

NATIONAL SCHOOL MEALS

What does this indicator measure?

The *National School Meals* indicator shows (1) the number of children in Connecticut by school district who are enrolled in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and are eligible to receive school meals at no cost or at a reduced price, (2) the percent of students participating at no cost or a reduced rate compared to the total school district enrollment, and (3) school districts that offer the School Breakfast Program (SBP) in at least one school.¹

This indicator measures the number of children who are participating in the program rather than the actual number of children eligible to receive free or reduced-price school meals. There may be additional children who are eligible but not currently enrolled. Therefore, this indicator may underestimate the actual number of low-income children within a school and/or district. Despite this fact, the percent of children enrolled in the NSLP at a free or reduced-price rate is an accepted measure of child poverty in a community.

Why is this indicator important?

Congress created the NSLP in 1946 in response to the high rejection rate of prospective WWII draftees due to conditions related to malnutrition. Congress established the SBP initially as a pilot program in 1966 to ensure that all children have access to a healthy breakfast at school. Maintenance of government programs that provide nutritional supplementation to low-income children remains essential.

National School Meals Programs and Family Economic Security

While these programs alone will never eliminate the detrimental effects of poverty, they can help reduce the nutritional and educational disparities that exist between poor and not-poor children. Research has shown the beneficial effects of school meal participation for lower-income children.

While the SBP clearly has the potential to provide the most benefits to children from lower-income families with limited resources, all children could benefit from SBP participation. The SBP can consistently provide a nutritious morning meal to all children, some who would otherwise not eat, and others who would likely eat a meal at home that is higher in saturated fat, sodium

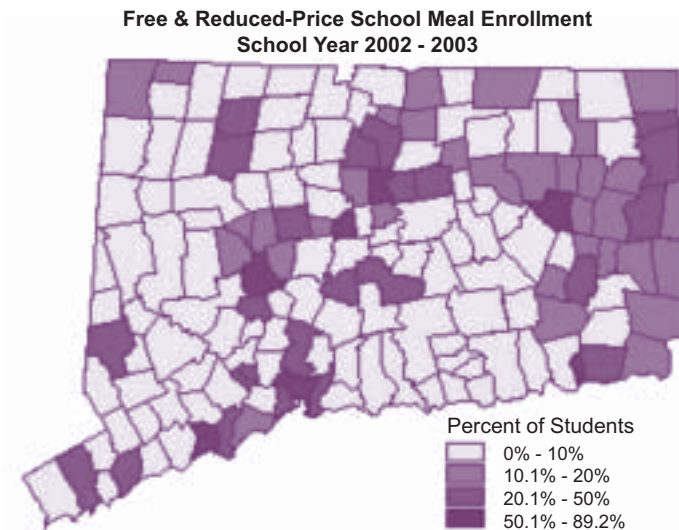
and cholesterol and containing less nutritional value.² It is well documented that school performance is enhanced, and absenteeism and tardiness are reduced, when children participate in a School Breakfast Program.³

How are Connecticut children faring?

In Connecticut during the 2002-2003 school year, 92% of public schools offered the NSLP and served approximately 260,750 meals per day, 46% of them at a reduced price or at no cost to the student.⁴ Free or reduced-price NSLP enrollment as a percent of student enrollment was highest in Connecticut's largest cities and inner-ring suburbs. NSLP participation was also relatively high in the Naugatuck Valley and northeastern Connecticut.

In cities with both significant wealth and significant poverty (e.g., Norwalk, Danbury, and Stamford), the overall percent of children enrolled to receive reduced-price or free school meals may mask the actual extent of the poverty found in specific neighborhoods and schools. School districts with relatively low overall percents of children receiving free or reduced-price school meals may also contain "Severe Need" schools with high proportions of low-income children.

The SBP is currently offered in 33% of Connecticut schools with 34% of these schools offering the SBP to all students free of charge (often referred



to as a Universal program).⁵ Of schools where more than 20% of NSLP participants receive their meals at no cost or at a reduced rate, only Stratford (30%) does not have a SBP. Other school districts that contain at least one Severe Needs School but do not currently offer a SBP are Southington, Milford, and Wallingford.

What can be done: Enhanced administration and universal access

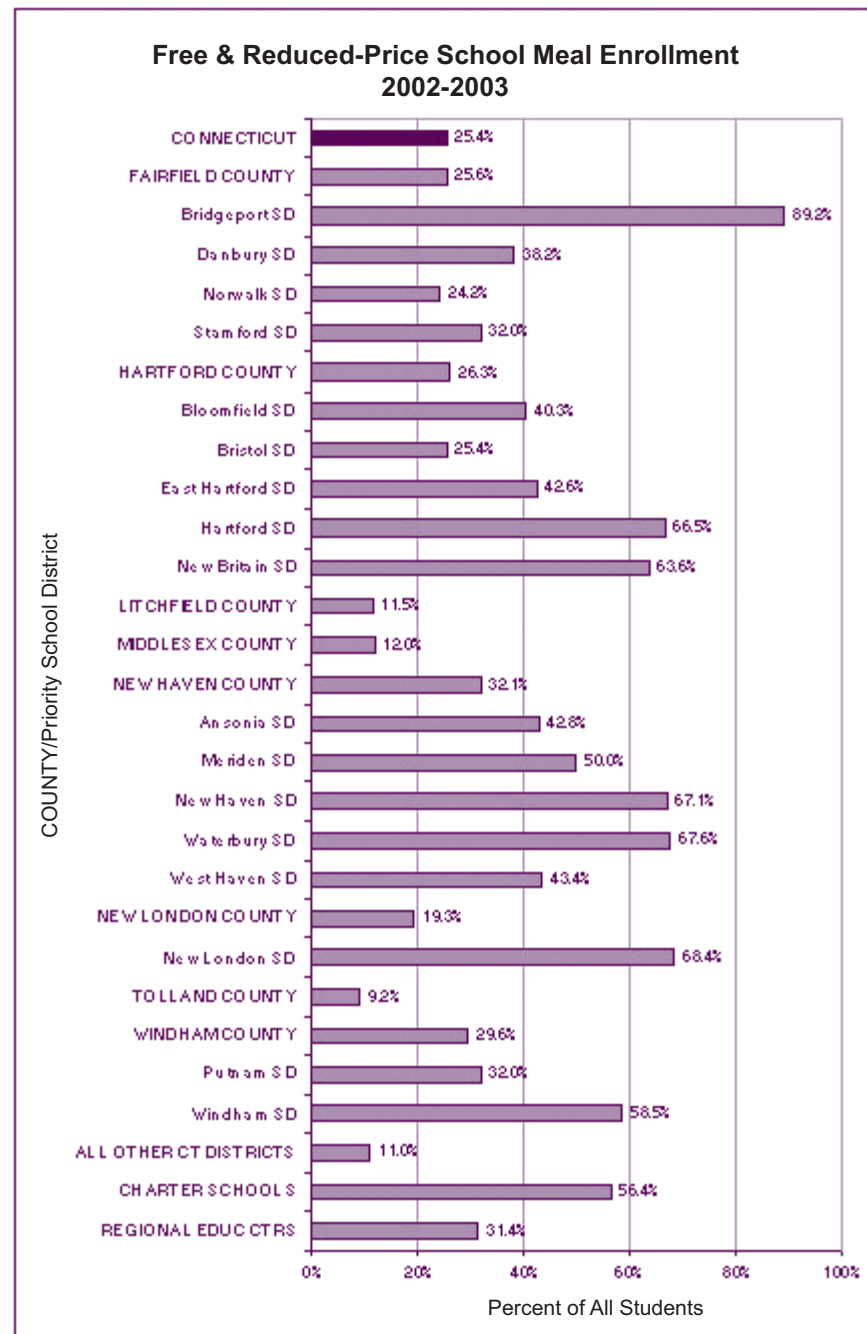
Action at the federal and state levels is needed to improve National School Meals participation, including the following activities:

- ▶ Maintenance of adequate federal funding levels to continue providing federally subsidized nutritious lunches to all public school children;
- ▶ Improvement of the content of the school meals in order to optimize the nutrient value and to increase cultural acceptability;
- ▶ Administration of the school meals programs in a manner that will encourage low-income families to apply;
- ▶ Simplification of the application process to encourage parents with limited English proficiency and/or literacy problems to apply;
- ▶ Implementation of a SBP in all Severe Need Schools; and
- ▶ Implementation of universal SBPs in all Connecticut elementary schools.

Where can I get more information?

More information can be found using the following sources:

- ▶ U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), at: www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/
- ▶ Connecticut State Department of Education (SDE), Bureau of Health and Nutrition Services, at: <http://www.state.ct.us/sde/deps/nutrition/>
- ▶ Food Research Action Center (FRAC) http://www.frac.org/html/federal_food_programs/programs/sbp.html
- ▶ American School Food Service Association (ASFSFA), at: www.asfsa.org



Endnotes

¹ This indicator does not show which schools offer a SBP, the percent of schools in a district offering a SBP, or additional districts and/or schools that should implement a SBP given their population demographics.

² Sampson, A., Dixit, S., Meyers, A., & Houser, R. The nutritional impact of a newly implemented School Breakfast Program (SBP) on the diets of inner-city African-American elementary school children. *Ambulatory Child Health* 1995:1:14-22.

³ Food Research and Action Center. (n.d.). *Breakfast for learning: Recent scientific research on the link between children's nutrition and academic performance*. Washington, DC. Retrieved on April 16, 2004, from: www.frac.org/html/federal_food_programs/programs/sbp.html

⁵ Staggenborg, M. Bureau Chief, Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Health and Nutrition Services. (Personal communication, April 6, 2004).

⁶ Staggenborg, M. (Personal communication, April 12, 2004).

What we need to know

- How the school meals application process can be simplified to encourage low-income eligible non-participants to apply
- What is preventing school districts from implementing the School Breakfast Program

National School Meals - 2002-2003 School Year

District Name	All Students	# Enrolled F/RP	% Enrolled F/RP	SBP Offered	District Name	All Students	# Enrolled F/RP	% Enrolled F/RP	SBP Offered
Fairfield County	143,903	36,825	25.6%						
Bethel SD	3,225	200	6.2%		Newtown SD	5,224	160	3.1%	P
Bridgeport SD	23,066	20,566	89.2%	P	Norwalk SD	11,237	2,716	24.2%	P
Brookfield SD	3,023	113	3.7%		Redding SD	1,282	13	1.0%	
Danbury SD	9,565	3,658	38.2%	P	Ridgefield SD	5,386	72	1.3%	
Darien SD	4,136	44	1.1%		Shelton SD	5,631	526	9.3%	P
District No. 9	895	2	0.2%		Sherman SD	500	0	0.0%	
Easton SD	1,084	15	1.4%		Stamford SD	15,326	4,906	32.0%	P
Fairfield SD	8,546	363	4.2%		Stratford SD	7,611	2,293	30.1%	
Greenwich SD	8,931	654	7.3%	P	Trumbull SD	6,338	188	3.0%	
Monroe SD	4,151	87	2.1%		Weston SD	2,413	24	1.0%	
New Canaan SD	3,930	0	0.0%		Westport SD	5,128	76	1.5%	
New Fairfield SD	3,160	141	4.5%		Wilton SD	4,115	8	0.2%	
Hartford County	144,312	37,992	26.3%						
Avon SD	3,128	59	1.9%		Hartland SD	295	9	3.1%	
Berlin SD	3,272	105	3.2%		Manchester SD	7,694	2,377	30.9%	P
Bloomfield SD	2,533	1,022	40.3%	P	Marlborough SD	655	16	2.4%	
Bristol SD	8,978	2,283	25.4%	P	New Britain SD	10,599	6,736	63.6%	P
Canton SD	1,634	44	2.7%	P	Newington SD	4,615	414	9.0%	
District No. 8	1,524	31	2.0%		Plainville SD	2,655	343	12.9%	
District No. 10	2,610	52	2.0%		Rocky Hill SD	2,503	128	5.1%	
East Granby SD	890	8	0.9%		Simsbury SD	5,040	142	2.8%	
East Hartford SD	7,842	3,344	42.6%	P	Southington SD	6,677	423	6.3%	
East Windsor SD	1,563	256	16.4%		South Windsor SD	5,100	253	5.0%	P
Enfield SD	6,850	1,245	18.2%	P	Suffield SD	2,329	81	3.5%	P
Farmington SD	4,239	210	5.0%		West Hartford SD	9,642	1,278	13.3%	P
Glastonbury SD	6,442	205	3.2%	P	Wethersfield SD	3,574	362	10.1%	
Granby SD	2,165	33	1.5%		Windsor SD	4,456	995	22.3%	P
Hartford SD	22,845	15,201	66.5%	P	Windsor Locks SD	1,963	337	17.2%	P
Litchfield County	28,747	3,319	11.5%						
Barkhamsted SD	342	20	5.8%		New Hartford SD	652	36	5.5%	
Canaan SD	131	11	8.4%		New Milford SD	5,203	419	8.1%	P
Colebrook SD	140	11	7.9%		Norfolk SD	154	12	7.8%	
Cornwall SD	171	6	3.5%		North Canaan SD	384	57	14.8%	
District No. 1	590	28	4.7%		Plymouth SD	1,908	195	10.2%	
District No. 6	1,068	72	6.7%		Salisbury SD	342	35	10.2%	
District No. 7	1,098	26	2.4%		Sharon SD	271	21	7.7%	
District No. 12	1,151	15	1.3%		Thomaston SD	1,364	149	10.9%	
District No. 14	2,309	76	3.3%		Torrington SD	5,069	1,250	24.7%	P
Kent SD	308	22	7.1%		Watertown SD	3,554	360	10.1%	
Litchfield SD	1,412	68	4.8%		Winchester SD *	1,126	430	38.2%	P
Middlesex Co.	23,340	2,795	12.0%						
Chester SD	332	11	3.3%		East Haddam SD	1,421	101	7.1%	
Clinton SD	2,210	203	9.2%		East Hampton SD	2,046	147	7.2%	
Cromwell SD	1,847	135	7.3%		Essex SD	549	29	5.3%	
Deep River SD	369	29	7.9%		Middletown SD	5,115	1,621	31.7%	P
District No. 4	862	45	5.2%		Old Saybrook SD	1,601	106	6.6%	
District No. 13	2,122	91	4.3%		Portland SD	1,441	119	8.3%	
District No. 17	2,373	62	2.6%		Westbrook SD	1,052	96	9.1%	P

National School Meals

Source:

Connecticut Department of Education.
(2002-2003). Unpublished data.

Methodology:

The total number of children enrolled in the free and reduced-price meals program as a percentage of the total school district enrollment. Children are eligible for free meals if their family income is below 130% of the federal poverty level, and for reduced-price meals if their family income is below 185% of the federal poverty level. Some districts did not report data.

Key:

F/RP = Free & Reduced-Price Meals
Program

SBP = School Breakfast Program

*** =** Contains the data for those districts where most or all high school students attend endowed and incorporated academies. Specifically, Norwich students attend Norwich Free Academy, Winchester students attend the Gilbert School, and Woodstock students attend Woodstock Academy.

P = District in which School Breakfast program is offered in at least one school.

National School Meals - 2002-2003 School Year									
District Name	All Students	# Enrolled F/RP	% Enrolled F/RP	SBP Offered	District Name	All Students	# Enrolled F/RP	% Enrolled F/RP	SBP Offered
New Haven Co.	130,789	41,922	32.1%						
Ansonia SD	2,628	1,124	42.8%	P	Milford SD	7,487	1,000	13.4%	P
Bethany SD	592	25	4.2%		Naugatuck SD	5,598	1,424	25.4%	P
Branford SD	3,691	366	9.9%	P	New Haven SD	20,452	13,725	67.1%	P
Cheshire SD	5,110	126	2.5%		North Branford SD	2,482	199	8.0%	
Derby SD	1,625	496	30.5%	P	North Haven SD	3,809	215	5.6%	
District No. 5	2,415	25	1.0%		Orange SD	1,383	46	3.3%	
District No. 15	4,420	78	1.8%		Oxford SD	1,403	72	5.1%	
District No. 16	2,415	185	7.7%		Seymour SD	2,887	0	0.0%	P
East Haven SD	4,005	1,116	27.9%	P	Wallingford SD	7,161	618	8.6%	
Guilford SD	3,917	121	3.1%		Waterbury SD	17,439	11,794	67.6%	P
Hamden SD	6,329	1,287	20.3%	P	West Haven SD	7,237	3,140	43.4%	P
Madison SD	3,678	49	1.3%		Wolcott SD	2,935	304	10.4%	
Meriden SD	8,742	4,368	50.0%	P	Woodbridge SD	949	19	2.0%	
New London Co.	40,218	7,743	19.3%						
Bozrah SD	274	38	13.9%		Montville SD	2,943	415	14.1%	P
Colchester SD	3,243	148	4.6%	P	New London SD	3,270	2,237	68.4%	P
District No. 18	1,588	35	2.2%		North Stonington SD	857	95	11.1%	P
East Lyme SD	3,276	147	4.5%		Norwich SD *	4,101	1,938	47.3%	P
Franklin SD	233	18	7.7%		Preston SD	518	50	9.7%	P
Griswold SD	2,186	375	17.2%	P	Salem SD	608	20	3.3%	
Groton SD	5,731	1,378	24.0%	P	Sprague SD	351	70	19.9%	P
Lebanon SD	1,504	111	7.4%	P	Stonington SD	2,439	267	10.9%	P
Ledyard SD	3,033	107	3.5%	P	Voluntown SD	344	45	13.1%	
Lisbon SD	628	84	13.4%	P	Waterford SD	3,091	165	5.3%	P
Tolland County	21,808	2,008	9.2%						
Andover SD	369	13	3.5%		Mansfield SD	1,422	254	17.9%	P
Bolton SD	1,010	31	3.1%		Somers SD	1,705	39	2.3%	
Columbia SD	686	19	2.8%		Stafford SD	2,026	388	19.2%	P
Coventry SD	2,088	215	10.3%	P	Tolland SD	2,976	93	3.1%	
District No. 19	1,248	83	6.7%		Union SD	75	3	4.0%	
Ellington SD	2,352	87	3.7%		Vernon SD	4,146	729	17.6%	P
Hebron SD	1,100	21	1.9%		Willington SD	605	33	5.5%	
Windham County	17,320	5,123	29.6%						
Ashford SD	578	55	9.5%		Plainfield SD	2,666	710	26.6%	P
Brooklyn SD	972	168	17.3%	P	Pomfret SD	560	52	9.3%	P
Canterbury SD	577	64	11.1%		Putnam SD	1,386	443	32.0%	P
Chaplin SD	240	37	15.4%		Scotland SD	161	22	13.7%	
District No. 11	357	58	16.2%		Sterling SD	448	68	15.2%	
Eastford SD	169	25	14.8%		Thompson SD	1,430	204	14.3%	P
Hampton SD	182	27	14.8%		Windham SD	3,588	2,099	58.5%	P
Killingly SD	3,008	1,015	33.7%	P	Woodstock SD *	998	76	7.6%	
Charter Schools	2,187	1,234	56.4%		DCF/Corrections	1,394	1,394	100.0%	
Regional Ed Ctrs	5,692	1,789	31.4%		Voc Tech Schools	11,048	3,466	31.4%	
Other Schools	3,802	213	5.6%						
CONNECTICUT	574,560	145,823	25.4%						