COMMUNITY ELIGIBILITY SUPPORTS CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND LEARNING

In MARYLAND, approximately 218,000 children live in food-insecure households, jeopardizing their health and well-being.¹

School meal programs combat food insecurity by providing millions of children with the nutrition they need to learn and thrive.

The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) is an option within the school meal programs that increases students' access to nutritious food by allowing schools and school districts serving large numbers of children from families with low incomes to offer meals at no charge to all students.

How CEP Schools Are Reimbursed

Rather than relying on school meal applications to determine a school's federal reimbursements, CEP schools are reimbursed based on the share of students who are automatically eligible for free school meals without an application because they meet specific criteria, such as being in foster care or participating in certain federal means-tested programs, including SNAP. Schools can adopt CEP if at least 25 percent of students meet these criteria. The more students who are automatically eligible for free school meals, the more federal reimbursement CEP schools receive.

THE SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SNAP) CUTS

recently enacted in H.R. 1 will **exacerbate food insecurity** and have ripple effects for the school meal programs, including threatening schools' ability to implement CEP.

As children lose access to SNAP, their automatic eligibility for free school meals is severed and federal reimbursement for meals served in CEP schools decreases, jeopardizing the program's financial viability.

CEP Is a Win for Students, Families, and Schools

CEP provides all students access to the balanced school breakfasts and lunches they need to be well-nourished and ready to learn, while reducing the stigma often present in school cafeterias when schools have to track students' eligibility for free, reduced-price, and paid meals.

When students have access to free meals at school, families have lower grocery bills and more money in their household budgets to help make ends meet.

CEP makes school meal operations more efficient and effective for schools and districts. CEP eliminates the administrative burden associated with school meal applications, strengthens program integrity, and supports school nutrition finances by eliminating school meal debt and increasing participation in school breakfast and lunch programs, which allows for economies of scale.

In the 2024–2025 school year, 74 percent of eligible schools nationwide adopted CEP. These 54,000 schools reached more than 27 million students around the country.



In the 2024-2025 school year:

700 SCHOOLS

in MARYLAND adopted CEP. An additional 397 schools were eligible to adopt CEP but did not participate.

In MARYLAND, during the 2024–2025 school year:



471,311

children ate a school lunch and **252,595** children ate a school breakfast on an average school day.²



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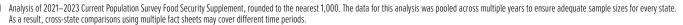
school districts adopted CEP for some or all schools. An additional 12 school districts had schools that were eligible to adopt CEP but did not participate.



🖁 392,075

children attended schools that adopted CEP.

By repealing SNAP cuts and investing in CEP, policymakers can reduce barriers that keep eligible children from receiving free school meals and help families afford to put food on the table.



² Average daily participation data for school breakfast and lunch are reflective of April 2025. U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service. (2025). State-level table current activity. Accessed September 24, 2025. https://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/child-nutrition-tables



OCTOBER 2025

The following table identifies the school districts in each of MARYLAND'S congressional districts that contain CEP-eligible and participating schools, as well as the number of children enrolled in CEP schools for the 2024–2025 school year.³

School District	Number of CEP-Eligible Schools	Number of CEP-Participating Schools	Students Enrolled in CEP-Participating Schools		
Congressional District #1					
BALTIMORE CO PUB SCH	174	174	111,000		
CAROLINE CO PUB SCH	9	9	5,728		
CECIL CO PUB SCH	31	14	6,233		
DORCHESTER CO BOARD OF ED	11	11	4,614		
HARFORD CO PUB SCH	26	17	11,022		
KENT CO BRD OF ED	5	5	1,763		
QUEEN ANNES COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION	9	0			
SOMERSET CO PUB SCH	7	7	2,893		
TALBOT CO PUB SCH	8	0			
WICOMICO CO BRD OF ED	26	26	15,223		
WORCESTER CO BRD OF ED	13	9	3,627		
Congressional District #2					
BALTIMORE CITY PUB SCH	158	157	75,610		
BALTIMORE CO PUB SCH	174	174	111,000		
Congressional District #3					
HOWARD CO PUB SCH	32	11	5,179		
Congressional District #4					
MONTGOMERY CO PUB SCH	123	61	36,607		
PRINCE GEORGE'S CO. PUBLIC SCHOOL	188	132	86,807		
Congressional District #5					
CHARLES COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	33	12	7,572		
PRINCE GEORGE'S CO. PUBLIC SCHOOL	188	132	86,807		
ST MARYS CO PUB SCH	18	3	1,478		

School District	Number of CEP-Eligible Schools	Number of CEP-Participating Schools	Students Enrolled in CEP-Participating Schools		
Congressional District #6					
ALLEGANY CO PUB SCH	24	24	8,132		
FREDERICK CO PUB SCH	32	1	51		
GARRETT CO PUB SCH	13	0			
MONTGOMERY CO PUB SCH	123	61	36,607		
WASHINGTON CO PUB SCH	41	15	5,499		
	Congressional Dis	trict #7			
BALTIMORE CITY PUB SCH	158	157	75,610		
BALTIMORE CO PUB SCH	174	174	111,000		
	Congressional Dis	trict #8			
MONTGOMERY CO PUB SCH	123	61	36,607		
PRINCE GEORGE'S CO. PUBLIC SCHOOL	188	132	86,807		
	Unassigned School	Districts	'		
Not all school districts could b	pe matched to congression	onal districts due to data inconsi	stencies		
ANNE ARUNDEL CO PUB SCH	72	0			
ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE	8	8	1,969		
BALTIMORE CO PUB SCH	1	0			
CALVERT CO PUB SCH CARROLL CO PUB SCH	13 13	0			
CHEDER CHABAD INC.	1	1	395		
CONGREGATION OHEL LEVI YITZCHOK LUBAVITCH	1	0	000		
DON BOSCO CRISTO REY HIGH SCHOOL	1	0			
KENNEDY KRIEGER	1	0			
MARYLAND SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND	1	1	206		
PHILLIPS PROGRAMS	1	0			
SEED SCHOOL OF MARYLAND	1	1	357		
ST. IGNATIUS LOYOLA ACADEMY, INC	1	1	110		
TORAH INSTITUTE OF BALTIMORE	1	0			



NOTE: School districts, rather than individual schools, are listed under congressional district. If a school district crosses congressional district boundaries, all of their schools and children are included in each congressional district. Not all school districts could be matched to congressional districts due to inconsistencies in how the data sources numerically identify and name school districts and schools. Unmatched school districts are listed as unassigned.



³ Food Research & Action Center. (2025). Community Eligibility Provision database for the 2024–2025 school year. https://frac.org/community-eligibility-database/. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Common core of data for the 2023–2024 school year. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/edge/geographic/relationshipfiles