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School Meal Programs: maintenance of the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) at 40%

Free Meals

In 2014, approximately 10.54 million students living in families with incomes below 130% of the poverty threshold, received an average of 167 free school breakfasts each, under the School Breakfast Program. Among those, we estimate 43% were living in food-insecure households (4,532,200 million children). The cost of each meal was between \$1.62 and \$1.93, depending on the area eligibility status of the school, and other factors, or approximately \$1.78 on average. At this average cost, the 167 breakfasts were valued at \$297.26 per student per school year.

If both children in our simulated family of three people, one adult and two children, were school-age and participated in the SBP, the value of their free breakfasts would be \$594.52, and comprise 3.12% of their family's poverty threshold of \$19,073/year. This percentage was used to shift the family's food purchasing power up the range of income-to-poverty ratio categories, moving some into the next higher category.

To those children eligible to enjoy the next higher range of income-to-poverty ratio category food purchase power (130-185%) we applied the prevalence of food insecurity (30.1%) for that category. The result indicates that although some children enjoyed a higher purchasing power, it was not enough to shift them all from food insecurity to food security. However, 69.9% were able to become newly food-secure.

Similarly, approximately 19.2 million students living in families with incomes below 130% of the poverty threshold received an average of 166 free school lunches each in 2014, under the National School Lunch Program. Among those, 8,256,000 million children were food-insecure. Depending on the area eligibility status of the school, and other factors, these 166 meals were valued at between \$2.98 and \$3.21 each, or at approximately \$3.10 on average. At this average cost, the 166 lunches were valued at \$513 per student per year on average. Receipt of these free lunches could be viewed as increasing each child's family's food purchasing power by \$513 that year.

If both children participated in the NSLP, the amount would double (\$1,029.2) and comprise 5.4% of their family's poverty threshold of \$19,073/year. Some of them would then enjoy the following, or next higher, income-to-poverty ratio category's food purchasing power, and some of those would be made food-secure.

Under a three-person family scenario, with one parent and two school-age children, we assumed both children would be participants in school meal programs, receiving free or reduced-price breakfast and lunch at school. We modeled the impact of the school meal programs on food insecurity in participating students' families under the existing 40% cut-off for community eligibility provision (CEP). We estimate that in 2014, under the CEP then in place, the Free School Breakfast Program enabled 97,614 food-insecure students to become food secure (2.15%). Since both children in our hypothetical three-person family were eligible to receive free breakfasts, they were also eligible to receive free lunches. In 2014, under the 40% CEP cut-off, the National School Lunch Program enabled 307,826 students (3.73%) to move into food-security because their families could use money previously spent on school meals to increase their food purchasing power. When all family members are included, the estimated total number of food insecure people who would be enabled to become food secure by the SBP in our simulation (using data for 2014) is 608,160 (3.17%).

Table 1: Changes in Food Insecurity Resulting from the maintenance of 40% Eligibility Provision Criteria

Basis for Change Free Breakfast and Lunch	Number of people elected for change to Food Security (3.12% - Breakfast); (5.40% - Lunch)	Number remaining Food Insecure After Change	Number Newly Food Secure	% of Those Elected for Change Becoming Food Secure
Free Breakfast From that of 0% - ≤130% of poverty to that of 130% - ≤185%; Food Insecurity prevalence changes from 43.1% to 30.9%	141,265	43,651	97,614	2.15%
Free Lunch From that of 0% - ≤130% of poverty to that of 130% - ≤185%; Food Insecurity prevalence changes from 43.1% to 30.9%	445,479	137,653	307,826	3.73%
Totals including just children	586,744	181,304	405,440	3.17%
Totals including all family members	880,116	271,956	608,160	3.17%

Reduced Priced Meals

In 2014, 1.01 million children living in families with incomes between 130% and 185% of the poverty threshold received the same number of reduced-price breakfasts each, under the School Breakfast Program. Among those, 434,300 children lived in food-insecure households. Those meals were reimbursed to the school at an average rate of about \$1.48 each. At this average cost, the 167 reduced-price breakfasts were valued at \$247.16 per student on average. If these students were one of two children in single-parent families, and they and their siblings both received reduced-price breakfasts, this would amount to \$494.32 or 2.59% of their poverty threshold, shifting the food

purchasing power of these families into a higher income-to-poverty ratio category. Applying the higher income-to-poverty ratio category's prevalence of food insecurity, we simulated how many people would become food-secure and how many would remain in food insecure.

In addition, 2.5 million children living in families with incomes between 130% and 185% of the poverty threshold received a similar number of reduced-price lunches each in 2014, under the National School Lunch Program, and 43% of those (1,075,000) were living in food-insecure households. In that year, those meals were reimbursed to the school at an average rate of about \$2.70 each. At this average cost, the 166 reduced-price meals were valued at \$448.20 per student on average. Thus, these students' families saw their food purchasing power increase by \$448.20 on average as a result of their children's receipt of the reduced-price meals. If the child had a sibling also participating and receiving reduced-price meals, the 332 total meals received would be valued at \$896.40, comprising 4.7% of her family's poverty threshold.

In the same fashion, we simulated the increase in families' food purchasing power resulting from receipt of reduced-price breakfasts and lunches, and its implications for food security. As an example, we used both children of a family composed by 1 adult and 2 children eligible to receive reduced price breakfast and lunch at school. We estimate that in 2014, under the CEP in place, the School Breakfast Program enabled 10,355 food-insecure students to become food secure (2.38%). In addition, the National School Lunch Program enabled 46,479 students to become food-secure (4.32%). When all family members are included, the estimated total number of food insecure people who were enabled to become food secure in 2014 is 85,252 (3.77%).

Table 2: Changes in Food Insecurity Resulting from the maintenance of 40% Eligibility Provision Criteria

Basis for Change	Number of people elected for change to Food Security (2.59% - Breakfast); (4.70% - Lunch)	Number remaining Food Insecure After Change	Number Newly Food Secure	% of Those Elected for Change Becoming Food Secure
Reduced-price Breakfast From that of 130% - ≤185% of poverty to that of >185%; Food Insecurity prevalence changes from 30.9% to 8%	11,256	900	10,355	2.38
Reduced-price Lunch From that of 130% - ≤185% of poverty to that of >185%; Food Insecurity prevalence changes from 30.9% to 8%	50,521	4,042	46,479	4.32
Totals including just children	61,776	4,942	56,834	3.77
Totals including all family members	92,665	7,413	85,252	3.77

The increased food purchasing power obtained through the School Breakfast Program and the National School Lunch Program enabled 693,411 families to enjoy the purchasing power of a next-higher income-to-poverty ratio category, and approximately 3.23% of all estimated food-insecure children and their parent (in our hypothetical three-person families with two children) receiving free

or reduced-price school breakfasts and lunches under 2014 conditions. Since these students' family incomes are close to the threshold values, within approximately 4%-6% of the relevant income to poverty threshold values, they are also likely to be the most vulnerable to becoming food insecure if CEP criteria were made more stringent (e.g., by changing from 40% to 60%), or if the CEP were eliminated.