

Abstract

This report examines data from the Current Population Survey (CPS) in order to analyze trends in free and reduced price certification and participation in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) during the period of 1993-1997. The data indicate that free certifications for NSLP as a percentage of CPS estimated eligibles have been increasing for several years and was 118% in 1997 (latest available).

Moreover, although combined free and reduced price certifications as a percentage of estimated eligibles is still under 100%, this percentage has also been increasing for several years and will likely exceed 100% when 1998 CPS data is available. Nearly all states (49 of 51) had an increase in their total number of free and reduced price certifications as a percentage of estimated eligibles between 1993-1997.

Percentages are particularly high in the Southwest, Southeast, and Mid-Atlantic regions. CPS data on reported free and reduced price participation indicate that between 1993-1996 there were participation increases at income levels both above and below 185% of poverty. Currently, 23.3 % of households with participants report income over 185% of poverty with 6.2 % of households having income above 300% of poverty. Comparable percentages at the student level are 19.6% and 4.4%.

Consideration of data and methodological issues indicates it is unlikely that these issues are the source of the high certification and participation rates among ineligibles suggested by the CPS data. Other large, nationally representative data sources confirm that certification and participation in the free and reduced price NSLP program by ineligibles is substantial.

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