

# 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 **794** Schools in **NORTH CAROLINA**

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 **NORTH CAROLINA**.

### 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

**1,625** SCHOOLS

in **NORTH CAROLINA** — which represents **64** percent of schools that participate in the school lunch program — adopted CEP, reaching **803,238** children each school day.

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



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



**61** school districts in **NORTH CAROLINA**, listed on the reverse page, would be affected.



**408,887** **NORTH CAROLINA** 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 **NORTH CAROLINA**, 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
ALEXANDER COUNTY SCHOOLS	10	4335
ARAPAHOE CHARTER SCHOOL	1	469
ASHE COUNTY SCHOOLS	6	2719
AVERY COUNTY SCHOOLS	6	1479
BRUNSWICK COUNTY SCHOOLS	20	12905
BURKE COUNTY SCHOOLS	7	4603
CABARRUS COUNTY SCHOOLS	11	6107
CALDWELL COUNTY SCHOOLS	22	10151
CAPITOL ENCORE ACADEMY	1	648
CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG SCHOOLS	113	81041
CHEROKEE COUNTY SCHOOLS	13	3165
CRAVEN COUNTY SCHOOLS	16	7189
DAVIDSON COUNTY SCHOOLS	11	5029
DURHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS	10	6546
GASTON COUNTY SCHOOLS	40	20732
GIRLS LEADERSHIP ACADEMY OF WILMINGTON	1	371
HARNETT COUNTY SCHOOLS	15	9377
HAYWOOD COUNTY SCHOOLS	15	6529
HENDERSON COUNTY SCHOOLS	21	11888
HICKORY CITY SCHOOLS	9	3843
HOKE COUNTY SCHOOLS	14	8753
IREDELL-STATESVILLE SCHOOLS	23	11345
JACKSON COUNTY SCHOOLS	5	1333
JOHNSTON COUNTY SCHOOLS	43	30131
KANNAPOLIS CITY SCHOOLS	1	1688

School District	Schools Impacted	Children Impacted
KIPP DURHAM COLLEGE PREPARATORY	1	314
LEE COUNTY SCHOOLS	10	3843
LINCOLN COUNTY SCHOOLS	13	5562
MACON COUNTY SCHOOLS	9	3143
MADISON COUNTY SCHOOLS	5	1604
MALLARD CREEK STEM ACADEMY	1	910
MCDOWELL COUNTY SCHOOLS	14	5924
MITCHELL COUNTY SCHOOLS	7	1700
MONTGOMERY COUNTY SCHOOLS	11	3671
MOORE COUNTY SCHOOLS	11	4939
MOUNT AIRY CITY SCHOOLS	4	1751
NEW HANOVER COUNTY SCHOOLS	30	14215
NORTH EAST CAROLINA PREPARATORY SCHOOL	1	925
PAMLICO COUNTY SCHOOLS	4	1211
PASQUOTANK COUNTY SCHOOLS	13	4760
PERQUIMANS COUNTY SCHOOLS	4	1677
PERSON COUNTY SCHOOLS	13	4458
PITT COUNTY SCHOOLS	38	22537
POLK COUNTY SCHOOLS	7	2159
RANDOLPH COUNTY SCHOOLS	10	4344
ROANOKE RAPIDS CITY SCHOOLS	5	2793
ROWAN-SALISBURY SCHOOLS	31	17845
RUTHERFORD COUNTY SCHOOLS	19	7529
SOUTHWEST CHARLOTTE STEM ACADEMY	1	771
STANLY COUNTY SCHOOLS	14	4886

The following table identifies the school districts in **NORTH CAROLINA**, 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.

(continued)

School District	Schools Impacted	Children Impacted
SUMMIT CREEK ACADEMY	1	554
SURRY COUNTY SCHOOLS	15	4941
SWAIN COUNTY SCHOOLS	4	1777
THE MATH AND SCIENCE ACADEMY OF CHARLOTTE	1	448
TRANSYLVANIA COUNTY SCHOOLS	6	2649
TRINITY CHRISTIAN SCHOOL	1	489
TYRRELL COUNTY SCHOOLS	3	500
WILKES COUNTY SCHOOLS	22	8505
WILSON COUNTY SCHOOLS	22	9832
WILSON PREPARATORY ACADEMY	1	716
YADKIN COUNTY SCHOOLS	8	2629