer be able to offer free meals to all students using the SSO waiver when school resumes. Congress should further extend USDA's nationwide waiver authority through school year 2022–2023 to ensure USDA has continued flexibility to respond to the ongoing and evolving impacts of the pandemic as well as its aftermath.

- **Expand direct certification** to ensure that more children in need of free meals are automatically linked to them. For example, all states should be allowed to directly certify low-income children who participate in Medicaid for free school meals.
- **Support breakfast after the bell models** to increase school breakfast participation, which reaches far fewer children than school lunch.

Beyond Nationwide Waivers: Options for Serving Meals at No Cost to Families

If Congress fails to extend the U.S. Department of Agriculture's authority to issue nationwide waivers for the 2022–2023 school year, eligible schools can use these options to offer free meals to all students:

- **Community Eligibility Provision:** Community eligibility schools are high-poverty schools that offer free breakfast and lunch to all students and do not have to collect, process, or verify school meal applications, or keep track of meals by fee category, resulting in significant administrative savings and increased participation. Find out what schools in your state or community are participating or are eligible for the Community Eligibility Provision with the Food Research & Action Center's database.
- **Provision 2:** Schools using Provision 2 (a provision of the National School Lunch Act) do not need to collect, process, or verify school meal applications or keep track of meals by fee category for at least three out of every four years. Schools collect school meal applications and count and claim meals by fee category during year one of the multiyear cycle, called the "base year." Those data then determine the federal reimbursement and are used for future years in the cycle. Provision 2 schools have the option to serve only breakfast and lunch, or both breakfast and lunch to all students at no charge, and use economies of scale from increased participation and significant administrative savings to offset the cost of offering free meals to all students.
- **Nonpricing:** No fees are collected from students while schools continue to receive federal reimbursements for the breakfasts served under the three-tier federal fee categories (free, reduced-price, and paid).[4]

4 School lunch equity requires the fee that a school district charges to be equal to the free federal lunch reimbursement rate. If not, the district is required to gradually increase its lunch fees each year until it reaches equity or must cover the difference using funds outside of the school nutrition account.

Technical Notes

During December 2021–February 2022, the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) distributed an electronic survey to 119 large school districts nationwide. Sixty-two districts completed the survey, and the findings in this report are based on the information provided in the surveys. For this report, a large district was defined as one with more than 8,000 students. The survey was composed primarily of multiple-choice questions and asked each school district about their breakfast and lunch participation and practices.

The survey collected School Breakfast Program (SBP), National School Lunch Program (NSLP), Seamless Summer Option (SSO), and Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) data for April 2021; and SBP, NSLP, and SSO data for October 2021. Breakfast and lunch participation in SSO and SFSP is included in the free participation data for SBP and NSLP. School districts were given the opportunity to review the tables included in this report and provide updated information prior to publication.

The goals of this report include:

- **COLLECT** information on large district school nutrition operations during the 2020–2021 and 2021–2022 school years as the COVID-19 pandemic continued and impacted School Nutrition Programs.
- **DETERMINE** the extent to which the ongoing pandemic impacted school meal operations.
- **UNDERSTAND** the extent to which the surveyed districts used the U.S. Department of Agriculture's nationwide child nutrition waivers that have been made available during the pandemic, and the impact those waivers had on districts.

- **DISCOVER** the extent to which the surveyed districts are implementing promising practices to maintain and increase participation, such as breakfast after the bell and offering meals at no charge to all students, as the pandemic continues.

Participation in the school meals program was determined by self-reported numbers provided by each district as part of the survey.

Table 6: To determine the average daily participation in breakfast and lunch for April 2021 and October 2021, the total number of meals served in each month was divided by the total number of serving days and rounded to the nearest whole number. We used the number of serving days for breakfast if districts did not provide the number of serving days for lunch.

Table 1: Student Enrollment and Breakfast and Lunch Service, October 2021

School District	State	Total Student Enrollment	Number of Schools in District	Number of Schools in District Serving Breakfast	Percentage of Schools in District Serving Breakfast[1]	Number of Schools in District Serving Lunch	Percentage of Schools in District Serving Lunch[2]
Albuquerque Public Schools	NM	73,000	138	138	100%	138	100%
Anchorage School District	AK	43,606	113	63	56%	81	72%
Bibb County School District	GA	20,698	36	36	100%	36	100%
Boise School District	ID	23,526	47	47	100%	46	98%
Broward County Public Schools	FL	205,952	228	227	100%	228	100%
Charleston County School District	SC	49,500	88	88	100%	88	100%
Chicago Public Schools	IL	302,680	574	574	100%	574	100%
Cincinnati Public Schools	OH	35,645	64	64	100%	64	100%
Clark County School District	NV	303,940	350	349	100%	349	100%
Cleveland Metropolitan School District	OH	35,417	85	85	100%	85	100%
Cobb County School District	GA	107,776	112	112	100%	112	100%
Compton Unified School District	CA	18,477	30	30	100%	30	100%
Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District	TX	117,404	90	89	99%	89	99%
Dallas Independent School District	TX	143,792	229	229	100%	229	100%
Des Moines Public Schools	IA	31,906	61	61	100%	61	100%
Detroit Public Schools Community District	MI	48,998	106	106	100%	106	100%
Duval County Public Schools	FL	103,535	152	152	100%	152	100%
Elizabeth Public Schools	NJ	27,147	40	40	100%	40	100%
Erie City School District	PA	10,102	22	22	100%	22	100%
Ferguson-Florissant School District	MO	9,300	23	23	100%	23	100%
Floyd County Schools	GA	8,993	17	17	100%	17	100%
Fresno Unified School District	CA	71,806	101	101	100%	101	100%
Fulton County Schools	GA	85,240	97	97	100%	97	100%
Hawai'i Department of Education	HI	160,050	257	257	100%	257	100%
Houston County School District	GA	30,243	38	38	100%	38	100%
Irving Independent School District	TX	33,000	36	36	100%	36	100%
Kalamazoo Public Schools	MI	13,614	31	31	100%	31	100%
Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools	KS	22,033	46	46	100%	46	100%
Knox County Schools	TN	60,748	89	89	100%	89	100%
Little Rock School District	AR	22,054	41	41	100%	41	100%

1 3 districts (Broward County Public Schools, Clark County School District, and School District of Palm Beach County) are listed as having 100% of their schools serving breakfast due to rounding. They are not included in the total on page 3.

2 1 district (Clark County School District) is listed as having 100% of their schools serving lunch due to rounding. They are not included in the total on page 3.

Table 1: Student Enrollment and Breakfast and Lunch Service, October 2021 (continued)

School District	State	Total Student Enrollment	Number of Schools in District	Number of Schools in District Serving Breakfast	Percentage of Schools in District Serving Breakfast[1]	Number of Schools in District Serving Lunch	Percentage of Schools in District Serving Lunch[2]
Livingston Parish Public Schools	LA	26,928	43	42	98%	42	98%
Los Angeles Unified School District	CA	463,491	684	684	100%	684	100%
Mesa Public Schools	AZ	58,561	78	76	97%	78	100%
Minneapolis Public Schools	MN	30,096	81	70	86%	70	86%
New York City Department of Education[3]	NY	1,003,199	2,394	2,315	97%	2,326	97%
Newark School District	NJ	37,331	68	68	100%	68	100%
Newburgh Enlarged City School District	NY	11,064	14	14	100%	14	100%
Norfolk Public Schools	VA	27,745	50	50	100%	50	100%
Oakland Unified School District	CA	36,201	129	129	100%	129	100%
Oklahoma City Public Schools	OK	32,294	62	62	100%	62	100%
Omaha Public Schools	NE	51,674	96	96	100%	96	100%
Pinellas County Schools	FL	100,106	148	147	99%	148	100%
Pittsburg Unified School District	CA	10,600	13	13	100%	13	100%
Pittsburgh Public Schools	PA	20,313	56	56	100%	56	100%
Polk County Public Schools	FL	93,387	134	134	100%	134	100%
Portland Public Schools	OR	44,474	92	92	100%	92	100%
Riverside Unified School District	CA	40,346	47	47	100%	47	100%
Salt Lake City School District	UT	20,477	37	37	100%	37	100%
San Antonio Independent School District	TX	44,779	95	95	100%	95	100%
San Bernardino City Unified School District	CA	47,752	84	84	100%	83	99%
San Diego Unified School District	CA	103,777	201	201	100%	201	100%
San Francisco Unified School District	CA	50,307	134	132	99%	134	100%
San Marcos Consolidated ISD	TX	8,204	11	11	100%	11	100%
School District of Lee County	FL	83,768	85	85	100%	85	100%
School District of Palm Beach County	FL	174,878	206	205	100%	206	100%
School District of Philadelphia	PA	118,971	228	228	100%	228	100%
School District U-46 (Elgin)	IL	37,856	57	57	100%	57	100%
Shelby County Schools	TN	114,070	203	203	100%	203	100%
Syracuse City School District	NY	20,937	40	40	100%	40	100%
Toledo Public Schools	OH	21,325	53	53	100%	53	100%
Wake County Public School System	NC	159,726	193	191	99%	193	100%
Waterbury Public Schools	CT	19,266	31	31	100%	31	100%

1 3 districts (Broward County Public Schools, Clark County School District, and School District of Palm Beach County) are listed as having 100% of their schools serving breakfast due to rounding. They are not included in the total on page 3.

2 1 district (Clark County School District) is listed as having 100% of their schools serving lunch due to rounding. They are not included in the total on page 3.

3 Less than 1% of New York City Department of Education students attend a school that does not serve both breakfast and lunch.

Table 2: Operational Challenges During the 2021–2022 School Year

School District	State	Supply Chain Disruptions	Labor Shortages	Low Participation in Meal Programs	Serving Meals Safely	Rising Food Prices
Albuquerque Public Schools	NM	X	X	–	–	–
Anchorage School District	AK	X	X	–	–	X
Bibb County School District	GA	X	X	X	–	X
Boise School District	ID	X	X	–	–	–
Broward County Public Schools	FL	X	X	X	–	X
Charleston County School District	SC	X	–	–	–	X
Chicago Public Schools	IL	X	X	X	–	X
Cincinnati Public Schools	OH	X	X	–	–	X
Clark County School District	NV	X	X	X	X	X
Cleveland Metropolitan School District	OH	X	X	X	X	X
Cobb County School District	GA	X	X	–	–	X
Compton Unified School District	CA	X	X	–	–	X
Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District	TX	X	X	–	–	X
Dallas Independent School District	TX	X	X	–	–	X
Des Moines Public Schools	IA	X	X	–	–	–
Detroit Public Schools Community District	MI	X	X	X	X	X
Duval County Public Schools	FL	X	X	X	–	X
Elizabeth Public Schools	NJ	X	–	–	–	–
Erie City School District	PA	X	X	X	–	X
Ferguson-Florissant School District	MO	X	X	X	X	X
Floyd County Schools	GA	X	X	–	–	X
Fresno Unified School District	CA	X	X	X	–	X
Fulton County Schools	GA	X	X	–	–	X
Hawai'i Department of Education	HI	X	X	–	–	X
Houston County School District	GA	X	X	–	–	X
Irving Independent School District	TX	X	X	–	–	X
Kalamazoo Public Schools	MI	X	X	X	–	X
Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools	KS	X	X	–	–	X
Knox County Schools	TN	X	X	–	–	X
Little Rock School District	AR	X	X	–	X	X
Livingston Parish Public Schools	LA	X	X	–	–	–

Table 2: Operational Challenges During the 2021–2022 School Year (continued)

School District	State	Supply Chain Disruptions	Labor Shortages	Low Participation in Meal Programs	Serving Meals Safely	Rising Food Prices
Los Angeles Unified School District	CA	X	X	X	X	X
Mesa Public Schools	AZ	X	X	–	–	–
Minneapolis Public Schools	MN	–	X	–	–	–
New York City Department of Education	NY	X	X	–	–	X
Newark School District	NJ	X	X	X	X	X
Newburgh Enlarged City School District	NY	X	X	–	–	X
Norfolk Public Schools	VA	X	X	–	X	X
Oakland Unified School District	CA	X	X	–	–	X
Oklahoma City Public Schools	OK	X	X	X	–	X
Omaha Public Schools	NE	X	X	–	–	X
Pinellas County Schools	FL	X	X	–	–	X
Pittsburg Unified School District	CA	X	X	X	–	X
Pittsburgh Public Schools	PA	X	X	X	X	X
Polk County Public Schools	FL	X	X	–	–	X
Portland Public Schools	OR	X	X	–	–	X
Riverside Unified School District	CA	X	X	X	X	X
Salt Lake City School District	UT	X	X	–	–	X
San Antonio Independent School District	TX	X	X	X	–	X
San Bernardino City Unified School District	CA	X	X	X	–	X
San Diego Unified School District	CA	X	X	–	–	X
San Francisco Unified School District	CA	X	X	–	–	X
San Marcos Consolidated ISD	TX	X	–	–	X	X
School District of Lee County	FL	X	X	–	–	X
School District of Palm Beach County	FL	X	X	–	–	X
School District of Philadelphia	PA	X	X	X	–	X
School District U-46 (Elgin)	IL	X	X	X	X	X
Shelby County Schools	TN	X	X	X	–	X
Syracuse City School District	NY	X	X	X	X	X
Toledo Public Schools	OH	X	X	X	X	X
Wake County Public School System	NC	X	X	–	–	X
Waterbury Public Schools	CT	X	X	X	–	X
Number of districts who experienced each challenge		61	59	25	14	55
Percent of districts who experienced each challenge		98%	95%	40%	23%	89%

Table 3: School Nutrition Programs Utilized, April 2021 and October 2021

School District	State	Federal Nutrition Program(s) Used to Serve Breakfast and Lunch, April 2021			Federal Nutrition Program(s) Used to Serve Breakfast and Lunch, Oct. 2021
		NSLP/SBP	SSO	SFSP	SSO
Albuquerque Public Schools	NM	–	SSO	–	SSO
Anchorage School District	AK	–	–	SFSP	SSO
Bibb County School District	GA	–	SSO	–	SSO
Boise School District	ID	–	–	SFSP	SSO
Broward County Public Schools	FL	–	–	SFSP	SSO
Charleston County School District	SC	–	SSO	–	SSO
Chicago Public Schools	IL	–	–	SFSP	SSO
Cincinnati Public Schools	OH	–	–	SFSP	SSO
Clark County School District	NV	–	–	SFSP	SSO
Cleveland Metropolitan School District	OH	–	–	SFSP	SSO
Cobb County School District	GA	–	SSO	–	SSO
Compton Unified School District	CA	–	SSO	–	SSO
Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District	TX	–	SSO	–	SSO
Dallas Independent School District	TX	–	SSO	–	SSO
Des Moines Public Schools	IA	–	–	SFSP	SSO
Detroit Public Schools Community District	MI	–	–	SFSP	SSO
Duval County Public Schools	FL	–	SSO	–	SSO
Elizabeth Public Schools	NJ	–	–	SFSP	SSO
Erie City School District	PA	–	SSO	–	SSO
Ferguson-Florissant School District	MO	–	SSO	–	SSO
Floyd County Schools	GA	–	SSO	–	SSO
Fresno Unified School District	CA	–	SSO	–	SSO
Fulton County Schools	GA	–	SSO	–	SSO
Hawai'i Department of Education	HI	NSLP/SBP	SSO	–	SSO
Houston County School District	GA	–	SSO	–	SSO
Irving Independent School District	TX	–	–	SFSP	SSO
Kalamazoo Public Schools	MI	–	–	SFSP	SSO
Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools	KS	–	–	SFSP	SSO
Knox County Schools	TN	–	SSO	–	SSO
Little Rock School District	AR	NSLP/SBP	–	–	SSO
Livingston Parish Public Schools	LA	–	–	SFSP	SSO

Table 3: School Nutrition Programs Utilized, April 2021 and October 2021 (continued)

School District	State	Federal Nutrition Program(s) Used to Serve Breakfast and Lunch, April 2021			Federal Nutrition Program(s) Used to Serve Breakfast and Lunch, Oct. 2021
		NSLP/SBP	SSO	SFSP	SSO
Los Angeles Unified School District	CA	–	–	SFSP	SSO
Mesa Public Schools	AZ	–	–	SFSP	SSO
Minneapolis Public Schools	MN	–	–	SFSP	SSO
New York City Department of Education	NY	–	–	SFSP	SSO
Newark School District	NJ	–	–	SFSP	SSO
Newburgh Enlarged City School District	NY	–	–	SFSP	SSO
Norfolk Public Schools	VA	–	–	SFSP	SSO
Oakland Unified School District	CA	–	SSO	–	SSO
Oklahoma City Public Schools	OK	–	–	SFSP	SSO
Omaha Public Schools	NE	–	–	SFSP	SSO
Pinellas County Schools	FL	–	–	SFSP	SSO
Pittsburg Unified School District	CA	–	SSO	–	SSO
Pittsburgh Public Schools	PA	–	–	SFSP	SSO
Polk County Public Schools	FL	–	SSO	–	SSO
Portland Public Schools	OR	–	–	SFSP	SSO
Riverside Unified School District	CA	–	SSO	–	SSO
Salt Lake City School District	UT	–	SSO	–	SSO
San Antonio Independent School District	TX	NSLP/SBP	–	–	SSO
San Bernardino City Unified School District	CA	–	SSO	–	SSO
San Diego Unified School District	CA	–	SSO	–	SSO
San Francisco Unified School District	CA	–	SSO	–	SSO
San Marcos Consolidated ISD	TX	–	SSO	–	SSO
School District of Lee County	FL	–	–	SFSP	SSO
School District of Palm Beach County	FL	–	SSO	–	SSO
School District of Philadelphia	PA	–	SSO	–	SSO
School District U-46 (Elgin)	IL	–	–	SFSP	SSO
Shelby County Schools	TN	–	SSO	–	SSO
Syracuse City School District	NY	–	–	SFSP	SSO
Toledo Public Schools	OH	–	SSO	–	SSO
Wake County Public School System	NC	–	–	SFSP	SSO
Waterbury Public Schools	CT	–	SSO	–	SSO
Number of districts who utilized each program		3	30	30	62
Percent of districts who utilized each program		5%	48%	48%	100%

Table 4: Waiver Take-Up by District, April 2021 and October 2021

School District	State	USDA Child Nutrition Waivers Used by School Districts, April 2021						USDA Child Nutrition Waivers Used by School Districts, October 2021				
		Meal Times Waiver	Meal Pattern Waiver	Non-Congregate Feeding Waiver	Parent/ Guardian Meal Pick-Up Waiver	SSO[1]	SFSP[2]	Meal Times Waiver	Meal Pattern Waiver	Non-Congregate Feeding Waiver	Parent/ Guardian Meal Pick-Up Waiver	SSO[3]
Albuquerque Public Schools	NM	X	X	X	X	SSO	–	–	X	X	X	SSO
Anchorage School District	AK	X	X	X	X	–	SFSP	–	X	–	–	SSO
Bibb County School District	GA	X	X	X	–	SSO	–	–	X	X	–	SSO
Boise School District	ID	–	–	–	–	–	SFSP	–	–	–	–	SSO
Broward County Public Schools	FL	X	–	X	X	–	SFSP	X	X	–	–	SSO
Charleston County School District	SC	X	X	X	X	SSO	–	X	X	X	X	SSO
Chicago Public Schools	IL	X	–	X	X	–	SFSP	X	–	X	X	SSO
Cincinnati Public Schools	OH	X	X	X	X	–	SFSP	–	X	X	X	SSO
Clark County School District	NV	X	–	X	X	–	SFSP	X	–	X	X	SSO
Cleveland Metropolitan School District	OH	–	–	–	X	–	SFSP	X	X	–	–	SSO
Cobb County School District	GA	X	X	X	X	SSO	–	X	X	X	X	SSO
Compton Unified School District	CA	X	X	X	X	SSO	–	X	X	–	–	SSO
Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District	TX	X	X	X	X	SSO	–	X	–	X	X	SSO
Dallas Independent School District	TX	X	X	X	X	SSO	–	X	X	X	X	SSO
Des Moines Public Schools	IA	X	X	X	X	–	SFSP	X	X	X	X	SSO
Detroit Public Schools Community District	MI	X	X	X	X	–	SFSP	X	X	X	X	SSO
Duval County Public Schools	FL	X	X	X	X	SSO	–	X	X	X	X	SSO
Elizabeth Public Schools	NJ	X	X	X	X	–	SFSP	–	–	X	–	SSO
Erie City School District	PA	X	X	X	X	SSO	–	X	X	X	X	SSO
Ferguson-Florissant School District	MO	X	X	X	X	SSO	–	X	X	X	X	SSO
Floyd County Schools	GA	X	X	X	–	SSO	–	–	X	–	–	SSO
Fresno Unified School District	CA	X	X	X	X	SSO	–	X	X	X	X	SSO
Fulton County Schools	GA	X	X	X	X	SSO	–	X	X	X	X	SSO
Hawai'i Department of Education	HI	X	X	X	X	SSO	–	–	–	X	X	SSO
Houston County School District	GA	X	X	X	X	SSO	–	X	X	X	X	SSO
Irving Independent School District	TX	X	X	X	X	–	SFSP	X	–	–	–	SSO
Kalamazoo Public Schools	MI	X	X	X	X	–	SFSP	X	X	X	X	SSO
Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools	KS	–	X	X	X	–	SFSP	–	X	–	–	SSO
Knox County Schools	TN	X	X	X	X	SSO	–	X	X	X	X	SSO
Little Rock School District	AR	X	X	X	X	–	–	X	X	X	X	SSO
Livingston Parish Public Schools	LA	X	X	X	X	–	SFSP	X	X	X	–	SSO
Los Angeles Unified School District	CA	X	X	X	X	–	SFSP	X	X	X	X	SSO

1 School districts that participated in the SSO waiver were able to offer free meals to all students and did not have to meet the area eligibility test normally required to operate SSO.

2 School districts that participated in the SFSP waiver were able to offer free meals to all students and did not have to meet the area eligibility test normally required to operate SFSP.

3 School districts that participated in the SSO waiver were able to offer free meals to all students and did not have to meet the area eligibility test normally required to operate SSO. School districts were reimbursed at the summer food reimbursement rate but did not have the option to participate in the SFSP during the 2021–2022 school year.

Table 4: Waiver Take-Up by District, April 2021 and October 2021 (continued)

School District	State	USDA Child Nutrition Waivers Used by School Districts, April 2021						USDA Child Nutrition Waivers Used by School Districts, October 2021				
		Meal Times Waiver	Meal Pattern Waiver	Non-Congregate Feeding Waiver	Parent/ Guardian Meal Pick-Up Waiver	SSO[1]	SFSP[2]	Meal Times Waiver	Meal Pattern Waiver	Non-Congregate Feeding Waiver	Parent/ Guardian Meal Pick-Up Waiver	SSO[3]
Mesa Public Schools	AZ	X	X	X	X	–	SFSP	X	X	X	X	SSO
Minneapolis Public Schools	MN	X	X	X	X	–	SFSP	X	X	X	X	SSO
New York City Department of Education	NY	X	–	X	X	–	SFSP	X	–	X	X	SSO
Newark School District	NJ	X	X	X	X	–	SFSP	–	–	X	–	SSO
Newburgh Enlarged City School District	NY	X	–	X	X	–	SFSP	X	X	X	X	SSO
Norfolk Public Schools	VA	X	–	X	X	–	SFSP	X	X	X	X	SSO
Oakland Unified School District	CA	X	X	X	X	SSO	–	X	X	X	X	SSO
Oklahoma City Public Schools	OK	X	–	X	X	–	SFSP	X	–	X	X	SSO
Omaha Public Schools	NE	X	X	–	–	–	SFSP	–	X	–	–	SSO
Pinellas County Schools	FL	X	–	X	X	–	SFSP	X	X	X	X	SSO
Pittsburg Unified School District	CA	X	X	X	X	SSO	–	X	X	X	X	SSO
Pittsburgh Public Schools	PA	X	X	X	X	–	SFSP	X	X	X	X	SSO
Polk County Public Schools	FL	X	X	X	X	SSO	–	–	X	–	–	SSO
Portland Public Schools	OR	X	X	X	X	–	SFSP	X	X	X	X	SSO
Riverside Unified School District	CA	X	X	X	X	SSO	–	X	X	X	X	SSO
Salt Lake City School District	UT	X	X	X	X	SSO	–	X	X	X	X	SSO
San Antonio Independent School District	TX	X	–	X	X	–	–	X	X	X	X	SSO
San Bernardino City Unified School District	CA	X	X	X	X	SSO	–	X	X	X	X	SSO
San Diego Unified School District	CA	X	X	X	X	SSO	–	X	X	X	X	SSO
San Francisco Unified School District	CA	X	X	X	X	SSO	–	X	X	X	X	SSO
San Marcos Consolidated ISD	TX	X	X	–	–	SSO	–	X	X	–	–	SSO
School District of Lee County	FL	X	X	X	X	–	SFSP	X	X	X	X	SSO
School District of Palm Beach County	FL	X	–	X	X	SSO	–	X	–	X	–	SSO
School District of Philadelphia	PA	X	X	X	X	SSO	–	–	–	–	–	SSO
School District U-46 (Elgin)	IL	X	–	X	X	–	SFSP	–	X	–	–	SSO
Shelby County Schools	TN	X	X	X	X	SSO	–	–	X	–	X	SSO
Syracuse City School District	NY	X	X	X	X	–	SFSP	–	X	–	–	SSO
Toledo Public Schools	OH	–	X	–	X	SSO	–	X	X	–	X	SSO
Wake County Public School System	NC	X	–	X	X	–	SFSP	X	X	X	X	SSO
Waterbury Public Schools	CT	X	–	X	X	SSO	–	X	–	X	–	SSO
Number of districts who utilized each waiver		58	47	57	57	30	30	46	49	46	42	62
Percent of districts who utilized each waiver		94%	76%	92%	92%	48%	48%	74%	79%	74%	68%	100%

1 School districts that participated in the SSO waiver were able to offer free meals to all students and did not have to meet the area eligibility test normally required to operate SSO.

2 School districts that participated in the SFSP waiver were able to offer free meals to all students and did not have to meet the area eligibility test normally required to operate SFSP.

3 School districts that participated in the SSO waiver were able to offer free meals to all students and did not have to meet the area eligibility test normally required to operate SSO. School districts were reimbursed at the summer food reimbursement rate but did not have the option to participate in the SFSP during the 2021–2022 school year.

Table 5: Reported Benefits of Serving Free Meals to All Students

School District	State	Benefits Reported of Serving Free Meals to All Students								
		Reduces child hunger	Supports academic achievement	Increases # of fruits, vegetables & milk children consume	Advances racial equity	Eliminates school meal debt	Makes it easier for parents and guardians	Eases administrative work	Eliminates any stigma associated with school meals	Improves student behavior
Albuquerque Public Schools	NM	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Anchorage School District	AK	X	X	–	–	–	–	X	–	–
Bibb County School District	GA	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	–
Boise School District	ID	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Broward County Public Schools	FL	–	X	–	–	X	–	–	–	–
Charleston County School District	SC	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Chicago Public Schools	IL	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	–
Cincinnati Public Schools	OH	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	–
Clark County School District	NV	X	–	–	–	X	X	X	–	–
Cleveland Metropolitan School District	OH	X	X	X	X	–	X	X	X	–
Cobb County School District	GA	X	X	–	X	X	X	X	X	–
Compton Unified School District	CA	–	–	X	–	X	–	X	X	–
Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District	TX	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Dallas Independent School District	TX	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Des Moines Public Schools	IA	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Detroit Public Schools Community District	MI	X	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Duval County Public Schools	FL	X	X	X	–	X	X	X	X	X
Elizabeth Public Schools	NJ	X	X	X	–	X	X	X	X	X
Erie City School District	PA	X	–	–	–	–	X	X	X	X
Ferguson-Florissant School District	MO	X	–	–	–	–	X	–	–	X
Floyd County Schools	GA	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Fresno Unified School District	CA	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Fulton County Schools	GA	X	X	X	–	X	X	X	–	–
Hawai'i Department of Education	HI	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Houston County School District	GA	X	X	–	–	X	X	X	X	–
Irving Independent School District	TX	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Kalamazoo Public Schools	MI	X	X	X	X	X	X	–	X	X
Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools	KS	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	–
Knox County Schools	TN	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	–
Little Rock School District	AR	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Livingston Parish Public Schools	LA	X	X	X	–	X	X	X	X	–
Los Angeles Unified School District	CA	X	X	X	–	X	X	X	X	X
Mesa Public Schools	AZ	X	X	X	–	–	X	X	X	X

Table 5: Reported Benefits of Serving Free Meals to All Students (continued)

School District	State	Benefits Reported of Serving Free Meals to All Students								
		Reduces child hunger	Supports academic achievement	Increases # of fruits, vegetables & milk children consume	Advances racial equity	Eliminates school meal debt	Makes it easier for parents and guardians	Eases administrative work	Eliminates any stigma associated with school meals	Improves student behavior
Minneapolis Public Schools	MN	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
New York City Department of Education	NY	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Newark School District	NJ	X	–	X	–	–	X	–	X	–
Newburgh Enlarged City School District	NY	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Norfolk Public Schools	VA	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	–
Oakland Unified School District	CA	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	–
Oklahoma City Public Schools	OK	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Omaha Public Schools	NE	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Pinellas County Schools	FL	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Pittsburg Unified School District	CA	–	–	–	–	X	–	–	–	–
Pittsburgh Public Schools	PA	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Polk County Public Schools	FL	X	X	–	–	X	X	X	X	X
Portland Public Schools	OR	X	X	X	–	–	X	–	X	X
Riverside Unified School District	CA	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Salt Lake City School District	UT	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
San Antonio Independent School District	TX	X	X	X	–	X	X	X	X	X
San Bernardino City Unified School District	CA	X	X	X	–	X	X	X	–	X
San Diego Unified School District	CA	X	–	–	–	X	X	X	X	–
San Francisco Unified School District	CA	X	X	–	X	–	X	–	X	X
San Marcos Consolidated ISD	TX	X	X	X	–	X	X	X	X	X
School District of Lee County	FL	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
School District of Palm Beach County	FL	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
School District of Philadelphia	PA	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	–
School District U-46 (Elgin)	IL	X	–	–	–	–	X	–	X	–
Shelby County Schools	TN	X	–	X	–	–	–	X	X	–
Syracuse City School District	NY	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Toledo Public Schools	OH	X	–	X	–	X	–	X	X	–
Wake County Public School System	NC	X	X	–	X	X	X	X	X	X
Waterbury Public Schools	CT	X	X	X	–	–	X	–	–	X
Number of districts who reported each benefit		59	51	48	36	50	55	52	53	38
Percent of districts who reported each benefit		95%	82%	77%	58%	81%	89%	84%	85%	61%

Table 6: Meals Served for Free, at a Reduced-Price (RP), or at the Paid Rate by District

School District	State	Total number of breakfasts claimed in April 2021 by eligibility category			Total number of lunches claimed in April 2021 by eligibility category			Total number of breakfasts claimed in Oct. 2021 by eligibility category[1]	Total number of lunches claimed in Oct. 2021 by eligibility category[1]
		Free	Reduced-Price	Paid	Free	Reduced-Price	Paid	Free	Free
Albuquerque Public Schools	NM	310,463	–	–	450,103	–	–	421,052	716,359
Anchorage School District	AK	170,377	–	–	235,131	–	–	136,682	303,843
Bibb County School District	GA	150,797	–	–	208,478	–	–	107,161	198,490
Boise School District	ID	105,885	–	–	186,913	–	–	131,053	206,098
Broward County Public Schools	FL	615,466	–	–	1,241,562	–	–	719,174	2,130,634
Charleston County School District	SC	210,356	–	–	396,753	–	–	317,589	634,000
Chicago Public Schools	IL	708,288	–	–	830,850	–	–	1,897,338	3,067,981
Cincinnati Public Schools	OH	345,982	–	–	429,556	–	–	284,140	425,331
Clark County School District	NV	1,134,644	–	–	1,205,663	–	–	1,601,682	2,763,369
Cleveland Metropolitan School District	OH	103,326	–	–	149,221	–	–	290,402	451,091
Cobb County School District	GA	485,360	–	–	863,678	–	–	539,163	1,299,796
Compton Unified School District	CA	34,885	–	–	50,850	–	–	177,128	231,545
Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District	TX	630,882	–	–	1,178,014	–	–	688,368	1,539,341
Dallas Independent School District	TX	941,256	–	–	1,217,505	–	–	1,031,637	1,802,433
Des Moines Public Schools	IA	280,277	–	–	350,054	–	–	237,697	355,353
Detroit Public Schools Community District	MI	65,306	–	–	68,785	–	–	427,867	609,445
Duval County Public Schools	FL	672,141	–	–	986,194	–	–	783,086	1,204,643
Elizabeth Public Schools	NJ	156,476	–	–	110,667	–	–	251,508	395,197
Erie City School District	PA	88,901	–	–	112,429	–	–	89,628	141,852
Ferguson-Florissant School District	MO	43,235	–	–	48,723	–	–	84,624	113,927
Floyd County Schools	GA	59,538	–	–	80,041	–	–	53,145	87,075
Fresno Unified School District	CA	273,106	–	–	402,722	–	–	262,594	843,247
Fulton County Schools	GA	275,062	–	–	476,991	–	–	409,987	909,555
Hawai'i Department of Education	HI	390,521	1,243	2,932	868,623	13,763	121,363	400,402	1,346,555
Houston County School District	GA	321,730	–	–	424,019	–	–	237,390	346,789
Irving Independent School District	TX	315,579	N/A	N/A	387,291	N/A	N/A	274,119	422,331
Kalamazoo Public Schools	MI	65,308	–	–	65,011	–	–	118,961	147,196
Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools	KS	166,885	–	–	249,602	–	–	206,466	318,039
Knox County Schools	TN	242,290	–	–	550,157	–	–	232,734	569,759
Little Rock School District	AR	100,559	–	–	149,227	–	–	150,340	228,336
Livingston Parish Public Schools	LA	182,610	–	–	289,179	–	–	220,246	376,098
Los Angeles Unified School District	CA	1,703,251	–	–	1,722,628	–	–	3,372,201	4,868,997
Mesa Public Schools	AZ	334,833	–	–	699,287	–	–	225,306	538,978

1 All schools operated under SSO so meals were offered at no charge and reimbursed at the free rate.

Table 6: Meals Served for Free, at a Reduced-Price (RP), or at the Paid Rate by District (continued)

School District	State	Total number of breakfasts claimed in April 2021 by eligibility category			Total number of lunches claimed in April 2021 by eligibility category			Total number of breakfasts claimed in Oct. 2021 by eligibility category[1]	Total number of lunches claimed in Oct. 2021 by eligibility category[1]
		Free	Reduced-Price	Paid	Free	Reduced-Price	Paid	Free	Free
Minneapolis Public Schools	MN	125,860	–	–	150,270	–	–	172,195	288,935
New York City Department of Education	NY	3,948,169	–	–	5,093,048	–	–	5,695,011	10,736,674
Newark School District	NJ	145,370	N/A	N/A	146,076	N/A	N/A	421,320	475,547
Newburgh Enlarged City School District	NY	154,672	–	–	158,849	–	–	112,240	137,404
Norfolk Public Schools	VA	62,815	–	–	72,238	–	–	252,878	338,261
Oakland Unified School District	CA	402,194	–	–	402,194	–	–	179,192	266,113
Oklahoma City Public Schools	OK	30,282	–	–	347,763	–	–	170,116	312,652
Omaha Public Schools	NE	379,182	–	–	612,933	–	–	368,524	631,749
Pinellas County Schools	FL	535,144	–	–	840,594	–	–	519,718	1,037,173
Pittsburg Unified School District	CA	46,976	–	–	46,976	–	–	80,008	80,970
Pittsburgh Public Schools	PA	39,069	–	–	40,392	–	–	147,842	241,629
Polk County Public Schools	FL	26,370	–	–	48,142	–	–	30,804	60,240
Portland Public Schools	OR	215,374	–	–	216,884	–	–	130,867	365,812
Riverside Unified School District	CA	174,941	–	–	183,154	–	–	228,453	524,761
Salt Lake City School District	UT	80,311	–	–	136,198	–	–	89,377	213,878
San Antonio Independent School District	TX	311,046	–	–	345,772	–	–	480,777	633,128
San Bernardino City Unified School District	CA	249,095	–	–	249,095	–	–	188,738	552,130
San Diego Unified School District	CA	594,801	–	–	621,806	–	–	762,790	1,043,628
San Francisco Unified School District	CA	209,510	–	–	183,103	–	–	124,278	452,347
San Marcos Consolidated ISD	TX	46,326	–	–	96,808	–	–	53,086	113,567
School District of Lee County	FL	523,126	NA	NA	959,902	NA	NA	599,797	1,147,247
School District of Palm Beach County	FL	981,721	–	–	1,663,219	–	–	911,069	2,185,131
School District of Philadelphia	PA	384,381	–	–	383,220	–	–	781,127	1,185,641
School District U-46 (Elgin)	IL	386,106	–	–	345,676	–	–	215,327	409,801
Shelby County Schools	TN	602,562	–	–	669,609	–	–	651,954	997,400
Syracuse City School District	NY	138,788	–	–	149,374	–	–	166,795	225,680
Toledo Public Schools	OH	66,678	–	–	114,550	–	–	178,443	223,373
Wake County Public School System	NC	235,948	–	–	503,483	–	–	401,270	1,130,451
Waterbury Public Schools	CT	39,307	–	–	76,716	–	–	74,137	193,087
Total meals served at each rate		22,821,699	1,243	2,932	31,543,951	13,763	121,363	30,569,003	55,798,092
Percent of meals served at each rate		99.98%	0.01%	0.01%	99.57%	0.04%	0.38%	100%	100%

1 All schools operated under SSO so meals were offered at no charge and reimbursed at the free rate.

Table 7: Average Daily Participation, April 2021 and October 2021

School District	State	Average Daily Participation in Breakfast, April 2021	Average Daily Participation in Lunch, April 2021	Ratio of Students Eating Breakfast for Every 100 Students in Lunch, April 2021	Average Daily Participation in Breakfast, October 2021	Average Daily Participation in Lunch, October 2021	Ratio of Students Eating Breakfast for Every 100 Students in Lunch, October 2021
Albuquerque Public Schools	NM	15,523	22,505	69.0	22,161	37,703	58.8
Anchorage School District	AK	7,744	10,688	72.5	7,194	15,992	45.0
Bibb County School District	GA	6,854	9,476	72.3	6,698	12,406	54.0
Boise School District	ID	3,530	6,230	56.6	6,553	10,305	63.6
Broward County Public Schools	FL	23,672	47,752	49.6	35,959	106,532	33.8
Charleston County School District	SC	13,147	24,797	53.0	15,879	31,700	50.1
Chicago Public Schools	IL	23,610	27,695	85.2	90,349	146,094	61.8
Cincinnati Public Schools	OH	11,533	14,319	80.5	13,530	20,254	66.8
Clark County School District	NV	42,024	44,654	94.1	84,299	145,441	58.0
Cleveland Metropolitan School District	OH	4,697	6,783	69.2	13,829	21,481	64.4
Cobb County School District	GA	25,545	45,457	56.2	26,958	64,990	41.5
Compton Unified School District	CA	2,180	3,178	68.6	8,435	11,026	76.5
Cypress–Fairbanks Independent School District	TX	30,042	56,096	53.6	34,418	76,967	44.7
Dallas Independent School District	TX	31,375	40,584	77.3	49,126	80,831	60.8
Des Moines Public Schools	IA	12,740	15,912	80.1	12,510	18,703	66.9
Detroit Public Schools Community District	MI	3,265	3,439	94.9	20,375	29,021	70.2
Duval County Public Schools	FL	33,607	49,310	68.2	39,154	60,232	65.0
Elizabeth Public Schools	NJ	8,236	5,825	141.4	12,575	19,760	63.6
Erie City School District	PA	2,963	3,748	79.1	4,481	7,093	63.2
Ferguson–Florissant School District	MO	2,882	3,248	88.7	4,454	5,996	74.3
Floyd County Schools	GA	3,134	4,213	74.4	3,543	5,805	61.0
Fresno Unified School District	CA	9,104	13,424	67.8	13,130	42,162	31.1
Fulton County Schools	GA	11,002	19,080	57.7	21,578	47,871	45.1
Hawai'i Department of Education	HI	18,795	47,798	39.3	19,067	64,122	29.7
Houston County School District	GA	16,087	21,201	75.9	15,826	23,119	68.5
Irving Independent School District[1]	TX	10,519	12,910	81.5	15,229	23,463	64.9
Kalamazoo Public Schools	MI	2,177	2,167	100.5	5,665	8,178[2]	69.3
Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools	KS	7,947	11,886	66.9	10,867	16,739	64.9
Knox County Schools	TN	12,115	27,508	44.0	14,546	35,610	40.8
Little Rock School District	AR	4,571	6,783	67.4	7,517	11,417	65.8

1 Irving Independent School District provided updated numbers for average daily participation in breakfast and lunch for April 2021 and average daily participation for breakfast in October 2021 for this table.

2 Kalamazoo Public Schools reported differing breakfast and lunch serving days. 18 serving days were used to calculate the average daily lunch participation in October 2021 for Kalamazoo Public Schools.

Table 7: Average Daily Participation, April 2021 and October 2021 (continued)

School District	State	Average Daily Participation in Breakfast, April 2021	Average Daily Participation in Lunch, April 2021	Ratio of Students Eating Breakfast for Every 100 Students in Lunch, April 2021	Average Daily Participation in Breakfast, October 2021	Average Daily Participation in Lunch, October 2021	Ratio of Students Eating Breakfast for Every 100 Students in Lunch, October 2021
Livingston Parish Public Schools	LA	11,413	18,074	63.1	11,012	18,805	58.6
Los Angeles Unified School District	CA	77,421	78,301	98.9	160,581	231,857	69.3
Mesa Public Schools	AZ	11,161	23,310	47.9	14,082	33,686	41.8
Minneapolis Public Schools	MN	7,866	9,392	83.8	9,566	16,052	59.6
New York City Department of Education	NY	197,408	254,652	77.5	284,751	536,834	53.0
Newark School District	NJ	8,551	8,593	99.5	21,066	23,777	88.6
Newburgh Enlarged City School District	NY	5,524	5,673	97.4	5,612	6,870	81.7
Norfolk Public Schools	VA	3,695	4,249	87.0	12,042	16,108	74.8
Oakland Unified School District	CA	13,406	13,406	100.0	8,960	13,306	67.3
Oklahoma City Public Schools	OK	1,376	15,807	8.7	11,341	20,843	54.4
Omaha Public Schools	NE	18,056	29,187	61.9	21,678	37,162	58.3
Pinellas County Schools	FL	25,483	40,028	63.7	25,986	51,859	50.1
Pittsburg Unified School District	CA	1,957	1,957	100.0	3,810	3,856	98.8
Pittsburgh Public Schools	PA	2,056	2,126	96.7	7,392	12,081	61.2
Polk County Public Schools	FL	1,256	2,292	54.8	1,540	3,012	51.1
Portland Public Schools	OR	8,615	8,675	99.3	6,543	18,291	35.8
Riverside Unified School District	CA	5,831	6,105	95.5	9,519	21,865	43.5
Salt Lake City School District	UT	4,016	6,810	59.0	4,704	11,257	41.8
San Antonio Independent School District	TX	16,371	18,199	90.0	24,039	31,656	75.9
San Bernardino City Unified School District	CA	8,303	8,303	100.0	9,934	29,059	34.2
San Diego Unified School District	CA	29,740	31,090	95.7	34,672	47,438	73.1
San Francisco Unified School District	CA	9,523	8,323	114.4	6,214	22,617	27.5
San Marcos Consolidated ISD	TX	2,206	4,610	47.9	2,654	5,678	46.7
School District of Lee County	FL	26,156	47,995	54.5	29,990	57,362	52.3
School District of Palm Beach County	FL	49,086	83,161	59.0	45,553	109,257	41.7
School District of Philadelphia	PA	12,813	12,774	100.3	39,056	59,282	65.9
School District U–46 (Elgin)	IL	12,870	11,523	111.7	11,333	21,568	52.5
Shelby County Schools	TN	31,714	35,243	90.0	40,747	62,338	65.4
Syracuse City School District	NY	6,309	6,790	92.9	8,340	11,284	73.9
Toledo Public Schools	OH	4,167	7,159	58.2	9,392	11,756	79.9
Wake County Public School System	NC	7,865	16,783	46.9	21,119	59,497	35.5
Waterbury Public Schools	CT	1,709	3,335	51.2	3,902	10,162	38.4
Total		1,024,907	1,433,035	71.5	1,543,036	2,817,488	54.8

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The Reach of School Breakfast and Lunch
During the 2022–2023 School Year

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The Reach of School Breakfast and Lunch

During the 2022–2023 School Year

MARCH 2024

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Breakfast and Lunch Participation 2022–2023

JUST OVER **14.3** million children participated in school breakfast in the 2022–2023 school year on an average school day, with **11.3 million** receiving a free or reduced-price breakfast.

JUST OVER **28.1** million children participated in school lunch in the 2022–2023 school year on an average school day, with **19.7 million** receiving a free or reduced-price lunch.

School breakfast **DECREASED** by **1.2 million children**, and school lunch **DECREASED** by **1.8 million children**, with the end of the pandemic-era waivers that allowed schools to offer meals to all students at no charge.

42 states and the District of Columbia experienced a **DECREASE** in breakfast participation, and 42 states and the District of Columbia experienced a **DECREASE** in lunch participation compared to the 2021–2022 school year.

The states that had increases in school meal participation in the 2022–2023 school year **continued to offer meals to all students at no charge** in all or a significant number of their schools.

Executive Summary

For the first time since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, school breakfast and lunch returned to normal operations for the 2022–2023 school year. While the healthy breakfasts and lunches served at school remained an important support for millions of families, the expiration of key nationwide waivers also meant that many of the same challenges that children, families, and school nutrition departments faced prior to the pandemic began to reemerge.

The nationwide waivers that allowed schools to offer meals to all students at no charge were a game changer during the pandemic, ensuring that all students had access to the nutrition they needed to learn and thrive at school. In addition to increasing access, offering meals at no charge also reduced the administrative burden on school nutrition departments; eliminated school meal debt; reduced stigma; and streamlined the implementation of breakfast in the classroom and other alternative service models.

Many districts had to return to the tiered eligibility system in the 2022–2023 school year that required them to collect, process, and verify school meal applications, and millions of children lost access to the free school meals that were available beginning in the spring of 2020 through the 2021–2022 school year. Although it will take years to understand the full impact of the pandemic on children and their families, the end of the pandemic-era waivers that allowed schools to offer meals to all children at no charge had an immediate impact on school meal participation during the 2022–2023 school year.

KEY FINDINGS

- Just over **14.3 million children** participated in school breakfast in the 2022–2023 school year on an average school day, with **11.3 million** receiving a free or reduced-price breakfast.
- Total school breakfast participation decreased by nearly **1.2 million** children (**7.7 percent**) compared to the 2021–2022 school year.
- Just over **28.1 million children** participated in school lunch in the 2022–2023 school year on an average school day, with **19.7 million** receiving a free or reduced-price lunch.
- Total school lunch participation decreased by nearly **1.8 million** children (**6 percent**) compared to the 2021–2022 school year.
- The gap between school breakfast and lunch participation grew in the 2022–2023 school year compared to the previous year. Only **50.9 children** received a school breakfast for every 100 children who received a school lunch, a decrease from **51.9** per 100 in the 2021–2022 school year.
- During the 2022–2023 school year, **42** states and the District of Columbia experienced a decrease in breakfast participation, and **42** states and the District of Columbia experienced a decrease in lunch participation compared to the 2021–2022 school year, with the end of the pandemic-era waivers that allowed schools to offer meals to all students at no charge.
- The states that had increases in school meal participation in the 2022–2023 school year continued to offer meals to all students at no charge in all or a significant number of their schools.
  - » Four states — California, Maine, Massachusetts, and Vermont[1] — implemented a statewide Healthy School Meals for All policy and increased school breakfast and lunch participation.
  - » Pennsylvania implemented a statewide Healthy School Breakfast for All policy and increased breakfast participation.
  - » The other states that had increases in school breakfast, school lunch, or both, benefited from a high rate of Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) participation — Kentucky and Louisiana — or from a significant increase in the number of schools participating in CEP — Connecticut, North Carolina, and Texas.

The data is clear: Healthy School Meals for All policies offer an important strategy to ensure access to school meals. In addition to continued progress toward Healthy School Meals for All through state and federal legislation, the Community Eligibility Provision offers high-need schools a path to Healthy School Meals for All, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) recently made a policy change that makes 3,000 additional schools eligible to implement CEP. Maximizing participation in CEP remains an important tool for ensuring access to school meals for all students and mitigating the aftereffects of the pandemic.

School breakfast and lunch can — and should — be reaching more students. The advancement of Healthy School Meals for All through federal and state legislation and community eligibility, combined with proven best practices for increasing participation — such as implementing innovative breakfast models, ensuring enough time to eat, and serving high-quality, appealing meals — is the path forward to ensure all children have access to the nutritious school meals they need to learn and thrive.

About This Report

This report measures the reach of breakfast and lunch in the 2022–2023 school year from September through May — nationally and in each state — based on a variety of metrics and examines the impact of select trends and policies on program participation.

This report compares total breakfast and lunch participation in 2022–2023 to 2021–2022. Because of the nationwide pandemic waivers that allowed schools to offer meals at no charge to all students, free and reduced-price data from the spring of the 2019–2020 school year through the 2021–2022 school years do not provide a useful comparison for the 2022–2023 school year, as nearly all meals were claimed under the free category.

The broad participation in the National School Lunch Program by students across the states offers a useful comparison by which to measure how many students could and should be benefiting from school breakfast each day. The report also compares the number of schools offering the School Breakfast Program to the number of schools operating the National School Lunch Program, as this is an important indicator of access to the program for children from households with low incomes in the states.

How School Nutrition Programs Worked During the 2022–2023 School Year[2]

How Can Breakfasts and Lunches Be Served?

Any public school, nonprofit private school, or residential child care institution can participate in the School Breakfast Program and National School Lunch Program and receive federal funds for each breakfast and lunch served. These programs are administered at the federal level by the USDA and in each state by a state child nutrition agency, typically located in the state department of education or agriculture.

Who Can Receive Breakfast and Lunch?

Any student attending a school that offers the program can eat breakfast and lunch. What the federal government covers, and what a student pays, depends on family income. The 2022–2023 school year marked the end of the pandemic waivers that allowed schools to offer breakfast and lunch to all students, so most schools returned to the free, reduced-price, and paid eligibility described below.

- Children from families with incomes at or below 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) are eligible for free school meals.
- Children from families with incomes between 130 to 185 percent of the FPL qualify for reduced-price meals and can be charged no more than $0.30 for breakfast and no more than $0.40 for lunch.
- Children from families with incomes above 185 percent of the FPL pay school breakfast and lunch fees (referred to as “paid meals”), which are set by the school.

How Are Children Certified for Free or Reduced-Price Meals?

Most children are certified for free or reduced-price meals via applications collected by the school district at the beginning of the school year or during the year. However, children in households participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), as well as foster youth, migrant, homeless, or runaway youth, and Head Start participants are “categorically eligible” (automatically eligible) for free school meals and can be certified without submitting a school meal application.

(continued on next page)

School districts are required to "directly certify" children in households participating in SNAP for free school meals through data matching of SNAP records with school enrollment lists. School districts have the option of directly certifying other categorically eligible children as well. Forty-one states also use income information from Medicaid to directly certify students as eligible for free or reduced-price school meals; two additional states use Medicaid to directly certify students as eligible for free school meals.

Schools should use data from the state to certify other categorically eligible students when it is available. Schools also can coordinate with other personnel, such as the school district's homeless and migrant education liaisons, to obtain documentation to certify children for free school meals. Some categorically eligible children may be missed in this process, requiring the household to submit a school meal application. However, these households are not required to complete the income information section of the application.

How Are School Districts Reimbursed?

The federal reimbursement rate schools receive for each meal served depends on whether a student is receiving free, reduced-price, or paid meals.

For the 2022–2023[3] school year, schools received reimbursements at the following rates:

- $2.26 per free breakfast and $4.58 per free lunch
- $1.96 per reduced-price breakfast and $4.18 per reduced-price lunch
- $0.50 per paid breakfast and $0.93 per paid lunch

"Severe-need" schools received an additional $0.38 for each free or reduced-price breakfast served. Schools are considered severe-need if at least 40 percent of the lunches served during the second preceding school year were free or reduced-price.

Offering Breakfast and Lunch Free to All

Offering free meals to all students reduces the stigma often associated with means-tested school breakfast and school lunch, opens the program to children from families who would struggle to pay the reduced-price copayment or the paid breakfast and lunch charges, and streamlines the implementation of breakfast in the classroom and other alternative service models.

From March 2020 through June 2022, schools were able to offer free meals to all students through nationwide waivers. Moving forward, schools can offer free meals to all through the following federal options, which were available prior to and during the pandemic. Schools in states that have passed Healthy School Meals for All policies must utilize one of the following options to offer free meals to all students and receive federal reimbursements.

- **Community Eligibility Provision:** Community eligibility schools are high-poverty schools that offer free breakfast and lunch to all students and do not have to collect, process, or verify school meal applications, or keep track of meals by fee category, resulting in significant administrative savings and increased participation.
- **Provision 2:** Schools using Provision 2 (referring to a provision of the National School Lunch Act) do not need to collect, process, or verify school meal applications or keep track of meals by fee category for at least three out of every four years. Schools collect school meal applications and count and claim meals by fee category during year one of the multiyear cycle, called the "base year." That data will then determine the federal reimbursement and are used for future years in the cycle. Provision 2 schools have the option to serve only breakfast or lunch, or both breakfast and lunch, to all students at no charge, and use economies of scale from increased participation and significant administrative savings to offset the cost of offering free meals to all students.
- **Provision 3:** Schools using Provision 3 are required to serve meals to participating students at no charge and have a reduced application burden and meal counting and claiming procedures. Schools receive a comparable level of federal cash and commodity assistance as the school received in the last year in which free and reduced-price eligibility determinations were made, adjusted for enrollment, inflation, and operating days if applicable, for a period up to four years.
- **Non-pricing:** No fees are collected from students while schools continue to receive federal reimbursements for the meals[4] served under the three-tier federal fee categories (free, reduced-price, and paid).

School Breakfast During the 2022–2023 School Year

School breakfast participation fell during the 2022–2023 school year in all but eight states. As schools returned to normal operations and the nationwide waivers expired, many of the barriers that kept children from participating in breakfast before the pandemic, e.g., bus schedules and timing of breakfast service, reemerged.

Prior to the pandemic, schools were making progress in increasing breakfast participation and reducing the gap between breakfast and lunch participation by implementing innovative service models — such as breakfast in the classroom, grab and go breakfast, and second chance breakfast — which help overcome the common timing and location barriers to participation in school breakfast. States and schools need to reprioritize these efforts to ensure that children can start the school day ready to learn.

- On an average school day during the 2022–2023 school year, **just over 14.3 million children received a school breakfast** — a decrease of nearly 1.2 million (7.7 percent) children when compared to the 2021–2022 school year.
- Of the total number of children participating in school breakfast during the 2022–2023 school year, **10.8 million (75.6 percent) received a free breakfast, 500,299 (3.5 percent) received a reduced-price breakfast**, and nearly 3 million (20.9 percent) received a paid breakfast.
- **Nearly 2.2 billion total breakfasts were served** through the School Breakfast Program during the 2022–2023 school year — a decrease of just over 204.9 million breakfasts when compared to the 2021–2022 school year.

Breakfast After the Bell Boosts Participation

Implementing a breakfast after the bell service model has been shown to increase participation and can help reduce any stigma associated with eating breakfast at school. As school meals operations return to normal, expanding access through innovative breakfast service models can help to offset drops in participation. There are three primary options for serving breakfast after the bell:

- **Breakfast in the classroom:** Meals are delivered to and eaten in the classroom at the start of the school day.
- **"Grab and go":** Children (particularly older students) can quickly grab their breakfast from carts or kiosks in the hallway or the cafeteria line to eat in their classroom or in common areas.
- **Second chance breakfast:** Students are offered a second chance to eat breakfast after the school day starts. Many middle and high school students are not hungry first thing in the morning but are ready to eat breakfast after their first class of the day, helping them to focus on their classes until lunch time.

- **Forty-two states and the District of Columbia saw a decrease in breakfast participation on an average day** in the 2022–2023 school year compared to the 2021–2022 school year.
- **Only eight states** — California (12.8 percent), Kentucky (1.5 percent), Maine (7.8 percent), Massachusetts (11.5 percent), North Carolina (0.2 percent), Pennsylvania (3.7 percent), Texas (1.7 percent), and Vermont (7.6 percent) — **saw an increase in participation**.
  - » Four of these states — California, Maine, Massachusetts, and Vermont — implemented Healthy School Meals for All legislation in the 2022–2023 school year, which helped them counteract the end of the waivers.
  - » Almost 90 percent of the schools serving breakfast and lunch in Kentucky participated in community eligibility.
  - » In Pennsylvania, state legislation allocated funding to cover the cost of offering breakfast at no charge to all students during the 2022–2023 school year.
  - » North Carolina and Texas saw a sizeable increase in schools adopting community eligibility during the 2022–2023 school year, with 95 additional schools (9.8 percent) participating in North Carolina, and 491 additional schools (13.1 percent) participating in Texas.[5]
- **The gap between school breakfast and lunch participation grew in the 2022–2023 school year compared to the previous year.** Only 50.9 children received a school breakfast for every 100 children who received a school lunch, a decrease from 51.9 per 100 in the 2021–2022 school year.

School Lunch During the 2022–2023 School Year

School lunch also lost significant ground during the 2022–2023 school year in comparison to the 2021–2022 school year.

- On an average school day during the 2022–2023 school year, just **over 28.1 million children received a school lunch** — a decrease of 1.8 million (6 percent) children when compared to the 2021–2022 school year.
- Of the total number of children participating in school lunch during the 2022– 2023 school year, **18.6 million (66.2 percent) received a free lunch, 1.1 million (3.9 percent) received a reduced-price lunch, and 8.4 million (29.8 percent) received a paid lunch**.
- **Just over 4.2 billion total lunches were served through the National School Lunch Program during the 2022–2023 school year** — a decrease of nearly 302.2 million lunches compared to the 2021–2022 school year.
- **Forty-two states and the District of Columbia saw a decrease in lunch participation on an average day** in the 2022–2023 school year compared to the 2021–2022 school year.
- **Only eight states** — California (4.2 percent), Connecticut (0.2 percent), Kentucky (3.3 percent), Louisiana (2.9 percent), Maine (7.1 percent), Massachusetts (3.7 percent), North Carolina (2.9 percent), and Vermont (6.7 percent) — **saw an increase in lunch participation in the 2022–2023 school year compared to the 2021–2022 school year**.

» Four of these states — California, Maine, Massachusetts, and Vermont — implemented Healthy School Meals for All legislation in the 2022–2023 school year.

» The other four states either implemented community eligibility broadly — more than 90 percent of schools serving breakfast and lunch in Kentucky and more than 85 percent in Louisiana were participating in community eligibility — or increased the use of community eligibility significantly, with Connecticut and North Carolina increasing school participation by 15 percent and 9.8 percent respectively.[5]

Looking Ahead: Opportunities to Bolster Breakfast and Lunch

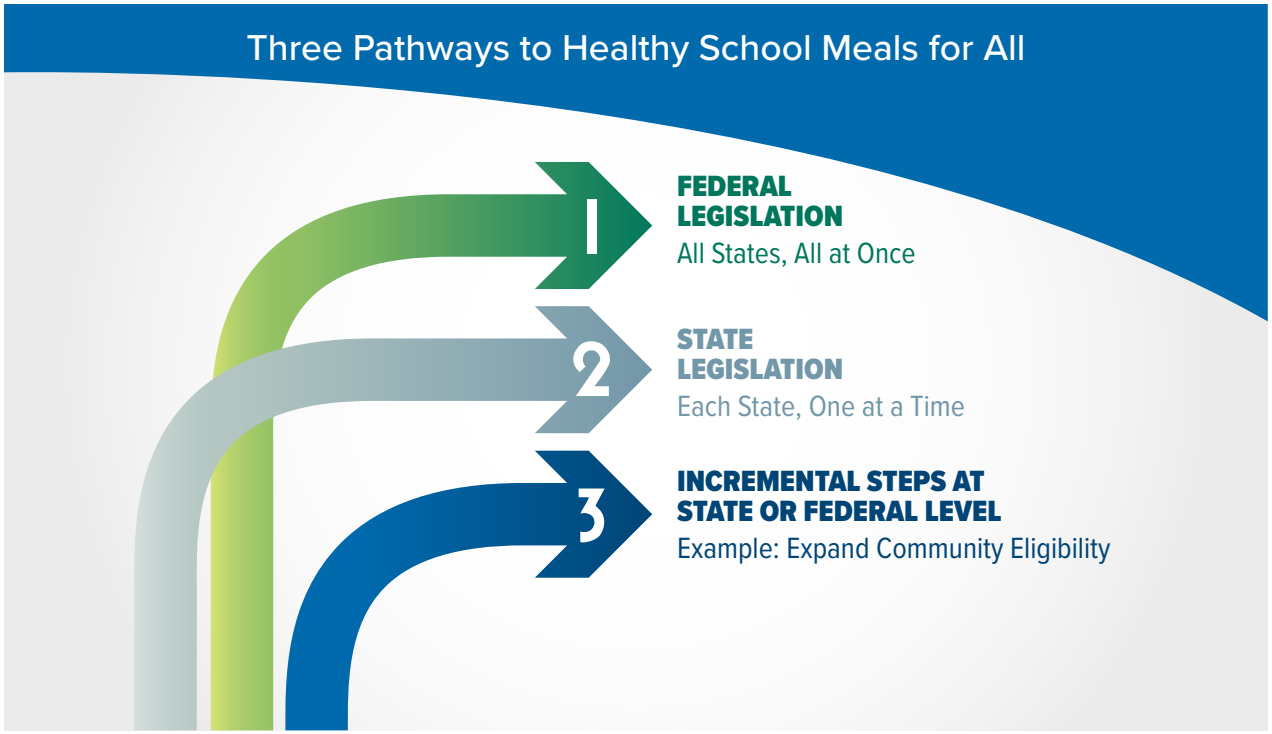
It will take bold and targeted action on the local, state, and federal levels to ensure access to school meals. Additional investments on the federal and state levels in making Healthy School Meals for All a reality is the most effective way to increase participation in both programs. On the local level, schools and advocates must recommit to the implementation of proven best practices that boost participation, such as breakfast after the bell, to eliminate the access barriers that keep breakfast participation trailing lunch.

Healthy School Meals for All

The nationwide pandemic child nutrition waivers offered a trial run of Healthy School Meals for All during the pandemic and highlighted just what is possible when schools can offer meals at no charge to all students. Across the country, states are stepping up to fill the gap left by the expiration of those nationwide waivers. In lieu of Congressional action, eight states — California, Colorado, Massachusetts, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, and Vermont — have now implemented permanent Healthy School Meals for All policies. While this momentum on the state level is inspiring and impactful, it cannot replace action on the federal level. Several bills have been introduced in Congress to support Healthy School Meals for All; advancing these bills will most effectively fill the nutrition gap left by the pandemic.

There are many pathways to Healthy School Meals for All. The following strategies would ensure meals are available to all children, at no cost to families, alongside their textbooks and technology.

- **Federal legislation.** Enacting legislation is the most effective way to make free school meals accessible to all students throughout the country.



Spotlight on Federal Healthy School Meals for All Legislation

Legislation has been introduced on the federal level to support the expansion of Healthy School Meals for All. Advocates in every state can work with their Members of Congress to support these important bills.

- **Universal School Meals Program Act** (S.1568/H.R.3204): Creates a nationwide Healthy School Meals for All program.
- **School Meals Expansion Act** (H.R.2567): Increases federal funding for community eligibility schools and makes more schools eligible.
- **No Hungry Kids in School Act** (H.R.3112): Creates a statewide community eligibility option.
- **Expanding Access to School Meals Act** (H.R.3113): Increases eligibility for free meals to 200 percent and expands direct certification, resulting in increased federal funding for community eligibility schools and better access to school meals for struggling families.

- **State legislation.** State momentum for Healthy School Meals for All is growing, largely because schools, families, and students throughout the country have not wanted to return to how the school nutrition programs operated before the pandemic. While eight states have passed permanent legislation, over 25 states have active campaigns. To learn more, check out the Healthy School Meals for All website.
- **Maximizing Community Eligibility Provision.** In October 2023, USDA released a final rule that provides 3,000 additional school districts the opportunity to offer nutritious meals to all students at no cost by lowering the eligibility threshold from 40 percent identified students to 25 percent. Maximizing participation in CEP remains an important strategy for Healthy School Meals for All for schools and states.
- **Certification processes improvements and expansion.** Increasing the number of children from households with low incomes who are directly certified to receive free school meals without an application would ensure more eligible children do not fall through the cracks. At this time, 43 states are participating in Medicaid Direct Certification. USDA continues to accept applications from states for the 2025–2026 school year.

Community Eligibility

The Community Eligibility Provision allows high-poverty schools to offer breakfast and lunch free of charge to all students. During the 2022–2023 school year, any district, group of schools in a district, or school with 40 percent or more "identified students" — children who are eligible for free school meals who already are identified by means other than an individual household application — could choose to participate. Under the new USDA rule, schools can participate with 25 percent or more "identified students."

"Identified students" include those who are in two categories:

- **children who are directly certified for free school meals** through data matching because their households receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations benefits, or, in many states, Medicaid benefits; and
- **children who are certified for free meals without an application** because they are homeless, migrant, enrolled in Head Start, or in foster care.

Community eligibility schools are reimbursed for meals served, based on a formula. To account for children who would have been certified through a school meal application, reimbursements to the school are calculated by multiplying the percentage of identified students by 1.6 to determine the percentage of meals that will be reimbursed at the federal free rate. For example, a school with 50 percent identified students would be reimbursed at the free rate for 80 percent of the meals eaten (50 multiplied by 1.6 is 80), and at the paid rate for 20 percent.

School districts also were able to choose to participate districtwide or group schools, however, they choose if the district or group has an overall identified student percentage of 40 percent or higher, and now can participate at 25 percent or higher. Find out which schools in your state or community are participating or eligible for the Community Eligibility Provision in FRAC's database.

Conclusion

Breakfast and lunch participation decreased in the 2022–2023 school year compared to the 2021–2022 school year, and the gap between breakfast and lunch participation also increased. State Healthy School Meals for All policies in five states allowed many schools to continue to offer meals to all students at no charge, ensuring that all children in their state continued to have access to school meals.

The return to normal school meal operations, and its impact on participation, highlight the need for policymakers, advocates, and schools to bolster efforts and recommit to ensuring that school breakfast and school lunch are accessible to every child every school day. This includes fully maximizing CEP and investing in Healthy School Meals for All on both the state and federal levels, combined with a focus on the strategies needed to expand school breakfast, so that all children have access to the school breakfasts and lunches they need to continue learning throughout the school day.

Technical Notes

The data in this report are collected from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and an annual survey of state child nutrition officials conducted by the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC). This report does not include data for students or schools that participate in school meals programs in Puerto Rico, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, or Department of Defense schools. Due to rounding, totals in the tables may not add up to 100 percent.

For consistency, all USDA data used in this report are from the states' 90-day revisions of the monthly reports. The 90-day revisions are the final required reports from the states, but states have the option to change numbers at any time after that point.

Student Participation

The student participation data in each state is based on daily averages of the number of breakfasts and lunches served through the available program options on school days during the nine months from September through May. FRAC calculated the number of children reached in each state during each school year by dividing the total number of breakfasts and lunches served by each state's average number of serving days during the corresponding school year. The pandemic impacted which federal child nutrition programs schools operated to provide breakfasts and lunches as well program operations. The following bullets describe the data adjustments made to each school year to account for the impact of the pandemic on the available data.

- **During the 2021–2022 school year**, average daily participation is based on the number of breakfasts and lunches served through the School Breakfast Program (SBP), National School Lunch Program (NSLP), Seamless Summer Option (SSO), and each state's average number of serving days in SBP and NSLP during the 2018–2019 school year. While FRAC would normally use the service days from the corresponding year (in this case, it would be 2021–2022) to determine the number of children served, disruptions to the number of traditional service days — and the transition to SSO in most states — in those years would not provide a fair comparison. Using the 2018–2019 service days assumes that school schedules were consistent with pre-COVID-19 pandemic schedules.
- **During the 2022–2023 school year**, average daily participation is based on the number of breakfasts and lunches served through School Breakfast and National School Lunch Program and each state's average number of serving days in SBP and NSLP during the 2022–2023 school year. Twelve states reported to USDA that they served breakfasts and lunches through SSO in the 2022–2023 school year. Those numbers are included in their participation data because meals served through SSO are included in the free category of meals served in SBP and NSLP instead of being reported separately.

Breakfasts and lunches served through SSO have historically been reported in the free category of SBP or NSLP. During the 2021–2022 school year, schools were using SSO broadly through the USDA waivers. In normal years, including the 2022–2023 school year, SSO participation during the school year is outside of the regular school day, and are "summer meals," which includes meals served in September before the school year starts, and during extended breaks at year-round schools or unanticipated school closures.

Based on information from USDA, FRAC applies a formula (divide average daily participation by an attendance factor) to adjust numbers upwards to account for children who were absent from school on a particular day. FRAC uses an attendance factor of 0.927 to adjust the average daily participation numbers in breakfast and lunch for the 2021–2022 and 2022–2023 school years.

The number of participating schools is reported by states to USDA in October of the relevant school year. The number includes not only public schools, but also nonprofit private schools, residential child care institutions, and other institutions that operate school meals programs. FRAC's *The Reach of School Breakfast and Lunch During the 2022–2023 School Year* report uses the October number, which is verified by FRAC with state officials, and FRAC provides an opportunity for state officials to update or correct the school numbers.

Endnotes

1 Nevada also implemented Healthy School Meals for All during the 2022–2023 school year. The state had an increase in total school lunch participation compared to the 2018–2019 school year (the year prior to the pandemic) but experienced a decrease in school breakfast participation. The state's total participation in breakfast and lunch dropped from the 2021–2022 school year, a year when schools also were offering free meals to all students.

2 For more information on how the School Nutrition Programs worked during the 2021–2022 school year when nationwide waivers were available, read *The Reach of School Breakfast and Lunch During the 2021–2022 School Year*.

3 The Keep Kids Fed Act of 2022 provided an additional 40 cents for each lunch served and 15 cents for each breakfast served for the 2022–2023 school year. These increases are included in the reimbursement rates listed.

4 School lunch fees are required to be equitable to the federal free reimbursement rate. States and school districts can provide non-federal funds to eliminate or keep school lunch fees low. This rule does not apply to breakfast fees. Under certain circumstances, this requirement has been waived.

5 *Community Eligibility: The Key to Hunger Free Schools — School Year 2022–2023*. (2023). Food Research & Action Center.

Table 1: Total Average Daily Participation in School Breakfast and Lunch, School Years 2021–2022[1] and 2022–2023

State	School Year 2021–2022			School Year 2022–2023			% Change: SY 2021–2022 to 2022–2023	
	Average Daily Participation in Breakfast	Average Daily Participation in Lunch	Breakfast to Lunch Participation Ratio	Average Daily Participation in Breakfast	Average Daily Participation in Lunch	Breakfast to Lunch Participation Ratio	% Change in Breakfast Average Daily Participation	% Change in Lunch Average Daily Participation
Alabama	307,178	519,430	59.1	268,322	482,073	55.7	-12.6%	-7.2%
Alaska	25,749	50,558	50.9	21,445	42,612	50.3	-16.7%	-15.7%
Arizona	319,881	670,508	47.7	253,209	545,950	46.4	-20.8%	-18.6%
Arkansas	203,369	311,720	65.2	193,313	305,445	63.3	-4.9%	-2.0%
California	1,550,114	3,075,213	50.4	1,749,211	3,205,414	54.6	12.8%	4.2%
Colorado	202,961	433,471	46.8	140,097	341,686	41.0	-31.0%	-21.2%
Connecticut	149,143	314,868	47.4	142,375	315,345	45.1	-4.5%	0.2%
Delaware	53,859	92,203	58.4	50,914	91,336	55.7	-5.5%	-0.9%
District of Columbia	55,802	68,071	82.0	36,609	48,343	75.7	-34.4%	-29.0%
Florida	820,733	1,761,802	46.6	782,819	1,689,960	46.3	-4.6%	-4.1%
Georgia	676,407	1,170,408	57.8	616,602	1,083,830	56.9	-8.8%	-7.4%
Hawaii	27,721	92,717	29.9	26,884	89,866	29.9	-3.0%	-3.1%
Idaho	74,438	167,776	44.4	53,310	133,458	39.9	-28.4%	-20.5%
Illinois	448,909	998,885	44.9	401,778	908,867	44.2	-10.5%	-9.0%
Indiana	308,304	724,756	42.5	307,451	706,642	43.5	-0.3%	-2.5%
Iowa	148,484	383,960	38.7	119,176	360,962	33.0	-19.7%	-6.0%
Kansas	162,237	353,500	45.9	122,913	313,535	39.2	-24.2%	-11.3%
Kentucky	306,105	470,212	65.1	310,606	485,935	63.9	1.5%	3.3%
Louisiana	278,163	479,662	58.0	273,915	493,761	55.5	-1.5%	2.9%
Maine	61,985	105,178	58.9	66,804	112,661	59.3	7.8%	7.1%
Maryland	265,027	477,460	55.5	222,075	412,367	53.9	-16.2%	-13.6%
Massachusetts	237,991	571,647	41.6	265,363	592,896	44.8	11.5%	3.7%
Michigan	465,727	857,326	54.3	409,170	773,811	52.9	-12.1%	-9.7%
Minnesota	326,653	684,765	47.7	227,474	575,079	39.6	-30.4%	-16.0%
Mississippi	201,884	330,269	61.1	183,536	312,057	58.8	-9.1%	-5.5%
Missouri	355,324	606,152	58.6	285,906	525,326	54.4	-19.5%	-13.3%
Montana	49,539	86,425	57.3	37,741	74,634	50.6	-23.8%	-13.6%
Nebraska	94,911	255,619	37.1	80,608	240,257	33.6	-15.1%	-6.0%
Nevada	139,605	250,434	55.7	123,084	235,415	52.3	-11.8%	-6.0%
New Hampshire	45,193	95,337	47.4	23,509	74,535	31.5	-48.0%	-21.8%
New Jersey	394,451	813,439	48.5	339,680	627,759	54.1	-13.9%	-22.8%
New Mexico	135,044	193,086	69.9	125,497	184,352	68.1	-7.1%	-4.5%
New York	904,662	1,649,711	54.8	792,856	1,578,532	50.2	-12.4%	-4.3%
North Carolina	428,917	732,698	58.5	429,935	753,656	57.0	0.2%	2.9%
North Dakota	42,373	96,617	43.9	33,221	93,028	35.7	-21.6%	-3.7%
Ohio	568,939	1,077,387	52.8	442,544	926,339	47.8	-22.2%	-14.0%
Oklahoma	228,006	408,666	55.8	201,967	390,062	51.8	-11.4%	-4.6%
Oregon	142,196	271,018	52.5	130,988	265,234	49.4	-7.9%	-2.1%
Pennsylvania	477,687	1,010,572	47.3	495,269	951,369	52.1	3.7%	-5.9%
Rhode Island	39,461	78,122	50.5	30,558	70,157	43.6	-22.6%	-10.2%
South Carolina	287,358	475,779	60.4	259,258	450,893	57.5	-9.8%	-5.2%
South Dakota	43,558	110,065	39.6	29,616	100,326	29.5	-32.0%	-8.8%
Tennessee	391,770	654,500	59.9	361,183	611,820	59.0	-7.8%	-6.5%
Texas	1,785,293	3,366,772	53.0	1,815,077	3,334,834	54.4	1.7%	-0.9%
Utah	116,371	358,233	32.5	72,043	308,197	23.4	-38.1%	-14.0%
Vermont	32,778	51,268	63.9	35,255	54,704	64.4	7.6%	6.7%
Virginia	447,640	784,591	57.1	386,520	697,829	55.4	-13.7%	-11.1%
Washington	240,803	567,425	42.4	202,109	464,759	43.5	-16.1%	-18.1%
West Virginia	142,224	174,232	81.6	135,866	166,504	81.6	-4.5%	-4.4%
Wisconsin	273,775	530,315	51.6	190,724	471,463	40.5	-30.3%	-11.1%
Wyoming	25,791	51,597	50.0	15,819	43,928	36.0	-38.7%	-14.9%
Total	**15,512,493**	**29,916,425**	**51.9**	**14,322,204**	**28,119,800**	**50.9**	**-7.7%**	**-6.0%**

1 Average Daily Participation in SBP and NSLP includes meals served through the Seamless Summer Option (SSO). SSO meals are normally served during summer breaks, extended breaks for year-round schools, and unanticipated school closures. During the 2021–2022 school year, the vast majority of meals were served through SSO at no charge to all students through the pandemic child nutrition waivers.

Table 2: Average Daily Participation In Breakfast by Fee Type, School Years 2021–2022 and 2022–2023

State	Students Receiving a Free[1] Breakfast				Students Receiving a Reduced-Price[2] Breakfast				Students Receiving a Paid Breakfast			
	2021–2022	%	2022–2023	%	2021–2022	%	2022–2023	%	2021–2022	%	2022–2023	%
Alabama	307,178	100.0%	213,812	79.7%	–	0.0%	9,567	3.6%	–	0.0%	44,943	16.7%
Alaska	25,749	100.0%	15,843	73.9%	–	0.0%	906	4.2%	–	0.0%	4,696	21.9%
Arizona	319,577	99.9%	179,550	70.9%	17	0.0%	18,855	7.4%	287	0.1%	54,805	21.6%
Arkansas	203,238	99.9%	126,745	65.6%	35	0.0%	20,259	10.5%	96	0.0%	46,310	24.0%
California	1,548,247	99.9%	1,186,969	67.9%	194	0.0%	31,955	1.8%	1,673	0.1%	530,287	30.3%
Colorado	202,914	100.0%	85,344	60.9%	8	0.0%	14,969	10.7%	39	0.0%	39,784	28.4%
Connecticut	149,139	100.0%	101,013	70.9%	1	0.0%	3,272	2.3%	3	0.0%	38,090	26.8%
Delaware	53,819	99.9%	32,372	63.6%	13	0.0%	1,203	2.4%	27	0.1%	17,338	34.1%
District of Columbia	55,514	99.5%	30,773	84.1%	19	0.0%	246	0.7%	269	0.5%	5,589	15.3%
Florida	814,773	99.3%	676,635	86.4%	934	0.1%	14,121	1.8%	5,026	0.6%	92,062	11.8%
Georgia	676,407	100.0%	459,536	74.5%	–	0.0%	35,423	5.7%	–	0.0%	121,643	19.7%
Hawaii	27,721	100.0%	18,540	69.0%	–	0.0%	1,674	6.2%	–	0.0%	6,670	24.8%
Idaho	74,438	100.0%	29,295	55.0%	–	0.0%	5,987	11.2%	–	0.0%	18,027	33.8%
Illinois	448,842	100.0%	356,908	88.8%	9	0.0%	3,968	1.0%	58	0.0%	40,902	10.2%
Indiana	308,266	100.0%	229,571	74.7%	–	0.0%	14,943	4.9%	38	0.0%	62,938	20.5%
Iowa	148,484	100.0%	82,265	69.0%	–	0.0%	5,076	4.3%	–	0.0%	31,835	26.7%
Kansas	162,237	100.0%	81,357	66.2%	–	0.0%	10,623	8.6%	–	0.0%	30,933	25.2%
Kentucky	306,105	100.0%	277,974	89.5%	–	0.0%	1,642	0.5%	–	0.0%	30,990	10.0%
Louisiana	278,163	100.0%	243,687	89.0%	–	0.0%	2,264	0.8%	–	0.0%	27,964	10.2%
Maine	61,985	100.0%	25,467	38.1%	–	0.0%	2,801	4.2%	–	0.0%	38,536	57.7%
Maryland	264,941	100.0%	152,108	68.5%	8	0.0%	14,037	6.3%	78	0.0%	55,929	25.2%
Massachusetts	237,991	100.0%	192,081	72.4%	–	0.0%	2,564	1.0%	–	0.0%	70,719	26.6%
Michigan	465,639	100.0%	338,220	82.7%	11	0.0%	8,040	2.0%	77	0.0%	62,909	15.4%
Minnesota	326,555	100.0%	120,178	52.8%	21	0.0%	21,224	9.3%	77	0.0%	86,072	37.8%
Mississippi	201,884	100.0%	150,511	82.0%	–	0.0%	11,483	6.3%	–	0.0%	21,542	11.7%
Missouri	354,742	99.8%	178,014	62.3%	56	0.0%	22,837	8.0%	526	0.1%	85,055	29.7%
Montana	49,378	99.7%	23,510	62.3%	18	0.0%	2,223	5.9%	143	0.3%	12,008	31.8%
Nebraska	94,905	100.0%	56,526	70.1%	–	0.0%	5,451	6.8%	6	0.0%	18,631	23.1%
Nevada	139,605	100.0%	96,585	78.5%	–	0.0%	540	0.4%	–	0.0%	25,959	21.1%
New Hampshire	45,061	99.7%	9,758	41.5%	2	0.0%	1,998	8.5%	130	0.3%	11,753	50.0%
New Jersey	394,419	100.0%	223,842	65.9%	10	0.0%	24,748	7.3%	22	0.0%	91,090	26.8%
New Mexico	135,006	100.0%	102,741	81.9%	1	0.0%	1,650	1.3%	37	0.0%	21,107	16.8%
New York	904,343	100.0%	707,736	89.3%	11	0.0%	8,224	1.0%	308	0.0%	76,895	9.7%
North Carolina	428,599	99.9%	343,270	79.8%	35	0.0%	13,312	3.1%	283	0.1%	73,353	17.1%
North Dakota	42,373	100.0%	14,596	43.9%	–	0.0%	2,866	8.6%	–	0.0%	15,759	47.4%
Ohio	568,911	100.0%	308,494	69.7%	6	0.0%	20,710	4.7%	22	0.0%	113,339	25.6%
Oklahoma	228,006	100.0%	136,844	67.8%	–	0.0%	16,019	7.9%	–	0.0%	49,104	24.3%
Oregon	142,196	100.0%	83,987	64.1%	–	0.0%	2,487	1.9%	–	0.0%	44,514	34.0%
Pennsylvania	477,631	100.0%	370,129	74.7%	5	0.0%	5,918	1.2%	51	0.0%	119,222	24.1%
Rhode Island	39,409	99.9%	21,872	71.6%	8	0.0%	1,608	5.3%	44	0.1%	7,078	23.2%
South Carolina	287,343	100.0%	202,887	78.3%	4	0.0%	7,805	3.0%	11	0.0%	48,566	18.7%
South Dakota	43,557	100.0%	16,924	57.1%	1	0.0%	2,685	9.1%	–	0.0%	10,008	33.8%
Tennessee	391,735	100.0%	255,042	70.6%	1	0.0%	17,278	4.8%	34	0.0%	88,863	24.6%
Texas	1,778,349	99.6%	1,530,337	84.3%	863	0.0%	51,800	2.9%	6,081	0.3%	232,940	12.8%
Utah	114,327	98.2%	40,072	55.6%	258	0.2%	6,838	9.5%	1,786	1.5%	25,133	34.9%
Vermont	32,767	100.0%	13,477	38.2%	–	0.0%	1,286	3.6%	11	0.0%	20,493	58.1%
Virginia	447,638	100.0%	291,888	75.5%	–	0.0%	8,122	2.1%	2	0.0%	86,511	22.4%
Washington	240,751	100.0%	145,083	71.8%	10	0.0%	5,534	2.7%	42	0.0%	51,491	25.5%
West Virginia	142,191	100.0%	112,361	82.7%	4	0.0%	689	0.5%	29	0.0%	22,816	16.8%
Wisconsin	273,770	100.0%	124,648	65.4%	–	0.0%	8,507	4.5%	5	0.0%	57,569	30.2%
Wyoming	25,791	100.0%	7,387	46.7%	–	0.0%	2,061	13.0%	–	0.0%	6,370	40.3%
Total	**15,492,609**	**99.9%**	**10,824,765**	**75.6%**	**2,563**	**0.0%**	**500,299**	**3.5%**	**17,321**	**0.1%**	**2,997,140**	**20.9%**

1 This includes breakfasts served at no charge through the Seamless Summer Option (SSO). SSO breakfasts are normally served during summer breaks, extended breaks for year-round schools, and unanticipated school closures. During the 2021–2022 school year, the vast majority of breakfasts were served through SSO at no charge to all students through the pandemic child nutrition waivers.

2 States that have participation in the reduced-price and paid fee category during the 2021–2022 school year are in districts that did not adopt the SSO waiver and missed out on the opportunity to offer free meals to all of their students.

Table 3: Average Daily Participation In Lunch by Fee Type, School Years 2021–2022 and 2022–2023

State	Students Receiving a Free[1] Lunch				Students Receiving a Reduced-Price[2] Lunch				Students Receiving a Paid Lunch			
	2021–2022	%	2022–2023	%	2021–2022	%	2022–2023	%	2021–2022	%	2022–2023	%
Alabama	519,430	100.0%	356,588	74.0%	–	0.0%	18,584	3.9%	–	0.0%	106,900	22.2%
Alaska	50,558	100.0%	29,300	68.8%	–	0.0%	1,988	4.7%	–	0.0%	11,324	26.6%
Arizona	669,650	99.9%	334,472	61.3%	103	0.0%	44,985	8.2%	755	0.1%	166,493	30.5%
Arkansas	310,917	99.7%	184,808	60.5%	107	0.0%	33,278	10.9%	696	0.2%	87,359	28.6%
California	3,069,653	99.8%	2,134,682	66.6%	528	0.0%	59,839	1.9%	5,032	0.2%	1,010,893	31.5%
Colorado	433,375	100.0%	156,973	45.9%	26	0.0%	33,032	9.7%	70	0.0%	151,680	44.4%
Connecticut	314,773	100.0%	185,495	58.8%	3	0.0%	8,595	2.7%	92	0.0%	121,255	38.5%
Delaware	92,150	99.9%	51,527	56.4%	18	0.0%	2,556	2.8%	35	0.0%	37,254	40.8%
District of Columbia	67,834	99.7%	40,077	82.9%	43	0.1%	417	0.9%	194	0.3%	7,849	16.2%
Florida	1,733,599	98.4%	1,390,519	82.3%	4,167	0.2%	37,212	2.2%	24,036	1.4%	262,229	15.5%
Georgia	1,170,408	100.0%	720,593	66.5%	–	0.0%	67,271	6.2%	–	0.0%	295,966	27.3%
Hawaii	92,680	100.0%	49,706	55.3%	7	0.0%	6,540	7.3%	30	0.0%	33,620	37.4%
Idaho	167,776	100.0%	56,309	42.2%	–	0.0%	15,274	11.4%	–	0.0%	61,875	46.4%
Illinois	998,171	99.9%	682,101	75.0%	44	0.0%	14,807	1.6%	670	0.1%	211,959	23.3%
Indiana	724,606	100.0%	412,919	58.4%	13	0.0%	38,553	5.5%	137	0.0%	255,169	36.1%
Iowa	383,960	100.0%	171,837	47.6%	–	0.0%	15,180	4.2%	0	0.0%	173,945	48.2%
Kansas	353,422	100.0%	153,103	48.8%	2	0.0%	24,399	7.8%	76	0.0%	136,033	43.4%
Kentucky	470,212	100.0%	415,286	85.5%	–	0.0%	3,534	0.7%	–	0.0%	67,114	13.8%
Louisiana	479,662	100.0%	407,334	82.5%	–	0.0%	6,390	1.3%	–	0.0%	80,037	16.2%
Maine	105,178	100.0%	38,612	34.3%	–	0.0%	4,350	3.9%	–	0.0%	69,699	61.9%
Maryland	477,193	99.9%	261,522	63.4%	20	0.0%	27,267	6.6%	247	0.1%	123,578	30.0%
Massachusetts	571,647	100.0%	335,798	56.6%	–	0.0%	7,456	1.3%	–	0.0%	249,642	42.1%
Michigan	856,553	99.9%	543,916	70.3%	30	0.0%	20,309	2.6%	743	0.1%	209,586	27.1%
Minnesota	684,347	99.9%	226,629	39.4%	74	0.0%	49,037	8.5%	344	0.1%	299,413	52.1%
Mississippi	330,269	100.0%	234,899	75.3%	–	0.0%	22,352	7.2%	–	0.0%	54,805	17.6%
Missouri	603,327	99.5%	261,136	49.7%	153	0.0%	41,317	7.9%	2,672	0.4%	222,873	42.4%
Montana	85,912	99.4%	35,968	48.2%	47	0.1%	4,703	6.3%	466	0.5%	33,963	45.5%
Nebraska	255,512	100.0%	114,596	47.7%	2	0.0%	17,183	7.2%	105	0.0%	108,478	45.2%
Nevada	250,434	100.0%	171,397	72.8%	–	0.0%	1,890	0.8%	–	0.0%	62,129	26.4%
New Hampshire	94,679	99.3%	20,664	27.7%	17	0.0%	4,582	6.1%	641	0.7%	49,289	66.1%
New Jersey	813,191	100.0%	330,258	52.6%	46	0.0%	48,472	7.7%	202	0.0%	249,028	39.7%
New Mexico	193,042	100.0%	144,875	78.6%	1	0.0%	3,270	1.8%	43	0.0%	36,208	19.6%
New York	1,648,571	99.9%	1,267,716	80.3%	21	0.0%	20,590	1.3%	1,119	0.1%	290,226	18.4%
North Carolina	732,202	99.9%	561,566	74.5%	59	0.0%	26,995	3.6%	437	0.1%	165,095	21.9%
North Dakota	96,617	100.0%	25,871	27.8%	–	0.0%	6,399	6.9%	–	0.0%	60,758	65.3%
Ohio	1,075,461	99.8%	504,364	54.4%	87	0.0%	48,452	5.2%	1,839	0.2%	373,523	40.3%
Oklahoma	408,666	100.0%	237,626	60.9%	–	0.0%	33,363	8.6%	–	0.0%	119,073	30.5%
Oregon	271,005	100.0%	155,054	58.5%	3	0.0%	5,793	2.2%	10	0.0%	104,386	39.4%
Pennsylvania	1,009,184	99.9%	645,358	67.8%	36	0.0%	13,820	1.5%	1,352	0.1%	292,190	30.7%
Rhode Island	78,038	99.9%	38,649	55.1%	16	0.0%	4,321	6.2%	68	0.1%	27,187	38.8%
South Carolina	475,774	100.0%	321,133	71.2%	3	0.0%	16,920	3.8%	2	0.0%	112,840	25.0%
South Dakota	109,993	99.9%	33,818	33.7%	–	0.0%	7,561	7.5%	72	0.1%	58,947	58.8%
Tennessee	654,453	100.0%	385,104	62.9%	2	0.0%	32,393	5.3%	45	0.0%	194,323	31.8%
Texas	3,350,031	99.5%	2,528,786	75.8%	1,830	0.1%	118,492	3.6%	14,911	0.4%	687,557	20.6%
Utah	358,233	100.0%	104,856	34.0%	–	0.0%	24,383	7.9%	–	0.0%	178,958	58.1%
Vermont	51,236	99.9%	18,484	33.8%	1	0.0%	1,968	3.6%	31	0.1%	34,252	62.6%
Virginia	784,591	100.0%	452,287	64.8%	–	0.0%	18,279	2.6%	–	0.0%	227,262	32.6%
Washington	566,871	99.9%	290,194	62.4%	78	0.0%	16,090	3.5%	476	0.1%	158,475	34.1%
West Virginia	174,170	100.0%	133,898	80.4%	3	0.0%	936	0.6%	59	0.0%	31,670	19.0%
Wisconsin	530,315	100.0%	244,329	51.8%	–	0.0%	22,146	4.7%	–	0.0%	204,989	43.5%
Wyoming	51,597	100.0%	15,087	34.3%	–	0.0%	5,232	11.9%	–	0.0%	23,610	53.7%
Total	**29,851,128**	**99.8%**	**18,618,078**	**66.2%**	**7,590**	**0.0%**	**1,108,755**	**3.9%**	**57,707**	**0.2%**	**8,392,967**	**29.8%**

1 This includes lunches served at no charge through the Seamless Summer Option (SSO). SSO breakfasts are normally served during summer breaks, extended breaks for year-round schools, and unanticipated school closures. During the 2021–2022 school year, the vast majority of breakfasts were served through SSO at no charge to all students through the pandemic child nutrition waivers.

2 States that have participation in the reduced-price and paid fee category during the 2021–2022 school year are in districts that did not adopt the SSO waiver and missed out on the opportunity to offer free meals to all of their students.

Table 4: School Breakfasts and Lunches Served by Type, School Year 2022–2023[1]

State	Free[1]		Reduced-Price[2]		Paid		Total Meals Served: SY 2022–2023		Change in Number of Meals Served From SY 2021–2022 to 2022–2023[2]	
	Breakfast	Lunch	Breakfast	Lunch	Breakfast	Lunch	Breakfast	Lunch	Breakfast	Lunch
Alabama	31,472,138	52,451,311	1,408,195	2,733,630	6,615,401	15,724,161	39,495,734	70,909,102	-5,762,134	-5,522,539
Alaska	2,326,923	4,266,200	133,007	289,427	689,808	1,648,904	3,149,738	6,204,531	-813,721	-1,504,178
Arizona	25,929,793	48,032,673	2,722,897	6,460,236	7,914,640	23,909,582	36,567,330	78,402,491	-10,416,146	-19,113,759
Arkansas	18,918,701	27,629,717	3,023,953	4,975,181	6,912,454	13,060,609	28,855,108	45,665,507	-2,057,191	-1,651,648
California	180,084,393	323,448,437	4,845,241	9,066,825	80,404,992	153,171,148	265,334,626	485,686,410	28,743,028	16,903,507
Colorado	12,526,464	23,313,161	2,197,063	4,905,843	5,839,426	22,527,069	20,562,953	50,746,073	-9,590,891	-13,965,718
Connecticut	15,807,905	29,031,897	512,060	1,345,248	5,960,893	18,977,695	22,280,858	49,354,840	-1,058,755	-45,343
Delaware	4,802,864	7,662,139	178,538	380,015	2,572,319	5,539,679	7,553,721	13,581,833	-505,776	-236,368
District of Columbia	4,666,084	6,078,083	37,326	63,217	847,473	1,190,407	5,550,883	7,331,707	-3,392,857	-3,574,402
Florida	101,087,992	207,292,677	2,109,709	5,547,364	13,753,912	39,092,027	116,951,613	251,932,068	-10,398,684	-20,882,917
Georgia	66,531,665	104,192,178	5,128,474	9,726,942	17,611,451	42,794,411	89,271,590	156,713,531	-9,328,919	-13,596,417
Hawaii	2,715,048	7,228,513	245,200	951,137	976,754	4,889,265	3,937,002	13,068,915	-216,964	-760,414
Idaho	4,181,866	8,125,558	854,651	2,204,004	2,573,409	8,928,684	7,609,926	19,258,246	-3,490,124	-5,498,921
Illinois	54,945,289	103,434,359	610,851	2,245,316	6,296,790	32,141,690	61,852,930	137,821,365	-7,837,142	-15,268,388
Indiana	33,714,324	60,889,586	2,194,484	5,685,086	9,242,886	37,627,607	45,151,694	104,202,279	-76,167	-2,867,228
Iowa	12,711,828	26,701,164	784,292	2,358,749	4,919,292	27,028,604	18,415,412	56,088,517	-4,707,371	-3,736,389
Kansas	11,775,315	22,001,016	1,537,535	3,506,101	4,477,181	19,548,134	17,790,031	45,055,251	-5,457,237	-5,251,412
Kentucky	40,101,819	60,070,466	236,873	511,250	4,470,795	9,707,968	44,809,487	70,289,684	770,932	2,460,850
Louisiana	34,826,630	58,198,932	323,584	912,994	3,996,426	11,435,539	39,146,640	70,547,465	-876,824	1,556,053
Maine	3,832,523	5,818,478	421,544	655,582	5,799,281	10,503,036	10,053,348	16,977,096	695,290	1,056,406
Maryland	23,676,868	40,689,712	2,184,979	4,242,424	8,705,860	19,227,237	34,567,707	64,159,373	-6,711,233	-10,753,582
Massachusetts	29,526,372	51,144,069	394,058	1,135,664	10,870,792	38,022,009	40,791,222	90,301,742	3,921,470	3,431,437
Michigan	50,724,701	80,174,758	1,205,860	2,993,642	9,434,786	30,893,565	61,365,347	114,061,965	-7,887,088	-10,607,641
Minnesota	18,019,436	34,150,955	3,182,321	7,389,509	12,905,552	45,118,827	34,107,309	86,659,291	-15,294,816	-17,200,588
Mississippi	22,304,056	34,771,307	1,701,667	3,308,747	3,192,281	8,112,657	27,198,004	46,192,711	-2,939,137	-3,027,053
Missouri	25,984,472	38,309,295	3,333,467	6,061,256	12,415,291	32,695,925	41,733,230	77,066,476	-11,520,390	-13,126,625
Montana	3,655,064	5,586,772	345,613	730,542	1,866,962	5,275,406	5,867,639	11,592,720	-1,953,908	-2,007,525
Nebraska	8,216,219	16,674,537	792,262	2,500,202	2,708,056	15,784,258	11,716,537	34,958,997	-2,282,989	-2,554,689
Nevada	14,629,516	26,010,071	81,814	286,743	3,932,030	9,428,234	18,643,360	35,725,048	-2,437,205	-2,123,508
New Hampshire	1,479,142	3,106,610	302,882	688,857	1,781,462	7,409,975	3,563,486	11,205,442	-3,415,364	-3,396,416
New Jersey	34,142,208	54,053,985	3,774,805	7,933,570	13,893,706	40,758,837	51,810,719	102,746,392	-11,071,129	-23,051,653
New Mexico	14,752,175	21,250,423	236,860	479,634	3,030,631	5,311,045	18,019,666	27,041,102	-1,483,096	-844,869
New York	108,725,268	189,741,022	1,263,404	3,081,697	11,812,939	43,438,547	121,801,611	236,261,266	-17,038,880	-9,976,387
North Carolina	53,525,668	87,851,324	2,075,770	4,223,163	11,437,891	25,827,392	67,039,329	117,901,879	1,387,738	5,142,814
North Dakota	2,208,820	3,934,734	433,681	973,143	2,384,762	9,240,598	5,027,263	14,148,475	-1,639,649	-1,157,903
Ohio	47,343,266	77,743,183	3,178,350	7,468,417	17,393,725	57,575,118	67,915,341	142,786,718	-18,095,464	-20,666,307
Oklahoma	18,835,596	32,914,007	2,204,902	4,621,125	6,758,771	16,493,041	27,799,269	54,028,173	-3,970,015	-3,162,764
Oregon	12,242,325	22,661,646	362,449	846,727	6,488,542	15,256,371	19,093,316	38,764,744	-2,146,405	-1,662,542
Pennsylvania	58,288,028	101,449,225	932,024	2,172,484	18,775,040	45,931,801	77,995,092	149,553,510	2,405,295	-10,005,787
Rhode Island	3,301,635	5,856,665	242,810	654,770	1,068,400	4,119,783	4,612,845	10,631,218	-1,588,211	-1,579,257
South Carolina	30,886,786	48,860,368	1,188,269	2,574,304	7,393,578	17,168,639	39,468,633	68,603,311	-4,955,662	-4,623,386
South Dakota	2,443,996	4,963,217	387,683	1,109,691	1,445,210	8,651,296	4,276,889	14,724,204	-2,084,922	-1,695,385
Tennessee	36,451,384	55,171,468	2,469,464	4,640,678	12,700,604	27,839,519	51,621,452	87,651,665	-5,736,631	-7,928,596
Texas	227,474,575	374,271,958	7,699,671	17,537,390	34,625,050	101,761,558	269,799,296	493,570,906	-10,063,021	-29,063,647
Utah	6,063,182	15,809,095	1,034,597	3,676,156	3,802,846	26,981,366	10,900,625	46,466,617	-7,102,796	-8,687,014
Vermont	2,016,905	2,762,105	192,486	294,046	3,066,939	5,118,396	5,276,330	8,174,547	259,320	348,118
Virginia	44,074,822	68,107,438	1,226,363	2,752,483	13,063,059	34,222,168	58,364,244	105,082,089	-8,521,409	-12,639,756
Washington	24,880,698	49,085,340	949,122	2,721,559	8,830,366	26,805,479	34,660,186	78,612,378	-1,651,117	-6,807,698
West Virginia	17,028,444	20,350,925	104,414	142,277	3,457,796	4,813,522	20,590,654	25,306,724	-538,243	-526,268
Wisconsin	19,440,208	37,749,484	1,326,820	3,421,608	8,978,462	31,671,328	29,745,490	72,842,420	-13,424,556	-9,194,546
Wyoming	1,117,825	2,242,397	311,933	777,718	963,899	3,509,203	2,393,657	6,529,318	-1,591,072	-1,505,995
Total	**1,626,419,224**	**2,793,314,640**	**74,626,277**	**165,964,373**	**451,060,871**	**1,263,909,319**	**2,152,106,372**	**4,223,188,332**	**-204,948,238**	**-302,154,243**

1 This includes breakfasts and lunches served at no charge through the Seamless Summer Option (SSO). SSO breakfasts are normally served during summer breaks, extended breaks for year-round schools, and unanticipated school closures. During the 2021–2022 school year, the vast majority of breakfasts and lunches were served through SSO at no charge to all students through the pandemic child nutrition waivers.

2 Year-to-year fluctuations in the number of days of service can cause average daily participation to increase, even though fewer breakfasts or lunches are served (or vice versa).

Table 5: School Participation in School Lunch (NSLP) and School Breakfast (SBP), School Years 2021–2022 and 2022–2023

State	School Year 2021–2022			School Year 2022–2023		
	SBP Schools	NSLP Schools	SBP Schools as % of NSLP Schools	SBP Schools	NSLP Schools	SBP Schools as % of NSLP
Alabama	1,433	1,455	98.5%	1,443	1,468	98.3%
Alaska	384	414	92.8%	351	379	92.6%
Arizona	1,817	1,874	97.0%	1,743	1,794	97.2%
Arkansas	1,058	1,066	99.2%	1,061	1,073	98.9%
California	8,966	9,550	93.9%	9,756	9,808	99.5%
Colorado	1,589	1,750	90.8%	1,543	1,787	86.3%
Connecticut	951	1,038	91.6%	950	1,024	92.8%
Delaware	258	257	100.4%	253	252	100.4%
District of Columbia	257	257	100.0%	243	244	99.6%
Florida	3,233	3,286	98.4%	3,920	3,970	98.7%
Georgia	2,286	2,285	100.0%	2,339	2,345	99.7%
Hawaii	277	281	98.6%	254	257	98.8%
Idaho	640	663	96.5%	647	675	95.9%
Illinois	3,589	4,092	87.7%	3,533	4,028	87.7%
Indiana	1,947	2,085	93.4%	1,955	2,087	93.7%
Iowa	1,269	2,821	45.0%	1,259	1,340	94.0%
Kansas	1,309	1,372	95.4%	1,265	1,335	94.8%
Kentucky	1,296	1,300	99.7%	1,287	1,316	97.8%
Louisiana	1,409	1,469	95.9%	1,377	1,437	95.8%
Maine	575	593	97.0%	571	584	97.8%
Maryland	1,426	1,437	99.2%	1,432	1,446	99.0%
Massachusetts	1,949	2,121	91.9%	1,775	1,905	93.2%
Michigan	3,161	3,357	94.2%	3,101	3,224	96.2%
Minnesota	144	106	135.8%	1,743	1,908	91.4%
Mississippi	853	874	97.6%	853	877	97.3%
Missouri	2,272	2,381	95.4%	2,295	2,390	96.0%
Montana	745	789	94.4%	734	781	94.0%
Nebraska	789	923	85.5%	788	926	85.1%
Nevada	639	683	93.6%	572	597	95.8%
New Hampshire	415	442	93.9%	417	443	94.1%
New Jersey	3,622	3,565	101.6%	2,239	2,617	85.6%
New Mexico	833	859	97.0%	837	882	94.9%
New York	4,885	5,073	96.3%	4,767	4,973	95.9%
North Carolina	2,562	2,589	99.0%	2,527	2,555	98.9%
North Dakota	376	408	92.2%	376	405	92.8%
Ohio	3,273	3,552	92.1%	3,235	3,526	91.7%
Oklahoma	1,830	1,845	99.2%	1,819	1,830	99.4%
Oregon	218	237	92.0%	1,206	1,237	97.5%
Pennsylvania	2,299	2,393	96.1%	3,132	3,260	96.1%
Rhode Island	330	336	98.2%	328	333	98.5%
South Carolina[1]	—	—	—	1,174	1,175	99.9%
South Dakota	364	404	90.1%	162	185	87.6%
Tennessee	1,740	1,783	97.6%	1,742	1,759	99.0%
Texas	8,599	9,229	93.2%	8,559	8,521	100.4%
Utah	934	976	95.7%	923	956	96.5%
Vermont	317	320	99.1%	321	325	98.8%
Virginia	1,259	1,270	99.1%	1,958	1,961	99.8%
Washington	2,059	2,127	96.8%	2,054	2,131	96.4%
West Virginia	669	689	97.1%	682	689	99.0%
Wisconsin	639	669	95.5%	2,092	2,367	88.4%
Wyoming	293	311	94.2%	307	318	96.5%
Total	**84,037**	**89,656**	**93.7%**	**89,900**	**93,705**	**95.9%**

1 School data for South Carolina during the 2021–2022 school year was not available at the time of publication.

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Summer Nutrition Status Report

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Summer Nutrition Status Report

AUGUST 2024

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About FRAC

The Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) improves the nutrition, health, and well-being of people struggling against poverty-related hunger in the United States through advocacy, partnerships, and by advancing bold and equitable policy solutions. For more information about FRAC, or to sign up for FRAC's e-newsletters, go to www.frac.org.

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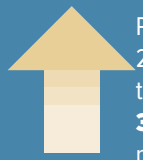
IN JULY 2023:

JUST OVER 2.8 MILLION CHILDREN participated in the Summer Nutrition Programs on an average day in July 2023. This was a **DECREASE** of almost **170,926 children** compared to July 2022.

Participation in summer lunch **DECREASED** by **5.7 percent** in July 2023 compared to July 2022.

15.3 CHILDREN received a summer lunch for every 100 who received a free or reduced-price school lunch during the 2022–2023 school year.



Participation in lunch in July 2023 was slightly **HIGHER** than pre-pandemic levels. **30,533 additional children** participated in July 2023 when compared to July 2019 (the last summer before the pandemic).

1.5 MILLION CHILDREN participated in breakfast in July 2023, 287,096 **FEWER** children than in July 2022.

Executive Summary

The Summer Nutrition Programs[1] are designed to replace the school breakfasts and lunches that millions of children lose access to when the school year ends. These programs play a vital role in helping to reduce food insecurity. Many summer meals sites also provide important educational and enrichment activities that keep children learning, engaged, active, and safe during summer break.

The summer of 2023 marked the return to normal operations for most summer meals sites. The nationwide pandemic-era waivers that allowed summer meals sites to operate in every community, and provided operational flexibilities, including a non-congregate waiver for families to pick up meals to take home instead of children eating meals at the site, were no longer available. The only remaining flexibility was non-congregate meal service in rural areas.[2] At the same time, many summer programs still struggled with staffing shortages resulting from both staff retention and staff burnout.[3] The end of the waivers, as well as additional challenges that many summer programs faced, impacted access to summer meals.

As a result, participation in the Summer Nutrition Programs decreased in July 2023 compared to July 2022 — and was only slightly higher than that of July 2019, the last summer before the pandemic.

KEY FINDINGS

- Just over **2.8 million children** participated in the Summer Nutrition Programs on an average day in July 2023. This was a **decrease of 170,926 children** compared to July 2022.
- Participation in summer lunch **decreased by 5.7 percent** in July 2023 compared to July 2022.
- In July 2023, **15.3 children** received a summer lunch for every 100 who received a free or reduced-price school lunch during the 2022–2023 school year.
- Participation in lunch in July 2023 was slightly **higher** than pre-pandemic levels. **30,533 additional children** participated in July 2023 when compared to July 2019 (the last summer before the pandemic).[4]
- 1.5 million children participated in breakfast in July 2023, **287,096 fewer children** than in July 2022.

Summer 2024 offers important and exciting opportunities to support access to summer nutrition and reverse the 2023 drop in participation. The new, nationwide Summer EBT Program (also called SUN Bucks) provides families with $120 in grocery benefits on an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card for every eligible child to offset the loss of school meals. The non-congregate option for rural communities (also called Sun Meals To-Go) provides an additional avenue to reach underserved children with limited access to summer meals.

As these new opportunities roll out, it is important that providing summer meals in combination with education and enrichment programming at sites remains the gold standard. Summer meals sites provide a place for children to socialize, learn, and be engaged while receiving a healthy meal, which can help counter both summer hunger and summer learning loss. Summer programming can also help foster social and emotional learning.[5]

On the federal level, Congress can make important improvements by allowing more communities to offer summer meals, streamlining program requirements so that sites can operate year-round, and allowing all sites to provide three meals a day. They can also provide additional funding to support summer programs, including through the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program.

As the first summer without the pandemic-era waiver options, summer 2023 data provides key insights into the function of the Summer Nutrition Programs and the role that they can and should play in supporting children and families during the summer, a time of increased childhood food insecurity[6] and learning loss for children from households with low incomes.[7] With the launch of the Summer EBT Program and the rural non-congregate option, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has taken the opportunity to recommit and reinvest in the summer feeding programs and has been engaging state child nutrition agencies, policymakers, educators, and anti-hunger advocates, to reenergize summer meals. This collaboration and investment are critical in ensuring that all children can access the nutrition and enrichment they need during the summer months.

About the *Summer Nutrition Status Report*

This report measures the reach of the Summer Nutrition Programs in July 2023, nationally and in each state[8], compared to July 2022. It is based on a variety of metrics and examines the impact of trends and policies on program participation.

First, this report looks at average weekday July lunch and breakfast participation in the Summer Nutrition Programs — the combined participation in the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), which includes children participating through the NSLP Seamless Summer Option and those certified for free and reduced-price meals. For lunch, the report uses average daily participation in free or reduced-price school meals in the preceding school year as a benchmark against which to compare summer.

Second, this report looks at the number of sponsors and sites operating SFSP in July, as this is an important indicator of access to the program for children from households with low incomes.

Finally, this report sets an ambitious but achievable goal of reaching 40 children with lunch during the month of July through the Summer Nutrition Programs for every 100 participating in free and reduced-price school lunch during the regular school year and calculates the number of unserved children and the federal dollars lost in each state that is not meeting this goal.

The Summer Nutrition Programs

The two federal Summer Nutrition Programs — the National School Lunch Program Seamless Summer Option (NSLP) and the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) — provide funding to serve meals and snacks to children at sites during summer vacation or the extended breaks of year-round schools. The programs also can be used to feed children during unanticipated school closures.

To qualify as a summer meals site, at least 50 percent of the children in the geographic area have to be eligible for free or reduced-price school meals; or at least 50 percent of the children participating in the program at the site have to be individually determined eligible for free or reduced-price school meals; or the children served have to be primarily migrant.[9] Once a site is determined eligible, all children who come to the site can eat for free. Summer camps also can participate, but they are only reimbursed for the meals served to children who are individually eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. Rural non-congregate sites can provide summer meals to children who are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals in areas that do not meet the 50 percent eligibility threshold. During summer school, NSLP also reimburses schools under the regular school rules, providing reimbursement for free, reduced-price, and paid meals served.

Public and private nonprofit schools, local government agencies, National Youth Sports Programs, and private nonprofit organizations, can participate in SFSP and sponsor one or more sites. Only schools are eligible to participate in NSLP (but the schools can use the NSLP Seamless Summer Option to provide meals and snacks at non-school and school sites). A sponsor enters into an agreement with their state agency to run the program and receives reimbursement for each eligible meal and snack served at meal sites. A site is the physical location where children receive meals during the summer. Sites work directly with sponsors. USDA provides the funding for these programs through a state agency in each state, usually the state department of education, health, or agriculture.

National Findings for July 2023

In July 2023, on an average weekday, the Summer Nutrition Programs served lunch to just over **2.8 million children**, a **DECREASE** of **170,926 children** compared to July 2022.

Participation in lunch in July 2023 was slightly **HIGHER** than pre-pandemic levels. **30,533 additional children** participated in July 2023 when compared to July 2019 (the last summer before the pandemic).[10]

In July 2023, **15.3 children** received summer lunch for every 100 children who received a free or reduced-price lunch in the 2022–2023 school year.

The number of SFSP sponsors and sites **INCREASED** from July 2022 to July 2023. Nationally, **4,671 sponsors** (an increase of 119 sponsors from 2022) and 35,578 sites (**an increase of 21 sites** from 2022) participated in July 2023.

The number of SFSP sponsors and sites operating in July 2023 was lower than that of pre-pandemic levels. When comparing July 2023 and July 2019, there is a **DECREASE** of **876 sponsors and 11,967 sites**.[11]

State Findings for July 2023

One state met the Food Research & Action Center's (FRAC) goal of reaching 40 children with summer lunch for every 100 children who received a school lunch during the 2022–2023 regular school year: **Vermont (54.4 to 100)**. Only one state hitting the benchmark could be a result of states adjusting to the end of pandemic-era waivers for summer meals and challenges faced by summer programs.

The **top state** performers were: **Vermont** (54.4 to 100), **New Mexico** (32.3 to 100), **Maine** (31.8 to 100), **Montana** (29.7 to 100), **New Jersey** (29.5 to 100), and **New York** (29.0 to 100).

Thirty-nine states provided summer lunch to **FEWER** than one child for every five children who participated in free or reduced-price school lunch during the 2022–2023 school year.

28 states and the District of Columbia saw a **DECREASE** in the average daily participation in the Summer Nutrition Programs in July 2023 compared to July 2022.[12]

Snapshot of Breakfast Participation in July 2023

- Just over **1.5 million children** received a breakfast through the Summer Nutrition Programs on an average day in July 2023. This was a **DECREASE** of **287,096 children** (15.9 percent) compared to July 2022.
- Nationally, **54.1 children** received a breakfast for every 100 who received a lunch through the Summer Nutrition Programs.
- Participation in breakfast in July 2023 was also slightly **LOWER** than pre-pandemic levels: **2,886 fewer children** received a summer breakfast in July 2023 compared to July 2019 (the last summer before the pandemic).[13]

2024 and Beyond: Expanding Access to the Summer Nutrition Programs

Programmatic Opportunities

- **Leverage summer learning funding:** The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 included $30 billion in funding that could be used to support summer and afterschool programs. By making this historic increased investment in federal afterschool and summer programs funding, more families with low incomes will have access to the enrichment and educational programs that provide an important foundation for summer meals. This is the last year for states to distribute this funding, and many still have dollars on the table.
- **Engage governors and elected officials:** Governors and elected officials can play a critical role in establishing and strengthening statewide summer meals expansion efforts. For example, governors can work with the state agency to set expansion goals, create a statewide summer meals workgroup, and help raise awareness about the availability of summer meals. This will be especially important as states utilize federal funding for the roll out of the new Summer EBT Program and the rural non-congregate option. Learn more about strategies to engage governors here.
- **Support and retain sponsors and sites:** Sponsors and sites increased in 2023. To help ensure that they continue to participate, state agencies and advocates can help with outreach and promotion. They also can survey and connect with sponsors to provide additional support to overcome challenges and identify opportunities for growth.

The Permanent Summer EBT Program

The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2022 created a nationwide, permanent Summer EBT Program that builds on the success of Summer EBT demonstration projects.

Summer EBT — which provides families with eligible children grocery benefits to purchase food — was piloted to test new ways to reach children during the summer due to the limited access children had to summer meals and the seasonal increase in food insecurity in households with school-age children. Evaluations of Summer EBT have shown that it reduces food insecurity and improves nutrition.[14] Families in participating states will receive $120 per eligible child beginning in summer 2024.

Summer EBT complements the existing Summer Nutrition Programs; together, these two programs work to decrease summer hunger. Summer EBT is an important nutrition support for families, but it works out to be about $1.33 per child per day and is not enough to cover a child's nutritional needs. The Summer Nutrition Programs provide a maximum of two meals each day at most sites, which is less than the breakfast, lunch, supper, and snack that children can receive on school days during the school year. In addition, most summer meals sites also provide educational, enrichment, or recreational activities that keep children learning.

Children only have access to Summer EBT benefits if their state opts in to the program. In summer 2024, 13 states are not implementing the Summer EBT Program. This report shows the limited reach of summer meals: Mississippi, the highest performing state in the Summer Nutrition Programs out of those opting out of Summer EBT, only reached one child in 2023 for every four who received a free or reduced-price school lunch during the 2022–2023 school year, further highlighting the need for all states to implement Summer EBT.

To learn more, read FRAC's fact sheet: *The Importance of Summer EBT: Why States Must Operate Summer EBT and Summer Nutrition Programs*.

Policy Opportunities

- **Lower the area eligibility threshold:** Lowering the eligibility threshold from 50 percent to 40 percent, or setting an even lower threshold, would allow more communities to serve children whose families are struggling and would improve access to summer meals in every state. The 50 percent threshold for participating keeps many communities where poverty is less concentrated, such as rural and suburban areas, from participating.
- **Streamline the Summer Food Service Program and Afterschool Meal Program:** Many sites that operate the Summer Food Service Program also serve meals after school during the school year through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). Allowing SFSP sponsors to operate year-round would encourage overall program retention as well as eliminate duplicative and burdensome paperwork while supporting sponsors' efforts to serve more children in their community. Currently, sponsors must apply for and operate two separate programs despite the fact they often serve the same children.
- **Allow all summer meals sites to serve three meals:** Allowing all summer sites to serve three meals would align summer with the school year, when children can receive breakfast and lunch at school and a supper and snack at an afterschool program. Presently, most sites can only provide a maximum of two meals per day.
- **Permanently increase federal funding for summer (and afterschool) programs:** This will help ensure that all children have access to the nutritious meals and high-quality programming they need during the summer (and after school).

Updating the Summer Food Nutrition Standards

In April 2024, USDA published updates to the school nutrition standards that better align school meals with the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020–2025*. These research-based standards improve the nutritional quality of school meals by limiting sodium content, maintaining whole grain requirements, and, for the first time, implementing a limit on the added sugar content of meals served. Schools participating in the Seamless Summer Option will be required to adhere to these updated nutrition standards. While substantive nutrition changes were not made to the Summer Food Service Program in the new rule, USDA communicated in the proposed rule that they intend to comprehensively address the SFSP meal pattern in a future rulemaking. Updating the SFSP meal pattern creates an important opportunity to ensure that healthier meals are being served during the summer months, a time when rates of obesity and food insecurity increase for too many children. It is important for USDA to move swiftly on the rulemaking process for SFSP to ensure that all children have access to healthy, high-quality meals year-round.

Non-Congregate in Rural Areas

The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2022 included a permanent non-congregate meals service option for rural areas. The goal of this option is to fill gaps in rural communities that do not have congregate meals sites. USDA issued an Interim Final Rule in December 2023, which supports the implementation of rural non-congregate meals service and expands the definition of rural, allowing more communities to provide non-congregate meals in summer 2024.

Conclusion

Participation in the Summer Nutrition Programs decreased in summer 2023 from 2022. The pandemic child nutrition waivers, which allowed all communities to operate summer meals sites and to offer widespread non-congregate meals, came to an end, limiting access to summer meals.

Summer 2024 offers important opportunities to increase access to summer nutrition through efforts to support and expand summer programming, the provision of non-congregate meals in underserved rural areas, and the permanent Summer EBT Program. Maximizing the opportunities that are available this summer and beyond will be critical to ensuring that children have the nutrition, and the education and enrichment programming, they need to return to school well-nourished and ready to learn. Now is the time to recommit to ending summer hunger.

Technical Notes

The data in this report are collected from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) also conducted a survey of state child nutrition officials to collect information on program operations. Thirty-seven states responded to that survey.

This report does not include the Summer Nutrition Programs in Puerto Rico, Guam, the Virgin Islands, or Department of Defense schools.

Due to rounding, totals in the tables may not add up to 100 percent.

Summer Food Service Program During the Summer

USDA provided the number of Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) lunches and SFSP breakfasts served in each state to the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC). FRAC calculated each state's July average daily lunch participation and daily breakfast participation in SFSP by dividing the total number of SFSP lunches and breakfasts served in July by the total number of weekdays in July (excluding the Independence Day holiday or the day that it is observed if not July Fourth).

The average daily breakfast and lunch participation numbers for July reported in FRAC's analysis are slightly different from USDA's average daily participation numbers. FRAC's revised measure allows consistent comparisons from state to state and year to year. This measure also is more in line with the average daily lunch participation numbers in the school year National School Lunch Program, as described on the next page. FRAC uses July data, as the start and end dates for summer vacation vary by state and school district, making the number of serving days in those months inconsistent. It is important

to note that children served meals in rural areas through the non-congregate option can impact the average daily participation since multiple meals can be provided to the same child, increasing the number of meals a child receives as opposed to increasing the number of children served.

USDA obtains the July numbers of SFSP sponsors and sites from the states and reports them as the states provide them. USDA does not report the number of sponsors or sites for June or August.

NSLP During the School Year

Using data provided by USDA, FRAC calculated the regular school year NSLP average daily attendance for students from households with low incomes for each state, based on the number of free and reduced-price meals served from September through May.

NSLP During the Summer

FRAC used the July average daily attendance figures provided by USDA for the summertime NSLP and School Breakfast Program (SBP) participation data in this report. The NSLP summer meals numbers include all free and reduced-price lunches served through NSLP during July, which includes lunches served during summer school and on regular school days (during July). FRAC then included USDA-provided daily attendance data on breakfasts and lunches served through the SBP and NSLP Seamless Summer Option.

Note that USDA calculates average daily participation in the regular school year NSLP by dividing the average daily lunch figures by an attendance factor (0.927) to account for children who were absent from school on a particular day. FRAC's annual The Reach of School Meals reports these NSLP average daily participation numbers; that is, including the attendance factor. To make the NSLP numbers consistent with the SFSP numbers, for which there is no analogous attendance factor, this *Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation* report does not include the attendance factor. As a result, the regular school year NSLP numbers in this report do not match the NSLP numbers in FRAC's *The Reach of School Meals, School Year 2022–2023*.

Cost of Low Participation

For each state, FRAC calculated the average daily number of children receiving summer lunch in July for every 100 children receiving free or reduced-price lunches during the regular school year. FRAC then calculated the number of additional children who would be reached if that state achieved a 40 to 100 ratio of summer nutrition to regular school year lunch participation. FRAC then multiplied this unserved population by the summer lunch reimbursement rate for the number of weekdays (not counting the Independence Day holiday) in July. FRAC assumed each meal is reimbursed at the lowest standard rate available ($4.87 per lunch for July 2023).

Data Table Changes

Note that unlike in previous reports Table 1 does not include data for school year 2021–2022 lunch participation or the ratio of 2022 summer lunch participation compared to school year 2021–2022 lunch participation. This is due to changes in program operations that make it difficult to compare school year 2021–2022 data to school year 2022–2023 data. During school year

2021–2022, schools were able to offer meals to all students at no charge, and the breakfasts and lunches served were counted as "free meals." This was available through the pandemic child nutrition waivers. In the 2022–2023 school year, schools returned to claiming meals as free, reduced-price, or paid. Therefore, the ratio of summer lunch to NSLP, and rank, do not allow for a consistent comparison. Included in Table 1 of this report is the 2022–2023 NSLP average daily participation (ADP) for free and reduced-price meals, the ratio of summer nutrition to that ADP, and the state rank based on that ratio. The NSLP data points for school year 2021–2022 can be found in Table 1 in last year's report.

Endnotes

1 The Summer Nutrition Programs include the Summer Food Service Program and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), which includes the Seamless Summer Option available through NSLP.

2 This designation refers to the rural definition in 2023. USDA redefined its definition of rural in 2024 to expand what areas are covered by the non-congregate option.

3 Early Learning Resource Center (2024). Afterschool Alliance and NAA Partner for Afterschool Workforce Initiative. Available at: https://elrc5.alleghenycounty.us/news/afterschool-alliance-and-naa-partner-for-afterschool-workforce-initiative.

4 Food Research & Action Center. (2020). *Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation: Summer Breakfast Status Report*. Available at: https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/FRAC-SummerBreakfastReport2020.pdf.

5 National Summer Learning Association. (2022). The Evidence Base for Summer Enrichment and Comprehensive Afterschool Opportunities. Available at: https://www.summerlearning.org/knowledge-center/investing-arp-funds/.

6 Huang, J., Barnidge, E., & Kim, Y. (2015). Children Receiving Free or Reduced Price School Lunch Have Higher Food Insufficiency Rates in Summer. The Journal of Nutrition, 145(9), 2161–2168. https://doi.org/10.3945/jn.115.214486.

7 Hartline-Grafton, Heather. Food Research & Action Center (2019). *Summer Nutrition and Enrichment Programs: Effective Tools to Support Child Food Security, Health, and Learning During the Summertime*. Available at: https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/summer-nutrition-and-enrichment-programs.pdf.

8 This report does not include Minnesota data from summer 2022, which was under review by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service at the time of publication.

9 During summer 2022, USDA extended the pandemic child nutrition waiver that allowed summer meal sites to operate in any community without meeting the 50 percent eligibility threshold.

10 Food Research & Action Center. (2020). *Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation: Summer Breakfast Status Report*. Available at: https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/FRAC-SummerBreakfastReport2020.pdf.

11 Food Research & Action Center. (2020). *Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation: Summer Breakfast Status Report*. Available at: https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/FRAC-SummerBreakfastReport2020.pdf.

12 This report does not include Minnesota data from summer 2022, which was under review by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service at the time of publication.

13 Food Research & Action Center. (2022). *Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation: Summer Nutrition Status Report*. Available at: https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/Summer-Report-2022_final.pdf.

14 U.S. Department of Agriculture (2024). Summary of the Evaluation of the USDA Summer EBT (Electronic Benefits Transfer) Demonstrations: Lessons Learned From More Than a Decade of Research. Available at: https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/ops-sebt-summary.pdf.

Table 1: Average Daily Participation (ADP) in Summer Lunch[1] in July 2023, Compared to ADP in Summer Lunch in July 2022 and Regular School Year Free and Reduced-Price National School Lunch Program (NSLP)[2] ADP for School Year 2022–2023, by State

State	Summer Lunch ADP July 2022	Summer Lunch ADP July 2023	Free and Reduced-Price NSLP ADP 2022–2023	Ratio[3] of Summer Lunch to NSLP 2022–2023	Rank 2023	Percent Change in Summer Lunch ADP 2022 to 2023
Alabama	29,461	24,309	347,785	7.0	46	-17.5%
Alaska	2,104	1,690	29,003	5.8	50	-19.7%
Arizona	54,068	65,728	351,757	18.7	16	21.6%
Arkansas	31,390	34,484	202,165	17.1	20	9.9%
California	453,014	421,193	2,034,321	20.7	12	-7.0%
Colorado	21,169	18,773	176,135	10.7	42	-11.3%
Connecticut	36,034	34,501	179,922	19.2	15	-4.3%
Delaware	10,107	10,015	50,134	20.0	13	-0.9%
District of Columbia	9,685	8,896	37,538	23.7	11	-8.1%
Florida	162,002	147,046	1,323,506	11.1	41	-9.2%
Georgia[4]	147,875	124,471	730,350	17.0	21	-15.8%
Hawaii	6,518	13,267	52,140	25.4	9	103.5%
Idaho	12,487	10,711	66,357	16.1	26	-14.2%
Illinois	68,012	73,399	646,033	11.4	40	7.9%
Indiana	54,445	72,267	418,515	17.3	19	32.7%
Iowa	18,353	19,975	173,365	11.5	39	8.8%
Kansas	34,220	23,551	164,544	14.3	28	-31.2%
Kentucky	47,169	62,995	388,247	16.2	25	33.6%
Louisiana	17,764	30,323	383,522	7.9	45	70.7%
Maine	14,395	12,672	39,826	31.8	3	-12.0%
Maryland	90,846	63,882	267,707	23.9	10	-29.7%
Massachusetts	71,176	61,892	318,197	19.5	14	-13.0%
Michigan	68,790	69,422	523,037	13.3	33	0.9%
Minnesota[5]	NA	44,997	255,543	17.6	18	NA
Mississippi	30,187	61,628	238,472	25.8	8	104.2%
Missouri	31,298	23,253	280,374	8.3	44	-25.7%
Montana	10,014	11,215	37,702	29.7	4	12.0%
Nebraska	4,682	4,826	122,159	4.0	51	3.1%
Nevada	15,252	9,483	160,636	5.9	49	-37.8%
New Hampshire	5,860	4,124	23,403	17.6	17	-29.6%
New Jersey	266,223	103,642	351,084	29.5	5	-61.1%
New Mexico	40,864	44,325	137,330	32.3	2	8.5%
New York	425,114	346,645	1,194,259	29.0	6	-18.5%
North Carolina	70,092	65,488	545,596	12.0	38	-6.6%
North Dakota	3,755	4,174	29,914	14.0	30	11.2%
Ohio	52,946	65,572	512,461	12.8	36	23.8%
Oklahoma	16,155	16,185	251,206	6.4	48	0.2%
Oregon	26,881	25,042	149,106	16.8	22	-6.8%
Pennsylvania	74,976	73,549	611,058	12.0	37	-1.9%
Rhode Island	8,550	5,486	39,833	13.8	32	-35.8%
South Carolina	41,609	84,264	313,375	26.9	7	102.5%
South Dakota	5,597	5,338	38,358	13.9	31	-4.6%
Tennessee	48,227	64,828	387,019	16.8	23	34.4%
Texas	143,716	170,901	2,454,027	7.0	47	18.9%
Utah	16,951	17,282	119,805	14.4	27	1.9%
Vermont	13,127	10,319	18,959	54.4	1	-21.4%
Virginia	68,699	57,314	436,215	13.1	34	-16.6%
Washington	30,880	25,549	283,925	9.0	43	-17.3%
West Virginia	14,200	16,146	124,991	12.9	35	13.7%
Wisconsin	39,307	34,549	247,022	14.0	29	-12.1%
Wyoming	9,400	3,126	18,836	16.6	24	-66.7%
U.S.	**2,975,642**	**2,804,716**	**18,286,774**	**15.3**		**-5.7%**

1 Summer Lunch includes the lunches served through the Summer Food Service Program and the free and reduced-price lunches served through National School Lunch Program, including the Seamless Summer Option.

2 School Year NSLP numbers reflect free and reduced-price lunch participation during the regular school year.

3 Ratio of Summer Lunch to NSLP is the number of children in Summer Lunch per 100 receiving free or reduced-price lunch through NSLP.

4 NSLP ADP includes free and reduced-price lunches, including the Seamless Summer Option.

5 2022 data for Minnesota is not available.

Table 2: Change in Summer Food Service Program Average Daily Lunch Participation (ADP); and in National School Lunch Program (NSLP) ADP[1] from July 2022 to July 2023, by State

State	SFSP Lunch ADP July 2022	SFSP Lunch ADP July 2023	SFSP ADP Percent Change 2022–2023	NSLP ADP July 2022	NSLP ADP July 2023	NSLP ADP Percent Change 2022–2023
Alabama	15,710	15,862	1.0%	13,751	8,447	-38.6%
Alaska	1,759	1,261	-28.3%	345	429	24.5%
Arizona	8,329	8,470	1.7%	45,739	57,257	25.2%
Arkansas	7,467	9,365	25.4%	23,923	25,119	5.0%
California	103,385	42,992	-58.4%	349,629	378,201	8.2%
Colorado	20,895	17,456	-16.5%	274	1,317	380.9%
Connecticut	25,850	25,444	-1.6%	10,184	9,057	-11.1%
Delaware	9,251	9,630	4.1%	855	385	-55.0%
District of Columbia	7,165	7,384	3.1%	2,520	1,512	-40.0%
Florida	117,200	98,195	-16.2%	44,802	48,851	9.0%
Georgia	37,491	36,165	-3.5%	110,383	88,306	-20.0%
Hawaii	2,094	13,071	524.2%	4,424	196	-95.6%
Idaho	11,761	10,241	-12.9%	726	470	-35.3%
Illinois	51,507	56,743	10.2%	16,505	16,656	0.9%
Indiana	23,028	22,033	-4.3%	31,417	50,234	59.9%
Iowa	12,617	18,661	47.9%	5,736	1,314	-77.1%
Kansas	21,180	21,671	2.3%	13,040	1,880	-85.6%
Kentucky	40,870	61,988	51.7%	6,299	1,008	-84.0%
Louisiana	14,625	26,782	83.1%	3,139	3,541	12.8%
Maine	13,515	12,290	-9.1%	879	382	-56.5%
Maryland	89,667	62,515	-30.3%	1,180	1,368	15.9%
Massachusetts	51,613	50,749	-1.7%	19,563	11,143	-43.0%
Michigan	58,103	58,561	0.8%	10,687	10,861	1.6%
Minnesota[2]	NA	34,688	NA	NA	10,309	NA
Mississippi	9,458	7,875	-16.7%	20,730	53,753	159.3%
Missouri	20,551	17,271	-16.0%	10,747	5,982	-44.3%
Montana	9,508	10,741	13.0%	507	474	-6.4%
Nebraska	4,207	4,229	0.5%	474	598	25.9%
Nevada	13,160	7,840	-40.4%	2,092	1,642	-21.5%
New Hampshire	4,160	3,382	-18.7%	1,700	742	-56.3%
New Jersey	108,913	86,820	-20.3%	157,309	16,821	-89.3%
New Mexico	9,599	10,450	8.9%	31,265	33,876	8.4%
New York	354,258	258,451	-27.0%	70,856	88,194	24.5%
North Carolina	47,702	45,744	-4.1%	22,389	19,744	-11.8%
North Dakota	3,598	4,008	11.4%	157	166	5.3%
Ohio	37,797	46,927	24.2%	15,149	18,645	23.1%
Oklahoma	12,874	13,989	8.7%	3,280	2,196	-33.1%
Oregon	22,639	21,966	-3.0%	4,242	3,076	-27.5%
Pennsylvania	51,299	44,436	-13.4%	23,677	29,114	23.0%
Rhode Island	6,500	5,149	-20.8%	2,050	336	-83.6%
South Carolina	14,081	15,360	9.1%	27,528	68,904	150.3%
South Dakota	3,917	3,870	-1.2%	1,680	1,468	-12.6%
Tennessee	22,024	26,363	19.7%	26,202	38,465	46.8%
Texas	57,313	42,492	-25.9%	86,403	128,409	48.6%
Utah	1,941	2,262	16.5%	15,010	15,020	0.1%
Vermont	12,997	10,236	-21.2%	130	83	-36.0%
Virginia	51,185	44,723	-12.6%	17,514	12,591	-28.1%
Washington	27,689	22,790	-17.7%	3,191	2,759	-13.5%
West Virginia	13,423	15,316	14.1%	777	831	7.0%
Wisconsin	31,229	30,733	-1.6%	8,078	3,816	-52.8%
Wyoming	7,301	2,921	-60.0%	2,099	206	-90.2%
U.S.	**1,704,406**	**1,528,559**	**-10.3%**	**1,271,236**	**1,276,157**	**0.4%**

1 NSLP ADP includes free and reduced-price lunches, including the Seamless Summer Option.

2 2022 data for Minnesota is not available.

Table 3: Change in Number of Summer Food Service Program Sponsors and Sites from July 2022 to July 2023, by State

State	Sponsors July 2022	Sponsors July 2023	Sponsors Percent Change	Sites July 2022	Sites July 2023	Sites Percent Change
Alabama	57	47	-17.5%	517	355	-31.3%
Alaska	15	15	0.0%	81	70	-13.6%
Arizona	19	24	26.3%	203	274	35.0%
Arkansas	65	61	-6.2%	179	213	19.0%
California	117	114	-2.6%	1,739	1,135	-34.7%
Colorado	61	65	6.6%	441	467	5.9%
Connecticut	40	40	0.0%	481	462	-4.0%
Delaware	29	31	6.9%	284	290	2.1%
District of Columbia	9	10	11.1%	205	173	-15.6%
Florida	96	90	-6.3%	2,627	2,442	-7.0%
Georgia	60	69	15.0%	773	966	25.0%
Hawaii	13	10	-23.1%	88	115	30.7%
Idaho	53	72	35.8%	178	258	44.9%
Illinois	130	125	-3.8%	1,570	1,509	-3.9%
Indiana	163	164	0.6%	818	810	-1.0%
Iowa	108	119	10.2%	365	400	9.6%
Kansas	103	119	15.5%	374	417	11.5%
Kentucky	128	139	8.6%	1,385	1,441	4.0%
Louisiana	69	63	-8.7%	449	464	3.3%
Maine	116	106	-8.6%	445	410	-7.9%
Maryland	39	39	0.0%	1,389	1,326	-4.5%
Massachusetts	112	116	3.6%	1,101	1,091	-0.9%
Michigan	351	368	4.8%	1,398	1,372	-1.9%
Minnesota[1]	NA	154	NA	NA	690	NA
Mississippi	57	50	-12.3%	230	193	-16.1%
Missouri	126	122	-3.2%	703	515	-26.7%
Montana	91	94	3.3%	243	236	-2.9%
Nebraska	58	59	1.7%	141	156	10.6%
Nevada	20	15	-25.0%	266	242	-9.0%
New Hampshire	21	20	-4.8%	142	179	26.1%
New Jersey	152	168	10.5%	1,187	1,253	5.6%
New Mexico	23	28	21.7%	328	344	4.9%
New York	488	448	-8.2%	2,278	2,555	12.2%
North Carolina	110	120	9.1%	1,564	1,751	12.0%
North Dakota	33	36	9.1%	100	155	55.0%
Ohio	130	130	0.0%	1,213	1,204	-0.7%
Oklahoma	53	47	-11.3%	499	441	-11.6%
Oregon	113	107	-5.3%	659	592	-10.2%
Pennsylvania	222	214	-3.6%	1,582	1,750	10.6%
Rhode Island	28	25	-10.7%	200	183	-8.5%
South Carolina	41	42	2.4%	787	729	-7.4%
South Dakota	36	32	-11.1%	77	68	-11.7%
Tennessee	42	40	-4.8%	757	953	25.9%
Texas	123	100	-18.7%	1,983	1,439	-27.4%
Utah	11	7	-36.4%	87	98	12.6%
Vermont	58	55	-5.2%	261	252	-3.4%
Virginia	113	116	2.7%	1,111	994	-10.5%
Washington	164	149	-9.1%	795	774	-2.6%
West Virginia	88	89	1.1%	442	563	27.4%
Wisconsin	174	169	-2.9%	757	720	-4.9%
Wyoming	24	29	20.8%	75	89	18.7%
U.S.	**4,552**	**4,671**	**2.6%**	**35,557**	**35,578**	**0.1%**

1 2022 data for Minnesota is not available.

Table 4: Number of Summer Food Service Program Lunches Served in June, July[1], and August 2022 and 2023, by State

State	Lunches June 2022	Lunches June 2023	Percent Change June	Lunches July 2022	Lunches July 2023	Percent Change July	Lunches August 2022	Lunches August 2023	Percent Change August
Alabama	629,841	570,243	-9.5%	314,207	317,240	1.0%	7,570	18,785	148.2%
Alaska	54,239	49,032	-9.6%	35,180	25,218	-28.3%	11,634	8,578	-26.3%
Arizona	210,842	513,927	143.7%	166,585	169,409	1.7%	3,840	6,008	56.5%
Arkansas	171,997	196,982	14.5%	149,334	187,300	25.4%	64,050	51,030	-20.3%
California	1,326,248	708,302	-46.6%	2,067,706	859,841	-58.4%	554,345	221,303	-60.1%
Colorado	681,719	587,639	-13.8%	417,909	349,123	-16.5%	77,804	52,553	-32.5%
Connecticut	53,048	78,917	48.8%	517,008	508,884	-1.6%	202,987	145,468	-28.3%
Delaware	64,442	71,357	10.7%	185,027	192,595	4.1%	78,726	74,065	-5.9%
District of Columbia	787	17,941	2,179.7%	143,301	147,677	3.1%	61,900	55,267	-10.7%
Florida	4,256,797	2,950,090	-30.7%	2,344,002	1,963,898	-16.2%	72,348	123,238	70.3%
Georgia	704,536	762,123	8.2%	749,829	723,301	-3.5%	40,011	22,694	-43.3%
Hawaii	66,274	183,732	177.2%	41,882	261,420	524.2%	0	15,653	
Idaho	318,849	314,498	-1.4%	235,226	204,815	-12.9%	67,194	43,182	-35.7%
Illinois	420,450	742,765	76.7%	1,030,136	1,134,868	10.2%	287,465	195,380	-32.0%
Indiana	785,198	887,905	13.1%	460,556	440,668	-4.3%	27,115	27,039	-0.3%
Iowa	221,121	499,780	126.0%	252,345	373,226	47.9%	64,874	84,078	29.6%
Kansas	645,528	796,408	23.4%	423,600	433,422	2.3%	33,239	27,107	-18.4%
Kentucky	690,597	1,368,923	98.2%	817,396	1,239,756	51.7%	200,108	205,453	2.7%
Louisiana	451,191	1,276,197	182.9%	292,506	535,634	83.1%	15,612	33,579	115.1%
Maine	43,159	57,543	33.3%	270,309	245,791	-9.1%	114,037	98,409	-13.7%
Maryland	6,753	181,121	2,582.1%	1,793,331	1,250,291	-30.3%	1,467,216	643,005	-56.2%
Massachusetts	77,796	87,588	12.6%	1,032,257	1,014,987	-1.7%	613,197	452,226	-26.3%
Michigan	442,636	637,597	44.0%	1,162,061	1,171,219	0.8%	706,241	603,961	-14.5%
Minnesota[2]	NA	494,029	NA	NA	693,759	NA	NA	358,894	NA
Mississippi	330,075	520,657	57.7%	189,153	157,494	-16.7%	3,397	2,122	-37.5%
Missouri	1,103,571	1,338,935	21.3%	411,011	345,423	-16.0%	182,995	132,626	-27.5%
Montana	174,864	210,807	20.6%	190,150	214,822	13.0%	94,187	106,385	13.0%
Nebraska	269,850	327,529	21.4%	84,145	84,574	0.5%	8,770	8,770	0.0%
Nevada	473,826	472,890	-0.2%	263,198	156,806	-40.4%	119,652	61,364	-48.7%
New Hampshire	11,743	10,796	-8.1%	83,194	67,633	-18.7%	37,345	34,639	-7.2%
New Jersey	92,827	123,771	33.3%	2,178,263	1,736,409	-20.3%	2,403,311	837,324	-65.2%
New Mexico	258,916	330,346	27.6%	191,979	208,994	8.9%	7,103	4,773	-32.8%
New York	131,366	251,027	91.1%	7,085,159	5,169,014	-27.0%	8,306,078	3,418,294	-58.8%
North Carolina	617,067	831,684	34.8%	954,046	914,873	-4.1%	326,924	280,573	-14.2%
North Dakota	109,703	155,442	41.7%	71,953	80,165	11.4%	26,166	25,854	-1.2%
Ohio	830,702	967,980	16.5%	755,944	938,538	24.2%	319,942	353,508	10.5%
Oklahoma	221,127	496,022	124.3%	257,482	279,789	8.7%	46,128	41,364	-10.3%
Oregon	139,912	145,879	4.3%	452,783	439,329	-3.0%	287,802	218,675	-24.0%
Pennsylvania	388,002	401,340	3.4%	1,025,974	888,711	-13.4%	1,304,088	438,963	-66.3%
Rhode Island	11,394	9,240	-18.9%	130,009	102,981	-20.8%	67,397	52,035	-22.8%
South Carolina	373,791	347,132	-7.1%	281,610	307,204	9.1%	81,689	46,017	-43.7%
South Dakota	109,745	114,457	4.3%	78,331	77,392	-1.2%	24,372	20,308	-16.7%
Tennessee	613,253	1,072,965	75.0%	440,487	527,250	19.7%	11,080	26,184	136.3%
Texas	2,037,568	1,818,068	-10.8%	1,146,263	849,842	-25.9%	347,195	218,220	-37.1%
Utah	40,063	59,922	49.6%	38,827	45,233	16.5%	12,411	12,906	4.0%
Vermont	33,909	35,057	3.4%	259,936	204,714	-21.2%	108,898	107,923	-0.9%
Virginia	369,389	464,781	25.8%	1,023,693	894,456	-12.6%	271,044	199,273	-26.5%
Washington	170,016	145,271	-14.6%	553,773	455,795	-17.7%	246,166	210,773	-14.4%
West Virginia	179,641	226,381	26.0%	268,463	306,314	14.1%	159,779	61,509	-61.5%
Wisconsin	607,867	695,288	14.4%	624,581	614,663	-1.6%	260,677	231,262	-11.3%
Wyoming	111,411	68,655	-38.4%	146,019	58,413	-60.0%	23,910	18,057	-24.5%
U.S.	**22,135,646**	**25,676,961**	**16.0%**	**34,088,119**	**30,571,173**	**-10.3%**	**19,860,019**	**10,736,656**	**-45.9%**

1 The Average Daily Participation (ADP) in the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) is calculated by dividing the total number of SFSP lunches served in July by the total number of weekdays in July, minus the Independence Day Holiday.

2 2022 data for Minnesota is not available.

Table 5: Average Daily Participation (ADP) in Summer Lunch[1] and Additional ADP and Additional Federal Reimbursement if States Reached FRAC's Goal of 40 Summer Lunch Participants per 100 Regular School Year Lunch Participants[2]

State	Summer Lunch ADP, July 2023	Ratio of Summer Lunch to NSLP[3]	Total Summer Lunch ADP if Summer Lunch to NSLP Ratio Reached 40:100	Additional Summer Lunch ADP if Summer Lunch to NSLP Ratio Reached 40:100	Additional Federal Reimbursement Dollars if Summer Lunch to NSLP Ratio Reached 40:100[4]
Alabama	24,309	7.0	139,114	114,805	$11,182,008
Alaska	1,690	5.8	11,601	9,911	$965,340
Arizona	65,728	18.7	140,703	74,975	$7,302,552
Arkansas	34,484	17.1	80,866	46,382	$4,517,606
California	421,193	20.7	813,729	392,535	$38,232,915
Colorado	18,773	10.7	70,454	51,681	$5,033,756
Connecticut	34,501	19.2	71,969	37,468	$3,649,363
Delaware	10,015	20.0	20,054	10,039	$977,792
District of Columbia	8,896	23.7	15,015	6,119	$596,001
Florida	147,046	11.1	529,402	382,356	$37,241,485
Georgia	124,471	17.0	292,140	167,669	$16,330,926
Hawaii	13,267	25.4	20,856	7,589	$739,204
Idaho	10,711	16.1	26,543	15,832	$1,542,079
Illinois	73,399	11.4	258,413	185,014	$18,020,381
Indiana	72,267	17.3	167,406	95,139	$9,266,504
Iowa	19,975	11.5	69,346	49,371	$4,808,756
Kansas	23,551	14.3	65,818	42,266	$4,116,740
Kentucky	62,995	16.2	155,299	92,303	$8,990,344
Louisiana	30,323	7.9	153,409	123,086	$11,988,555
Maine	12,672	31.8	15,930	3,259	$317,383
Maryland	63,882	23.9	107,083	43,201	$4,207,740
Massachusetts	61,892	19.5	127,279	65,386	$6,368,618
Michigan	69,422	13.3	209,215	139,792	$13,615,783
Minnesota	44,997	17.6	102,217	57,220	$5,573,262
Mississippi	61,628	25.8	95,389	33,761	$3,288,291
Missouri	23,253	8.3	112,150	88,896	$8,658,478
Montana	11,215	29.7	15,081	3,865	$376,497
Nebraska	4,826	4.0	48,864	44,037	$4,289,252
Nevada	9,483	5.9	64,255	54,772	$5,334,768
New Hampshire	4,124	17.6	9,361	5,237	$510,124
New Jersey	103,642	29.5	140,433	36,791	$3,583,489
New Mexico	44,325	32.3	54,932	10,607	$1,033,096
New York	346,645	29.0	477,704	131,059	$12,765,121
North Carolina	65,488	12.0	218,239	152,751	$14,877,921
North Dakota	4,174	14.0	11,966	7,792	$758,913
Ohio	65,572	12.8	204,984	139,412	$13,578,734
Oklahoma	16,185	6.4	100,483	84,297	$8,210,564
Oregon	25,042	16.8	59,642	34,600	$3,370,031
Pennsylvania	73,549	12.0	244,423	170,874	$16,643,139
Rhode Island	5,486	13.8	15,933	10,448	$1,017,609
South Carolina	84,264	26.9	125,350	41,086	$4,001,762
South Dakota	5,338	13.9	15,343	10,005	$974,518
Tennessee	64,828	16.8	154,808	89,980	$8,764,049
Texas	170,901	7.0	981,611	810,710	$78,963,108
Utah	17,282	14.4	47,922	30,640	$2,984,362
Vermont	10,319	54.4	7,583	Met Goal	Met Goal
Virginia	57,314	13.1	174,486	117,172	$11,412,526
Washington	25,549	9.0	113,570	88,021	$8,573,235
West Virginia	16,146	12.9	49,996	33,850	$3,296,993
Wisconsin	34,549	14.0	98,809	64,259	$6,258,859
Wyoming	3,126	16.6	7,534	4,408	$429,332
U.S.	**2,804,716**	**15.3**	**7,314,710**	**4,509,994**	**$439,273,439**

1 Summer Nutrition includes the Summer Food Service Program and free and reduced-price National School Lunch Program (NSLP) participation during July. The Seamless Summer Option lunches are claimed and included in the NSLP free lunch category.

2 Regular School Year Lunch participants includes participation in the free and reduced-price NSLP.

3 Ratio of Summer Nutrition to NSLP is the number of children in Summer Nutrition per 100 receiving free or reduced-price lunch through the 2022–2023 school year NSLP program.

4 Additional federal reimbursement dollars were calculated assuming that the state's sponsors were reimbursed for each child each weekday only for lunch (not breakfast or a snack), at the lowest rate for an SFSP lunch ($4.87 per lunch), and were served 20 days in July 2023

Table 6: Average Daily Participation (ADP) in Summer Breakfast[1] and Summer Lunch[2] in July 2022 and July 2023 and Ratio[3] and Rank, by State

State	Summer Breakfast ADP July 2022	Summer Lunch ADP July 2022	Ratio 2022	Rank 2022	Summer Breakfast ADP July 2023	Summer Lunch ADP July 2023	Ratio 2023	Rank 2023	Percent Change in Breakfast ADP 2022 to 2023
Alabama	13,626	29,461	46.2	40	13,341	24,309	54.9	30	-2.1%
Alaska	1,038	2,104	49.3	35	1,139	1,690	67.4	20	9.7%
Arizona	21,497	54,068	39.8	44	21,346	65,728	32.5	46	-0.7%
Arkansas	17,802	31,390	56.7	21	23,579	34,484	68.4	19	32.5%
California	191,801	453,014	42.3	43	156,411	421,193	37.1	43	-18.5%
Colorado	12,990	21,169	61.4	17	9,568	18,773	51.0	33	-26.3%
Connecticut	26,534	36,034	73.6	9	25,408	34,501	73.6	11	-4.2%
Delaware	7,484	10,107	74.0	8	7,719	10,015	77.1	9	3.1%
District of Columbia	7,947	9,685	82.1	4	7,516	8,896	84.5	2	-5.4%
Florida	82,862	162,002	51.1	31	72,996	147,046	49.6	34	-11.9%
Georgia	65,885	147,875	44.6	41	56,644	124,471	45.5	40	-14.0%
Hawaii	735	6,518	11.3	50	11,235	13,267	84.7	1	1429.1%
Idaho	4,380	12,487	35.1	46	2,402	10,711	22.4	48	-45.2%
Illinois	33,182	68,012	48.8	36	35,935	73,399	49.0	36	8.3%
Indiana	13,601	54,445	25.0	48	15,157	72,267	21.0	50	11.4%
Iowa	9,397	18,353	51.2	30	12,711	19,975	63.6	24	35.3%
Kansas	23,364	34,220	68.3	12	16,467	23,551	69.9	16	-29.5%
Kentucky	30,090	47,169	63.8	16	49,792	62,995	79.0	6	65.5%
Louisiana	10,592	17,764	59.6	20	23,728	30,323	78.3	7	124.0%
Maine	9,814	14,395	68.2	13	9,292	12,672	73.3	12	-5.3%
Maryland	89,393	90,846	98.4	1	49,956	63,882	78.2	8	-44.1%
Massachusetts	43,174	71,176	60.7	18	37,672	61,892	60.9	25	-12.7%
Michigan	46,279	68,790	67.3	15	49,162	69,422	70.8	15	6.2%
Minnesota[4]	NA	NA	NA	NA	24,815	44,997	55.1 29	NA	NA
Mississippi	9,117	30,187	30.2	47	13,538	61,628	22.0	49	48.5%
Missouri	16,789	31,298	53.6	26	13,923	23,253	59.9	26	-17.1%
Montana	5,153	10,014	51.5	29	8,065	11,215	71.9	14	56.5%
Nebraska	2,063	4,682	44.1	42	2,206	4,826	45.7	39	6.9%
Nevada	11,909	15,252	78.1	7	6,505	9,483	68.6	18	-45.4%
New Hampshire	4,299	5,860	73.4	10	3,042	4,124	73.8	10	-29.2%
New Jersey	243,072	266,223	91.3	2	75,754	103,642	73.1	13	-68.8%
New Mexico	19,058	40,864	46.6	39	20,958	44,325	47.3	38	10.0%
New York	345,118	425,114	81.2	6	274,277	346,645	79.1	5	-20.5%
North Carolina	39,351	70,092	56.1	22	36,920	65,488	56.4	28	-6.2%
North Dakota	1,831	3,755	48.8	37	2,059	4,174	49.3	35	12.5%
Ohio	29,654	52,946	56.0	23	41,948	65,572	64.0	23	41.5%
Oklahoma	9,695	16,155	60.0	19	8,313	16,185	51.4	32	-14.3%
Oregon	12,752	26,881	47.4	38	12,168	25,042	48.6	37	-4.6%
Pennsylvania	54,834	74,976	73.1	11	47,897	73,549	65.1	21	-12.7%
Rhode Island	4,766	8,550	55.7	24	3,119	5,486	56.9	27	-34.6%
South Carolina	21,585	41,609	51.9	27	24,191	84,264	28.7	47	12.1%
South Dakota	2,781	5,597	49.7	34	2,146	5,338	40.2	41	-22.8%
Tennessee	24,287	48,227	50.4	33	33,604	64,828	51.8	31	38.4%
Texas	73,301	143,716	51.0	32	55,831	170,901	32.7	45	-23.8%
Utah	3,038	16,951	17.9	49	2,815	17,282	16.3	51	-7.4%
Vermont	11,052	13,127	84.2	3	8,335	10,319	80.8	4	-24.6%
Virginia	46,569	68,699	67.8	14	39,985	57,314	69.8	17	-14.1%
Washington	11,923	30,880	38.6	45	10,070	25,549	39.4	42	-15.5%
West Virginia	11,536	14,200	81.2	5	13,189	16,146	81.7	3	14.3%
Wisconsin	21,284	39,307	54.1	25	22,127	34,549	64.0	22	4.0%
Wyoming	4,849	9,400	51.6	28	1,059	3,126	33.9	44	-78.2%
U.S.	**1,805,132**	**2,975,642**	**60.7**		**1,518,036**	**2,804,716**	**54.1**		**-15.9%**

1 Summer Breakfast is the sum of the average daily participation in Summer Food Service Program breakfast service in July plus the average daily free and reduced-price participation in the School Breakfast Program — including the Seamless Summer Option — in July.

2 Summer Lunch is the sum of the average daily participation in Summer Food Service Program lunch service in July plus the average daily free and reduced-price participation in the National School Lunch Program — including the Seamless Summer Option — in July.

3 Ratio of Summer Breakfast to Summer Lunch is the number of children in Summer Breakfast per 100 in Summer Lunch.

4 2022 data for Minnesota is not available.

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Community Eligibility: The Key to Hunger-Free Schools

School Year 2022–2023

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Community Eligibility: The Key to Hunger-Free Schools

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MAY 2023

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About FRAC

The Food Research & Action Center improves the nutrition, health, and well-being of people struggling against poverty-related hunger in the United States through advocacy, partnerships, and by advancing bold and equitable policy solutions. For more information about FRAC, or to sign up for FRAC's e-newsletters, go to www.frac.org.

This report was written by Food Research & Action Center's Allyson Pérez, Senior Child Nutrition Policy Analyst, and Crystal FitzSimons, Director of School and Out-of-School Time Programs.

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Food Research & Action Center

Community Eligibility Participation 2022–2023

6,419
school districts have one or more schools adopting community eligibility, an increase of **876** school districts, or **15.8 percent**, from the 2021–2022 school year.

40,235
schools have adopted community eligibility, an increase of **6,935** schools, or **20.8 percent**, from the previous school year.

82 percent
of eligible schools have adopted community eligibility.

19.9 million
children attend a school that has adopted community eligibility, an increase of nearly **3.7 million** children, or **22.5 percent**, from the previous school year.

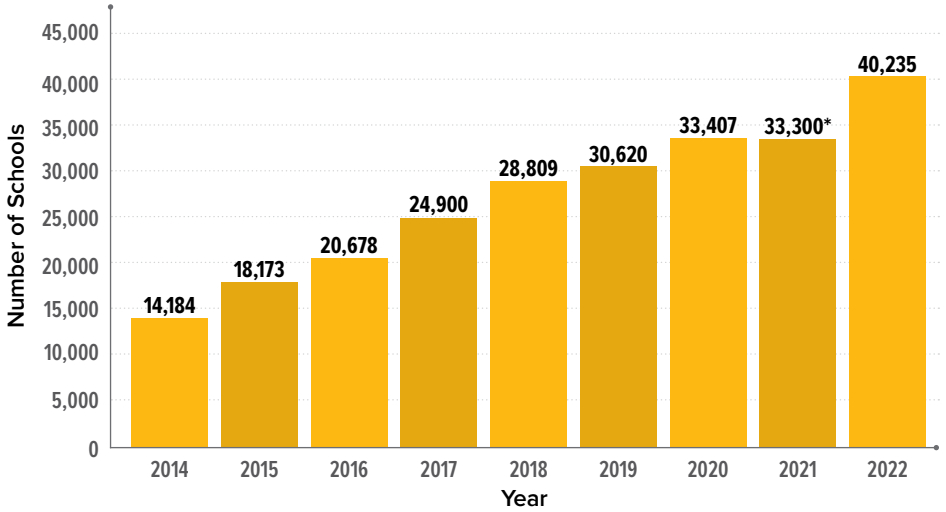
Executive Summary

The 2022–2023 school year marked the end of the pandemic-related child nutrition waivers that have allowed schools across the country to offer meals to all their students at no charge since spring 2020. Through the waivers, students, families, and schools were able to experience the benefits of Healthy School Meals for All. School districts reported numerous benefits, including reduced childhood hunger, elimination of stigma from participating in school meals, easing administrative work, supporting academic achievement, and eliminating school meal debt.[1] School nutrition professionals did not want to return to pre-pandemic operations,[2] and according to Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) polling, 63 percent of voters nationwide support legislation that would make healthy school meals for all students a permanent policy.[3]

The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) has offered high-need school districts and schools an important opportunity to continue to offer school breakfast and lunch to all students at no charge for another four years instead of transitioning back to normal school nutrition operations, resulting in significant growth in community eligibility participation. Created through the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, community eligibility can be adopted by any district, group of schools in a district, or school with 40 percent or more "identified students" — children who are eligible for free school meals and already identified by means other than an individual household application. Schools that participate in community eligibility often see increased participation in school meals, allowing more students to experience the many educational and health benefits linked to school meal participation. A 2022 U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) community eligibility study on school year 2016–2017 found a 6.8 percent increase in school lunch participation and a 12.1 percent increase in school breakfast.

Under community eligibility, schools no longer have to collect and process school meal applications, which reduces administrative costs and paperwork, allowing school nutrition staff to focus more on offering healthy, appealing meals. Moreover, offering meals at no charge to all students eliminates the stigma from the perception that school meals are only for "children from low-income families," and facilitates the implementation of breakfast after the bell service models, such as breakfast in the classroom, which further boosts participation.

GRAPH 1: 9-Year Trend in Schools Participating in Community Eligibility



** The number of students enrolled in CEP schools in 2021 increased even though there was a slight decrease in schools adopting CEP. This was driven by school consolidations in New York City.*

1 Food Research & Action Center (2022). *Large School District Report: Operating School Nutrition Programs During the Pandemic*. Available at https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/large-school-district-report-2022.pdf.

2 School Nutrition Association (2023). *2023 Position Paper: Meals for All Fact Sheet*. Available at https://schoolnutrition.org/resource/2023-position-paper-meals-for-all-fact-sheet.

3 Food Research & Action Center (2023). *Raise Your Hand for Healthy School Meals for All*. Available at https://frac.org/healthy-school-meals-for-all.

Participation in community eligibility has continued to grow since it became available nationwide in the 2014–2015 school year. During the 2022–2023 school year, there was a significant increase in the number of schools and districts participating in community eligibility. Here are the top-level findings for this year:

- 6,419 school districts have one or more schools adopting community eligibility, an increase of 876 school districts, or 15.8 percent, from the 2021–2022 school year.
- 40,235 schools have adopted community eligibility, an increase of 6,935 schools, or 20.8 percent, from the previous school year.
- 82 percent of eligible schools have adopted community eligibility.
- 19.9 million children attend a school that has adopted community eligibility, an increase of nearly 3.7 million children, or 22.5 percent, from the previous school year.

Despite these increases, there are many eligible schools and districts across the country that have not adopted community eligibility that stand to benefit. Several factors that existed prior to the pandemic, such as challenges associated with the loss of traditional school meal application data and low rates of direct certification (which is the foundation of community eligibility), have hindered adoption in some states and school districts, and the low multiplier of 1.6 limits the financial viability of community eligibility for many eligible schools.

Looking ahead to the 2023–2024 school year, strong state, district, and school-level leadership; hands-on technical assistance from national, state, and local stakeholders; peer-to-peer learning among districts; and state efforts to pass Healthy School Meals for All legislation that provide state funding to make offering free school meals to all students financially viable can help overcome these barriers. In addition, Congress can enact Healthy School Meals for All legislation, including by expanding community eligibility, and USDA, state child nutrition agencies, and anti-hunger and education advocates can work together to promote community eligibility to eligible school districts. Taking these important steps will allow more schools to implement community eligibility.

About This Report

This report analyzes community eligibility adoption — nationally and for each state and the District of Columbia — in the 2022–2023 school year, and is based on three measures:

1. the number of eligible and adopting school districts and schools;
2. the share of eligible districts and schools that have adopted community eligibility; and
3. the number and share of eligible schools that have adopted, based on the school's poverty level.

As a companion to this report, FRAC has compiled all data collected in a database of eligible and adopting schools that can be searched by state and school district.

How CEP Works

Community eligibility schools are high-need schools that offer breakfast and lunch to all students at no charge and use significant administrative savings to offset any additional costs, over and above federal reimbursements, of serving free meals to all. Instead of collecting school meal applications, community eligibility schools are reimbursed for a percentage of the meals served, using a formula based on the percentage of students who are certified for free school meals without an application (for example, students whose households participate in specific means-tested programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)).

There are many benefits that community eligibility provides to schools and families:

- **Schools no longer collect, process, or verify school meal applications**, saving significant time and administrative burdens.
- **Schools do not need to track each meal served by fee category** (free, reduced-price, paid), and instead report total meal counts.
- **School nutrition staff do not need to collect fees** from students who are eligible for reduced-price or paid school meals, allowing students to move through the cafeteria line faster, and ensuring that more children can be served.
- **Offering meals at no charge to all students increases participation among all students** because it eliminates any perception that the school meals programs are just for children from households with low incomes.
- **Schools no longer have to deal with unpaid school meal debt** for reduced-price and paid students at the end of the school year, or follow up with families when students do not have money to pay for meals.

How Schools Can Participate

Any district, group of schools in a district, or a school with 40 percent or more "identified students" is eligible to participate. Identified students are comprised of students certified for free school meals without an application. This includes:

- children directly certified for free school meals through data matching because their households receive SNAP, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations benefits, and in most states, Medicaid benefits; and
- children who are certified for free school meals without an application because they are homeless, migrant, runaway, enrolled in Head Start, or in foster care.

School districts may choose to participate school by school, districtwide, or group schools at their discretion, if the school, school district, or group has an overall identified student percentage (ISP) of 40 percent or higher.

Identified students are a subset of those eligible for free and reduced-price school meals. This is a smaller group than the total number of children who would be certified to receive free or reduced-price school meals if school meal applications were collected. For that reason, a multiplier (discussed below) is applied to the ISP. Schools that qualify for community eligibility typically have free and reduced-price percentages of 65–70 percent or higher if traditional school meal applications were collected from student households.

How Schools Are Reimbursed

Although all meals are offered at no charge to all students in schools that participate in community eligibility, federal reimbursements are based on the proportion of children from households with low incomes in the school. The ISP is multiplied by 1.6 to calculate the percentage of meals reimbursed at the federal free rate, and the remainder are reimbursed at the lower paid rate. The 1.6 multiplier was determined by Congress to reflect the ratio of six students certified to receive free or reduced-price meals with an application for every 10 students certified for free meals without an application. This serves as a proxy for the percentage of students that would be eligible for free and reduced-price meals if the school districts had collected school meal applications. For example, a school with 50 percent identified students would be reimbursed for 80 percent of the meals eaten at the free reimbursement rate (50 x 1.6 = 80), and 20 percent at the paid rate.

KEY FINDINGS FOR THE 2022–2023 SCHOOL YEAR

School District Adoption

Nationally, 6,419 school districts — 67.5 percent of those eligible — adopted the Community Eligibility Provision in one or more schools for the 2022–2023 school year.[4] This is a significant increase of 876 school districts from the prior school year, when 5,543 school districts adopted. This increase is likely due to the end of the child nutrition waivers that had allowed schools to offer meals at no charge to all students beginning in spring 2020, which meant the return of pre-pandemic school nutrition operations and to active participation in community eligibility.[5]

The median state's take-up rate in school year 2022–2023 for eligible school districts is 73.9 percent; however, school district take-up rates across the states vary significantly, from 20 percent in New Hampshire to over 90 percent in Louisiana, New Mexico, Oregon, Nevada, West Virginia, Virginia, Kentucky, the District of Columbia, Washington, Wyoming, North Dakota, and Hawaii.

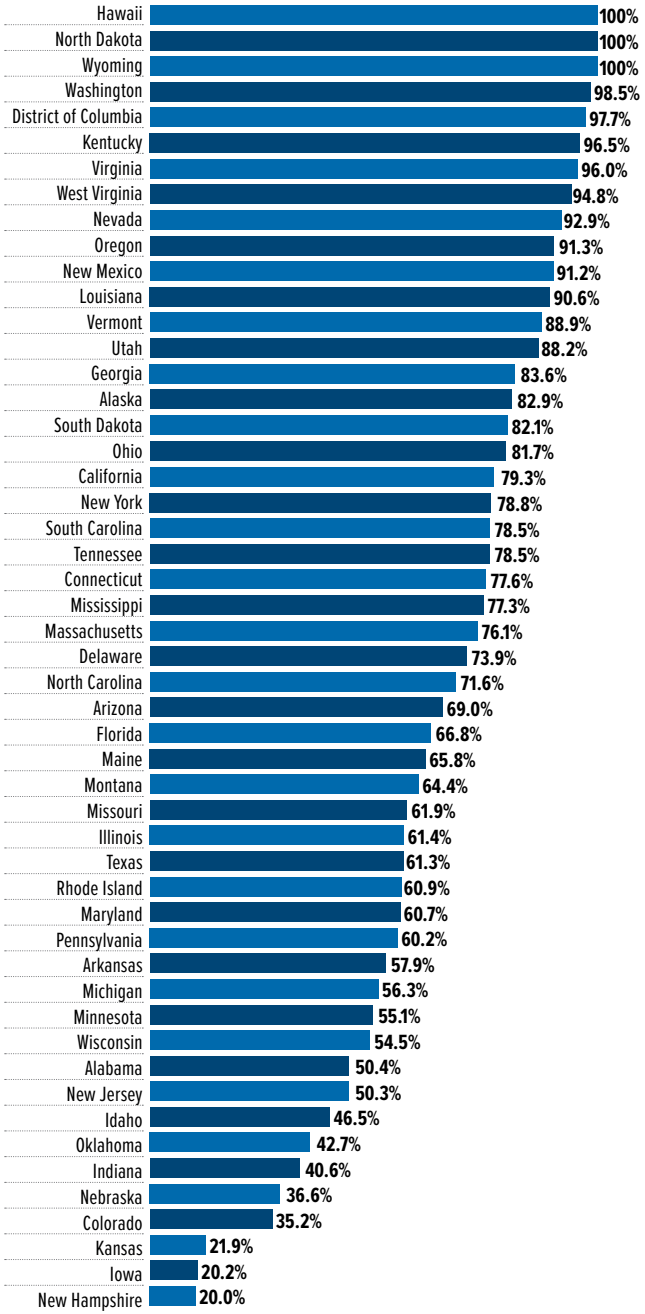
Several states saw increases in the 2022–2023 school year. California had the largest growth in the number of school districts adopting, increasing by 221 school districts. Washington and Pennsylvania followed in school district adoption growth with 93 and 90 school districts, respectively.

Eight states have had small decreases — between one and five — in the number of districts implementing community eligibility in the 2022–2023 school year. Of those that have had fewer school districts adopting community eligibility, five have had a decrease in the number of eligible school districts. Missouri has had the largest decrease in adopting school districts — five school districts — despite adding four more eligible school districts, resulting in the percentage of eligible districts adopting decreasing from 66.7 percent to 61.9 percent.

A primary factor in the growth in school district (and school) adoption of community eligibility in the 2022–2023 school year compared with previous years was the desire to continue offering school breakfast and lunch to all students at no charge after the expiration of the pandemic child nutrition waivers. Given the success many schools observed when offering free meals to all students, many eligible schools and districts looked to community eligibility as a way to continue providing healthy school meals to all students through an existing federal program when financially viable.

Furthermore, as more school districts overcome the perceived barrier that community eligibility will change Title I funding allocations dramatically, and those in states that require alternative income applications for state education funding and other purposes work through the challenges of collecting alternative income applications, more school districts have been adopting this provision.

GRAPH 2: Percentage of Eligible School Districts Adopting Community Eligibility in School Year 2022–2023



4 Under federal law, states are required to publish annually a list of school districts that are eligible for the Community Eligibility Provision districtwide, as well as a list of individual schools that are eligible, by May 1. During the pandemic, USDA has allowed states to extend this deadline and other community eligibility deadlines including for the 2022–2023 school year. For more information on requirements related to the published lists, see https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/ default/files/resource-files/SP17-2019os.pdf.

5 In March 2020, USDA issued a series of pandemic-related child nutrition waivers that allowed schools across the country to offer free meals to all students regardless of their household income, which expired in June 2022. As a result, most schools and districts listed as adopting community eligibility in the 2020–2021 and 2021–2022 school years were operating under the waivers and not actively participating in community eligibility.

While the significant increase in community eligibility participation for the 2022–2023 school year is encouraging, states can focus on direct certification and continue to improve their systems to ensure that school districts can maintain the ISPs necessary to become and remain eligible for community eligibility, and to ensure that it continues to be a viable financial option for school districts. In USDA's latest report on state direct certification rates, 12 states did not meet the required benchmark of directly certifying 95 percent of children living in households that participated in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for free school meals in the 2018–2019 school year, pointing to missed opportunities for school districts to increase their ISPs to facilitate easier community eligibility implementation.[6] In addition, the Medicaid direct certification demonstration pilots offer an important opportunity to improve ISPs, and the 11 states and the District of Columbia that are not included should consider applying to further support participation in community eligibility.

As more school districts consider community eligibility for the upcoming school year, conducting robust direct certification will be critical to support implementation. It also can help reduce the number of school meal applications that districts have to collect and process, even if they do not adopt community eligibility.

School Adoption

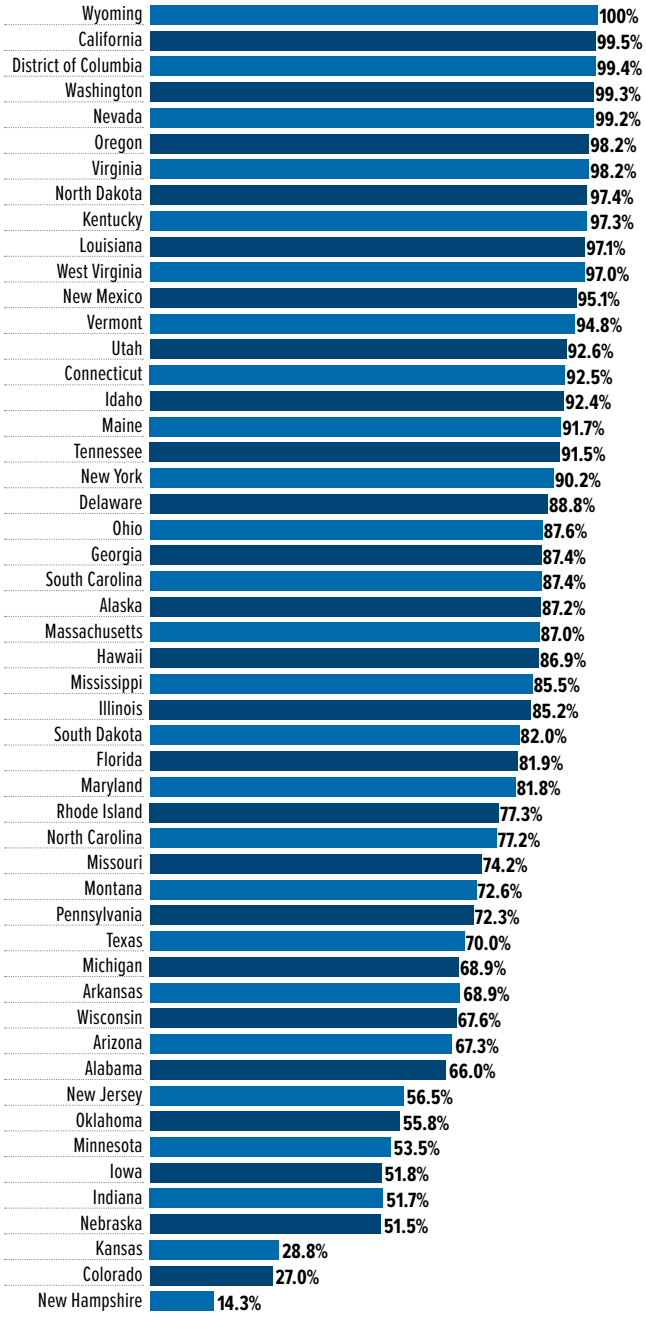
In the 2022–2023 school year, there are 40,235 schools adopting community eligibility, including schools from all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Overall, school adoption of community eligibility increased by nearly 7,000 schools from the prior school year. This dramatic increase in the number of schools participating in community eligibility is likely due to many schools' desire to continue offering healthy meals to all students free of charge after the expiration of the pandemic child nutrition waivers. In the 2022–2023 school year, 82 percent of all eligible schools have adopted community eligibility nationally, with a median state take-up rate of 86.9 percent.

Among the states, the percentage of eligible and adopting schools varies significantly. Nineteen states and the District of Columbia have 90 percent or more of their eligible schools adopting community eligibility. Thirty-one states have 80 percent or more of their eligible schools adopting it. Alternatively, Kansas, Colorado, and New Hampshire have less than 40 percent of their eligible schools adopting it: 28.8 percent, 27 percent, and 14.3 percent, respectively.

Thirty-nine states have seen an increase in the number of schools adopting community eligibility. California had the largest increase, with 2,420 more schools adopting community eligibility since the 2021–2022 school year, likely due to their state having passed statewide Healthy School Meals for All legislation in 2022. Florida, Washington, and Texas added 1,080, 731, and 491 schools, respectively. Smaller states with fewer eligible schools also have made strong progress, including Nebraska, which increased by 106 schools, or 235 percent, and Vermont, which increased by 33 schools, or 56 percent.

Four states — Georgia, Hawaii, North Dakota, and Wyoming — have maintained the same number of community eligibility schools during the 2022–2023 school year. Eight states have experienced a decrease in the number of schools eligible to implement community eligibility. The largest decreases were in Missouri (17 schools) and South Dakota (10 schools).

GRAPH 3: Percentage of Eligible Schools Adopting Community Eligibility in School Year 2022–2023



6 U.S. Department of Agriculture (2021). Direct Certification in the National School Lunch Program State Implementation Progress Report to Congress School Year 2017–2018 and School Year 2018–2019. Available at https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/NSLPDirectCertification2017-1.pdf.

School Adoption by Poverty Level

All schools that qualify for community eligibility are considered to be high need, but a school's ability to implement community eligibility successfully — and maintain financial viability — typically improves when its ISP is higher. For this report, the Food Research & Action Center examined the number of schools adopting in each state, based on their ISP as a proxy for the school's poverty level.

Schools with higher ISPs receive the free reimbursement rate for more meals, which makes community eligibility a more financially viable option. As a result, schools with ISPs of 60 percent and above — those that receive the free reimbursement rate for 100 percent or nearly 100 percent of their meals — are more likely to participate in community eligibility than schools with lower ISPs; that has been the case since the program became available nationwide. Still, since the 2016–2017 school year, the number of schools participating with an ISP between 40 and 50 has more than quadrupled, and the number of schools participating with an ISP between 50 and 60 percent has increased by over one-third as schools become more familiar with the positive impact of community eligibility on school nutrition finances and the benefits for children and families.[7]

In the 2022–2023 school year, of the 40,235 schools adopting community eligibility, a plurality of schools — 19,883 or 49.4 percent — had ISPs of 60 percent or higher. Of adopting schools with lower ISPs, 10,871 schools, or 27 percent, had ISPs between 50 and 60 percent, and 9,399 schools, or 23.4 percent, had ISPs between 40 and 50 percent. Among schools with ISPs between 40 and 50 percent, the national average of take-up rate for eligible schools was 60.3 percent, with a median of 58.4 percent.

Among states, the percentage of eligible versus adopting schools in the 40 to 50 percent ISP group varies significantly. Twelve states and the District of Columbia had 90 percent or more eligible low ISP schools adopting. An additional three states had 80 percent or more of their schools adopting. Alternatively, 10 states had less than 30 percent of their eligible low-ISP schools adopting, including New Hampshire, which has only 6.7 percent of eligible low-ISP schools adopting.

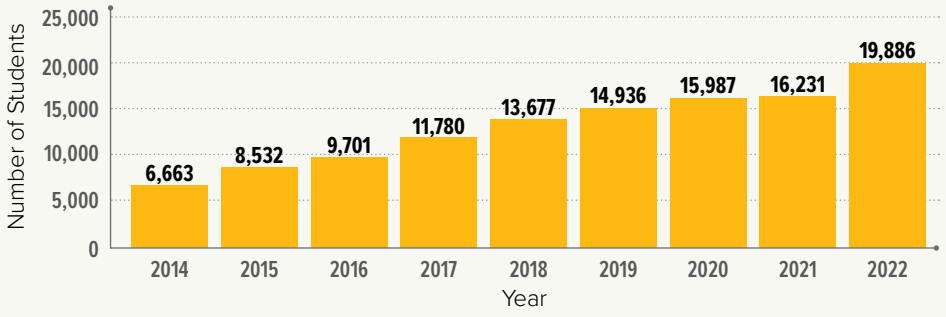
Student Enrollment

The reach of community eligibility is most evident in the number of students impacted. In the 2022–2023 school year, 19.9 million students attend schools that have adopted the Community Eligibility Provision; this is up from 16.2 million in the 2021–2022 school year. California and Texas have the most children attending schools that are adopting community eligibility, with approximately 3.5 million and 2.3 million in each state, respectively. Nationally, more than one in four students attending a school that is adopting community eligibility lives in California or Texas.

Thirty-seven states have seen increases in the number of students in community eligibility schools in the 2022–2023 school year. The states that saw the biggest increases in the number of enrolled students are California and Florida, having added over 1.3 million and over 854,000 students, respectively. Washington, Texas, and Pennsylvania had significant increases relative to other states as well, adding over 350,000, over 255,000, and over 148,000, respectively.

Fourteen states saw decreases in student enrollment numbers in community eligibility schools in the 2022–2023 school year. Twelve states saw decreases of more than 1,000 students, and two states had decreases of more than 10,000 students, but the driver of these decreases varied. Seven states had a decrease in students, but increased or maintained the same number of schools participating from the prior school year. For example, New York saw a decrease of more than 16,000 students, or less than one percent, from the 2021–2022 school year, but this can be accounted for in the fact that 29 participating schools did not report enrollment data. South Carolina, West Virginia, and Mississippi all had significant decreases as well, with 13,545, 9,136, and 9,037, respectively. While some of these states saw schools fall out of community eligibility, many attribute these losses to overall drops in student enrollment statewide as a continuing result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

GRAPH 4: 9-Year Trend in Student Enrollment in Schools Participating in Community Eligibility (in Thousands)



7 Food Research & Action Center (2017). *Community Eligibility Continues to Grow in the 2016–2017 School Year*. Available at https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/CEP-Report_Final_Links_032317-1.pdf.

Healthy School Meals for All State Legislation

The trial run of Healthy School Meals for All during the pandemic has highlighted the value of offering healthy school meals to all students at no charge regardless of their household income. Schools, families, and students throughout the country do not want to go back to the way the school nutrition programs operated before the pandemic. In lieu of Congressional action, five states — California, Colorado, Maine, Minnesota, and New Mexico — have implemented Healthy School Meals for All permanently. Four more states — Connecticut, Massachusetts, Nevada, and Vermont — have extended Healthy School Meals for All for at least one more year. Other states, such as Oregon and Washington, have provided additional funding to support community eligibility to increase the number of schools able to offer free meals to all of their students. As a result of these legislative efforts, these states have had significant increases in take up of community eligibility in the 2022–2023 school year. Read more at FRAC's Healthy School Meals for All microsite.

Expanding Access to Community Eligibility

In spring 2022, the U.S. Department of Agriculture released a *Community Eligibility Provision Characteristics Study* in the 2016–2017 school year. The report found that schools and districts participating in community eligibility saw increased meal participation and federal reimbursements, an increase in average daily attendance, the elimination of unpaid school meal fees, and reduced stigma for students from low-income households.

The report also found that three out of four school districts (76 percent) had implemented community eligibility districtwide. The most often cited concerns among eligible nonparticipating districts were districtwide ISPs that kept the district from participating in all schools and the financial viability of using the current multiplier. Fifty-one percent of eligible nonparticipating school districts reported that increasing the 1.6 multiplier would make community eligibility more appealing.

In spring 2023, USDA announced a proposed rule to lower the eligibility threshold for community eligibility from 40 percent to 25 percent, which would address the concern among some eligible districts about qualifying districtwide. FRAC supports the proposed rule, which would make more high-need schools eligible to participate in community eligibility, expand school districts' ability to group schools together, and support states that have passed Healthy School Meals for All legislation.

However, USDA does not have the authority to increase funding for community eligibility, and the proposed rule does not address this challenge. In order to make community eligibility a more financially viable option for high-need school districts and schools, Congress must increase the multiplier that determines the level of federal reimbursement that community eligibility schools receive from 1.6 to 2.5 as proposed in the School Meals Expansion Act (H.R. 2567).

Medicaid Direct Certification

Medicaid direct certification allows children whose families participate in Medicaid to be automatically certified as eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. This ensures that they are not missed through the application process, and it increases schools' ISPs, making community eligibility a more financially viable option for more schools.

The Medicaid direct certification demonstration project was first authorized through the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 to allow students who are enrolled in Medicaid and belong to a family whose income, as defined by Medicaid, is below 133 percent of the federal poverty level[8] to be directly certified to receive free school meals. Kentucky and New York directly certify children for free school meals through this statutory authority.

USDA used its demonstration authority to test using Medicaid data to certify children for free and reduced-price school meals. It put out a request for proposals (RFP) to states in 2016, 2021, and 2022 to participate in these demonstration projects. Alabama, California, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin are all currently using Medicaid data and income tests to directly certify children for free or reduced-price school meals.[9]

Thirteen additional states — Arizona, Colorado, Delaware, Georgia, Montana, New Mexico, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Tennessee, Vermont, and Wyoming — were approved through the 2022 RFP and will start in the 2023–2024 school year.

USDA may issue another request for proposals for states to pilot Medicaid Direct Certification. If another request for proposals is issued, FRAC encourages states to apply so they can benefit from the demonstration project's positive impact on children, families, and schools. Learn more about the Medicaid Direct Certification Demonstration Project on USDA's website.

8 As defined in section 673(2) of the Community Services Block Grant Act (42 U.S.C. 9902(2)).

9 It is worth noting that if a child can be directly certified for free school meals through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, foster care, Head Start, or through being migrant or homeless, that certification always will take precedence over Medicaid direct certification.

Conclusion

Community eligibility allows high-need schools and districts to meet the nutritional needs of the many students they serve. As schools returned to normal school nutrition operations after two years of serving healthy school meals to all students at no charge through pandemic child nutrition waiver authority, community eligibility has allowed high-need schools to continue to offer free meals to all of their students. The option creates hunger-free schools by ensuring that all students have access to the nutritious school breakfasts and lunches they need to be well-nourished and ready to learn, and it allows school nutrition departments to use their limited resources to provide nutritious and appealing meals by streamlining administrative requirements.

To increase the reach of community eligibility, states and school districts must work together to ensure that direct certification systems identify all students so that a school's identified student percentage accurately reflects the need within the school. Outreach and technical assistance by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, state agencies, and anti-hunger advocates also will be critical as schools consider the social, health, and financial benefits of community eligibility to help continue to serve healthy meals to all students.

Looking forward, Congress should pass legislation that allows all schools to offer free breakfast and lunch to all of their students. In lieu of that, an important incremental step is for Congress to bolster the financial viability of community eligibility by increasing the multiplier and creating a statewide community eligibility option that supports the growing number of states passing Healthy School Meals for All legislation.

Additional Resources

- *Direct Certification Improves Low-Income Student Access to School Meals: An Updated Guide to Direct Certification*
- *School District Strategies for Improving Direct Certification*
- CEP Financial Calculators (School districts and other stakeholders should use these tools to group schools strategically and to maximize the federal funding received.)
- *Community Eligibility: Making It Work With Lower ISPs*
- *Community Eligibility Partial Implementation Guide*

For more information and additional resources to help determine if community eligibility is a possibility for your school district, go to FRAC's Community Eligibility webpage.

Technical Notes

The Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) obtained information on schools that were approved to operate under community eligibility in the 2022–2023 school year from state education agencies or entities at the state level that administer the federal school nutrition programs. Between November 2022 and April 2023, FRAC collected these data:

- school name;
- school district name;
- identified student percentage;
- participation in community eligibility as an individual school, part of a group, or a whole district; and
- enrollment.

FRAC followed up with state education agencies for data clarifications, and when necessary, to obtain missing data.

Under federal law, states are required to publish, by May 1 of each year, a list of schools and districts with ISPs of at least 40 percent and those with ISPs between 30 and just under 40 percent (near-eligible schools and districts). For the 2022–2023 school year, this deadline was extended by USDA to June 30, 2022 for some states who applied for waiver flexibility in order to grant flexibility to state agencies during the COVID-19 pandemic. FRAC compared this published list to the lists of approved schools, and compiled a universe of eligible and approved schools and districts in the 2022–2023 school year. When compiling the universe of eligible schools, FRAC treated a district as eligible if it contained at least one eligible school. FRAC treated a school as eligible if it appeared on a state's published list of eligible schools. In addition, schools that were missing from a state's list of eligible schools, but appeared on its list of adopting schools were treated as eligible.

FRAC gave the states the option to report both eligible and adopting schools in the fall data collection. This gave states the opportunity to update their eligible schools list to reflect any school closures or consolidations. Sixteen states — Alabama, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Missouri, Montana, North Carolina, Nebraska, New Hampshire, Nevada, Ohio, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wyoming — chose to provide both eligible and adopting schools for this analysis.

There are two circumstances under which a school might be able to adopt community eligibility even if it did not appear on a state's list of eligible schools:

1. The U.S. Department of Agriculture permitted states to base their May published lists on proxy data readily available to them. Proxy data are merely an indicator of potential eligibility, not the basis for eligibility. Districts must submit more accurate information, which may be more complete, more recent, or both, when applying to adopt community eligibility.
2. A school can participate as a member of an adopting group (part or all of a district). A group's eligibility is based on the ISP for the group as a whole.

The lists obtained from state education agencies indicated whether schools have elected to adopt community eligibility, the ISP the schools use to determine the federal reimbursement for meals served, and the total number of students attending each adopting school.

During the 2020–2021 and 2021–2022 school years, many schools that adopted community eligibility operated under the USDA-issued child nutrition waivers that were made available in response to the pandemic. These waivers allowed meals to be offered at no charge to all students and provided the higher summer food reimbursement rate for each meal served. These waivers were no longer available during the 2022–2023 school year, and schools transitioned back to normal school nutrition operations. Thus, school districts and schools participated in community eligibility for the first time since the 2019–2020 school year.

The following states had schools that did not provide student enrollment numbers:

- 62 schools in Alabama
- 11 schools in Arizona
- 1 school in Nevada
- 1 school in New Mexico
- 29 schools in New York
- 40 schools in South Carolina

Indiana did not provide the ISP used by adopting community eligibility schools to calculate federal reimbursements for meals served, often referred to as the "claiming ISP" or "grouped ISP," for three schools. For these schools, the ISPs are shown as N/A in the database.

Some states reported schools' free claiming percentages (ISP multiplied by 1.6) as 100 percent, so it is impossible to know the exact grouped ISP. It can be determined that the school is participating in community eligibility with an ISP of 62.5 percent or above. In these cases, 62.5 percent was used in the database:

- 35 schools in the District of Columbia
- 297 schools in Ohio

Table 1: Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) Take-Up Rate in School Districts for School Years (SY) 2021–2022[1] and 2022–2023[2]

State	School Year 2021–2022			School Year 2022–2023		
	Eligible for CEP	Adopting CEP	Percentage Adopting CEP of Total Eligible	Eligible for CEP	Adopting CEP	Percentage Adopting CEP of Total Eligible
Alabama	76	58	76.3%	131	66	50.4%
Alaska	43	33	76.7%	41	34	82.9%
Arizona	261	179	68.6%	271	187	69.0%
Arkansas	116	73	62.9%	121	70	57.9%
California	677	384	56.7%	763	605	79.3%
Colorado	71	24	33.8%	71	25	35.2%
Connecticut	57	54	94.7%	76	59	77.6%
Delaware	25	20	80.0%	23	17	73.9%
District of Columbia	43	42	97.7%	43	42	97.7%
Florida	316	203	64.2%	325	217	66.8%
Georgia	150	109	72.7%	140	117	83.6%
Hawaii	13	13	100.0%	13	13	100.0%
Idaho	30	23	76.7%	43	20	46.5%
Illinois	523	298	57.0%	627	385	61.4%
Indiana	278	113	40.6%	350	142	40.6%
Iowa	112	21	18.8%	124	25	20.2%
Kansas	78	4	5.1%	32	7	21.9%
Kentucky	172	166	96.5%	173	167	96.5%
Louisiana	129	123	95.3%	138	125	90.6%
Maine	49	28	57.1%	38	25	65.8%
Maryland	29	17	58.6%	28	17	60.7%
Massachusetts	156	99	63.5%	180	137	76.1%
Michigan	606	408	67.3%	739	416	56.3%
Minnesota	150	66	44.0%	136	75	55.1%
Mississippi	89	73	82.0%	97	75	77.3%
Missouri	156	104	66.7%	160	99	61.9%
Montana	65	53	81.5%	87	56	64.4%
Nebraska	115	22	19.1%	71	26	36.6%
Nevada	23	19	82.6%	28	26	92.9%
New Hampshire	5	0	0.0%	10	2	20.0%
New Jersey	137	79	57.7%	159	80	50.3%
New Mexico	139	121	87.1%	147	134	91.2%
New York	598	471	78.8%	647	510	78.8%
North Carolina	156	101	64.7%	155	111	71.6%
North Dakota	25	24	96.0%	23	23	100.0%
Ohio	421	343	81.5%	469	383	81.7%
Oklahoma	205	110	53.7%	262	112	42.7%
Oregon	206	88	42.7%	127	116	91.3%
Pennsylvania	329	248	75.4%	561	338	60.2%
Rhode Island	20	9	45.0%	23	14	60.9%
South Carolina	81	63	77.8%	79	62	78.5%
South Dakota	42	32	76.2%	39	32	82.1%
Tennessee	131	97	74.0%	130	102	78.5%
Texas	926	490	52.9%	918	563	61.3%
Utah	17	14	82.4%	17	15	88.2%
Vermont	28	18	64.3%	27	24	88.9%
Virginia	125	123	98.4%	125	120	96.0%
Washington	178	108	60.7%	204	201	98.5%
West Virginia	58	54	93.1%	58	55	94.8%
Wisconsin	243	114	46.9%	257	140	54.5%
Wyoming	8	7	87.5%	7	7	100.0%
U.S. TOTAL	**8,686**	**5,543**	**63.8%**	**9,513**	**6,419**	**67.5%**

1 For the 2021–2022 school year data, school districts are defined as eligible if they include at least one school with an ISP of 40 percent or higher, or at least one school has already adopted community eligibility.

2 For the 2022–2023 school year data, school districts are defined as eligible if they include at least one school with an ISP of 40 percent or higher, or at least one school has already adopted community eligibility.

Table 2: Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) Take-Up Rate in Schools for School Years (SY) 2021–2022[1] and 2022–2023[2]

State	School Year 2021–2022			School Year 2022–2023		
	Eligible for CEP	Adopting CEP	Percentage Adopting CEP of Total Eligible	Eligible for CEP	Adopting CEP	Percentage Adopting CEP of Total Eligible
Alabama	672	490	72.9%	812	536	66.0%
Alaska	240	208	86.7%	242	211	87.2%
Arizona	774	493	63.7%	755	508	67.3%
Arkansas	400	259	64.8%	363	250	68.9%
California	4,952	3,730	75.3%	6,179	6,150	99.5%
Colorado	429	100	23.3%	392	106	27.0%
Connecticut	434	420	96.8%	522	483	92.5%
Delaware	119	114	95.8%	143	127	88.8%
District of Columbia	184	183	99.5%	181	180	99.4%
Florida	2,955	1,462	49.5%	3,105	2,542	81.9%
Georgia	1,090	873	80.1%	999	873	87.4%
Hawaii	115	106	92.2%	122	106	86.9%
Idaho	84	64	76.2%	66	61	92.4%
Illinois	2,340	1,823	77.9%	2,449	2,087	85.2%
Indiana	957	506	52.9%	1,148	593	51.7%
Iowa	382	176	46.1%	427	221	51.8%
Kansas	223	31	13.9%	118	34	28.8%
Kentucky	1,107	1,061	95.8%	1,122	1,092	97.3%
Louisiana	1,145	1,095	95.6%	1,212	1,177	97.1%
Maine	104	75	72.1%	84	77	91.7%
Maryland	443	357	80.6%	434	355	81.8%
Massachusetts	818	718	87.8%	972	846	87.0%
Michigan	1,951	1,468	75.2%	2,378	1,638	68.9%
Minnesota	296	150	50.7%	299	160	53.5%
Mississippi	413	376	91.0%	433	370	85.5%
Missouri	552	433	78.4%	561	416	74.2%
Montana	166	147	88.6%	230	167	72.6%
Nebraska	368	45	12.2%	293	151	51.5%
Nevada	412	388	94.2%	505	501	99.2%
New Hampshire	13	0	0.0%	21	3	14.3%
New Jersey	528	319	60.4%	568	321	56.5%
New Mexico	612	556	90.8%	701	667	95.1%
New York	3,289	3,021	91.9%	3,382	3,051	90.2%
North Carolina	1,302	879	67.5%	1,261	974	77.2%
North Dakota	38	37	97.4%	38	37	97.4%
Ohio	1,205	1,062	88.1%	1,302	1,141	87.6%
Oklahoma	542	326	60.1%	688	384	55.8%
Oregon	904	588	65.0%	722	709	98.2%
Pennsylvania	1,212	1,172	96.7%	2,045	1,478	72.3%
Rhode Island	91	61	67.0%	88	68	77.3%
South Carolina	634	538	84.9%	625	546	87.4%
South Dakota	130	110	84.6%	122	100	82.0%
Tennessee	974	845	86.8%	958	877	91.5%
Texas	5,852	3,740	63.9%	6,045	4,231	70.0%
Utah	60	42	70.0%	54	50	92.6%
Vermont	76	59	77.6%	97	92	94.8%
Virginia	1,018	1,008	99.0%	1,106	1,086	98.2%
Washington	748	482	64.4%	1,221	1,213	99.3%
West Virginia	606	593	97.9%	603	585	97.0%
Wisconsin	820	498	60.7%	874	591	67.6%
Wyoming	14	13	92.9%	13	13	100.0%
U.S. TOTAL	**44,793**	**33,300**	**74.3%**	**49,080**	**40,235**	**82.0%**

1 For the 2021–2022 school year data, school districts are defined as eligible if they include at least one school with an ISP of 40 percent or higher, or at least one school has already adopted community eligibility.

2 For the 2022–2023 school year data, school districts are defined as eligible if they include at least one school with an ISP of 40 percent or higher, or at least one school has already adopted community eligibility.

Table 3: Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) Take-Up Rate by Schools' Identified Student Percentage (ISP) for School Year 2022–2023[2,3]

State	Total Adopting	40-<50%			50-<60%			60%+		
		Eligible	Adopting	Percentage Adopting	Eligible	Adopting	Percentage Adopting	Eligible	Adopting	Percentage Adopting
Alabama	536	245	90	36.7%	268	191	71.3%	299	255	85.3%
Alaska	211	59	47	79.7%	62	55	88.7%	120	109	90.8%
Arizona	508	307	133	43.3%	256	212	82.8%	179	160	89.4%
Arkansas	250	170	95	55.9%	125	96	76.8%	68	59	86.8%
California	6150	2,649	2,644	99.8%	1,540	1,534	99.6%	1,990	1,972	99.1%
Colorado	106	227	49	21.6%	103	24	23.3%	62	33	53.2%
Connecticut	483	159	129	81.1%	127	120	94.5%	236	234	99.2%
Delaware	127	94	85	90.4%	43	39	90.7%	6	2	33.3%
District of Columbia	180	25	25	100.0%	17	17	100.0%	139	138	99.3%
Florida	2,542	428	250	58.4%	680	557	81.9%	1,997	1,735	86.9%
Georgia	873	164	91	55.5%	330	307	93.0%	505	475	94.1%
Hawaii	106	45	31	68.9%	23	22	95.7%	54	52	96.3%
Idaho	61	39	28	71.8%	17	16	94.1%	10	9	90.0%
Illinois	2,087	509	289	56.8%	446	352	78.9%	1,494	1,443	96.6%
Indiana[1]	593	323	79	24.5%	356	200	56.2%	469	311	66.3%
Iowa	221	158	17	10.8%	157	111	70.7%	112	93	83.0%
Kansas	34	64	13	20.3%	42	19	45.2%	13	2	15.4%
Kentucky	1,092	144	124	86.1%	334	328	98.2%	644	640	99.4%
Louisiana	1,177	200	189	94.5%	401	391	97.5%	611	597	97.7%
Maine	77	61	46	75.4%	20	17	85.0%	3	3	100.0%
Maryland	355	138	82	59.4%	105	94	89.5%	191	179	93.7%
Massachusetts	846	176	83	47.2%	164	139	84.8%	632	624	98.7%
Michigan	1638	532	227	42.7%	592	424	71.6%	1,254	987	78.7%
Minnesota	160	103	29	28.2%	86	61	70.9%	110	69	62.7%
Mississippi	370	49	8	16.3%	50	35	70.0%	334	327	97.9%
Missouri	416	199	108	54.3%	145	116	80.0%	217	192	88.5%
Montana	167	82	44	53.7%	54	35	64.8%	94	88	93.6%
Nebraska	151	95	14	14.7%	54	22	40.7%	144	114	79.2%
Nevada	501	235	230	97.9%	146	146	100.0%	124	124	100.0%
New Hampshire	3	15	1	6.7%	6	2	33.3%	0	0	0%
New Jersey	321	234	69	29.5%	158	91	57.6%	176	154	87.5%
New Mexico	667	167	138	82.6%	344	339	98.5%	190	190	100.0%
New York	3,051	460	309	67.2%	368	314	85.3%	2,516	2,428	96.5%
North Carolina	974	316	99	31.3%	383	327	85.4%	562	548	97.5%
North Dakota	37	10	10	100.0%	4	4	100.0%	24	23	95.8%
Ohio	1,141	374	260	69.5%	408	377	92.4%	520	492	94.6%
Oklahoma	384	403	184	45.7%	188	128	68.1%	97	53	54.6%
Oregon	709	647	637	98.5%	45	41	91.1%	30	29	96.7%
Pennsylvania	1,478	573	229	40.0%	414	319	77.1%	1,058	930	87.9%
Rhode Island	68	25	8	32.0%	33	24	72.7%	30	30	100.0%
South Carolina	546	191	129	67.5%	202	185	91.6%	232	232	100.0%
South Dakota	100	25	10	40.0%	34	28	82.4%	63	62	98.4%
Tennessee	877	271	211	77.9%	536	525	97.9%	151	139	92.1%
Texas	4,231	1,104	301	27.3%	1,838	1,320	71.8%	3,103	2,610	84.1%
Utah	50	19	18	94.7%	23	21	91.3%	12	11	91.7%
Vermont	92	82	80	97.6%	11	10	90.9%	3	2	66.7%
Virginia	1,086	380	363	95.5%	404	403	99.8%	322	320	99.4%
Washington	1,213	799	792	99.1%	263	262	99.6%	159	158	99.4%
West Virginia	585	186	173	93.0%	334	331	99.1%	83	81	97.6%
Wisconsin	591	309	98	31.7%	187	134	71.7%	378	359	95.0%
Wyoming	13	1	1	100.0%	6	6	100.0%	6	6	100.0%
U.S. TOTAL	**40,235**	**14,270**	**9,399**	**65.9%**	**12,932**	**10,871**	**84.1%**	**21,826**	**19,883**	**91.1%**

1 Indiana did not report ISP data for three schools listed as participating in community eligibility for the 2022–2023 school year.

2 In addition to the state that did not report the identified student percentage (ISP) that community eligibility schools use for federal reimbursements for all adopting schools, some states reported ISPs for adopting schools that are below the 40 percent eligibility threshold (three schools in Arizona, one school in Delaware, three schools in the District of Columbia, one school in Hawaii, eight schools in Idaho, three schools in Illinois, 11 schools in Maine, one school in Minnesota, one school in Nebraska, one school in Nevada, seven schools in New Jersey, 12 schools in Ohio, 19 schools in Oklahoma, two schools in Oregon, six schools in Rhode Island, two schools in Tennessee, one school in Washington). These schools are not included in the total number of adopting schools by each ISP category. These schools could be participating because of a grace year or as part of a group, but reported separately.

3 The data referenced in footnotes 1 and 2 account for the difference between the U.S. total number of adopting schools and the total number of adopting schools by identified student percentage category.

Table 4: Student Enrollment for School Years (SY) 2014–2015,[1] 2015–2016,[2] 2016–2017,[3] 2017–2018,[4] 2018–2019,[5] 2019–2020,[6] 2020–2021,[7] 2021–2022,[8] and 2022–2023[10]

State	Enrollment									Change
	SY 2014–2015	SY 2015–2016	SY 2016–2017	SY 2017–2018	SY 2018–2019	SY 2019–2020	SY 2020–2021	SY 2021–2022	SY 2022–2023	SY 2021–2022 to SY 2022–2023
Alabama	180,789	196,802	195,853	208,748	208,929	208,068	101,387	222,189	240,153	17,964
Alaska	27,666	29,234	34,106	36,575	37,244	36,560	38,089	33,465	35,400	1,935
Arizona	30,763	55,048	94,229	116,488	145,273	178,535	193,750	171,028	187,541	16,513
Arkansas	791	20,060	55,605	71,475	80,732	91,510	104,128	103,678	99,022	-4,656
California	113,513	435,900	748,533	799,646	1,690,225	1,944,304	2,207,703	2,174,949	3,524,445	1,349,496
Colorado	12,455	34,920	36,198	39,244	39,950	39,028	40,165	33,404	33,798	394
Connecticut	66,524	105,547	110,322	118,067	151,552	175,155	208,824	206,444	233,711	27,267
Delaware	46,096	50,837	56,306	58,154	62,920	61,047	61,156	58,917	65,164	6,247
District of Columbia	47,013	51,524	56,143	58,085	62,424	61,909	65,025	62,651	65,187	2,536
Florida	274,071	474,006	579,138	705,602	858,135	872,443	913,549	933,123	1,787,164	854,041
Georgia	354,038	420,383	467,411	472,296	490,319	510,532	494,963	524,495	521,529	-2,966
Hawaii	2,640	4,650	20,150	28,750	28,994	27,747	33,120	48,964	47,228	-1,736
Idaho	18,828	32,299	33,058	33,898	28,876	21,953	21,646	22,852	17,142	-5,710
Illinois	552,751	672,831	685,101	725,241	731,062	762,195	804,574	793,894	870,519	76,625
Indiana	96,604	117,187	127,405	136,855	172,969	224,192	247,399	241,398	282,269	40,871
Iowa	32,103	46,021	50,589	53,880	67,192	81,424	83,660	83,234	107,405	24,171
Kansas	5,992	19,641	22,661	25,722	26,338	26,038	13,563	10,912	9,648	-1,264
Kentucky	279,144	385,043	436,419	479,450	501,059	522,512	539,460	532,628	549,813	17,185
Louisiana	146,141	217,496	341,492	455,318	399,190	493,727	523,957	518,791	554,714	35,923
Maine[9]	5,284	17,977	20,411	20,435	23,733	19,975	Not Reported	Not Reported	21,882	21,882
Maryland	7,624	94,496	99,484	103,814	106,218	102,788	171,613	173,972	171,905	-2,067
Massachusetts	134,071	200,948	238,872	260,364	282,030	301,465	274,211	330,684	389,055	58,371
Michigan	266,249	275,579	273,071	287,801	418,447	466,540	544,806	541,554	586,515	44,961
Minnesota	20,688	49,944	57,003	57,957	63,057	51,818	53,982	50,873	54,787	3,914
Mississippi	136,095	148,781	151,815	147,677	164,297	145,097	162,110	158,523	149,486	-9,037
Missouri	106,126	111,319	121,962	134,996	139,884	143,692	142,542	142,654	134,522	-8,132
Montana	15,802	21,161	23,290	26,180	24,777	21,741	22,340	20,656	26,032	5,376
Nebraska	180	2,425	4,277	7,411	7,276	6,173	12,100	12,090	67,351	55,261
Nevada	7,917	15,970	71,345	95,001	100,957	218,746	293,179	271,504	362,578	91,074
New Hampshire	0	644	1,125	1,082	1,100	652	621	0	569	569
New Jersey	99,840	107,277	127,108	140,199	153,533	144,312	143,586	143,264	148,078	4,814
New Mexico	119,300	149,057	164,569	177,388	175,756	186,116	187,301	176,450	220,400	43,950
New York	505,859	528,748	603,795	1,586,981	1,646,409	1,742,005	1,719,661	1,755,995	1,739,621	-16,374
North Carolina	310,850	357,307	367,705	433,204	418,820	455,237	463,666	415,375	458,418	43,043
North Dakota	5,284	5,661	5,698	6,039	6,525	7,424	9,420	9,420	8,893	-527
Ohio	305,451	354,727	363,860	397,594	409,467	410,400	412,116	416,274	431,250	14,976

Table 4: Student Enrollment for School Years (SY) 2014–2015,[1] 2015–2016,[2] 2016–2017,[3] 2017–2018,[4] 2018–2019,[5] 2019–2020,[6] 2020–2021,[7] 2021–2022,[8] and 2022–2023[10] *(continued)*

State	Enrollment									Change
	SY 2014–2015	SY 2015–2016	SY 2016–2017	SY 2017–2018	SY 2018–2019	SY 2019–2020	SY 2020–2021	SY 2021–2022	SY 2022–2023	SY 2021–2022 to SY 2022–2023
Oklahoma	43,433	66,323	104,162	148,994	152,695	154,078	99,447	123,293	124,882	1,589
Oregon	103,601	129,635	130,336	129,766	122,553	133,615	240,052	245,362	277,613	32,251
Pennsylvania	327,573	394,630	426,984	470,275	509,073	540,877	565,014	556,188	704,553	148,365
Rhode Island	838	6,531	10,350	16,675	18,043	30,915	32,220	31,774	37,426	5,652
South Carolina	111,453	173,364	201,587	235,711	249,036	255,006	265,027	254,439	240,894	-13,545
South Dakota	13,056	14,626	15,981	15,499	19,409	18,332	20,310	20,824	15,661	-5,163
Tennessee	417,165	436,821	428,424	437,641	389,163	382,428	367,184	362,507	362,551	44
Texas	941,262	1,015,384	984,976	1,184,559	1,566,088	1,873,513	2,111,019	2,088,076	2,343,402	255,326
Utah	7,019	8,565	8,880	12,353	20,148	20,900	19,194	15,159	19,066	3,907
Vermont	7,386	12,751	13,508	13,946	13,768	12,053	12,239	13,045	21,019	7,974
Virginia	42,911	99,404	119,051	156,687	204,610	241,056	385,041	512,500	567,126	54,626
Washington	53,369	69,432	75,357	95,514	110,815	126,278	158,518	195,397	545,548	350,151
West Virginia	124,978	145,057	177,875	195,075	208,960	209,566	212,362	225,803	216,667	-9,136
Wisconsin	133,232	146,330	156,519	158,325	165,513	172,782	188,219	189,098	204,917	15,819
Wyoming	1,255	1,255	1,370	1,500	1,886	1,931	2,043	1,928	1,854	-74
U.S. TOTAL	**6,663,073**	**8,531,558**	**9,701,469**	**11,780,137**	**13,677,429**	**14,936,390**	**15,987,261**	**16,231,697**	**19,886,373**	**3,654,676**

1 Data for the 2014–2015 school year are from *Take Up of Community Eligibility This School Year* (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, February 2015).

2 Data for the 2015–2016 school year are from *Community Eligibility Adoption Rises for the 2015–2016 School Year, Increasing Access to School Meals* (Food Research & Action Center and Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, updated May 2016).

3 Data for the 2016–2017 school year are from *Community Eligibility Continues to Grow in the 2016–2017 School Year* (Food Research & Action Center, March 2017). Some schools did not provide student enrollment information for the 2016–2017 school year: one school in California, two schools in Georgia, four schools in Idaho, three schools in Maine, 26 schools in Tennessee, and four schools in South Carolina.

4 Data for the 2017–2018 school year are from *Community Eligibility: The Key to Hunger-Free Schools, School Year 2018–2019* (Food Research & Action Center, May 2019). Some schools did not provide student enrollment information for the 2017–2018 school year: 12 schools in Alaska, 19 schools in Louisiana, four schools in Mississippi, five schools in Oklahoma, one school in South Carolina, and two schools in Vermont.

5 Data for the 2018–2019 school year are from *Community Eligibility: The Key to Hunger-Free Schools, School Year 2018–2019* (Food Research & Action Center, May 2019). Some schools did not provide student enrollment information for the 2018–2019 school year: four schools in Hawaii, 182 schools in Louisiana, 25 schools in Mississippi, 14 schools in South Carolina, and three schools in Utah.

6 Data for the 2019–2020 school year are from *Community Eligibility: The Key to Hunger-Free Schools, School Year 2019–2020* (Food Research & Action Center, May 2020). Some schools did not provide student enrollment information for the 2019–2020 school year: 19 schools in Alabama, 11 schools in California, four schools in the District of Columbia, five schools in Indiana, two schools in Louisiana, seven schools in Maine, two schools in Massachusetts, 10 schools in Michigan, one school in Nevada, four schools in Oregon, 18 schools in South Carolina, one school in South Dakota, five schools in Texas, and one school in Virginia.

7 Data for the 2020–2021 school year are from *Community Eligibility: The Key to Hunger-Free Schools, School Year 2020–2021* (Food Research & Action Center, June 2021). Some schools did not provide student enrollment information for the 2020–2021 school year: eight schools in Alabama, 43 schools in California, six schools in Florida, eight schools in Georgia, one school in Idaho, one school in Louisiana, 149 schools in Massachusetts, two schools in Michigan, three schools in Missouri, one school in New Mexico, 115 schools in New York, four schools in South Carolina, five schools in Tennessee, eight schools in Texas, one school in Washington.

8 Data for the 2021–2022 school year are from *Community Eligibility: The Key to Hunger-Free Schools, School Year 2020–2021* (Food Research & Action Center, June 2022). Some schools did not provide student enrollment information for the 2021–2022 school year: 17 schools in Alabama, three schools in Alaska, one school in Colorado, one school in Idaho, two schools in Kentucky, four schools in Louisiana, one school in Maryland, one school in Montana, one school in North Carolina, two schools in Oregon, three schools in Tennessee.

9 Maine did not report student enrollment data for the 2020–2021 or 2021–2022 school years.

10 Some schools did not provide student enrollment information for the 2022–2023 school year: 62 schools in Alabama, 11 schools in Arizona, one school in Nevada, one school in New Mexico, 29 schools in New York, 40 schools in South Carolina.

Table 5: Number of Schools Adopting the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) for School Years (SY) 2014–2015,[1] 2015–2016,[2] 2016–2017,[3] 2017–2018,[4] 2018–2019,[5] 2019–2020,[6] 2020–2021,[7] 2021–2022,[8] and 2022–2023

State	Adopting									Change
	SY 2014–2015	SY 2015–2016	SY 2016–2017	SY 2017–2018	SY 2018–2019	SY 2019–2020	SY 2020–2021	SY 2021–2022	SY 2022–2023	SY 2021–2022 to SY 2022–2023
Alabama	347	392	391	425	444	445	454	490	536	46
Alaska	123	137	174	213	208	208	216	208	211	3
Arizona	73	133	227	296	372	446	500	493	508	15
Arkansas	4	57	139	178	201	229	255	259	250	-9
California	208	651	1,070	1,311	2,833	3,275	3,777	3,730	6,150	2,420
Colorado	34	82	91	101	105	105	108	100	106	6
Connecticut	133	212	228	241	307	364	426	420	483	63
Delaware	95	108	117	116	212	116	166	114	127	13
District of Columbia	96	107	115	116	119	115	116	183	180	-3
Florida	548	831	1,001	1,142	1,356	1,374	1,440	1,462	2,542	1,080
Georgia	589	700	768	787	818	834	819	873	873	0
Hawaii	6	25	43	65	69	68	80	106	106	0
Idaho	50	88	92	92	82	61	62	64	61	-3
Illinois	1,041	1,322	1,363	1,499	1,541	1,588	1,693	1,823	2,087	264
Indiana	214	253	283	287	362	462	515	506	593	87
Iowa	78	110	119	123	156	176	177	176	221	45
Kansas	18	64	69	72	75	70	44	31	34	3
Kentucky	611	804	888	948	984	1,028	1,060	1,061	1,092	31
Louisiana	335	484	741	968	1,016	1,029	1,087	1,095	1,177	82
Maine	21	59	72	71	87	73	73	75	77	2
Maryland	25	227	228	242	242	238	364	357	355	-2
Massachusetts	294	462	525	574	613	685	720	718	846	128
Michigan	625	662	652	715	1,105	1,259	1,466	1,468	1,638	170
Minnesota	56	125	153	154	163	146	153	150	160	10
Mississippi	257	298	333	342	410	337	390	376	370	-6
Missouri	298	330	367	402	420	427	432	433	416	-17
Montana	93	127	138	158	157	150	154	147	167	20
Nebraska	2	9	15	26	26	26	43	45	151	106
Nevada	13	36	122	153	167	316	399	388	501	113
New Hampshire	0	2	3	3	4	3	3	0	3	3
New Jersey	197	227	270	306	331	319	315	319	321	2
New Mexico	343	429	487	535	546	568	574	556	667	111
New York	1,246	1,351	1,561	3,381	3,565	3,481	3,633	3,021	3,051	30
North Carolina	648	752	787	914	882	941	955	879	974	95
North Dakota	23	24	25	26	29	31	37	37	37	0

Table 5: Number of Schools Adopting the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) for School Years (SY) 2014–2015,[1] 2015–2016,[2] 2016–2017,[3] 2017–2018,[4] 2018–2019,[5] 2019–2020,[6] 2020–2021,[7] 2021–2022,[8] and 2022–2023 *(continued)*

State	Adopting									Change
	SY 2014–2015	SY 2015–2016	SY 2016–2017	SY 2017–2018	SY 2018–2019	SY 2019–2020	SY 2020–2021	SY 2021–2022	SY 2022–2023	SY 2021–2022 to SY 2022–2023
Ohio	739	842	918	998	998	1,022	1,025	1,062	1,141	79
Oklahoma	100	184	301	413	427	408	306	326	384	58
Oregon	262	340	346	344	341	353	622	588	709	121
Pennsylvania	646	795	861	959	1,031	1,112	1,171	1,172	1,478	306
Rhode Island	1	10	21	34	37	58	61	61	68	7
South Carolina	226	348	412	471	515	531	531	538	546	8
South Dakota	142	109	124	89	97	97	102	110	100	-10
Tennessee	862	924	909	914	836	840	831	845	877	32
Texas	1,477	1,665	1,678	2,070	2,716	3,250	3,700	3,740	4,231	491
Utah	22	28	29	35	52	51	54	42	50	8
Vermont	32	56	60	68	62	53	56	59	92	33
Virginia	87	206	255	341	428	511	782	1,008	1,086	78
Washington	122	172	193	232	273	314	394	482	1,213	731
West Virginia	369	428	492	518	540	545	558	593	585	-8
Wisconsin	348	381	415	422	438	468	494	498	591	93
Wyoming	5	5	7	10	11	14	14	13	13	0
US Total	**14,184**	**18,173**	**20,678**	**24,900**	**28,809**	**30,620**	**33,407**	**33,300**	**40,235**	**6,935**

1 Data for the 2014–2015 school year are from *Take Up of Community Eligibility This School Year* (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, February 2015).

2 Data for the 2015–2016 school year are from *Community Eligibility Adoption Rises for the 2015–2016 School Year, Increasing Access to School Meals* (Food Research & Action Center and Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, updated May 2016).

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8 Data for the 2021–2022 school year are from *Community Eligibility: The Key to Hunger-Free Schools, School Year 2021–2022* (Food Research & Action Center, June 2022).

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Research Highlights the Benefits of Healthy School Meals for All Students: An Annotated Bibliography

July 2024

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Methodology

The methodology employed in constructing this annotated bibliography began with a thorough review of existing reports and research briefs from the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC), aiming to identify seminal papers and critical themes within the field. Duplicates within the retrieved reports were then removed. Sources were then filtered to include only those published after 2012, with exceptions for essential papers that provided foundational knowledge. Searches were conducted on platforms including Google Scholar, The University of Texas at Dallas library database, and Research Rabbit to locate newer papers by the same authors or related topics, ensuring updated information and insights were included. Additionally, general searches were performed using specific keywords related to universal school meals, broadening the scope of the bibliography. Systematic reviews were incorporated into the search process, and primary papers within these reviews were examined to include pertinent research findings. The culled papers were mapped out in Research Rabbit to identify any additional important or highly cited papers that were overlooked initially. Most papers had robust citations, but exceptions were made for papers published after 2022. The results of these searches are included below and organized by subject. Each citation includes a source, description, and key takeaway.

Harms of Childhood Food Insecurity

- Source: Shankar, P., Chung, R., & Frank, D. A. (2017). Association of Food Insecurity with Children's Behavioral, Emotional, and Academic Outcomes: A Systematic Review. *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics*, 38(2), 135–150. https://doi.org/10.1097/DBP.0000000000000383
    - Description: This review offers a comprehensive analysis of 23 peer-reviewed articles originating from developed nations. It examines the connections between food insecurity and detrimental childhood developmental outcomes, encompassing early cognitive development, academic performance, inattention, and other outcomes across four age groups: infants and toddlers, preschoolers, school-aged children, and adolescents. Household food insecurity, even at marginal levels, correlates with various behavioral, academic, and emotional challenges in children from infancy to adolescence.
    - **Takeaway: Food insecurity within households is linked to various behavioral, academic, and emotional difficulties experienced by children from infancy through adolescence.**

- Source: Jackson, D. B., Newsome, J., Vaughn, M. G., & Johnson, K. R. (2018). Considering the role of food insecurity in low self-control and early delinquency. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 56, 127–139. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2017.07.002
    - Description: This study utilized data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCWS), a nationwide investigation tracking a substantial cohort of children born in the U.S. between 1998 and 2000. Children raised in households facing food insecurity display notably diminished levels of self-control during early childhood and heightened tendencies toward delinquency during late childhood, in contrast to those raised in food-secure environments, even when accounting for other factors. The presence of both temporary and persistent food insecurity correlates significantly and positively with low self-control and early delinquent behavior, with sustained food insecurity associated with even greater increases in these risks. Supplementary analyses suggest that the relationship between food insecurity and early delinquency is partially mediated by low self-control.
    - **Takeaway: Children growing up in food-insecure households, as studied through the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, exhibit decreased self-control in early childhood and increased delinquent behavior in late childhood, even after considering other factors, with persistent food insecurity exacerbating these risks.**

- Source: Burke, M. P., Martini, L. H., Çayır, E., Hartline-Grafton, H. L., & Meade, R. L. (2016). Severity of Household Food Insecurity Is Positively Associated with Mental Disorders among Children and Adolescents in the United States. *The Journal of Nutrition*, 146(10), 2019–2026. https://doi.org/10.3945/jn.116.232298
    - Description: This paper uses cross-sectional data from the 2011–2014 National Health Interview Survey involving 16,918 children and 14,143 adolescents from participating families. Mental disorders were assessed using the brief Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, while food security status was measured using the 10-item USDA Household Food Security Survey Module. A significant linear trend in odds ratios was observed, indicating that as household food insecurity severity increased, so did the likelihood of youth experiencing a mental disorder ($P < 0.001$). Noteworthy findings included higher odds of mental disorder with impairment among youth in marginally food-secure households compared to those in food-secure households. Additionally, youth in very-low-food-secure households exhibited higher odds of severe mental disorder impairment relative to those in food-secure households.
    - **Takeaway: The severity of household food insecurity, as revealed by the National Health Interview Survey, is positively associated with an increased likelihood of mental disorders among youth, with particularly elevated risks observed in marginally food-secure and very-low-food-secure households.**

- Source: Shonkoff, J. P., & Garner, A. S. (2012). The lifelong effects of early childhood adversity and toxic stress. *Pediatrics* (Evanston), 129(1), e232–e246. https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2011-2663
    - Description: This paper delves into the evidence concerning the disruptive effects of toxic stress, providing compelling insights into the underlying causal pathways linking early adversity to subsequent challenges in learning, behavior, and overall physical and mental health. The implications stemming from this framework can bring about significant transformations in pediatrics. It suggests a paradigm shift, wherein numerous adult diseases are reframed as developmental disorders originating in early life. Furthermore, it posits that persistent health disparities linked to factors like poverty, discrimination, or maltreatment may be mitigated through the alleviation of toxic stress during childhood.
    - **Takeaway: Early adversity is linked with later challenges in learning, behavior, and health. Adult diseases can be seen as developmental disorders, and there is a potential to address persistent health disparities by mitigating childhood toxic stress.**

- Source: Gennetian, L. A., Wolf, S., Hill, H. D., & Morris, P. A. (2015). Intrayear Household Income Dynamics and Adolescent School Behavior. *Demography*, 52(2), 455–483. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13524-015-0370-9
    - Description: This study explores the connection between fluctuations in household income within a year and the behavioral outcomes of adolescents in educational settings. It draws on data from a nationally representative sample of households with adolescents, sourced from the 2004 panel of the Survey of Income and Program Participation. The findings reveal a negative relationship between income instability and various positive school-related behaviors among adolescents. Income instability is shown to reduce the likelihood of adolescents being highly engaged in school, regardless of their income level. Moreover, income instability predicts incidents of adolescent expulsions and suspensions.
    - **Takeaway: There is a negative association between income instability and adolescent school-related behaviors, irrespective of income levels, suggesting a significant impact on school engagement and increased risk of expulsions and suspensions, especially among low-income, older, and racial minority adolescents.**

- Source: Bidopia, T., Carbo, A. V., Ross, R. A., & Burke, N. L. (2023). Food insecurity and disordered eating behaviors in children and adolescents: A systematic review. *Eating Behaviors: An International Journal*, 49, 101731–101731. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eatbeh.2023.101731
    - Description: This systematic review identified a correlation between food insecurity (F.I.) and various behaviors among children and adolescents, including binge eating, loss-of-control eating, eating when not hungry, engaging in unhealthy weight control practices, and displaying picky eating tendencies. However, the strength of this association differed based on the type of disordered eating behavior examined and the severity of food insecurity. These findings underscore the significance of screening for disordered eating behaviors in young individuals experiencing food insecurity, as it can aid in the prevention and intervention of eating disorders.
    - **Takeaway: Food insecurity is correlated with a range of disordered eating behaviors among children and adolescents, emphasizing the importance of early screening to prevent and intervene in eating disorders among those affected.**

- Source: Huang, J., Barnidge, E., & Kim, Y. (2015). Children Receiving Free or Reduced-Price School Lunch Have Higher Food Insufficiency Rates in Summer. *The Journal of Nutrition* (Vol. 145, Issue 9, pp. 2161–2168). Elsevier B.V. https://doi.org/10.3945/jn.115.214486
    - Description: This study aimed to evaluate the link between NSLP participation and household food insufficiency by analyzing food insufficiency trends over a 10-month period. Using data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation, the study considered only students who were eligible for free or reduced-price meals and compared the households of those who opted to receive the meals with those who did not. Among NSLP participant households, the rate

of food insufficiency remained steady from January to May at around 4 percent, then rose to over 5 percent in June and July. In contrast, food insufficiency among eligible nonrecipients remained consistent throughout the year, averaging about 2 percent.
    - **Takeaway: Among households participating in the NSLP, there is a steady rate of food insufficiency with notable increases in summer months, highlighting the importance of addressing food insecurity dynamics beyond the academic year.**

- Source: Gundersen, C., & Ziliak, J. P. (2015). Food Insecurity And Health Outcomes. In Health Affairs (Vol. 34, Issue 11, pp. 1830–1839). *Health Affairs* (Project Hope). https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2015.0645
    - Description: Approximately 50 million Americans face food insecurity, a prominent health and nutrition concern. This review assesses recent research on food insecurity's health impacts across age groups. It begins by outlining measurement methods and prevalence trends, followed by a survey of studies linking food insecurity to negative health outcomes. Findings consistently show that food insecurity correlates with poorer health, such as higher rates of asthma in children and comparable limitations in daily activities for seniors. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) significantly reduces food insecurity and is vital for curbing associated health risks.
    - **Takeaway: Food insecurity has significant adverse health effects across different age groups, with programs like the NSLP and SNAP playing a crucial role in alleviating this issue.**

Benefits of School Meals

School Meals Reduce Childhood Food Insecurity

- Source: Fletcher, J. M., & Frisvold, D. E. (2017). The Relationship between the School Breakfast Program and Food Insecurity. *The Journal of Consumer Affairs*, 51(3), 481–500. https://doi.org/10.1111/joca.12163
    - Description: This study investigates the connection between the School Breakfast Program (SBP) and outcomes related to food insecurity. The SBP holds promise in alleviating food insecurity by providing breakfast to students and providing implicit income support to households. This study uses state-level thresholds linked to school-level poverty rates that mandate the implementation of the SBP to compare food security outcomes of students in similar schools but with varying obligations to offer breakfast. The findings indicate that state policies mandating schools to provide the SBP have led to a decrease in food insecurity among young children.
    - **Takeaway: State policies mandating SBP have been effective in reducing food insecurity among young children.**

- Source: Gundersen, C., Kreider, B., & Pepper, J. (2012). The impact of the National School Lunch Program on child health: A nonparametric bounds analysis. *Journal of Econometrics*, 166(1), 79–91. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeconom.2011.06.007
    - Description: Children from households receiving free or reduced-price school meals tend to display more adverse health outcomes compared to peers with similar observable characteristics who are not enrolled. However, assessing the program's causal effects poses challenges due to the lack of clear counterfactuals and systematic underreporting of participation. This study combines survey data with supplementary administrative information on NSLP caseload sizes, introducing a novel approach akin to a regression discontinuity design by extending nonparametric partial identification methods, which account for endogenous selection and nonrandom classification error simultaneously. The paper provides evidence, under relatively mild assumptions, that receiving free or reduced-price lunches positively impacts children's health outcomes.
    - **Takeaway: Children from households receiving free or reduced-price school meals experience improved health outcomes, indicating the program's potential benefits despite inherent limitations in evaluating its effects.**

- Source: Huang, J., & Barnidge, E. (2016). Low-income Children's participation in the National School Lunch Program and household food insufficiency. *Social Science Medicine* (Vol. 150, pp. 8–14). Elsevier B.V. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2015.12.020
    - Description: This study undertakes an examination of the impact of NSLP on household food insufficiency. Utilizing data from four longitudinal panels of the Survey of Income and Program Participation, the sample encompassed 15,241 households with at least one child (aged 5–18) benefiting from free or reduced-price lunch through the NSLP. The findings from fixed-effects regression analysis revealed that during summer months when schools are not in session, and low-income families are unable to participate in the NSLP, the food insufficiency rate among NSLP recipients is estimated to be 0.7 percent higher. This result underscores the association between NSLP participation and a notable reduction in the risk of food insufficiency by nearly 14 percent, highlighting the program's significance in mitigating food insecurity among vulnerable populations.
    Takeaway: This study demonstrates that participation in NSLP reduces the risk of household food insufficiency during the months in which children are eating in school as compared to the summer months when they are not.

- Source: Arteaga, I., & Heflin, C. (2014). Participation in the National School Lunch Program and Food Security: An analysis of transitions into kindergarten. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 47, 224–230. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2014.09.014
    - Description: This study examines the impact of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) on household food security by utilizing state kindergarten eligibility date variations, focusing on households with kindergarten-age children in the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study — Birth cohort (ECLS-B). Findings

indicate that NSLP participation reduces food insecurity, particularly for students from households earning below 185 percent of the federal poverty line. Paying full price for school lunches in these low-income households is associated with increased food insecurity. Sensitivity analyses confirm that changes in child care hours do not affect the NSLP's impact, and school entry does not reduce food insecurity for families with higher incomes. These results highlight the critical role of school lunch programs during early school years.
    - **Takeaway: The NSLP effectively mitigates food insecurity. Paying full price for school lunches correlates with heightened levels of food insecurity within the low-income cohort.**

- Source: Toossi, S. (2024). The effect of universal free school meals on children's food hardship. *Food Policy*, 124. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodpol.2024.102606
    - Description: Children residing in states where universal free school meals (UFSM) programs were not extended showed a 12.6 percent decrease (equivalent to a 38.3 percent reduction compared to the sample mean) in participation in school meals programs. Conversely, they were 1.5 percent more likely (a 9.8 percent increase over the sample mean) to encounter food insufficiency compared to their counterparts in states that extended UFSM programs.
    - **Takeaway: The absence of UFSM program extension in certain states resulted in a significant decrease in school meals program participation among children, accompanied by a higher likelihood of encountering food insufficiency compared to counterparts in states with extended UFSM programs.**

School Meals Improve Student Nutritional Intake and Outcomes

- Source: Cohen, J. F. W., Hecht, A. A., McLoughlin, G. M., Turner, L., & Schwartz, M. B. (2021). Universal School Meals and Associations with Student Participation, Attendance, Academic Performance, Diet Quality, Food Security, and Body Mass Index: A Systematic Review. *Nutrients* (Vol. 13, Issue 3, p. 911). MDPI AG. https://doi.org/10.3390/nu13030911
    - Description: This systematic review scrutinizes research on the relationship between universal free school meals and various facets such as students' school meal participation rates, dietary habits, attendance, academic performance, Body Mass Index (BMI), and school finances. The analysis encompassed 47 studies, with bias assessed using the Newcastle-Ottawa Scale (NOS). The prevailing trend across most studies indicates positive associations between universal free school meals and school meal participation rates. The majority of investigations, particularly those incorporating free lunches, reveal favorable connections with diet quality, food security, and academic performance. Lastly, providing free meals to students may lead to enhanced household incomes, particularly among lower-income families with children.
    - **Takeaway: Universal free school meals programs are associated with increased school meal participation rates, improved diet quality, food**

security, academic performance, and potentially enhanced household incomes, particularly benefiting lower-income families with children.

- Source: Vernarelli, J. A., & O'Brien, B. (2017). A Vote for School Lunches: School Lunches Provide Superior Nutrient Quality than Lunches Obtained from Other Sources in a Nationally Representative Sample of U.S. Children. *Nutrients*, 9(9), 924. https://doi.org/10.3390/nu9090924
    - Description: This study aimed to discern whether meals served after the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA) implementation had better nutritional value. The study sampled 2,190 children from across the nation; it was discovered that consuming school-provided lunches was associated with superior nutritional quality compared to lunches obtained from alternate sources, spanning various age and income groups. Notably, children eligible for no-cost school lunches but not enrolled in NSLP exhibited significantly different dietary patterns. Specifically, they consumed approximately 60 percent more energy, 58 percent more total fat, 60 percent more saturated fat, 50 percent more solid fat, 61 percent more sodium, double the amount of added sugars, and less than half the amount of fruit compared to NSLP participants (all $p < 0.001$). These findings highlight the nutritional advantages of school lunches over alternatives, particularly benefiting children from low-income backgrounds.
    - **Takeaway: Post-HHFKA implementation, school-provided lunches offer significantly better nutritional quality compared to lunches from other sources, emphasizing their importance, especially for children from low-income backgrounds.**

- Source: Au, L. E., Gurzo, K., Gosliner, W., Webb, K. L., Crawford, P. B., & Ritchie, L. D. (2018). Eating School Meals Daily Is Associated with Healthier Dietary Intakes: The Healthy Communities Study. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, 118(8), 1474–1481.e1. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jand.2018.01.010
    - Description: This study investigates the link between children's dietary intake and their frequency of participation in NSLP and SBP, utilizing data from the Healthy Communities Study, a cross-sectional observational study conducted from 2013 to 2015. Children who consumed school breakfast daily, as opposed to 0 to 4 days per week, reported higher intake of fruits and vegetables, dietary fiber, whole grains, dairy, and calcium. Similarly, children who consumed school lunch daily, in comparison to less frequent consumers, had higher intakes of dairy and calcium.
    - **Takeaway: Daily participation in NSLP and SBP is associated with increased intake of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, dairy, and essential nutrients among children, highlighting the positive impact of regular school meal consumption on dietary quality.**

- Source: Hecht, A. A., Dunn, C. G., Kinsey, E. W., Read, M. A., Levi, R., Richardson, A. S., Hager, E. R., & Seligman, H. K. (2022). Estimates of the Nutritional Impact of Non-Participation in the National School Lunch Program during COVID-19 School Closures. *Nutrients* (Vol. 14, Issue 7, p. 1387). MDPI AG. https://doi.org/10.3390/nu14071387

- Description: This study estimates changes in lunchtime calorie intake and nutrient consumption among participants in the NSLP in 2020 compared to the same period in 2019. NSLP participants who did not receive school meals would likely experience a weekly increase of 640 calories in their intake, alongside a reduction in nutrients like calcium and vitamin D. As there was a notable decrease in lunches served per week from March to November 2020 compared to the preceding year, it is projected that students across the nation may have collectively consumed an additional 3 to 10 billion calories per week.
- **Takeaway: Changes in NSLP participation in 2020 likely led to increased calorie intake and reduced nutrient consumption among children, potentially resulting in a significant nationwide increase in weekly calorie consumption.**

- Source: Cohen, J. F. W., Gorski Findling, M. T., Rosenfeld, L., Smith, L., Rimm, E. B., & Hoffman, J. A. (2018). The Impact of 1 Year of Healthier School Food Policies on Students' Diets During and Outside of the School Day. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics* (Vol. 118, Issue 12, pp. 2296–2301). Elsevier B.V. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jand.2018.07.009
  - Description: This study delves into the collective impact of enhanced standards on both school meal and snack choices, as well as dietary preferences beyond the school setting. Additionally, it scrutinizes how these standards influence the intake of essential nutrients. Post-implementation, there was a notable uptick in the proportion of students selecting school meals. Although there were no discernible shifts in competitive food purchases, there was a significant drop in the consumption of unhealthy snacks after school. Throughout the entire day, students, on average, consumed 22 grams less sugar post-implementation compared to pre-implementation (86 g vs. 108 g; P = 0.002).
  - **Takeaway: Following implementation of enhanced nutritional standards, there was an increase in school meal selection, a decrease in unhealthy snack consumption after school, and a reduction in daily sugar intake among students, indicating the positive impact of these standards on dietary choices both within and outside the school setting.**

- Source: Kinderknecht, K., Harris, C., & Jones-Smith, J. (2020). Association of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act With Dietary Quality Among Children in the U.S. National School Lunch Program. *JAMA* (Vol. 324, Issue 4, p. 359). American Medical Association (AMA). https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2020.9517
  - Description: The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA) of 2010 was found to have a positive impact on the dietary quality of lunchtime meals across diverse income brackets, including students from low-income, low-middle-income, and middle-high-income backgrounds who were presumed participants in the NSLP. In a sequential cross-sectional study involving 6,389 students, notable disparities were noted in the average Healthy Eating Index-2010 (HEI-2010) scores before and after the implementation of HHFKA. The principal focus was on assessing the dietary quality of lunch consumption gauged by HEI-2010. A score of 0

denotes non-adherence to the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, while a score of 100 indicates complete adherence to these guidelines. These discrepancies were particularly pronounced among low-income NSLP participants (mean difference: 11.9) in comparison to low-income NSLP nonparticipants (mean difference: -0.7), low-middle-income NSLP participants (mean difference: 14.3) versus low-middle-income nonparticipants (mean difference: 2.0), and middle-high-income NSLP participants (mean difference: 12.8) relative to middle-high-income nonparticipants (mean difference: 4.7).
    - **Takeaway: The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 significantly improved the dietary quality of lunchtime meals for students across various income brackets, as evidenced by increased Healthy Eating Index-2010 (HEI-2010) scores compared to nonparticipants.**

- Source: Cullen, K. W., & Chen, T. A. (2017). The contribution of the USDA school breakfast and lunch program meals to student daily dietary intake. *Preventive Medicine Reports* (Vol. 5, pp. 82–85). Elsevier B.V. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pmedr.2016.11.016
    - Description: This study assesses the impact of SBP and NSLP meals on the dietary intake of 5–18-year-olds using data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys (NHANES) spanning 2007 to 2012. Analysis of covariance, considering covariates such as BMI, ethnicity, sex, age, and poverty level, determined that nearly half of the day's energy intake came from these school meals for the 448 participants who consumed both on a weekday. The contribution of school meals to major food groups ranged from 40.6 percent for vegetables to 77.1 percent for milk, underscoring their significance in the daily dietary intake of children from low-income households.
    - **Takeaway: SBP and NSLP play a crucial role in providing nearly half of the daily energy intake for children from low-income households ages 5–18 in the U.S., highlighting their substantial contribution to their dietary needs.**

- Source: Johnson, D. B., Podrabsky, M., Rocha, A., & Otten, J. J. (2016). Effect of the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act on the Nutritional Quality of Meals Selected by Students and School Lunch Participation Rates. *JAMA Pediatrics* (Vol. 170, Issue 1, p. e153918). American Medical Association (AMA). https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2015.3918
    - Description: This study aimed to evaluate the impact of the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act on the nutritional quality of school meals and participation rates in a Washington state urban school district with 7,200 students, 54 percent eligible for free and reduced-price meals. Over 16 months before and 15 months after policy implementation, data from 1,741,630 meals were analyzed. Results showed significant improvements in nutritional quality post-implementation, with an increased mean adequacy ratio and decreased energy density of selected foods, while student meal participation remained stable. These findings suggest that improved nutrition standards positively influence food selection without negatively affecting participation rates, emphasizing the effectiveness of such policies in promoting healthier dietary habits among students.

- **Takeaway: Implementation of the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act led to improved nutritional quality of school meals without affecting student meal participation rates, highlighting the effectiveness of nutrition standards in promoting healthier food choices among students.**

- Source: Schwartz, A. E., & Rothbart, M. W. (2019). Let Them Eat Lunch: The Impact of Universal Free Meals on Student Performance. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* (Vol. 39, Issue 2, pp. 376–410). Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.22175
  - Description: This study examines the impact of universal free meals (UFM) on academic performance and school lunch participation in New York City middle schools. Findings reveal that UFM positively affects academic performance in both mathematics and English Language Arts, with larger effects observed for non-poor students. Additionally, UFM increases participation in school lunch programs for both poor and non-poor students. Further analysis suggests that increased school lunch participation enhances academic performance for all students. Importantly, there is no evidence of adverse effects on student weight outcomes, with some indications that school lunch participation improves weight outcomes for non-poor students.
  - **Takeaway: Extending free school lunches to all students in New York City middle schools, regardless of income, has a positive impact on academic performance, particularly in mathematics and English Language Arts, with increased participation in school lunch programs. Increased participation in school lunch programs improves academic performance for students without adversely affecting student weight outcomes.**

School Meals for All Increases Student Participation

- Source: Soldavini, J., & Ammerman, A. S. (2019). Serving Breakfast Free to All Students and Type of Breakfast Serving Model Are Associated with Participation in the School Breakfast Program. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, 119(7), 1142–1149. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jand.2019.03.001
  - Description: Cross-sectional study on SBP using data from 2,285 North Carolina public schools. Breakfast in the Classroom (BIC) and BIC plus "grab and go" serving models were positively associated with SBP participation among elementary and high school students. "Grab and go" and second-chance models were positively associated with SBP participation among middle and high school students.
  - **Takeaway: Breakfast serving models such as BIC and "grab and go," alongside offering breakfast at no charge to all students, are positively associated with SBP participation across various North Carolina public schools.**

- Source: Long, M. W., Marple, K., & Andreyeva, T. (2021). Universal Free Meals Associated with Lower Meal Costs While Maintaining Nutritional Quality. *Nutrients* (Vol. 13, Issue 2, p. 670). MDPI AG. https://doi.org/10.3390/nu13020670
    - Description: Engaging in universal free meals (UFM) programs, such as those offered through the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), has the potential to decrease meal expenses due to enhanced efficiencies and reduced administrative burdens. When comparing full costs, medium and large schools experienced slightly lower lunch costs in UFM schools and significantly lower breakfast costs. However, there was no discernible association between UFM and meal costs in smaller schools. Notably, Healthy Eating Index scores did not exhibit significant differences across UFM settings, suggesting that cost reductions could be achieved without compromising nutritional quality.
    - **Takeaway: Universal free meals programs like those offered through the CEP have the potential to reduce meal expenses, particularly for medium and large schools, without compromising nutritional quality, indicating potential cost savings and efficiency gains.**

- Source: Bullock, S. L., Dawson-McClure, S., Truesdale, K. P., Ward, D. S., Aiello, A. E., & Ammerman, A. S. (2022). Associations between a Universal Free Breakfast Policy and School Breakfast Program Participation, School Attendance, and Weight Status: A District-Wide Analysis. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (Vol. 19, Issue 7, p. 3749). MDPI AG. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19073749
    - Description: This longitudinal study examined whether a universal free breakfast (UFB) policy implemented in a school district was associated with changes in breakfast participation, school attendance, and student weight. On average, across schools in the district, there was an increase in breakfast participation of 4.1 percent following the implementation of the policy. Increases in SBP participation were not associated with significant changes in attendance or weight.
    - **Takeaway: Implementation of a universal free breakfast policy in a school district led to an average increase in breakfast participation by 4.1 percent.**

Community Eligibility Provision — Evidence for School Meals for All

- Source: Hecht, A. A., Pollack Porter, K. M., & Turner, L. (2020). Impact of The Community Eligibility Provision of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act on Student Nutrition, Behavior, and Academic Outcomes: 2011–2019. *American Journal of Public Health* (Vol. 110, Issue 9, pp. 1405–1410). American Public Health Association. https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.2020.305743
    - Description: This study compiles evidence and policy suggestions for CEP use by eligible schools. The evidence strongly supports that universal free meals significantly boost meal participation rates. Additionally, there is encouraging evidence that CEP positively affects weight outcomes, food security, disciplinary referrals, and timely grade promotion. CEP benefits both students who were

previously eligible and those ineligible for free or reduced-price meals. This is significant, as approximately 15 percent of marginally food-secure and 10 percent of food-insecure students do not meet the income criteria for free or reduced-price meals.
    - **Takeaway: Policy approaches to increase the utilization of CEP by eligible schools are supported by growing evidence of benefits, including increased meal participation rates and promising outcomes related to weight, food security, disciplinary referrals, and grade promotion, with mixed evidence regarding test scores and attendance.**

- Source: Andreyeva, T., & Sun, X. (2021). Universal School Meals in the U.S.: What Can We Learn from the Community Eligibility Provision? *Nutrients* (Vol. 13, Issue 8, p. 2634). MDPI AG. https://doi.org/10.3390/nu13082634
    - Description: Using data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study: Kindergarten Class of 2010–2011, this study assessed the effects of CEP on various outcomes including school meals participation, attendance, academic achievement, and household food security. On average, CEP participation increased the probability of children eating free school lunch by 9.3 percent. The study found no evidence that CEP participation affected body weight, test scores, and household food security among elementary schoolchildren. CEP participation showed beneficial effects for children from low-income families, reducing the likelihood of being overweight by 3.1 percent and enhancing reading scores for Hispanic children by 0.055 standard deviations.
    - **Takeaway: CEP participation increased free school lunch uptake and daily attendance, with specific benefits for children from low-income households, including reduced overweight probability and improved reading scores for Hispanic students.**

Community Eligibility Provision Increases Meal Participation

- Source: Pokorney, P. E., Chandran, A., & Long, M. W. (2019). Impact of the Community Eligibility Provision on meal counts and participation in Pennsylvania and Maryland National School Lunch Programs. *Public Health Nutrition* (Vol. 22, Issue 17, pp. 3281–3287). Cambridge University Press (CUP). https://doi.org/10.1017/s1368980019002246
    - Description: This study aims to investigate whether the adoption of CEP at the school level is linked to changes in school meals participation rates. The study utilizes negative binomial regression to forecast meal count rates per student year, considering overall and reimbursement level adjustments while accounting for the proportion eligible for free and reduced-price lunch and operating days. Results indicate that CEP was associated with a modest, albeit non-significant, 6 percent increase in total NSLP meal counts after adjusting for free and reduced-price lunch eligibility, enrollment, and operating days. After controlling for participation rates in the year prior to CEP implementation, the program exhibited a significant 8 percent increase in meal counts.

- **Takeaway: Adoption of the CEP at the school level was associated with a significant 8 percent increase in meal counts after controlling for prior participation rates.**

- Source: Turner, L., Guthrie, J. F., & Ralston, K. (2019). Community eligibility and other provisions for universal free meals at school: impact on student breakfast and lunch participation in California public schools. *Translational Behavioral Medicine* (Vol. 9, Issue 5, pp. 931–941). Oxford University Press (OUP). https://doi.org/10.1093/tbm/ibz090
  - Description: This study examines the impact of school-level adoption of universal free meals provisions on student participation rates in California's School Breakfast and National School Lunch Programs from 2013–2014 to 2016–2017. Results showed that when eligible schools adopted a provision that allows a school to offer free meals, participation rates increased by an average of 3.48 percent for breakfast and 5.79 points for lunch the following year. By 2016–2017, over half of eligible schools had adopted universal free meals provisions. Adoption of these provisions significantly increased participation rates, particularly benefiting children at risk of food insecurity.
  - **Takeaway: Adoption of universal free meals provisions in California schools significantly increased student participation rates in breakfast and lunch programs, particularly benefiting children at risk of food insecurity.**

- Source: Tan, M. L., Laraia, B., Madsen, K. A., Johnson, R. C., & Ritchie, L. (2020). Community Eligibility Provision and School Meal Participation among Student Subgroups. *Journal of School Health* (Vol. 90, Issue 10, pp. 802–811). Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.12942
  - Description: This research investigates the relationship between CEP and student participation rates among those eligible for free or reduced-price meals (FRPM). Utilizing data from the 2013–2015 Healthy Communities Study, it compared the participation rates in school breakfast and lunch programs among 842 students in K–8 attending 80 CEP schools and 1,463 students in 118 non-CEP schools. Overall, FRPM students demonstrated high participation rates in both breakfast and lunch programs across both types of schools. Adjusted models revealed that lunch participation among near-cutoff students was 12 percent higher in CEP schools compared to non-CEP schools. Similarly, breakfast participation among full-price students was 20 percent higher, and lunch participation was 19 percent higher in CEP schools compared to non-CEP schools.
  - **Takeaway: CEP schools saw a significant increase in lunch participation among near-cutoff students by 12 percent and among full-price students by 20 percent and 19 percent for breakfast and lunch, respectively.**

- Source: Ferris, D., Jabbari, J., Chun, Y., & Sándoval, J. S. O. (2022). Increased School Breakfast Participation from Policy and Program Innovation: The Community Eligibility

Provision and Breakfast after the Bell. *Nutrients* (Vol. 14, Issue 3, p. 511). MDPI AG. https://doi.org/10.3390/nu14030511

- Description: Schools have the opportunity to enhance participation in meals programs through various policy mechanisms like CEP and breakfast after the bell (BATB). This study investigates the longitudinal adoption of CEP and BATB and assesses their impact on increasing participation in free and reduced-price (FRP) breakfast programs. The findings indicate a notable increase in FRP breakfast participation among schools implementing both CEP and BATB, with a 14-percentage-point rise. Moreover, schools participating in CEP are more inclined to employ BATB strategies, such as breakfast in the classroom, "grab and go" carts, and second-chance breakfast. The study reveals that BATB alone adoption contributes to a 1.4-percentage-point increase in FRP school breakfasts served.
- **Takeaway: Implementing CEP and BATB significantly increases participation in free and reduced-price breakfast programs, with schools adopting both showing a 14-percentage-point rise and BATB adoption alone contributing to a 1.4-percentage-point increase.**

- Source: Schneider, K. R., Oslund, J., & Liu, T. (2021). Impact of the community eligibility provision program on school meal participation in Texas. *Public Health Nutrition* (Vol. 24, Issue 18, pp. 6534–6542). Cambridge University Press (CUP). https://doi.org/10.1017/s1368980021003712
  - Description: This study aimed to assess the impact of opting into the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) on school meal participation among Texas students. Using a quasi-experimental design with a two-way fixed effects panel difference-in-difference model, the study analyzed data from 2797 eligible public and charter K–12 schools over a span of six years. Results showed that opting into CEP increased school breakfast participation by 4.59 percent and lunch participation by 4.32 percent, with slightly larger effects persisting even when excluding summer months. These findings indicate that CEP adoption in Texas schools has a modest yet significant positive effect on both breakfast and lunch participation rates.
  - **Takeaway: CEP enrollment in Texas leads to a modest increase in school meal participation, with both breakfast and lunch participation rising by approximately 4.5 percent each.**

Community Eligibility Provision and Improvement in Health, Behavior, and Attendance

- Source: Localio, A. M., Knox, M. A., Basu, A., Lindman, T., Walkinshaw, L. P., & Jones-Smith, J. C. (2024). Universal Free School Meals Policy and Childhood Obesity. *Pediatrics*. American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2023-063749
  - Description: This study analyzed 3,531 schools eligible for CEP, with school-level obesity prevalence derived from BMI measurements. Initially, the student population comprised, on average, 72 percent Hispanic, 11 percent White, and 7

percent Black students, with 80 percent eligible for free or reduced-price meals. The baseline obesity prevalence stood at 25 percent. Upon implementing CEP, participating schools experienced a net decrease of 0.60 percent in obesity prevalence compared to eligible nonparticipating schools, translating to a 2.4 percent relative reduction from baseline. Notably, only CEP-participating schools saw an increase in meal servings during the six-year period.
    - **Takeaway: Implementing the CEP led to a modest reduction in obesity prevalence in eligible schools, with a net decrease of 0.60 percent compared to nonparticipating schools.**

- Source: Davis, W., & Musaddiq, T. (2018). Estimating the Effects of Subsidized School Meals on Child Health: Evidence from the Community Eligibility Provision in Georgia Schools. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. Elsevier B.V. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3155354
    - Description: This study assesses the impact of implementing universal free school meals under CEP on the proportion of students with healthy weights and the average Body Mass Index (BMI) score across K–12 schools in Georgia. The findings indicate that CEP participation is associated with a rise in the proportion of students with healthy weights attending schools and a decline in the average student BMI. Moreover, the study does not identify statistically significant evidence to suggest any harmful effects of CEP participation on overall measures of child weight.
    - **Takeaway: Participation in CEP is linked to an increase in the proportion of students with healthy weights and a decrease in average student BMI in K–12 schools in Georgia.**

- Source: Gordon, N., & Ruffini, K. (2021). Schoolwide Free Meals and Student Discipline: Effects of the Community Eligibility Provision. *Education Finance and Policy* (Vol. 16, Issue 3, pp. 418–442). MIT Press. https://doi.org/10.1162/edfp_a_00307
    - Description: The study's findings indicate that the implementation of schoolwide free meals led to a statistically significant reduction in suspensions by around 17 percent for White male elementary students. Although the point estimates for other subgroups in elementary schools and overall were negative, they were of smaller magnitude. While the treatment effects for Black students were not statistically significant, the paper could ascertain that the treatment effects between Black and White students were not equal.
    - **Takeaway: Implementation of schoolwide free meals resulted in a significant 17 percent reduction in suspensions for White male elementary students, with smaller effects observed for other subgroups.**

- Source: Bartfeld, J. S., Berger, L., & Men, F. (2020). Universal Access to Free School Meals through the Community Eligibility Provision Is Associated with Better Attendance for Low-Income Elementary School Students in Wisconsin. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics* (Vol. 120, Issue 2, pp. 210–218). Elsevier B.V. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jand.2019.07.022

- Description: This study evaluated the impact of the CEP on school attendance among elementary students in Wisconsin. The study focused on two outcome measures: the attendance rate (percentage of school days attended) and low attendance (fewer than 95 percent of days attended) during the first and second years of CEP implementation. In the first year, CEP showed no significant effect on attendance. However, in the second year, CEP implementation was associated with a 3.5-percentage-point decrease in the proportion of students with low attendance from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.
- **Takeaway: CEP implementation was associated with a 3.5-percentage-point reduction in low attendance among economically disadvantaged elementary school students in Wisconsin during the second year, highlighting its potential to mitigate attendance issues.**

- Source: Domina, T., Clark, L., Radsky, V., & Bhaskar, R. (2024). There Is Such a Thing as a Free Lunch: School Meals, Stigma, and Student Discipline. *American Educational Research Journal* (Vol. 61, Issue 2, pp. 287–327). American Educational Research Association (AERA). https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231222266
  - Description: The implementation of CEP enables high-poverty schools to provide free meals to all students irrespective of their family income. By viewing the universal meals provision as a means to mitigate the stigma associated with school meals, the authors posit that CEP adoption decreases suspension rates, especially among students from low-income backgrounds and marginalized groups. By merging student educational records from Oregon public schools spanning from 2010 to 2017 with administrative data detailing their families' incomes and participation in social safety net programs, our difference-in-differences analyses reveal that CEP demonstrates protective effects on suspension likelihood for students in participating schools, particularly those from low-income households, recipients of free or reduced-price meals pre-CEP, and Hispanic students.
  - **Takeaway: Implementation of CEP in high-poverty schools is associated with reduced suspension rates, particularly benefiting students from low-income backgrounds, previous recipients of free or reduced-price meals, and Hispanic students.**

Community Eligibility Provision and Academic Outcomes

- Source: Gordanier, J., Ozturk, O., Williams, B., & Zhan, C. (2020). Free Lunch for All! The Effect of the Community Eligibility Provision on Academic Outcomes. *Economics of Education Review*, 77, 101999-. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2020.101999
    - Description: This research evaluates the impact of the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) on the academic performance and attendance of elementary and middle school students in South Carolina. Employing a difference-in-differences approach, the study demonstrates that CEP results in approximately a 0.06 standard deviation increase in math test scores for elementary students. These effects vary depending on factors such as student poverty, school poverty, and locality. Notably, students who were previously eligible for free lunches but not enrolled in other public assistance programs benefit the most from CEP.
    - **Takeaway: Implementation of CEP in South Carolina led to a notable increase of approximately 0.06 standard deviations in math test scores for elementary students, particularly benefiting those previously eligible for free lunches but not enrolled in other public assistance programs.**

- Source: Ruffini, K. (2022). Universal Access to Free School Meals and Student Achievement: Evidence from the Community Eligibility Provision. *The Journal of Human Resources*, 57(3), 776–820. https://doi.org/10.3368/jhr.57.3.0518-9509R3
    - Description: This research investigates the impact of CEP, the most utilized federal option for providing free school meals to entire schools, on academic achievement. It examines variations in the timing of CEP participation both within and across states. The findings reveal that universal free meals under CEP lead to a 38 percent increase in breakfast participation and a 12 percent increase in lunch participation. Moreover, it shows that in districts with initially low eligibility for free meals, particularly among racial and ethnic groups with low-income-based participation rates, there are improvements in math performance.
    - **Takeaway: CEP implementation significantly boosts meal participation and math performance.**

Community Eligibility Provision and Economic Impact for Families

- Source: Marcus, M., & Yewell, K. G. (2022). The Effect of Free School Meals on Household Food Purchases: Evidence from the Community Eligibility Provision. *Journal of Health Economics* (Vol. 84, p. 102646). Elsevier B.V. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhealeco.2022.102646
    - Description: The study reveals implementation of CEP significantly influenced grocery spending for households with children. On average, monthly food purchases decreased by approximately 5 percent. In zip codes with greater exposure to CEP, this decline reached as high as $39 per month, corresponding to a 19 percent decrease. Furthermore, following the implementation of CEP, there were notable changes in the composition of food purchases, particularly among low-income households, who experienced an enhancement in dietary

quality. Lastly, exposure to CEP was linked to a nearly 5 percent reduction in households classified as food insecure.
    - **Takeaway: CEP implementation led to a significant decrease in grocery spending for households with children, particularly in areas with greater exposure to CEP, while also improving dietary quality and reducing food insecurity.**

Strategies and Innovation to Increase Participation

- Source: Hecht, A. A., Olarte, D. A., McLoughlin, G. M., & Cohen, J. F. W. (2023). Strategies to Increase Student Participation in School Meals in the United States: A Systematic Review. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics* (Vol. 123, Issue 7, pp. 1075-1096.e1). Elsevier B.V. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jand.2023.02.016
    - Description: This systematic review synthesized evidence from peer-reviewed and government studies in the U.S. up to January 2022, focusing on interventions, initiatives, and policies aimed at increasing school meal participation. Thirty-four articles met the inclusion criteria. Findings indicated that alternative breakfast models (such as breakfast in the classroom or "grab and go" options) and restrictions on competitive foods consistently boosted meal participation rates. Moreover, the review suggested that implementing stronger nutrition standards did not adversely affect participation and could, in certain instances, enhance meal uptake.
    - **Takeaway: Alternative breakfast models and restrictions on competitive foods consistently increase school meal participation, while stronger nutrition standards may also have a positive impact.**

Innovations in Breakfast

- Source: Polonsky, H. M., Davey, A., Bauer, K. W., Foster, G. D., Sherman, S., Abel, M. L., Dale, L. C., & Fisher, J. O. (2018). Breakfast Quality Varies by Location among Low-Income Ethnically Diverse Children in Public Urban Schools. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* (Vol. 50, Issue 2, pp. 190-197.e1). Elsevier B.V. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2017.09.009
    - Description: This study presents a cross-sectional analysis of fourth to sixth graders in 2013. Consuming breakfast at school was associated with an increased likelihood of consuming fruit, opting for lower saturated fats and added sugar (SFAS) items, and meeting the nutritional criteria of the SBP compared to other dining locations. Among the students who ate breakfast, 46.0 percent did so at home, 13.1 percent at school, 41.0 percent at multiple locations, and 21.8 percent at a corner store. Those who had breakfast at school had greater odds of consuming at least one fruit or vegetable and lower odds of consuming at least one SFAS food.
    - **Takeaway: Consuming breakfast at school is associated with healthier dietary choices and an increased likelihood of meeting SBP nutrition requirements compared to other dining locations.**

- Source: Hartline-Grafton, H., & Levin, M. (2022). Breakfast and School-Related Outcomes in Children and Adolescents in the U.S.: A Literature Review and its Implications for School Nutrition Policy. *Current Nutrition Reports* (Vol. 11, Issue 4, pp. 653–664). Springer Science and Business Media LLC. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13668-022-00434-z
    - Description: Despite the generally positive attitudes of school personnel, parents, and students towards breakfast and its perceived benefits for learning, recent research presents mixed evidence regarding breakfast's impact on objectively measured grades and test scores. Few recent studies have focused on behavioral outcomes, making it difficult to draw definitive conclusions about the relationship between breakfast and school behavior. However, several studies have noted improved attendance rates with increased access to and participation in school breakfast programs, particularly when breakfast is provided free of charge to all students.
    - **Takeaway: While attitudes towards breakfast are positive, there is mixed evidence of its impact on grades and test scores. Improved attendance is observed with increased access and participation, particularly when breakfast is offered free to all students.**

- Source: Olarte, D. A., Tsai, M. M., Chapman, L., Hager, E. R., & Cohen, J. F. W. (2023). Alternative School Breakfast Service Models and Associations with Breakfast Participation, Diet Quality, Body Mass Index, Attendance, Behavior, and Academic Performance: A Systematic Review. *Nutrients* (Vol. 15, Issue 13, p. 2951). MDPI AG. https://doi.org/10.3390/nu15132951
    - Description: This study reviews the impact of breakfast after the bell (BATB) on students' diet and academic outcomes, including various factors such as participation, diet quality, body mass index (BMI), academic performance, and more. In the 37 studies included, the review found BATB increased school breakfast participation, improved diet quality, and improved classroom behavior, particularly among students from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds and students eligible for free or reduced-price meals. The impact of BATB on BMI, weight status, academic achievement, and attendance was mixed.
    - **Takeaway: BATB increases school breakfast participation and improves diet quality and classroom behavior, especially among minority students and students from low-income households, but its effects on BMI, academic achievement, and attendance vary.**

- Source: Farris, A. R., Roy, M., Serrano, E. L., & Misyak, S. (2019). Impact of Breakfast in the Classroom on Participation and Food Waste. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* (Vol. 51, Issue 7, pp. 893–898). Elsevier B.V. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2019.04.015
    - Description: This study was conducted in the rural region of southwest Virginia and examined breakfast in the classroom (BITC) participation and food waste across seven elementary schools. Measurement of participation and waste occurred over four days in each school, both before and after the implementation of BITC. The findings revealed a notable decrease in food waste across all schools,

declining from 43.0 percent to 38.5 percent with the introduction of BITC. This reduction was particularly significant for entrée items, juice, and savory snacks.
    - **Takeaway: BITC reduces food waste and improves dietary intake in elementary schools, particularly in rural regions, with significant reductions observed in waste percentages for entrée items, juice, and savory snacks.**

- Source: Nanney, M. S., Leduc, R., Hearst, M., Shanafelt, A., Wang, Q., Schroeder, M., Grannon, K. Y., Kubik, M. Y., Caspi, C., & Harnack, L. J. (2019). A Group Randomized Intervention Trial Increases Participation in the School Breakfast Program in 16 Rural High Schools in Minnesota. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics* (Vol. 119, Issue 6, pp. 915–922). Elsevier B.V. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jand.2018.12.007
    - Description: This study aimed to assess two interventions, enhancing access and increased marketing, designed to improve participation in SBP within high schools. The initial component concentrated on augmenting SBP participation by enhancing student access to breakfast through breakfast service practices such as introducing "grab and go" carts in the atrium and extending breakfast service hours. The second component focused on promoting school breakfast through student-targeted marketing campaigns. The median change in SBP participation rate between the baseline and follow-up periods was 3 percent among the eight schools in the intervention group, while it stood at 0.5 percent in the control group. This difference in the rate of change between the two groups was statistically significant. Moreover, the intervention's effect progressively intensified throughout the intervention period, with the mean change in SBP participation rate by the end of the school year reaching 10.3 percent.
    - **Takeaway: Environmental interventions in high schools, including breakfast service modifications and student-targeted marketing, significantly increase participation in SBP.**

- Source: Larson, N., Wang, Q., Grannon, K., Wei, S., Nanney, M. S., & Caspi, C. (2018). A Low-Cost, Grab-and-Go Breakfast Intervention for Rural High School Students: Changes in School Breakfast Program Participation Among At-Risk Students in Minnesota. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* (Vol. 50, Issue 2, pp. 125-132.e1). Elsevier B.V. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2017.08.001
    - Description: This study assesses the effectiveness of a "grab and go" initiative integrated into a broader intervention aimed at promoting participation in SBP in rural schools across Minnesota. Eight schools participated solely in the "grab and go" component of the intervention. The study observed increases in SBP participation at the school level, from 13.0 percent to 22.6 percent, during the intervention year compared to the baseline among schools enrolled in the "grab and go" component. Increases in SBP participation were noted within the at-risk sample of students who reported eating breakfast less than three times a week. Within the at-risk sample, SBP participation rose from 7.6 percent to 21.9 percent, as well as across various subgroups based on eligibility for free or reduced-price meals and ethnic or racial background. Participation in SBP rose

among students eligible for free or reduced-price meals, from 13.9 percent to 30.7 percent, and among ineligible students, from 4.3 percent to 17.2 percent.

- **Takeaway: Implementing a "grab and go" initiative as part of a broader intervention significantly increases SBP participation in rural Minnesota schools.**

School Food Waste

- Source: Cohen, J. F. W., Richardson, S., Parker, E., Catalano, P. J., & Rimm, E. B. (2014). Impact of the New U.S. Department of Agriculture School Meal Standards on Food Selection, Consumption, and Waste. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* (Vol. 46, Issue 4, pp. 388–394). Elsevier B.V. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2013.11.013
    - Description: The study evaluates the impact of recent U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) changes to school meal standards on meal selection, consumption, and waste. Plate waste data from four schools in an urban, low-income district were analyzed before and after implementation. Results indicate increased fruit selection and consumption post-implementation, along with stable entrée and vegetable selection but increased consumption. Despite decreased milk consumption due to an unrelated policy change, overall diet quality improved, challenging media claims of increased food waste. The study suggests that the new standards positively affect students' meal habits, advocating against legislative efforts to weaken them.
    - **Takeaway: Changes to USDA school meal standards positively impact meal selection and consumption, improving overall diet quality and challenging media claims of increased food waste.**

Challenges During the COVID-19 Pandemic

- Source: Ogundari, K. (2023). The Effects of School Food Assistance on Children's Food Sufficiency During the COVID-19 Pandemic in the U.S. *Journal of Poverty* (pp. 1–20). Informa U.K. Limited. https://doi.org/10.1080/10875549.2023.2259897
    - Description: The findings indicate a notable increase in the likelihood of children achieving food sufficiency, with significant boosts observed among households utilizing school pickup, Pandemic-EBT, on-site school meals, and home delivery. The impact of school food assistance on children's food sufficiency varies across racial and ethnic groups. While all forms of school food assistance consistently affect food sufficiency levels among White children, only school meals obtained through school pickup, on-site consumption, and home delivery appear to influence food sufficiency among Black children.
    - **Takeaway: School pickup, Pandemic-EBT, on-site meals, and home delivery were interventions that increased food sufficiency in households with children.**

- Source: Harper, K., Bode, B., Gupta, K., Terhaar, A., Baltaci, A., Asada, Y., & Lane, H. (2023). Challenges and Opportunities for Equity in U.S. School Meal Programs: A Scoping Review of Qualitative Literature Regarding the COVID-19 Emergency. *Nutrients* (Vol. 15, Issue 17, p. 3738). MDPI AG. https://doi.org/10.3390/nu15173738
    - Description: This study is a qualitative literature review on challenges faced by schools in increasing equity including supply chain issues, safety, and limited staff capacity. Using the Getting to Equity Framework, the review assessed factors that influenced nutrition behavior. Programs addressed equity through various interventions. Federally issued waivers and enhanced communications reduced barriers, enabling programs to provide meals to families who previously

lacked access. Collaborations and partnerships bolstered community capacity, facilitating expanded meal distribution.
    - **Takeaway: Supply chain issues, safety concerns, and limited staff capacity were barriers to achieving equity in school meals programs. Solutions included waivers, enhanced communication, and community collaborations.**

- Source: Kenney, E. L., Dunn, C. G., Mozaffarian, R. S., Dai, J., Wilson, K., West, J., Shen, Y., Fleischhacker, S., & Bleich, S. N. (2021). Feeding Children and Maintaining Food Service Operations during COVID-19: A Mixed Methods Investigation of Implementation and Financial Challenges. *Nutrients* (Vol. 13, Issue 8, p. 2691). MDPI AG. https://doi.org/10.3390/nu13082691
    - Description: The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted access to critical U.S. Department of Agriculture National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs, prompting temporary policy changes allowing meal distribution outside of school buildings. This mixed methods study examines challenges faced by 12 major urban School Food Authorities (SFAs) in the U.S. during the pandemic. Interviews with SFA leaders and quantitative financial data analysis revealed operational reconfigurations, staff safety concerns, stakeholder management complexities, and financial strain due to reduced student participation and revenue despite ongoing costs. Future crisis response plans should prioritize disaster preparedness to support SFAs in transitioning to sustainable community meal distribution methods.
    - **Takeaway: During the COVID-19 pandemic, major urban SFAs faced operational, financial, and logistical challenges in transitioning to community meal distribution methods, highlighting the need for improved disaster preparedness planning.**

Literature From States With Healthy School Meals for All

- Source: Cohen, J. F. W., Polacsek, M., Hecht, C. E., Hecht, K., Read, M., Olarte, D. A., Patel, A. I., Schwartz, M. B., Turner, L., Zuercher, M., Gosliner, W., & Ritchie, L. D. (2022). Implementation of Universal School Meals during COVID-19 and Beyond: Challenges and Benefits for School Meals Programs in Maine. *Nutrients* (Vol. 14, Issue 19, p. 4031). MDPI AG. https://doi.org/10.3390/nu14194031
    - Description: This study assessed the effects of COVID-19 alongside the simultaneous introduction of universal school meals (USM) in Maine. Surveys were completed by a total of 43 school food authorities (SFAs) across the state. SFAs highlighted various advantages of USM, such as heightened participation in school meals programs, decreased stigma for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and their families, and the elimination of unpaid meal charges and debt. However, SFAs also encountered challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly regarding financial costs.
    - **Takeaway: The introduction of USM in Maine during the COVID-19 pandemic yielded benefits such as increased participation and reduced stigma for economically disadvantaged students, yet also**

posed financial challenges for SFAs.

- Source: Zuercher, M. D., Cohen, J. F. W., Ohri-Vachaspati, P., Hecht, C. A., Hecht, K., Polacsek, M., Olarte, D. A., Read, M., Patel, A. I., Schwartz, M. B., Chapman, L. E., Orta-Aleman, D., Ritchie, L. D., & Gosliner, W. (2024). Parent perceptions of school meals and how perceptions differ by race and ethnicity. *Health Affairs Scholar* (Vol. 2, Issue 1). Oxford University Press (OUP). https://doi.org/10.1093/haschl/qxad092
    - Description: This study evaluated how California parents perceived school meals during the COVID-19 crisis, particularly with the introduction of federally funded universal free school meals (UFSM), and whether these perceptions varied based on race/ethnicity. Surveying 1,110 parents of K–12 students in California, the majority expressed that school meals provided tangible benefits to their families, notably in terms of saving money (81.6 percent), time (79.2 percent), and reducing stress (75.0 percent). A small percentage indicated concerns that their child might feel embarrassed to eat school meals (11.7 percent). Moreover, fewer parents viewed school lunches favorably in terms of quality (36.9 percent), taste (39.6 percent), or healthiness (44.0 percent). Parents of Hispanic and Asian students tended to hold less favorable views regarding the quality, taste, and healthiness of school meals compared to parents of White students.
    - **Takeaway: Parents in California generally perceive school meals positively during the COVID-19 crisis, citing benefits such as saving money and time and reducing stress, but they express concerns about meal quality, taste, and healthiness, particularly Hispanic and Asian parents compared to White parents.**

- Source: Zuercher, M. D., Cohen, J. F. W., Hecht, C. E., Hecht, K., Ritchie, L. D., & Gosliner, W. (2022). Providing School Meals to All Students Free of Charge during the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond: Challenges and Benefits Reported by School Foodservice Professionals in California. *Nutrients* (Vol. 14, Issue 18, p. 3855). MDPI AG. https://doi.org/10.3390/nu14183855
    - Description: This research examined the viewpoints of school food authorities (SFAs) regarding the federal universal school meals (USM) program amid the COVID-19 pandemic during the 2021–22 school year. Findings indicated notable benefits such as increased student meals participation (79.2 percent) and diminished stigma (39.7 percent). Chief challenges included staffing issues (76.9 percent) and concerns regarding meal packaging and solid waste (67.4 percent). Additionally, more than 40 percent expressed that federal reimbursements fell short of covering expenses. Among the top requests for resources to facilitate the implementation of California's USM were additional facilities/equipment (83.8 percent), communication/marketing support (76.1 percent), boosting meal participation (71.5 percent), and enhanced financial management (61.5 percent). The majority of California SFAs noted that the adoption of federal USM successfully resulted in reaching more children with meals.
    - **Takeaway: California SFAs perceived benefits from the federal school meal waivers amid COVID-19, including increased student**

participation and reduced stigma, but faced challenges with staffing, packaging, waste, and inadequate federal reimbursements.

Stigma, Shaming, and a Call for Equity in Child Nutrition Programs

- Source: Spruance, L. A., McConkie, M., Patten, E., & Goates, M. C. (2021). A Thematic Analysis of Unpaid School Meals in the News Media. *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition* (Vol. 17, Issue 6, pp. 850–859). Informa U.K. Limited. https://doi.org/10.1080/19320248.2021.1971590
    - Description: Media coverage frequently addresses the issue of unpaid school meal fees and meal shaming in schools. This study aimed to analyze trends and themes in media coverage related to meal shaming and unpaid meal fees. Three hundred and fifty-five articles from two databases were analyzed for thematic patterns. The findings reveal widespread coverage of meal shaming across various states, with many articles referencing state and local school district policies. The study underscores the significance of meal shaming as a highlighted problem in the media, suggesting that universal no-cost meals programs could alleviate many issues associated with unpaid school meal fees.
    - **Takeaway: Media reports on meal shaming and unpaid school meal fees in schools emphasize the widespread nature of the issue and suggest universal no-cost meals programs as a potential solution.**

- Source: Karnaze, A. (2018). You Are Where You Eat: Discrimination in the National School Lunch Program. *Northwestern University Law Review*, 113(3).
    - Description: The NSLP, serving millions of children daily across the U.S., is federally regulated but implemented with significant local authority, leading to practices in some schools that stigmatize participating students. This study examines two such practices: segregation in cafeterias and meal "shaming," especially affecting minority students, to assess their potential "disparate impact" under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.
    - **Takeaway: School practices may lead to stigmatization and "disparate impact" under the Civil Rights Act of 1964.**

- Source: Fleischhacker, S., & Campbell, E. (2020). Ensuring Equitable Access to School Meals. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics* (Vol. 120, Issue 5, pp. 893–897). Elsevier B.V. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jand.2020.03.006
    - Description: This study discusses the growing problem of unpaid meal debt and lunch shaming in schools across the country and outlines the Academy's policy stance on addressing this issue, as developed by the Child Nutrition Reauthorization working group and approved by the Academy Board of Directors. The Academy advocates for tackling the root cause of lunch shaming — unpaid meal debt — by advocating for the expansion and enhancement of universal school meals policies and programs, including CEP, to promote equitable access to school meals.
    - **Takeaway: Promoting equitable access to nutritious school meals is crucial to address the growing issue of unpaid meal debt and lunch**

shaming, with the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics advocating for strengthened universal school meals policies and programs.

- Source: McLoughlin, G. M., McCarthy, J. A., McGuirt, J. T., Singleton, C. R., Dunn, C. G., & Gadhoke, P. (2020). Addressing Food Insecurity through a Health Equity Lens: A Case Study of Large Urban School Districts during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Journal of Urban Health* (Vol. 97, Issue 6, pp. 759–775). Springer Science and Business Media LLC. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11524-020-00476-0
    - Description: During public health emergencies, reduced access to school meals can worsen food insecurity, especially for children from urban and low-income households. To address health disparities, understanding meal distribution in large urban districts during emergencies is crucial. Our case study of four such districts during COVID-19 aimed to fill these gaps. Using the Getting to Equity framework, we evaluated meal distribution strategies, finding variations across districts. Strategies included offering healthy options, reducing barriers, building community capacity, and increasing resources. Geospatial analysis revealed potential gaps in meal site reach. These findings can inform efforts to combat food insecurity during and beyond the pandemic through programs like the Summer Food Service Program. Future research should explore the rationale behind meal site placement and changes over time.
    - **Takeaway: Understanding meal distribution strategies in large urban districts during emergencies is crucial for addressing health disparities and combating food insecurity, as revealed by a case study of four districts during COVID-19.**

- Source: Cohen, J. F. W., Stowers, K. C., Odoms-Young, A., & Franckle, R. L. (2023). A Call for Theory to Guide Equity-Focused Federal Child Nutrition Program Policy Responses and Recovery Efforts in Times of Public Health Crisis. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics* (Vol. 123, Issue 1, pp. 15–28). Elsevier B.V. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jand.2022.07.016
    - Description: Theory plays a pivotal role in guiding long-term strategies, improving federal nutrition assistance programs, fostering the well-being of children and families, and addressing systemic disparities in health. Policymakers should explore strategies such as streamlining application and certification processes across all programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. This would ensure uninterrupted access to eligible nutrition assistance programs for children while reducing the administrative burden of multiple application procedures. Moreover, frameworks should be implemented to evaluate the outcomes of child nutrition programs, ensuring equitable impacts. Leveraging existing tools like the Racial Equity Scorecard can facilitate this process.
    - **Takeaway: Theory can guide policymakers in improving federal nutrition assistance programs along with streamlining application processes, implementing frameworks for evaluating outcomes, and applying tools like the Racial Equity Scorecard.**

This report was compiled by Maria Islam, a 2024 Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellow at the Food Research & Action Center, and provides a comprehensive overview of the existing literature on school meals, summarizing key findings and insights from a diverse range of academic sources. The document is intended to help researchers and policymakers understand the current state of knowledge on school meals for all, identify gaps or areas for further investigation, and make informed decisions about policy and practice. Additionally, this annotated bibliography serves as a resource for advocacy efforts, providing evidence-based support for initiatives aimed at improving access to nutritious meals for all students. By synthesizing and evaluating recent research, this document contributes to a more robust understanding of the benefits and challenges associated with Healthy School Meals For All.

About FRAC

The Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) improves the nutrition, health, and well-being of people struggling against poverty-related hunger in the United States through advocacy, partnerships, and by advancing bold and equitable policy solutions. For more information about FRAC, or to sign up for FRAC's e-newsletters, go to http://www.frac.org.

Support the Summer Meals Act of 2021

The Summer Meals Act of 2021 (S. 1170 / H.R. 783), introduced by Senators Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) and Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) and Representatives Don Young (R-AK) and Rick Larsen (D-WA), would increase the reach of the Summer Nutrition Programs. The Summer Nutrition Programs help close the summer nutrition gap and support educational and enrichment programs that keep children learning, engaged, and safe when school is out.

What are the Summer Nutrition Programs?

The Summer Nutrition Programs (the Summer Food Service Program and the National School Lunch Program) provide federal funding to serve nutritious meals and snacks during summer break when low-income children lose access to school meals. The meals are served at sites such as summer schools, parks and recreation centers, YMCAs, and Boys & Girls Clubs located in geographic areas where at least 50 percent of the children are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals or that serve primarily low-income children. In July 2019, nearly 3 million children ate summer lunch on an average day, reaching only 1 in 7 of the low-income children who rely on school lunch during the school year.

What Does the Bill Propose?

Improve the area eligibility test to allow communities to participate if 40 percent of the children are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. The current 50 percent threshold prevents many communities with significant numbers of low-income children, but not a high enough concentration of poverty, from participating. Lowering the eligibility test from 50 to 40 percent would improve children's access to summer meals in every state, particularly in rural areas. In addition, the 50 percent test is inconsistent with other federal education summer funding, such as the 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs, which require 40 percent or more.

Allow local government agencies and private nonprofit organizations to feed children year-round through the Summer Food Service Program. Currently, sponsors must operate both the Summer Food Service Program and the Child and Adult Care Food Program in order to feed children — often the same children — after school and during the summer. This creates duplicative paperwork and confusing administrative rules that discourage participation. By streamlining the Summer Food Service Program and the Afterschool Meal Program, sponsors would be able to operate one program year-round.

Provide funding for transportation grants to fund innovative approaches and mobile meal trucks. Transportation is one of the biggest barriers to participation, and these grants will increase low-income children's access to summer meals in rural and other underserved areas.

Allow all sites to serve a third meal. Many summer meal sites run all day, thereby providing child care for working parents, but most sites can only serve a maximum of two meals a day. This leaves children without adequate nutrition to get through the day or forces sites to spend program dollars on food.

S. 1170 includes an additional provision to support meal service in disaster situations. This provision would allow USDA to waive the congregate feeding requirement when a disaster situation is declared by a governor; currently, USDA only has this authority if the president declares a disaster situation.

How Will the Summer Meals Act Benefit Communities?

Combat childhood hunger and obesity. The Summer Nutrition Programs provide healthy meals to replace the breakfasts, lunches, and afterschool meals and snacks that children receive during the school year.

Keep children safe, learning, and out of trouble. The meals help draw children into educational, enrichment, and recreational activities which are important tools for combating summer learning loss, reducing juvenile crime and teen pregnancy, and supporting working parents.

Provide states federal child nutrition funding that will create jobs and generate economic activity. The Summer Nutrition Programs bring federal dollars into local communities that must be used to support program costs (e.g., food purchases, salaries, transportation expenses).

THE SUMMER EBT PROGRAM

Will Help Reduce Summer Hunger Across the Nation

This summer, 37 states, the District of Columbia, all five U.S. territories, and two Tribes, will participate in the new nationwide Summer EBT Program. Families will receive $120 in federally funded grocery benefits on an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card for each school-age child who is eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. By implementing the program, these states, territories, and Tribes, are helping to reduce summer hunger, so children can return to school well-nourished and ready to learn.

A Snapshot of Summer EBT in 2024

- The Summer EBT Program will serve approximately 21.3 million children. This will result in approximately $2.6 billion in benefits being distributed to struggling families this summer.
- Thirty-seven states, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands, will participate.
- The Cherokee Nation and The Chickasaw Nation are participating this summer and will be providing benefits to members of other Tribes and non-Tribal members in neighboring areas as well.

Summer Can Be the Hungriest Time for Children

When the school year ends, millions of children from households with low incomes lose access to the school meals they rely on. The Summer Nutrition Programs, also called summer meals, were designed to replace school meals lost during summer vacation. These meal programs play an important role in reducing childhood hunger during the summer, and often provide important educational and enrichment programming that combined keep children and teens well-nourished and engaged. Despite these benefits, summer meals reach only a fraction of the children who rely on free and reduced-price school meals during the school year. Summer EBT, which provides benefits to families to purchase food at retail locations, bridges that gap. Summer meals combined with Summer EBT is an effective recipe to meet children's nutritional needs during the summer.

Impact of Summer EBT 2024

State[1,2]	School-Age Children Eligible[3]	Total Predicted Benefit Amount[5]	Expected Economic Impact (Lower Range)[4]	Expected Economic Impact (Higher Range)
American Samoa*	14,000	$1,680,000	$2,520,000	$3,024,000
Arizona	550,000	$66,000,000	$99,000,000	$118,800,000
Arkansas	315,000	$37,800,000	$56,700,000	$68,040,000
California	3,851,000	$462,120,000	$693,180,000	$831,816,000
Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands*	11,000	$1,320,000	$1,980,000	$2,376,000
Colorado	337,000	$40,440,000	$60,660,000	$72,792,000
Connecticut	273,000	$32,760,000	$49,140,000	$58,968,000
Delaware	80,000	$9,600,000	$14,400,000	$17,280,000
District of Columbia	80,000	$9,600,000	$14,400,000	$17,280,000
Guam*	26,000	$3,120,000	$4,680,000	$5,616,000
Hawaii*	100,000	$12,000,000	$18,000,000	$21,600,000
Illinois	1,145,000	$137,400,000	$206,100,000	$247,320,000
Indiana	669,000	$80,280,000	$120,420,000	$144,504,000
Kansas	266,000	$31,920,000	$47,880,000	$57,456,000
Kentucky	600,000	$72,000,000	$108,000,000	$129,600,000
Louisiana	594,000	$71,280,000	$106,920,000	$128,304,000
Maine	63,000	$7,560,000	$11,340,000	$13,608,000
Maryland	500,000	$60,000,000	$90,000,000	$108,000,000
Massachusetts	515,000	$61,800,000	$92,700,000	$111,240,000
Michigan	836,000	$100,320,000	$150,480,000	$180,576,000
Minnesota	412,000	$49,440,000	$74,160,000	$88,992,000
Missouri	429,000	$51,480,000	$77,220,000	$92,664,000
Montana	68,000	$8,160,000	$12,240,000	$14,688,000
Nebraska	175,000	$21,000,000	$31,500,000	$37,800,000
Nevada	352,000	$42,240,000	$63,360,000	$76,032,000
New Hampshire	39,000	$4,680,000	$7,020,000	$8,424,000
New Jersey	540,000	$64,800,000	$97,200,000	$116,640,000
New Mexico	223,000	$26,760,000	$40,140,000	$48,168,000
New York	2,027,000	$243,240,000	$364,860,000	$437,832,000
North Carolina	968,000	$116,160,000	$174,240,000	$209,088,000
North Dakota	40,000	$4,800,000	$7,200,000	$8,640,000
Ohio	837,000	$100,440,000	$150,660,000	$180,792,000
Oregon	294,000	$35,280,000	$52,920,000	$63,504,000
Pennsylvania	1,166,000	$139,920,000	$209,880,000	$251,856,000
Puerto Rico*	280,000	$33,600,000	$50,400,000	$60,480,000
Rhode Island	66,000	$7,920,000	$11,880,000	$14,256,000
Tennessee	644,000	$77,280,000	$115,920,000	$139,104,000
Vermont	35,000	$4,200,000	$6,300,000	$7,560,000
Virgin Islands*	12,000	$1,440,000	$2,160,000	$2,592,000
Virginia	791,000	$94,920,000	$142,380,000	$170,856,000
Washington	507,000	$60,840,000	$91,260,000	$109,512,000
West Virginia	202,000	$24,240,000	$36,360,000	$43,632,000
Wisconsin	401,000	$48,120,000	$72,180,000	$86,616,000
United States Total	**21,333,000**	**$2,559,960,000**	**$3,839,940,000**	**$4,607,928,000**

1. These states are not participating in 2024 and therefore are not included in the table above: Alabama, Alaska, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, and Wyoming. These states are able to participate in 2025.
2. State includes the District of Columbia and territories. Impact data is not available for The Cherokee Nation and The Chickasaw Nation.
3. FRAC sourced the School-Age Children Eligible and the Total Predicted Benefit Amount from USDA's Summer EBT estimates. These numbers are estimates and states may have updated figures.
4. Summer EBT uses the same model as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). According to a USDA report, every dollar spent on SNAP generates between $1.50 and $1.80 in local economic activity during an economic downturn. Calculations were made based on Total Predicted Benefit Amount to find the lower and higher end of the expected economic impact.
5. The total predicted benefit amount in the table above reflects the standard $120 per eligible child. All states and territories denoted with a "*" represent areas with higher reimbursement rates and therefore higher benefit amounts for Summer EBT.

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About FRAC

The Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) improves the nutrition, health, and well-being of people struggling against poverty-related hunger in the United States through advocacy, partnerships, and by advancing bold and equitable policy solutions. For more information about FRAC, or to sign up for FRAC's e-newsletters, go to www.frac.org.

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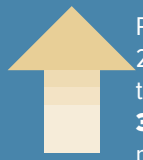
IN JULY 2023:

JUST OVER 2.8 MILLION CHILDREN participated in the Summer Nutrition Programs on an average day in July 2023. This was a **DECREASE** of almost **170,926 children** compared to July 2022.

Participation in summer lunch **DECREASED** by **5.7 percent** in July 2023 compared to July 2022.

15.3 CHILDREN received a summer lunch for every 100 who received a free or reduced-price school lunch during the 2022–2023 school year.



Participation in lunch in July 2023 was slightly **HIGHER** than pre-pandemic levels. **30,533 additional children** participated in July 2023 when compared to July 2019 (the last summer before the pandemic).

1.5 MILLION CHILDREN participated in breakfast in July 2023, 287,096 **FEWER** children than in July 2022.

Executive Summary

The Summer Nutrition Programs[1] are designed to replace the school breakfasts and lunches that millions of children lose access to when the school year ends. These programs play a vital role in helping to reduce food insecurity. Many summer meals sites also provide important educational and enrichment activities that keep children learning, engaged, active, and safe during summer break.

The summer of 2023 marked the return to normal operations for most summer meals sites. The nationwide pandemic-era waivers that allowed summer meals sites to operate in every community, and provided operational flexibilities, including a non-congregate waiver for families to pick up meals to take home instead of children eating meals at the site, were no longer available. The only remaining flexibility was non-congregate meal service in rural areas.[2] At the same time, many summer programs still struggled with staffing shortages resulting from both staff retention and staff burnout.[3] The end of the waivers, as well as additional challenges that many summer programs faced, impacted access to summer meals.

As a result, participation in the Summer Nutrition Programs decreased in July 2023 compared to July 2022 — and was only slightly higher than that of July 2019, the last summer before the pandemic.

KEY FINDINGS

- Just over **2.8 million children** participated in the Summer Nutrition Programs on an average day in July 2023. This was a **decrease of 170,926 children** compared to July 2022.
- Participation in summer lunch **decreased by 5.7 percent** in July 2023 compared to July 2022.
- In July 2023, **15.3 children** received a summer lunch for every 100 who received a free or reduced-price school lunch during the 2022–2023 school year.
- Participation in lunch in July 2023 was slightly **higher** than pre-pandemic levels. **30,533 additional children** participated in July 2023 when compared to July 2019 (the last summer before the pandemic).[4]
- 1.5 million children participated in breakfast in July 2023, **287,096 fewer children** than in July 2022.

Summer 2024 offers important and exciting opportunities to support access to summer nutrition and reverse the 2023 drop in participation. The new, nationwide Summer EBT Program (also called SUN Bucks) provides families with $120 in grocery benefits on an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card for every eligible child to offset the loss of school meals. The non-congregate option for rural communities (also called Sun Meals To-Go) provides an additional avenue to reach underserved children with limited access to summer meals.

As these new opportunities roll out, it is important that providing summer meals in combination with education and enrichment programming at sites remains the gold standard. Summer meals sites provide a place for children to socialize, learn, and be engaged while receiving a healthy meal, which can help counter both summer hunger and summer learning loss. Summer programming can also help foster social and emotional learning.[5]

On the federal level, Congress can make important improvements by allowing more communities to offer summer meals, streamlining program requirements so that sites can operate year-round, and allowing all sites to provide three meals a day. They can also provide additional funding to support summer programs, including through the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program.

As the first summer without the pandemic-era waiver options, summer 2023 data provides key insights into the function of the Summer Nutrition Programs and the role that they can and should play in supporting children and families during the summer, a time of increased childhood food insecurity[6] and learning loss for children from households with low incomes.[7] With the launch of the Summer EBT Program and the rural non-congregate option, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has taken the opportunity to recommit and reinvest in the summer feeding programs and has been engaging state child nutrition agencies, policymakers, educators, and anti-hunger advocates, to reenergize summer meals. This collaboration and investment are critical in ensuring that all children can access the nutrition and enrichment they need during the summer months.

About the *Summer Nutrition Status Report*

This report measures the reach of the Summer Nutrition Programs in July 2023, nationally and in each state[8], compared to July 2022. It is based on a variety of metrics and examines the impact of trends and policies on program participation.

First, this report looks at average weekday July lunch and breakfast participation in the Summer Nutrition Programs — the combined participation in the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), which includes children participating through the NSLP Seamless Summer Option and those certified for free and reduced-price meals. For lunch, the report uses average daily participation in free or reduced-price school meals in the preceding school year as a benchmark against which to compare summer.

Second, this report looks at the number of sponsors and sites operating SFSP in July, as this is an important indicator of access to the program for children from households with low incomes.

Finally, this report sets an ambitious but achievable goal of reaching 40 children with lunch during the month of July through the Summer Nutrition Programs for every 100 participating in free and reduced-price school lunch during the regular school year and calculates the number of unserved children and the federal dollars lost in each state that is not meeting this goal.

The Summer Nutrition Programs

The two federal Summer Nutrition Programs — the National School Lunch Program Seamless Summer Option (NSLP) and the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) — provide funding to serve meals and snacks to children at sites during summer vacation or the extended breaks of year-round schools. The programs also can be used to feed children during unanticipated school closures.

To qualify as a summer meals site, at least 50 percent of the children in the geographic area have to be eligible for free or reduced-price school meals; or at least 50 percent of the children participating in the program at the site have to be individually determined eligible for free or reduced-price school meals; or the children served have to be primarily migrant.[9] Once a site is determined eligible, all children who come to the site can eat for free. Summer camps also can participate, but they are only reimbursed for the meals served to children who are individually eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. Rural non-congregate sites can provide summer meals to children who are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals in areas that do not meet the 50 percent eligibility threshold. During summer school, NSLP also reimburses schools under the regular school rules, providing reimbursement for free, reduced-price, and paid meals served.

Public and private nonprofit schools, local government agencies, National Youth Sports Programs, and private nonprofit organizations, can participate in SFSP and sponsor one or more sites. Only schools are eligible to participate in NSLP (but the schools can use the NSLP Seamless Summer Option to provide meals and snacks at non-school and school sites). A sponsor enters into an agreement with their state agency to run the program and receives reimbursement for each eligible meal and snack served at meal sites. A site is the physical location where children receive meals during the summer. Sites work directly with sponsors. USDA provides the funding for these programs through a state agency in each state, usually the state department of education, health, or agriculture.

National Findings for July 2023

In July 2023, on an average weekday, the Summer Nutrition Programs served lunch to just over **2.8 million children**, a **DECREASE** of **170,926 children** compared to July 2022.

Participation in lunch in July 2023 was slightly **HIGHER** than pre-pandemic levels. **30,533 additional children** participated in July 2023 when compared to July 2019 (the last summer before the pandemic).[10]

In July 2023, **15.3 children** received summer lunch for every 100 children who received a free or reduced-price lunch in the 2022–2023 school year.

The number of SFSP sponsors and sites **INCREASED** from July 2022 to July 2023. Nationally, **4,671 sponsors** (an increase of 119 sponsors from 2022) and 35,578 sites (**an increase of 21 sites** from 2022) participated in July 2023.

The number of SFSP sponsors and sites operating in July 2023 was lower than that of pre-pandemic levels. When comparing July 2023 and July 2019, there is a **DECREASE** of **876 sponsors and 11,967 sites**.[11]

State Findings for July 2023

One state met the Food Research & Action Center's (FRAC) goal of reaching 40 children with summer lunch for every 100 children who received a school lunch during the 2022–2023 regular school year: **Vermont (54.4 to 100)**. Only one state hitting the benchmark could be a result of states adjusting to the end of pandemic-era waivers for summer meals and challenges faced by summer programs.

The **top state** performers were: **Vermont** (54.4 to 100), **New Mexico** (32.3 to 100), **Maine** (31.8 to 100), **Montana** (29.7 to 100), **New Jersey** (29.5 to 100), and **New York** (29.0 to 100).

Thirty-nine states provided summer lunch to **FEWER** than one child for every five children who participated in free or reduced-price school lunch during the 2022–2023 school year.

28 states and the District of Columbia saw a **DECREASE** in the average daily participation in the Summer Nutrition Programs in July 2023 compared to July 2022.[12]

Snapshot of Breakfast Participation in July 2023

- Just over **1.5 million children** received a breakfast through the Summer Nutrition Programs on an average day in July 2023. This was a **DECREASE** of **287,096 children** (15.9 percent) compared to July 2022.
- Nationally, **54.1 children** received a breakfast for every 100 who received a lunch through the Summer Nutrition Programs.
- Participation in breakfast in July 2023 was also slightly **LOWER** than pre-pandemic levels: **2,886 fewer children** received a summer breakfast in July 2023 compared to July 2019 (the last summer before the pandemic).[13]

2024 and Beyond: Expanding Access to the Summer Nutrition Programs

Programmatic Opportunities

- **Leverage summer learning funding:** The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 included $30 billion in funding that could be used to support summer and afterschool programs. By making this historic increased investment in federal afterschool and summer programs funding, more families with low incomes will have access to the enrichment and educational programs that provide an important foundation for summer meals. This is the last year for states to distribute this funding, and many still have dollars on the table.
- **Engage governors and elected officials:** Governors and elected officials can play a critical role in establishing and strengthening statewide summer meals expansion efforts. For example, governors can work with the state agency to set expansion goals, create a statewide summer meals workgroup, and help raise awareness about the availability of summer meals. This will be especially important as states utilize federal funding for the roll out of the new Summer EBT Program and the rural non-congregate option. Learn more about strategies to engage governors here.
- **Support and retain sponsors and sites:** Sponsors and sites increased in 2023. To help ensure that they continue to participate, state agencies and advocates can help with outreach and promotion. They also can survey and connect with sponsors to provide additional support to overcome challenges and identify opportunities for growth.

The Permanent Summer EBT Program

The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2022 created a nationwide, permanent Summer EBT Program that builds on the success of Summer EBT demonstration projects.

Summer EBT — which provides families with eligible children grocery benefits to purchase food — was piloted to test new ways to reach children during the summer due to the limited access children had to summer meals and the seasonal increase in food insecurity in households with school-age children. Evaluations of Summer EBT have shown that it reduces food insecurity and improves nutrition.[14] Families in participating states will receive $120 per eligible child beginning in summer 2024.

Summer EBT complements the existing Summer Nutrition Programs; together, these two programs work to decrease summer hunger. Summer EBT is an important nutrition support for families, but it works out to be about $1.33 per child per day and is not enough to cover a child's nutritional needs. The Summer Nutrition Programs provide a maximum of two meals each day at most sites, which is less than the breakfast, lunch, supper, and snack that children can receive on school days during the school year. In addition, most summer meals sites also provide educational, enrichment, or recreational activities that keep children learning.

Children only have access to Summer EBT benefits if their state opts in to the program. In summer 2024, 13 states are not implementing the Summer EBT Program. This report shows the limited reach of summer meals: Mississippi, the highest performing state in the Summer Nutrition Programs out of those opting out of Summer EBT, only reached one child in 2023 for every four who received a free or reduced-price school lunch during the 2022–2023 school year, further highlighting the need for all states to implement Summer EBT.

To learn more, read FRAC's fact sheet: *The Importance of Summer EBT: Why States Must Operate Summer EBT and Summer Nutrition Programs*.

Policy Opportunities

- **Lower the area eligibility threshold:** Lowering the eligibility threshold from 50 percent to 40 percent, or setting an even lower threshold, would allow more communities to serve children whose families are struggling and would improve access to summer meals in every state. The 50 percent threshold for participating keeps many communities where poverty is less concentrated, such as rural and suburban areas, from participating.
- **Streamline the Summer Food Service Program and Afterschool Meal Program:** Many sites that operate the Summer Food Service Program also serve meals after school during the school year through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). Allowing SFSP sponsors to operate year-round would encourage overall program retention as well as eliminate duplicative and burdensome paperwork while supporting sponsors' efforts to serve more children in their community. Currently, sponsors must apply for and operate two separate programs despite the fact they often serve the same children.
- **Allow all summer meals sites to serve three meals:** Allowing all summer sites to serve three meals would align summer with the school year, when children can receive breakfast and lunch at school and a supper and snack at an afterschool program. Presently, most sites can only provide a maximum of two meals per day.
- **Permanently increase federal funding for summer (and afterschool) programs:** This will help ensure that all children have access to the nutritious meals and high-quality programming they need during the summer (and after school).

Updating the Summer Food Nutrition Standards

In April 2024, USDA published updates to the school nutrition standards that better align school meals with the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020–2025*. These research-based standards improve the nutritional quality of school meals by limiting sodium content, maintaining whole grain requirements, and, for the first time, implementing a limit on the added sugar content of meals served. Schools participating in the Seamless Summer Option will be required to adhere to these updated nutrition standards. While substantive nutrition changes were not made to the Summer Food Service Program in the new rule, USDA communicated in the proposed rule that they intend to comprehensively address the SFSP meal pattern in a future rulemaking. Updating the SFSP meal pattern creates an important opportunity to ensure that healthier meals are being served during the summer months, a time when rates of obesity and food insecurity increase for too many children. It is important for USDA to move swiftly on the rulemaking process for SFSP to ensure that all children have access to healthy, high-quality meals year-round.

Non-Congregate in Rural Areas

The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2022 included a permanent non-congregate meals service option for rural areas. The goal of this option is to fill gaps in rural communities that do not have congregate meals sites. USDA issued an Interim Final Rule in December 2023, which supports the implementation of rural non-congregate meals service and expands the definition of rural, allowing more communities to provide non-congregate meals in summer 2024.

Conclusion

Participation in the Summer Nutrition Programs decreased in summer 2023 from 2022. The pandemic child nutrition waivers, which allowed all communities to operate summer meals sites and to offer widespread non-congregate meals, came to an end, limiting access to summer meals.

Summer 2024 offers important opportunities to increase access to summer nutrition through efforts to support and expand summer programming, the provision of non-congregate meals in underserved rural areas, and the permanent Summer EBT Program. Maximizing the opportunities that are available this summer and beyond will be critical to ensuring that children have the nutrition, and the education and enrichment programming, they need to return to school well-nourished and ready to learn. Now is the time to recommit to ending summer hunger.

Technical Notes

The data in this report are collected from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) also conducted a survey of state child nutrition officials to collect information on program operations. Thirty-seven states responded to that survey.

This report does not include the Summer Nutrition Programs in Puerto Rico, Guam, the Virgin Islands, or Department of Defense schools.

Due to rounding, totals in the tables may not add up to 100 percent.

Summer Food Service Program During the Summer

USDA provided the number of Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) lunches and SFSP breakfasts served in each state to the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC). FRAC calculated each state's July average daily lunch participation and daily breakfast participation in SFSP by dividing the total number of SFSP lunches and breakfasts served in July by the total number of weekdays in July (excluding the Independence Day holiday or the day that it is observed if not July Fourth).

The average daily breakfast and lunch participation numbers for July reported in FRAC's analysis are slightly different from USDA's average daily participation numbers. FRAC's revised measure allows consistent comparisons from state to state and year to year. This measure also is more in line with the average daily lunch participation numbers in the school year National School Lunch Program, as described on the next page. FRAC uses July data, as the start and end dates for summer vacation vary by state and school district, making the number of serving days in those months inconsistent. It is important

to note that children served meals in rural areas through the non-congregate option can impact the average daily participation since multiple meals can be provided to the same child, increasing the number of meals a child receives as opposed to increasing the number of children served.

USDA obtains the July numbers of SFSP sponsors and sites from the states and reports them as the states provide them. USDA does not report the number of sponsors or sites for June or August.

NSLP During the School Year

Using data provided by USDA, FRAC calculated the regular school year NSLP average daily attendance for students from households with low incomes for each state, based on the number of free and reduced-price meals served from September through May.

NSLP During the Summer

FRAC used the July average daily attendance figures provided by USDA for the summertime NSLP and School Breakfast Program (SBP) participation data in this report. The NSLP summer meals numbers include all free and reduced-price lunches served through NSLP during July, which includes lunches served during summer school and on regular school days (during July). FRAC then included USDA-provided daily attendance data on breakfasts and lunches served through the SBP and NSLP Seamless Summer Option.

Note that USDA calculates average daily participation in the regular school year NSLP by dividing the average daily lunch figures by an attendance factor (0.927) to account for children who were absent from school on a particular day. FRAC's annual The Reach of School Meals reports these NSLP average daily participation numbers; that is, including the attendance factor. To make the NSLP numbers consistent with the SFSP numbers, for which there is no analogous attendance factor, this *Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation* report does not include the attendance factor. As a result, the regular school year NSLP numbers in this report do not match the NSLP numbers in FRAC's *The Reach of School Meals, School Year 2022–2023*.

Cost of Low Participation

For each state, FRAC calculated the average daily number of children receiving summer lunch in July for every 100 children receiving free or reduced-price lunches during the regular school year. FRAC then calculated the number of additional children who would be reached if that state achieved a 40 to 100 ratio of summer nutrition to regular school year lunch participation. FRAC then multiplied this unserved population by the summer lunch reimbursement rate for the number of weekdays (not counting the Independence Day holiday) in July. FRAC assumed each meal is reimbursed at the lowest standard rate available ($4.87 per lunch for July 2023).

Data Table Changes

Note that unlike in previous reports Table 1 does not include data for school year 2021–2022 lunch participation or the ratio of 2022 summer lunch participation compared to school year 2021–2022 lunch participation. This is due to changes in program operations that make it difficult to compare school year 2021–2022 data to school year 2022–2023 data. During school year

2021–2022, schools were able to offer meals to all students at no charge, and the breakfasts and lunches served were counted as "free meals." This was available through the pandemic child nutrition waivers. In the 2022–2023 school year, schools returned to claiming meals as free, reduced-price, or paid. Therefore, the ratio of summer lunch to NSLP, and rank, do not allow for a consistent comparison. Included in Table 1 of this report is the 2022–2023 NSLP average daily participation (ADP) for free and reduced-price meals, the ratio of summer nutrition to that ADP, and the state rank based on that ratio. The NSLP data points for school year 2021–2022 can be found in Table 1 in last year's report.

Endnotes

1 The Summer Nutrition Programs include the Summer Food Service Program and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), which includes the Seamless Summer Option available through NSLP.

2 This designation refers to the rural definition in 2023. USDA redefined its definition of rural in 2024 to expand what areas are covered by the non-congregate option.

3 Early Learning Resource Center (2024). Afterschool Alliance and NAA Partner for Afterschool Workforce Initiative. Available at: https://elrc5.alleghenycounty.us/news/afterschool-alliance-and-naa-partner-for-afterschool-workforce-initiative.

4 Food Research & Action Center. (2020). *Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation: Summer Breakfast Status Report*. Available at: https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/FRAC-SummerBreakfastReport2020.pdf.

5 National Summer Learning Association. (2022). The Evidence Base for Summer Enrichment and Comprehensive Afterschool Opportunities. Available at: https://www.summerlearning.org/knowledge-center/investing-arp-funds/.

6 Huang, J., Barnidge, E., & Kim, Y. (2015). Children Receiving Free or Reduced Price School Lunch Have Higher Food Insufficiency Rates in Summer. The Journal of Nutrition, 145(9), 2161–2168. https://doi.org/10.3945/jn.115.214486.

7 Hartline-Grafton, Heather. Food Research & Action Center (2019). *Summer Nutrition and Enrichment Programs: Effective Tools to Support Child Food Security, Health, and Learning During the Summertime*. Available at: https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/summer-nutrition-and-enrichment-programs.pdf.

8 This report does not include Minnesota data from summer 2022, which was under review by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service at the time of publication.

9 During summer 2022, USDA extended the pandemic child nutrition waiver that allowed summer meal sites to operate in any community without meeting the 50 percent eligibility threshold.

10 Food Research & Action Center. (2020). *Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation: Summer Breakfast Status Report*. Available at: https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/FRAC-SummerBreakfastReport2020.pdf.

11 Food Research & Action Center. (2020). *Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation: Summer Breakfast Status Report*. Available at: https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/FRAC-SummerBreakfastReport2020.pdf.

12 This report does not include Minnesota data from summer 2022, which was under review by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service at the time of publication.

13 Food Research & Action Center. (2022). *Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation: Summer Nutrition Status Report*. Available at: https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/Summer-Report-2022_final.pdf.

14 U.S. Department of Agriculture (2024). Summary of the Evaluation of the USDA Summer EBT (Electronic Benefits Transfer) Demonstrations: Lessons Learned From More Than a Decade of Research. Available at: https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/ops-sebt-summary.pdf.

Table 1: Average Daily Participation (ADP) in Summer Lunch[1] in July 2023, Compared to ADP in Summer Lunch in July 2022 and Regular School Year Free and Reduced-Price National School Lunch Program (NSLP)[2] ADP for School Year 2022–2023, by State

State	Summer Lunch ADP July 2022	Summer Lunch ADP July 2023	Free and Reduced-Price NSLP ADP 2022–2023	Ratio[3] of Summer Lunch to NSLP 2022–2023	Rank 2023	Percent Change in Summer Lunch ADP 2022 to 2023
Alabama	29,461	24,309	347,785	7.0	46	-17.5%
Alaska	2,104	1,690	29,003	5.8	50	-19.7%
Arizona	54,068	65,728	351,757	18.7	16	21.6%
Arkansas	31,390	34,484	202,165	17.1	20	9.9%
California	453,014	421,193	2,034,321	20.7	12	-7.0%
Colorado	21,169	18,773	176,135	10.7	42	-11.3%
Connecticut	36,034	34,501	179,922	19.2	15	-4.3%
Delaware	10,107	10,015	50,134	20.0	13	-0.9%
District of Columbia	9,685	8,896	37,538	23.7	11	-8.1%
Florida	162,002	147,046	1,323,506	11.1	41	-9.2%
Georgia[4]	147,875	124,471	730,350	17.0	21	-15.8%
Hawaii	6,518	13,267	52,140	25.4	9	103.5%
Idaho	12,487	10,711	66,357	16.1	26	-14.2%
Illinois	68,012	73,399	646,033	11.4	40	7.9%
Indiana	54,445	72,267	418,515	17.3	19	32.7%
Iowa	18,353	19,975	173,365	11.5	39	8.8%
Kansas	34,220	23,551	164,544	14.3	28	-31.2%
Kentucky	47,169	62,995	388,247	16.2	25	33.6%
Louisiana	17,764	30,323	383,522	7.9	45	70.7%
Maine	14,395	12,672	39,826	31.8	3	-12.0%
Maryland	90,846	63,882	267,707	23.9	10	-29.7%
Massachusetts	71,176	61,892	318,197	19.5	14	-13.0%
Michigan	68,790	69,422	523,037	13.3	33	0.9%
Minnesota[5]	NA	44,997	255,543	17.6	18	NA
Mississippi	30,187	61,628	238,472	25.8	8	104.2%
Missouri	31,298	23,253	280,374	8.3	44	-25.7%
Montana	10,014	11,215	37,702	29.7	4	12.0%
Nebraska	4,682	4,826	122,159	4.0	51	3.1%
Nevada	15,252	9,483	160,636	5.9	49	-37.8%
New Hampshire	5,860	4,124	23,403	17.6	17	-29.6%
New Jersey	266,223	103,642	351,084	29.5	5	-61.1%
New Mexico	40,864	44,325	137,330	32.3	2	8.5%
New York	425,114	346,645	1,194,259	29.0	6	-18.5%
North Carolina	70,092	65,488	545,596	12.0	38	-6.6%
North Dakota	3,755	4,174	29,914	14.0	30	11.2%
Ohio	52,946	65,572	512,461	12.8	36	23.8%
Oklahoma	16,155	16,185	251,206	6.4	48	0.2%
Oregon	26,881	25,042	149,106	16.8	22	-6.8%
Pennsylvania	74,976	73,549	611,058	12.0	37	-1.9%
Rhode Island	8,550	5,486	39,833	13.8	32	-35.8%
South Carolina	41,609	84,264	313,375	26.9	7	102.5%
South Dakota	5,597	5,338	38,358	13.9	31	-4.6%
Tennessee	48,227	64,828	387,019	16.8	23	34.4%
Texas	143,716	170,901	2,454,027	7.0	47	18.9%
Utah	16,951	17,282	119,805	14.4	27	1.9%
Vermont	13,127	10,319	18,959	54.4	1	-21.4%
Virginia	68,699	57,314	436,215	13.1	34	-16.6%
Washington	30,880	25,549	283,925	9.0	43	-17.3%
West Virginia	14,200	16,146	124,991	12.9	35	13.7%
Wisconsin	39,307	34,549	247,022	14.0	29	-12.1%
Wyoming	9,400	3,126	18,836	16.6	24	-66.7%
U.S.	**2,975,642**	**2,804,716**	**18,286,774**	**15.3**		**-5.7%**

1 Summer Lunch includes the lunches served through the Summer Food Service Program and the free and reduced-price lunches served through National School Lunch Program, including the Seamless Summer Option.

2 School Year NSLP numbers reflect free and reduced-price lunch participation during the regular school year.

3 Ratio of Summer Lunch to NSLP is the number of children in Summer Lunch per 100 receiving free or reduced-price lunch through NSLP.

4 NSLP ADP includes free and reduced-price lunches, including the Seamless Summer Option.

5 2022 data for Minnesota is not available.

Table 2: Change in Summer Food Service Program Average Daily Lunch Participation (ADP); and in National School Lunch Program (NSLP) ADP[1] from July 2022 to July 2023, by State

State	SFSP Lunch ADP July 2022	SFSP Lunch ADP July 2023	SFSP ADP Percent Change 2022–2023	NSLP ADP July 2022	NSLP ADP July 2023	NSLP ADP Percent Change 2022–2023
Alabama	15,710	15,862	1.0%	13,751	8,447	-38.6%
Alaska	1,759	1,261	-28.3%	345	429	24.5%
Arizona	8,329	8,470	1.7%	45,739	57,257	25.2%
Arkansas	7,467	9,365	25.4%	23,923	25,119	5.0%
California	103,385	42,992	-58.4%	349,629	378,201	8.2%
Colorado	20,895	17,456	-16.5%	274	1,317	380.9%
Connecticut	25,850	25,444	-1.6%	10,184	9,057	-11.1%
Delaware	9,251	9,630	4.1%	855	385	-55.0%
District of Columbia	7,165	7,384	3.1%	2,520	1,512	-40.0%
Florida	117,200	98,195	-16.2%	44,802	48,851	9.0%
Georgia	37,491	36,165	-3.5%	110,383	88,306	-20.0%
Hawaii	2,094	13,071	524.2%	4,424	196	-95.6%
Idaho	11,761	10,241	-12.9%	726	470	-35.3%
Illinois	51,507	56,743	10.2%	16,505	16,656	0.9%
Indiana	23,028	22,033	-4.3%	31,417	50,234	59.9%
Iowa	12,617	18,661	47.9%	5,736	1,314	-77.1%
Kansas	21,180	21,671	2.3%	13,040	1,880	-85.6%
Kentucky	40,870	61,988	51.7%	6,299	1,008	-84.0%
Louisiana	14,625	26,782	83.1%	3,139	3,541	12.8%
Maine	13,515	12,290	-9.1%	879	382	-56.5%
Maryland	89,667	62,515	-30.3%	1,180	1,368	15.9%
Massachusetts	51,613	50,749	-1.7%	19,563	11,143	-43.0%
Michigan	58,103	58,561	0.8%	10,687	10,861	1.6%
Minnesota[2]	NA	34,688	NA	NA	10,309	NA
Mississippi	9,458	7,875	-16.7%	20,730	53,753	159.3%
Missouri	20,551	17,271	-16.0%	10,747	5,982	-44.3%
Montana	9,508	10,741	13.0%	507	474	-6.4%
Nebraska	4,207	4,229	0.5%	474	598	25.9%
Nevada	13,160	7,840	-40.4%	2,092	1,642	-21.5%
New Hampshire	4,160	3,382	-18.7%	1,700	742	-56.3%
New Jersey	108,913	86,820	-20.3%	157,309	16,821	-89.3%
New Mexico	9,599	10,450	8.9%	31,265	33,876	8.4%
New York	354,258	258,451	-27.0%	70,856	88,194	24.5%
North Carolina	47,702	45,744	-4.1%	22,389	19,744	-11.8%
North Dakota	3,598	4,008	11.4%	157	166	5.3%
Ohio	37,797	46,927	24.2%	15,149	18,645	23.1%
Oklahoma	12,874	13,989	8.7%	3,280	2,196	-33.1%
Oregon	22,639	21,966	-3.0%	4,242	3,076	-27.5%
Pennsylvania	51,299	44,436	-13.4%	23,677	29,114	23.0%
Rhode Island	6,500	5,149	-20.8%	2,050	336	-83.6%
South Carolina	14,081	15,360	9.1%	27,528	68,904	150.3%
South Dakota	3,917	3,870	-1.2%	1,680	1,468	-12.6%
Tennessee	22,024	26,363	19.7%	26,202	38,465	46.8%
Texas	57,313	42,492	-25.9%	86,403	128,409	48.6%
Utah	1,941	2,262	16.5%	15,010	15,020	0.1%
Vermont	12,997	10,236	-21.2%	130	83	-36.0%
Virginia	51,185	44,723	-12.6%	17,514	12,591	-28.1%
Washington	27,689	22,790	-17.7%	3,191	2,759	-13.5%
West Virginia	13,423	15,316	14.1%	777	831	7.0%
Wisconsin	31,229	30,733	-1.6%	8,078	3,816	-52.8%
Wyoming	7,301	2,921	-60.0%	2,099	206	-90.2%
U.S.	**1,704,406**	**1,528,559**	**-10.3%**	**1,271,236**	**1,276,157**	**0.4%**

1 NSLP ADP includes free and reduced-price lunches, including the Seamless Summer Option.

2 2022 data for Minnesota is not available.

Table 3: Change in Number of Summer Food Service Program Sponsors and Sites from July 2022 to July 2023, by State

State	Sponsors July 2022	Sponsors July 2023	Sponsors Percent Change	Sites July 2022	Sites July 2023	Sites Percent Change
Alabama	57	47	-17.5%	517	355	-31.3%
Alaska	15	15	0.0%	81	70	-13.6%
Arizona	19	24	26.3%	203	274	35.0%
Arkansas	65	61	-6.2%	179	213	19.0%
California	117	114	-2.6%	1,739	1,135	-34.7%
Colorado	61	65	6.6%	441	467	5.9%
Connecticut	40	40	0.0%	481	462	-4.0%
Delaware	29	31	6.9%	284	290	2.1%
District of Columbia	9	10	11.1%	205	173	-15.6%
Florida	96	90	-6.3%	2,627	2,442	-7.0%
Georgia	60	69	15.0%	773	966	25.0%
Hawaii	13	10	-23.1%	88	115	30.7%
Idaho	53	72	35.8%	178	258	44.9%
Illinois	130	125	-3.8%	1,570	1,509	-3.9%
Indiana	163	164	0.6%	818	810	-1.0%
Iowa	108	119	10.2%	365	400	9.6%
Kansas	103	119	15.5%	374	417	11.5%
Kentucky	128	139	8.6%	1,385	1,441	4.0%
Louisiana	69	63	-8.7%	449	464	3.3%
Maine	116	106	-8.6%	445	410	-7.9%
Maryland	39	39	0.0%	1,389	1,326	-4.5%
Massachusetts	112	116	3.6%	1,101	1,091	-0.9%
Michigan	351	368	4.8%	1,398	1,372	-1.9%
Minnesota[1]	NA	154	NA	NA	690	NA
Mississippi	57	50	-12.3%	230	193	-16.1%
Missouri	126	122	-3.2%	703	515	-26.7%
Montana	91	94	3.3%	243	236	-2.9%
Nebraska	58	59	1.7%	141	156	10.6%
Nevada	20	15	-25.0%	266	242	-9.0%
New Hampshire	21	20	-4.8%	142	179	26.1%
New Jersey	152	168	10.5%	1,187	1,253	5.6%
New Mexico	23	28	21.7%	328	344	4.9%
New York	488	448	-8.2%	2,278	2,555	12.2%
North Carolina	110	120	9.1%	1,564	1,751	12.0%
North Dakota	33	36	9.1%	100	155	55.0%
Ohio	130	130	0.0%	1,213	1,204	-0.7%
Oklahoma	53	47	-11.3%	499	441	-11.6%
Oregon	113	107	-5.3%	659	592	-10.2%
Pennsylvania	222	214	-3.6%	1,582	1,750	10.6%
Rhode Island	28	25	-10.7%	200	183	-8.5%
South Carolina	41	42	2.4%	787	729	-7.4%
South Dakota	36	32	-11.1%	77	68	-11.7%
Tennessee	42	40	-4.8%	757	953	25.9%
Texas	123	100	-18.7%	1,983	1,439	-27.4%
Utah	11	7	-36.4%	87	98	12.6%
Vermont	58	55	-5.2%	261	252	-3.4%
Virginia	113	116	2.7%	1,111	994	-10.5%
Washington	164	149	-9.1%	795	774	-2.6%
West Virginia	88	89	1.1%	442	563	27.4%
Wisconsin	174	169	-2.9%	757	720	-4.9%
Wyoming	24	29	20.8%	75	89	18.7%
U.S.	**4,552**	**4,671**	**2.6%**	**35,557**	**35,578**	**0.1%**

1 2022 data for Minnesota is not available.

Table 4: Number of Summer Food Service Program Lunches Served in June, July[1], and August 2022 and 2023, by State

State	Lunches June 2022	Lunches June 2023	Percent Change June	Lunches July 2022	Lunches July 2023	Percent Change July	Lunches August 2022	Lunches August 2023	Percent Change August
Alabama	629,841	570,243	-9.5%	314,207	317,240	1.0%	7,570	18,785	148.2%
Alaska	54,239	49,032	-9.6%	35,180	25,218	-28.3%	11,634	8,578	-26.3%
Arizona	210,842	513,927	143.7%	166,585	169,409	1.7%	3,840	6,008	56.5%
Arkansas	171,997	196,982	14.5%	149,334	187,300	25.4%	64,050	51,030	-20.3%
California	1,326,248	708,302	-46.6%	2,067,706	859,841	-58.4%	554,345	221,303	-60.1%
Colorado	681,719	587,639	-13.8%	417,909	349,123	-16.5%	77,804	52,553	-32.5%
Connecticut	53,048	78,917	48.8%	517,008	508,884	-1.6%	202,987	145,468	-28.3%
Delaware	64,442	71,357	10.7%	185,027	192,595	4.1%	78,726	74,065	-5.9%
District of Columbia	787	17,941	2,179.7%	143,301	147,677	3.1%	61,900	55,267	-10.7%
Florida	4,256,797	2,950,090	-30.7%	2,344,002	1,963,898	-16.2%	72,348	123,238	70.3%
Georgia	704,536	762,123	8.2%	749,829	723,301	-3.5%	40,011	22,694	-43.3%
Hawaii	66,274	183,732	177.2%	41,882	261,420	524.2%	0	15,653	
Idaho	318,849	314,498	-1.4%	235,226	204,815	-12.9%	67,194	43,182	-35.7%
Illinois	420,450	742,765	76.7%	1,030,136	1,134,868	10.2%	287,465	195,380	-32.0%
Indiana	785,198	887,905	13.1%	460,556	440,668	-4.3%	27,115	27,039	-0.3%
Iowa	221,121	499,780	126.0%	252,345	373,226	47.9%	64,874	84,078	29.6%
Kansas	645,528	796,408	23.4%	423,600	433,422	2.3%	33,239	27,107	-18.4%
Kentucky	690,597	1,368,923	98.2%	817,396	1,239,756	51.7%	200,108	205,453	2.7%
Louisiana	451,191	1,276,197	182.9%	292,506	535,634	83.1%	15,612	33,579	115.1%
Maine	43,159	57,543	33.3%	270,309	245,791	-9.1%	114,037	98,409	-13.7%
Maryland	6,753	181,121	2,582.1%	1,793,331	1,250,291	-30.3%	1,467,216	643,005	-56.2%
Massachusetts	77,796	87,588	12.6%	1,032,257	1,014,987	-1.7%	613,197	452,226	-26.3%
Michigan	442,636	637,597	44.0%	1,162,061	1,171,219	0.8%	706,241	603,961	-14.5%
Minnesota[2]	NA	494,029	NA	NA	693,759	NA	NA	358,894	NA
Mississippi	330,075	520,657	57.7%	189,153	157,494	-16.7%	3,397	2,122	-37.5%
Missouri	1,103,571	1,338,935	21.3%	411,011	345,423	-16.0%	182,995	132,626	-27.5%
Montana	174,864	210,807	20.6%	190,150	214,822	13.0%	94,187	106,385	13.0%
Nebraska	269,850	327,529	21.4%	84,145	84,574	0.5%	8,770	8,770	0.0%
Nevada	473,826	472,890	-0.2%	263,198	156,806	-40.4%	119,652	61,364	-48.7%
New Hampshire	11,743	10,796	-8.1%	83,194	67,633	-18.7%	37,345	34,639	-7.2%
New Jersey	92,827	123,771	33.3%	2,178,263	1,736,409	-20.3%	2,403,311	837,324	-65.2%
New Mexico	258,916	330,346	27.6%	191,979	208,994	8.9%	7,103	4,773	-32.8%
New York	131,366	251,027	91.1%	7,085,159	5,169,014	-27.0%	8,306,078	3,418,294	-58.8%
North Carolina	617,067	831,684	34.8%	954,046	914,873	-4.1%	326,924	280,573	-14.2%
North Dakota	109,703	155,442	41.7%	71,953	80,165	11.4%	26,166	25,854	-1.2%
Ohio	830,702	967,980	16.5%	755,944	938,538	24.2%	319,942	353,508	10.5%
Oklahoma	221,127	496,022	124.3%	257,482	279,789	8.7%	46,128	41,364	-10.3%
Oregon	139,912	145,879	4.3%	452,783	439,329	-3.0%	287,802	218,675	-24.0%
Pennsylvania	388,002	401,340	3.4%	1,025,974	888,711	-13.4%	1,304,088	438,963	-66.3%
Rhode Island	11,394	9,240	-18.9%	130,009	102,981	-20.8%	67,397	52,035	-22.8%
South Carolina	373,791	347,132	-7.1%	281,610	307,204	9.1%	81,689	46,017	-43.7%
South Dakota	109,745	114,457	4.3%	78,331	77,392	-1.2%	24,372	20,308	-16.7%
Tennessee	613,253	1,072,965	75.0%	440,487	527,250	19.7%	11,080	26,184	136.3%
Texas	2,037,568	1,818,068	-10.8%	1,146,263	849,842	-25.9%	347,195	218,220	-37.1%
Utah	40,063	59,922	49.6%	38,827	45,233	16.5%	12,411	12,906	4.0%
Vermont	33,909	35,057	3.4%	259,936	204,714	-21.2%	108,898	107,923	-0.9%
Virginia	369,389	464,781	25.8%	1,023,693	894,456	-12.6%	271,044	199,273	-26.5%
Washington	170,016	145,271	-14.6%	553,773	455,795	-17.7%	246,166	210,773	-14.4%
West Virginia	179,641	226,381	26.0%	268,463	306,314	14.1%	159,779	61,509	-61.5%
Wisconsin	607,867	695,288	14.4%	624,581	614,663	-1.6%	260,677	231,262	-11.3%
Wyoming	111,411	68,655	-38.4%	146,019	58,413	-60.0%	23,910	18,057	-24.5%
U.S.	**22,135,646**	**25,676,961**	**16.0%**	**34,088,119**	**30,571,173**	**-10.3%**	**19,860,019**	**10,736,656**	**-45.9%**

1 The Average Daily Participation (ADP) in the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) is calculated by dividing the total number of SFSP lunches served in July by the total number of weekdays in July, minus the Independence Day Holiday.

2 2022 data for Minnesota is not available.

Table 5: Average Daily Participation (ADP) in Summer Lunch[1] and Additional ADP and Additional Federal Reimbursement if States Reached FRAC's Goal of 40 Summer Lunch Participants per 100 Regular School Year Lunch Participants[2]

State	Summer Lunch ADP, July 2023	Ratio of Summer Lunch to NSLP[3]	Total Summer Lunch ADP if Summer Lunch to NSLP Ratio Reached 40:100	Additional Summer Lunch ADP if Summer Lunch to NSLP Ratio Reached 40:100	Additional Federal Reimbursement Dollars if Summer Lunch to NSLP Ratio Reached 40:100[4]
Alabama	24,309	7.0	139,114	114,805	$11,182,008
Alaska	1,690	5.8	11,601	9,911	$965,340
Arizona	65,728	18.7	140,703	74,975	$7,302,552
Arkansas	34,484	17.1	80,866	46,382	$4,517,606
California	421,193	20.7	813,729	392,535	$38,232,915
Colorado	18,773	10.7	70,454	51,681	$5,033,756
Connecticut	34,501	19.2	71,969	37,468	$3,649,363
Delaware	10,015	20.0	20,054	10,039	$977,792
District of Columbia	8,896	23.7	15,015	6,119	$596,001
Florida	147,046	11.1	529,402	382,356	$37,241,485
Georgia	124,471	17.0	292,140	167,669	$16,330,926
Hawaii	13,267	25.4	20,856	7,589	$739,204
Idaho	10,711	16.1	26,543	15,832	$1,542,079
Illinois	73,399	11.4	258,413	185,014	$18,020,381
Indiana	72,267	17.3	167,406	95,139	$9,266,504
Iowa	19,975	11.5	69,346	49,371	$4,808,756
Kansas	23,551	14.3	65,818	42,266	$4,116,740
Kentucky	62,995	16.2	155,299	92,303	$8,990,344
Louisiana	30,323	7.9	153,409	123,086	$11,988,555
Maine	12,672	31.8	15,930	3,259	$317,383
Maryland	63,882	23.9	107,083	43,201	$4,207,740
Massachusetts	61,892	19.5	127,279	65,386	$6,368,618
Michigan	69,422	13.3	209,215	139,792	$13,615,783
Minnesota	44,997	17.6	102,217	57,220	$5,573,262
Mississippi	61,628	25.8	95,389	33,761	$3,288,291
Missouri	23,253	8.3	112,150	88,896	$8,658,478
Montana	11,215	29.7	15,081	3,865	$376,497
Nebraska	4,826	4.0	48,864	44,037	$4,289,252
Nevada	9,483	5.9	64,255	54,772	$5,334,768
New Hampshire	4,124	17.6	9,361	5,237	$510,124
New Jersey	103,642	29.5	140,433	36,791	$3,583,489
New Mexico	44,325	32.3	54,932	10,607	$1,033,096
New York	346,645	29.0	477,704	131,059	$12,765,121
North Carolina	65,488	12.0	218,239	152,751	$14,877,921
North Dakota	4,174	14.0	11,966	7,792	$758,913
Ohio	65,572	12.8	204,984	139,412	$13,578,734
Oklahoma	16,185	6.4	100,483	84,297	$8,210,564
Oregon	25,042	16.8	59,642	34,600	$3,370,031
Pennsylvania	73,549	12.0	244,423	170,874	$16,643,139
Rhode Island	5,486	13.8	15,933	10,448	$1,017,609
South Carolina	84,264	26.9	125,350	41,086	$4,001,762
South Dakota	5,338	13.9	15,343	10,005	$974,518
Tennessee	64,828	16.8	154,808	89,980	$8,764,049
Texas	170,901	7.0	981,611	810,710	$78,963,108
Utah	17,282	14.4	47,922	30,640	$2,984,362
Vermont	10,319	54.4	7,583	Met Goal	Met Goal
Virginia	57,314	13.1	174,486	117,172	$11,412,526
Washington	25,549	9.0	113,570	88,021	$8,573,235
West Virginia	16,146	12.9	49,996	33,850	$3,296,993
Wisconsin	34,549	14.0	98,809	64,259	$6,258,859
Wyoming	3,126	16.6	7,534	4,408	$429,332
U.S.	**2,804,716**	**15.3**	**7,314,710**	**4,509,994**	**$439,273,439**

1 Summer Nutrition includes the Summer Food Service Program and free and reduced-price National School Lunch Program (NSLP) participation during July. The Seamless Summer Option lunches are claimed and included in the NSLP free lunch category.

2 Regular School Year Lunch participants includes participation in the free and reduced-price NSLP.

3 Ratio of Summer Nutrition to NSLP is the number of children in Summer Nutrition per 100 receiving free or reduced-price lunch through the 2022–2023 school year NSLP program.

4 Additional federal reimbursement dollars were calculated assuming that the state's sponsors were reimbursed for each child each weekday only for lunch (not breakfast or a snack), at the lowest rate for an SFSP lunch ($4.87 per lunch), and were served 20 days in July 2023

Table 6: Average Daily Participation (ADP) in Summer Breakfast[1] and Summer Lunch[2] in July 2022 and July 2023 and Ratio[3] and Rank, by State

State	Summer Breakfast ADP July 2022	Summer Lunch ADP July 2022	Ratio 2022	Rank 2022	Summer Breakfast ADP July 2023	Summer Lunch ADP July 2023	Ratio 2023	Rank 2023	Percent Change in Breakfast ADP 2022 to 2023
Alabama	13,626	29,461	46.2	40	13,341	24,309	54.9	30	-2.1%
Alaska	1,038	2,104	49.3	35	1,139	1,690	67.4	20	9.7%
Arizona	21,497	54,068	39.8	44	21,346	65,728	32.5	46	-0.7%
Arkansas	17,802	31,390	56.7	21	23,579	34,484	68.4	19	32.5%
California	191,801	453,014	42.3	43	156,411	421,193	37.1	43	-18.5%
Colorado	12,990	21,169	61.4	17	9,568	18,773	51.0	33	-26.3%
Connecticut	26,534	36,034	73.6	9	25,408	34,501	73.6	11	-4.2%
Delaware	7,484	10,107	74.0	8	7,719	10,015	77.1	9	3.1%
District of Columbia	7,947	9,685	82.1	4	7,516	8,896	84.5	2	-5.4%
Florida	82,862	162,002	51.1	31	72,996	147,046	49.6	34	-11.9%
Georgia	65,885	147,875	44.6	41	56,644	124,471	45.5	40	-14.0%
Hawaii	735	6,518	11.3	50	11,235	13,267	84.7	1	1429.1%
Idaho	4,380	12,487	35.1	46	2,402	10,711	22.4	48	-45.2%
Illinois	33,182	68,012	48.8	36	35,935	73,399	49.0	36	8.3%
Indiana	13,601	54,445	25.0	48	15,157	72,267	21.0	50	11.4%
Iowa	9,397	18,353	51.2	30	12,711	19,975	63.6	24	35.3%
Kansas	23,364	34,220	68.3	12	16,467	23,551	69.9	16	-29.5%
Kentucky	30,090	47,169	63.8	16	49,792	62,995	79.0	6	65.5%
Louisiana	10,592	17,764	59.6	20	23,728	30,323	78.3	7	124.0%
Maine	9,814	14,395	68.2	13	9,292	12,672	73.3	12	-5.3%
Maryland	89,393	90,846	98.4	1	49,956	63,882	78.2	8	-44.1%
Massachusetts	43,174	71,176	60.7	18	37,672	61,892	60.9	25	-12.7%
Michigan	46,279	68,790	67.3	15	49,162	69,422	70.8	15	6.2%
Minnesota[4]	NA	NA	NA	NA	24,815	44,997	55.1 29	NA	NA
Mississippi	9,117	30,187	30.2	47	13,538	61,628	22.0	49	48.5%
Missouri	16,789	31,298	53.6	26	13,923	23,253	59.9	26	-17.1%
Montana	5,153	10,014	51.5	29	8,065	11,215	71.9	14	56.5%
Nebraska	2,063	4,682	44.1	42	2,206	4,826	45.7	39	6.9%
Nevada	11,909	15,252	78.1	7	6,505	9,483	68.6	18	-45.4%
New Hampshire	4,299	5,860	73.4	10	3,042	4,124	73.8	10	-29.2%
New Jersey	243,072	266,223	91.3	2	75,754	103,642	73.1	13	-68.8%
New Mexico	19,058	40,864	46.6	39	20,958	44,325	47.3	38	10.0%
New York	345,118	425,114	81.2	6	274,277	346,645	79.1	5	-20.5%
North Carolina	39,351	70,092	56.1	22	36,920	65,488	56.4	28	-6.2%
North Dakota	1,831	3,755	48.8	37	2,059	4,174	49.3	35	12.5%
Ohio	29,654	52,946	56.0	23	41,948	65,572	64.0	23	41.5%
Oklahoma	9,695	16,155	60.0	19	8,313	16,185	51.4	32	-14.3%
Oregon	12,752	26,881	47.4	38	12,168	25,042	48.6	37	-4.6%
Pennsylvania	54,834	74,976	73.1	11	47,897	73,549	65.1	21	-12.7%
Rhode Island	4,766	8,550	55.7	24	3,119	5,486	56.9	27	-34.6%
South Carolina	21,585	41,609	51.9	27	24,191	84,264	28.7	47	12.1%
South Dakota	2,781	5,597	49.7	34	2,146	5,338	40.2	41	-22.8%
Tennessee	24,287	48,227	50.4	33	33,604	64,828	51.8	31	38.4%
Texas	73,301	143,716	51.0	32	55,831	170,901	32.7	45	-23.8%
Utah	3,038	16,951	17.9	49	2,815	17,282	16.3	51	-7.4%
Vermont	11,052	13,127	84.2	3	8,335	10,319	80.8	4	-24.6%
Virginia	46,569	68,699	67.8	14	39,985	57,314	69.8	17	-14.1%
Washington	11,923	30,880	38.6	45	10,070	25,549	39.4	42	-15.5%
West Virginia	11,536	14,200	81.2	5	13,189	16,146	81.7	3	14.3%
Wisconsin	21,284	39,307	54.1	25	22,127	34,549	64.0	22	4.0%
Wyoming	4,849	9,400	51.6	28	1,059	3,126	33.9	44	-78.2%
U.S.	**1,805,132**	**2,975,642**	**60.7**		**1,518,036**	**2,804,716**	**54.1**		**-15.9%**

1 Summer Breakfast is the sum of the average daily participation in Summer Food Service Program breakfast service in July plus the average daily free and reduced-price participation in the School Breakfast Program — including the Seamless Summer Option — in July.

2 Summer Lunch is the sum of the average daily participation in Summer Food Service Program lunch service in July plus the average daily free and reduced-price participation in the National School Lunch Program — including the Seamless Summer Option — in July.

3 Ratio of Summer Breakfast to Summer Lunch is the number of children in Summer Breakfast per 100 in Summer Lunch.

4 2022 data for Minnesota is not available.

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