



**T**he House Budget is proposing to significantly cut the number of schools eligible to participate in the Community Eligibility Provision, a federal option for high-poverty schools to offer free school meals to all students. Under the proposal, over 8,000 high-poverty schools, enrolling close to 3.8 million children currently participating in community eligibility, would be impacted — roughly 40 percent of the 20,000 schools currently participating. Nearly 13,000 additional schools that are eligible, but not yet participating, would lose the option to implement community eligibility in future years. Taking away this important and effective program would reintroduce unnecessary paperwork for high-poverty schools, decrease access to crucial

school meal programs for low-income communities, and divert time and resources away from providing nutritious meals to support health and learning.

### How Schools Qualify for Community Eligibility

Community eligibility schools no longer collect school meal applications. Instead, a school, group of schools, or a school district may qualify for community eligibility based on a subset of the low-income students in the schools, referred to as Identified Students. Identified Students are eligible for free school meals without submitting an application because they live in households participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), or the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), or are homeless, migrant, in foster care, or Head Start. As a result, the Identified Student Percentage (ISP) is much lower than the percentage of students eligible for free and reduced-price meals had the school collected school meal applications.

To make up for this difference, community eligibility schools multiply the ISP by 1.6, which accounts for the students who would have been certified for free or reduced-price school meals through an application. The 1.6 multiplier was derived from analyses indicating that for every 10 students certified for free school meals without an application, six more were certified for free or reduced-price meals based on an

application. This formula determines the percentage of meals reimbursed at the federal free rate, and remaining meals are reimbursed at the paid rate. Any expenses beyond the federal reimbursements are covered by the school district. The House bill proposes to raise the eligibility threshold for schools to participate from the current 40 percent identified students up to 60 percent, severely restricting the number of eligible schools.

### Schools With 40 to 60 Percent Identified Students Should Have the Choice to Participate

Many schools in the 40 to 60 percent Identified Student-range have very high concentrations of poverty — typically between 64 and 96 percent. Those that are currently participating have made a determination at the local level that the program is financially viable and want to ensure the nutritional needs of their students are met. These high-poverty schools should continue to have the option to implement community eligibility to support the academic achievement and health of their students.

## Many States Would See Hundreds of Schools Impacted by Changing the Threshold

For many states, this proposal would have a dramatic effect on participating schools. Several states would be hardest hit, with the proposal impacting more than 700 schools in Texas, more than 500 schools in New York and more than 400 schools in West Virginia, Kentucky and Tennessee. In these states, large urban districts and rural county districts alike would bear the brunt of this significant cut. More than 200 schools in 10 other states would be impacted, including Alabama, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Michigan, Ohio, Oregon, New Mexico, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania. The accompanying table gives the impact in each state.

### Community Eligibility is Working

FRAC's latest report shows that community eligibility is working, and more than 20,000 schools across the country have implemented the program, due to strong support by administrators, school nutrition staff, state education agencies, and families. Taking this program away from the thousands of participating schools would be a step back: Schools would need to manage more paperwork and administrative burdens; stigma in the cafeteria would be reintroduced; and, working poor families, who would otherwise qualify for reduced-price meals, but cannot afford the copays, would no longer reap the program's benefits.



## Impact of House Child Nutrition Bill By State

State	Number of Eligible, Non-Adopting Schools With ISPs Below 60%	Number of Eligible, Adopting Schools With ISPs Below 60%	Number of Students Attending Adopting Schools With ISPs Below 60%
Alabama	306	215	122,361
Alaska	14	43	15,866
Arizona	435	120	58,490
Arkansas	270	96	39,254
California	1,797	486	371,806
Colorado	263	77	31,815
Connecticut	52	157	76,962
Delaware	15	80	43,424
District of Columbia	8	135	49,731
Florida	848	92	59,239
Georgia	253	292	176,247
Hawaii	54	3	723
Idaho	55	86	32,453
Illinois	310	265	126,929
Indiana	284	136	65,414
Iowa	97	35	15,482
Kansas	145	52	16,821
Kentucky	114	410	200,072
Louisiana	183	205	92,464
Maine	99	56	12,645
Maryland	129	29	12,634
Massachusetts	249	91	35,706
Michigan	338	219	82,081
Minnesota	174	18	5,379
Mississippi	259	86	41,809
Missouri	298	161	48,915
Montana	33	78	14,333
Nebraska	81	5	986
Nevada	118	117	71,127
New Hampshire	26	2	688
New Jersey	288	100	51,094
New Mexico	135	280	85,156
New York	781	569	177,166
North Carolina	473	291	150,747
North Dakota	5	8	1,834
Ohio	23	300	117,777
Oklahoma	508	194	68,785
Oregon	92	241	93,358
Pennsylvania	297	287	119,493
Rhode Island	58	1	804
South Carolina	218	135	73,950
South Dakota	40	19	2,996
Tennessee	221	400	184,106
Texas	1,547	766	472,986
Utah	22	25	8,212
Vermont	16	49	11,813
Virginia	211	118	52,844
Washington	354	88	29,906
West Virginia	67	438	158,544
Wisconsin	177	62	17,990
Wyoming	3	3	688
Grand Total	12,843	8,215*	3,799,750

\*Table updated 7/28/17. Does not include 13 schools that have adopted community eligibility but for which ISP data are not available. Source: Food Research & Action Center. (2017). Community Eligibility Database: Schools That Can Adopt Community Eligibility for 2016- 2017. Available at <http://www.frac.org/research/resource-library/community-eligibility-cep-database>. Accessed on July 19, 2017.