

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.

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.

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.

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



23

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.

¹ Analysis of 2021–2023 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement, rounded to the nearest 1,000. The data for this analysis was pooled across multiple years to ensure adequate sample sizes for every state. As a result, cross-state comparisons using multiple fact sheets may cover different time periods.

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>

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 District #7			
BALTIMORE CITY PUB SCH	158	157	75,610
BALTIMORE CO PUB SCH	174	174	111,000
Congressional District #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 be matched to congressional districts due to data inconsistencies			
ANNE ARUNDEL CO PUB SCH	72	0	
ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE	8	8	1,969
BALTIMORE CO PUB SCH	1	0	
CALVERT CO PUB SCH	13	0	
CARROLL CO PUB SCH	13	0	
CHEDER CHABAD INC.	1	1	395
CONGREGATION OHEL LEVI YITZCHOK LUBAVITCH	1	0	
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 districts. 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/ccd/files.asp>; and NCES. School district geographic relationship files for the 119th Congress. <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/edge/geographic/relationshipfiles>