

SPECIAL NUTRITION PROGRAM OPERATIONS STUDY, SCHOOL YEAR 2012-13 (SUMMARY)

Background

The Special Nutrition Program Operations Study (SN-OPS) is a multiyear study designed to provide the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) with information on current State and school food authority (SFA) policies and practices, including school meal standards, competitive foods standards, professional standards, school lunch pricing and accounting, and standards for school wellness policies. The information in this study will provide a baseline for observing the improvements resulting from the implementation of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA).

Methods

The second year of SN-OPS relies on data collected during school year (SY) 2012-2013 through surveys of all State Child Nutrition (CN) directors and a nationally representative stratified sample of SFA directors from public school districts with at least one school participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP).

Fifty-four State CN directors and 1,491 SFA directors provided usable data for analysis in this report. The report includes both cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses, the latter covering SYs 2009-10 to 2012-13.

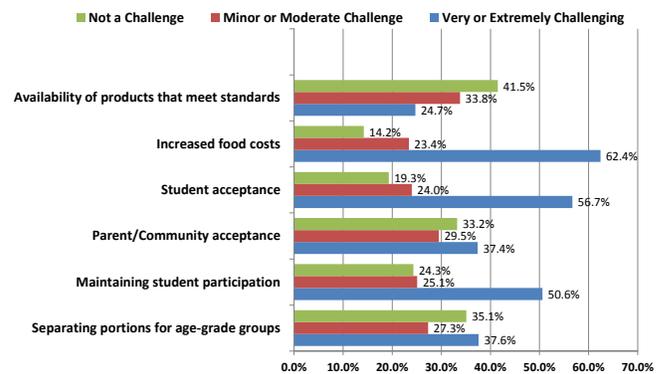
Findings

New Meal Pattern Requirements

*Eighty percent of SFAs were certified to receive the additional 6-cent reimbursement for meeting the new meal pattern requirements in SY 2012-13.* Small SFAs were somewhat less likely to have submitted the required materials for certification, although over three-fourths of small SFAs were certified.

*SFAs reported that increased food costs and student acceptance were two primary challenges, both initially and ongoing, in implementing the new meal patterns.* Sixty-three percent of the SFAs indicated that increased food costs were very or extremely challenging, while 57 percent said that student acceptance was very or extremely challenging.

Figure 1. Percentage of SFAs Reporting Various Challenges While Continuing To Implement the New Meal Patterns SY 2012-13



*That said, the majority of SFAs reported finding it easy to incorporate all vegetable subgroups into school meals.* SFAs found it easy to include starchy vegetables (87 percent), dark green vegetables (74 percent), red/orange vegetables (63 percent), and other vegetables (69 percent) into the menus, but only 53 percent of SFAs found it easy to incorporate beans/peas.

*In implementing the new meal patterns, 58 percent of SFAs used fresh fruit more often and 35 percent used fresh precut fruits more often than previously.*

*Most SFAs (about 80 percent) were able to meet the 50-percent whole grain-rich requirement with relative ease, but 57 to 59 percent of SFAs across all grade levels found meeting the daily grain requirements significantly more difficult.*

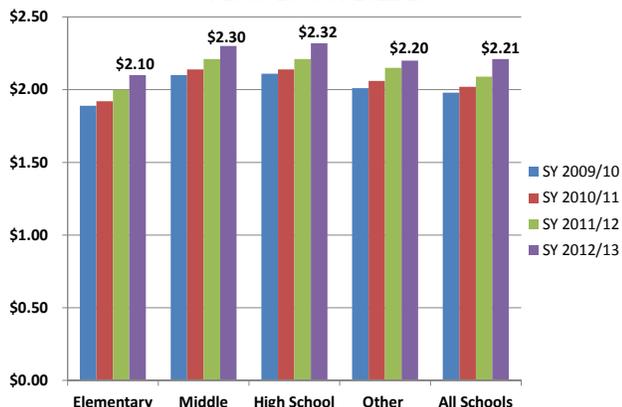
*About 30 percent of SFAs knew the sodium levels of their school meals.* More than two-thirds of these SFAs served lunches that met the SY 2014-15 (target 1) sodium levels, and about 20 percent served school lunches that met the final sodium target levels.

*Over half of the SFAs (52 percent) reported that they had begun implementing the new breakfast requirements in SY 2012-13 with 32 percent of the early implementers able to meet all requirements without any difficulties.* The two most difficult breakfast requirements to meet were the average daily calorie and sodium levels.

## SFA Finances

***In SY 2012-13, on average, SFAs charged \$2.21 for a paid lunch and \$1.27 for a paid breakfast.*** The average price for a paid lunch in secondary schools was about 11 percent higher (\$2.31 versus \$2.10) than in elementary schools and about 6-7 percent higher (\$1.32 versus \$1.24) for breakfast.

**Figure 2. Average Price Charged by SFAs for a Paid Student Lunch, SY 2009-10 to SY 2012-13**



SFA = School Food Authority  
SY= School Year

***Most SFAs raised prices after the implementation of the paid lunch equity provision in 2011; the typical increase was 10 cents.*** The great majority of the SFAs (82 percent) followed the same pricing structure for lunches across all grades. The most common pattern was to increase lunch prices in both SY 2011-12 and SY 2012-13.

Percent of SFAs With Price Changes in the NSLP and SBP Between SY 2009-10 and SY 2012-13		
Type of Price Change	Lunch	Breakfast
<b>All schools in the SFA follow the same price increase behavior</b>	<b>82.4%</b>	<b>93.9%</b>
No increase in any of the 3 years	10.6	49.0
Increase in 1 of 3 years	32.9	28.5
Increase in 2 of 3 years	30.8	13.0
Increase in all 3 years	8.3	3.4
<b>All schools in the SFA do <u>not</u> follow the same price increase behavior</b>	<b>17.6</b>	<b>6.1</b>
<b>Total SFAs Weighted</b>	<b>6,910</b>	<b>5,214</b>

NSLP = National School Lunch Program  
SBP = School Breakfast Program

## Operations

***Most SFAs (89 percent) had a local school wellness policy in place for all schools.*** These policies included nutritional guidelines for all foods (87 percent), goals for nutrition promotion (88 percent), goals for nutrition education (91 percent), and goals for physical education (93 percent). Over half of SFAs with local wellness

policies (53 percent) informed the public about the content and implementation of the policy.

***Free potable water was available in SY 2012-13 to students where school meals were served in nearly all (98 percent) SFAs.***

***Almost one-third of SFAs had schools participating in farm to school activities in SY 2011-12 with another 16 percent planning to initiate activities in the future.*** SFAs engaged in farm to school activities have taken various steps to ensure food safety for local food purchases including inspection of local food products on arrival (82 percent) and relying on the distributor to ensure local food product safety (79 percent).

## State Policies and Support

***Almost half (49 percent) of States provided a subsidy to SFAs beyond the Federal reimbursement for both breakfast and lunch in SY 2012-13.*** An additional 9 percent provided a subsidy for lunch only; 6 percent provided a subsidy for breakfast only. Just over one-third of States did not provide subsidies to their SFAs. In most cases, these subsidies represented only a limited portion of the total payments to schools for these meals.

***About three-fourths of State CN directors reported that they used all of their State administrative funds for administering the Child Nutrition Programs.*** Challenges that impeded States in their ability to fully use all Federal funds included State policy (30 percent), Governor's mandates (20 percent), and State legislation. Hiring freezes (30 percent) and travel restrictions (28 percent) also affected their ability to fully use Federal funds in SY 2012-13.

## Additional Information

The full report provides information on participation in NSLP, SBP, and other nutrition programs, the use of special eligibility provisions, SFA staff credentials, use of food service management companies, training and technical assistance, food procurement, competitive foods, SFA financials, and State policies and administration of NSLP and SBP.

## For More Information

L. May *et al.* (2016). Special Nutrition Program Operations Study, State and SFA Policies and Practices for School Meal Programs: SY 2012-13. Prepared by Westat. Alexandria, VA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. Project Officer: John Endahl. Available online at: [www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis](http://www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis).

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