



THE BUILD BACK BETTER ACT

Would Transform Child Nutrition in **Arkansas**

The House-passed Build Back Better (BBB) Act ([H.R. 5376](#)) would make historic investments in proven child nutrition programs. The Act would increase the number of schools that can offer meals to all students at no charge through the Community Eligibility Provision and it would create a nationwide Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) program. Combined, these provisions would help reduce hunger, improve health, and support children's academic achievement in **Arkansas**.

More Schools Could Offer Free School Meals to All Students

Community eligibility has transformed school meal programs for children, families, and schools. It allows schools to offer free school breakfast and lunch to all students, reduces paperwork for schools and families, and eliminates unpaid school meal fees. All students attending a community eligibility school have access to the nutritious breakfasts and lunches that are necessary for students to learn throughout the school day. The BBB Act would increase the number of schools eligible to adopt community eligibility, and would increase federal reimbursements, making it financially viable for more schools to participate.



If all eligible schools in Arkansas adopt community eligibility, then at least **820 schools** — which represent **77 percent of schools** that participate in the National School Lunch Program and School



Breakfast Program — could use community eligibility to offer free meals to all of their students, approximately **104,128 children**.



In the 2020–2021 school year, **255 schools** had adopted community eligibility. With the expanded provisions of the BBB Act in place, **565 additional schools** could implement community eligibility.



The BBB Act would also create an important new statewide community eligibility option. More than half — approximately **83–88 percent** — of the meals served would be reimbursed at the highest federal rate, the free rate, if Arkansas adopts community eligibility statewide. The state would be responsible for providing funding to reimburse schools for the rest of the meals at the free rate.

Summer EBT Would Help End Summer Childhood Hunger

When schools close, families who struggle to put food on the table lose access to healthy free or reduced-price school meals for their children. The result is increased food insecurity among families with children. This has been happening during the pandemic and it happens every summer. The existing summer nutrition programs are designed to replace school meals and often support much-needed summer programming. But the reach of these meals is too low, serving just one child for every seven who count on free or reduced-price school meals during the school year. The Summer EBT program in the BBB Act would provide a \$65-per-month grocery benefit on an EBT card for the summers of 2023 and 2024. Evaluations of Summer EBT demonstrations have found that they reduce food insecurity and improve nutrition.



ROUGHLY
324,000 **LOW-INCOME**
CHILDREN
in Arkansas would qualify for Summer EBT benefits