

# SCHOOL MEALS SUPPORT CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND LEARNING

## Proposed Cuts to School Meals Would Worsen Childhood Hunger, Hurt Struggling Families, and Create Unnecessary Burdens for **196** Schools in **ARKANSAS**

House Budget Committee Chair Jodey Arrington (R-TX) has proposed \$12 billion in cuts to school meals programs for the 2025 budget reconciliation. The proposals would substantially decrease the number of schools eligible for the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) and make it harder for eligible families to apply for free or reduced-price school meals at non-CEP schools. Combined, these proposals would reduce students' access to school meals and raise families' grocery bills, while imposing unnecessary and burdensome paperwork requirements on schools in **ARKANSAS**.

### What Is Community Eligibility?

CEP allows schools serving large numbers of children from families with low incomes to offer school meals at no charge to all students. Rather than relying on school meal applications to determine a school's federal reimbursements, CEP schools are reimbursed based on the share of students from families with low incomes, as determined through a data-matching process that identifies students' participation in other means-tested programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Currently, schools can adopt CEP if at least 25 percent of students receive these benefits.

### CONGRESS MUST REJECT ANY PROPOSAL TO WEAKEN CEP

Chair Arrington's proposal would increase the CEP eligibility threshold for schools from **25** percent to **60** percent of students identified as receiving benefits. This would cut over 24,000 schools nationwide from participating in CEP and undermine the health and learning of more than **12 million children**.

### Community Eligibility Supports Students, Families, and Schools

CEP is a win for students, families, and schools. CEP gives all students access to the nutritious 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 has grown in popularity since first becoming available nationwide over a decade ago. In the 2023–2024 school year, one out of every two schools that operated the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) participated in CEP. CEP makes school meal operations more efficient and effective: It 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, which allows for economies of scale.



IN 2023–2024 SCHOOL YEAR

**239** SCHOOLS

in **ARKANSAS** — which represents **23** percent of schools that participate in the school lunch program — adopted CEP, reaching **96,630** children each school day.

### The proposed cuts to school meals would **increase hardships** for children and families across **ARKANSAS**:



**196** schools in **ARKANSAS** would no longer be able to provide free school meals through CEP and would have to reinstate meal applications.



**55** school districts in **ARKANSAS**, listed on the reverse page, would be affected.



**82,364** **ARKANSAS** children attend schools that would no longer be able to offer meals at no charge to all students through CEP.<sup>1</sup>

Rather than reducing access to school meals, **CONGRESS SHOULD INVEST IN CEP** and reduce barriers to applying for free or reduced-price school meals, so families can afford groceries and children have access to the nutritious meals they need to thrive in school and beyond.

The following table identifies the school districts in **ARKANSAS**, and the number of schools and children within each district that would lose access to CEP if Congress increases the eligibility threshold to 60 percent of students identified as receiving benefits.

School District	Schools Impacted	Children Impacted
ARKANSAS SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND	2	91
BARTON SCHOOL DISTRICT	2	710
BOONEVILLE SCHOOL DISTRICT	3	1265
BRADFORD SCHOOL DISTRICT	2	486
CLARENDON SCHOOL DISTRICT	2	475
CLINTON SCHOOL DISTRICT	3	1348
COTTER PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT	2	771
CROSS COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	2	661
DECATUR SCHOOL DISTRICT	3	605
DREW CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	3	1131
DUMAS SCHOOL DISTRICT	4	1176
EARLE SCHOOL DISTRICT	2	465
EL DORADO SCHOOL DISTRICT	6	4071
ENGLAND SCHOOL DISTRICT	2	662
FLIPPIN SCHOOL DISTRICT	3	935
FUTURE SCHOOL OF FORT SMITH	1	230
GUY-PERKINS SCHOOL DISTRICT	2	357
HACKETT SCHOOL DISTRICT	2	785
HECTOR SCHOOL DISTRICT	2	609
HERMITAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT	2	461
HIGHLAND SCHOOL DISTRICT	3	1617
HOPE SCHOOL DISTRICT	6	2441
HOT SPRINGS SCHOOL DISTRICT	6	3697
HOXIE SCHOOL DISTRICT	2	878
JACKSONVILLE NORTH PULASKI SCHOOL DISTRICT	7	3876
JONESBORO SCHOOL DISTRICT	10	6671
KIRBY SCHOOL DISTRICT	2	413
LAFAYETTE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	1	307

School District	Schools Impacted	Children Impacted
MAMMOTH SPRING SCHOOL DISTRICT	2	526
MCGEHEE SCHOOL DISTRICT	3	1436
MINERAL SPRINGS SCHOOL DISTRICT	2	398
MOUNTAIN PINE SCHOOL DISTRICT	2	632
MOUNTAINBURG SCHOOL DISTRICT	3	663
MULBERRY PLEASANT VIEW BI-COUNTY SCHOOLS	3	451
NETTLETON SCHOOL DISTRICT	7	2665
NEVADA #1 SCHOOL DISTRICT	2	394
NEWPORT SCHOOL DISTRICT	2	1119
NORTH LITTLE ROCK SCHOOL DISTRICT	14	8620
PARAGOULD SCHOOL DISTRICT	7	3212
PARIS SCHOOL DISTRICT	3	1030
PREMIER HIGH SCHOOLS OF ARKANSAS	2	208
PRESCOTT SCHOOL DISTRICT	3	902
PULASKI COUNTY SPECIAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	12	4432
RIVERCREST SCHOOL DISTRICT	3	538
SCHOLARMADE ACHIEVEMENT PLACE	1	391
SHIRLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT	2	330
SOUTH CONWAY COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	5	2381
STRONG-HUTTIG SCHOOL DISTRICT	1	311
STUTTGART SCHOOL DISTRICT	2	891
TEXARKANA AR SCHOOL DISTRICT	8	4582
TRUMANN SCHOOL DISTRICT	3	1562
TWO RIVERS SCHOOL DISTRICT	2	799
WARREN SCHOOL DISTRICT	4	1564
WEST MEMPHIS SCHOOL DISTRICT	9	4655
WEST SIDE SCHOOL DISTRICT	2	478