

SPECIAL NUTRITION PROGRAM OPERATIONS STUDY, SCHOOL YEAR 2013-14 (SUMMARY)

Background

The Special Nutrition Program Operations Study (SN-OPS) is a multiyear study designed to provide the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) 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 provides a baseline for observing the improvements resulting from the implementation of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA).

Methods

The third year of SN-OPS relies on data collected during school year (SY) 2013-2014 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-five State CN directors and 1,598 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 2013-14.

Findings

New Meal Pattern Requirements

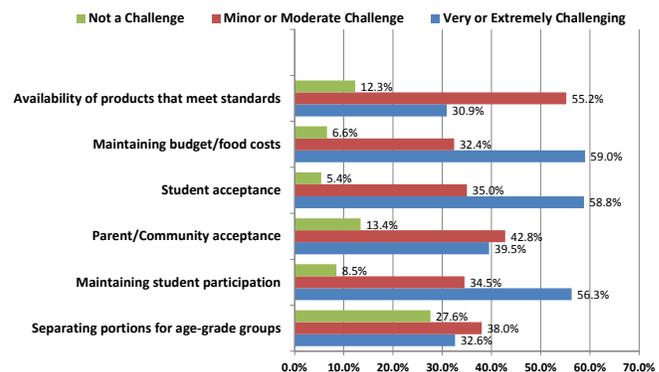
The new requirements were first implemented in SY 2012-13; this report thus focuses on the second year of implementation.

*Ninety-seven percent of SFAs were certified to receive the additional 6-cent reimbursement for meeting the new meal pattern requirements in SY 2013-14.* Of those not certified, most did not submit certification materials due to inadequate training to complete the application process, limited staff resources, or paperwork burden.

*SFAs continued to report that maintaining the budget with increased food costs (59.0 percent), student acceptance (58.8 percent), and maintaining student participation (56.3 percent) were very challenging in*

*implementing the new meal patterns.* SFAs were more challenged in SY 2013-14 in finding products that meet standards in part due to implementing the new breakfast requirements and the whole grain-rich requirement.

Figure 1. Percentage of SFAs Reporting Various Challenges While Continuing To Implement the New Meal Patterns SY 2013-14



*In SY 2013-14, 71 percent of SFAs reported changing their USDA Foods use in support of the new meal requirements.* SFAs are making better use of the wide variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grain-rich foods, and low-sodium, low-fat products available as USDA Foods.

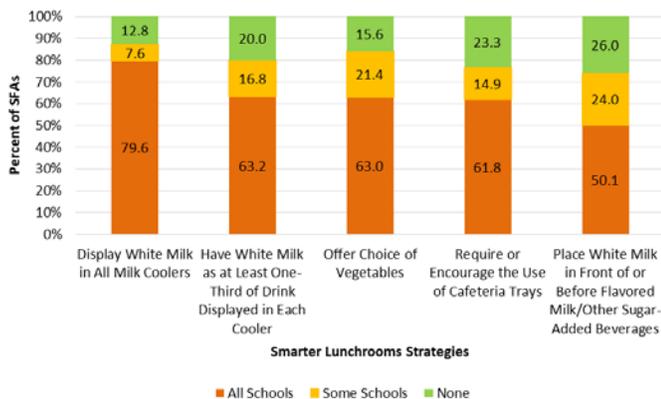
*SFA directors’ perceptions of the change in the amount of plate waste since the SY 2012-13 implementation of the new meal requirements varied by type of food.*

- Over 60 percent reported that students wasted more salad/raw or cooked vegetables after implementation.
- About half reported that students wasted more fruits and bread/grain items, while half reported that waste stayed the same or decreased.
- More than 55 percent observed no change or less plate waste among entrées, and relatively few observed a change in waste of fluid milk or desserts.

*In SY 2013-14, more than 80 percent of all SFAs implemented at least one Smarter Lunchrooms strategy in elementary, middle, and high schools.* The percentage of schools at all grade levels using at least one Smarter Lunchrooms strategy increased significantly between SY 2012-13 and SY 2013-14, especially among

middle schools and high schools (from about 75 percent to 86 percent). Those most commonly implemented are listed in Figure 2.

**Figure 2. Top Five Smarter Lunchrooms Strategies Used by SFAs**



Source: SFA Director Survey SY 2013–14, question 10.3.

## SFA Finances

*In SY 2013-14, on average, SFAs charged \$2.31 for a paid lunch and \$1.34 for a paid breakfast.* On average, SFAs charged \$2.16 for a paid lunch in elementary schools, \$2.36 in middle schools, and \$2.38 in high schools. The average price for a paid breakfast in elementary, middle, and high schools was \$1.28, \$1.35, and \$1.36, respectively.

*Most SFAs continued to raise prices of school lunches from SY 2012-13 to SY 2013-14 in response to the implementation of the paid lunch equity provision in 2011; the typical increase was 10 cents reflecting the maximum required increase under HRFKA.* About one-fourth of the SFAs elected to increase school breakfast prices as well during SY 2013-14 with the typical increase of 10 cents.

## Operations

*About 21 percent of SFA directors reported using food service management companies in SY 2013-14.*

Roughly two-thirds of these SFAs contracted with national companies, while about one-fourth contracted with regional companies and one-tenth contracted with local companies.

*In SY 2013-14, almost half (45 percent) of SFAs entered into cooperative agreements to competitively purchase goods and services.* Cooperative agreements were least common among small and very large SFAs, SFAs located in cities, and high-poverty SFAs.

*Almost one-third of SFAs had schools participating in farm-to-school activities in SY 2013-14 with another 20 percent planning to initiate activities in the future.* The top five food items purchased locally during SY 2012-13, based on their dollar value, were apples, milk, tomatoes, lettuce, and watermelon.

## State Policies and Support

*Over one-third (38 percent) of States provided a subsidy to SFAs beyond the Federal reimbursement for both breakfast and lunch in SY 2013-14.* An additional 7 percent provided a subsidy for lunch only; 9 percent provided a subsidy for breakfast only. About 45 percent 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.

*Over 90 percent of State Agencies had a standardized, computer-based reporting system in SY 2013-14 with 40 percent of State Agencies implementing their systems prior to 2005.* Primary functions of these systems include program renewal (94 percent), generating USDA reports (90 percent), meal claiming (86 percent), verification activities (78 percent), and direct certification matching and reporting (76 percent).

## Additional Information

The full report provides additional information on participation in NSLP, SBP, and other nutrition programs, the use of special assistance alternatives, use of food service management companies and cooperative agreements, general implementation of the new meal requirements, use of Smarter Lunchroom strategies, use of USDA Foods, farm-to-school activities, food safety, SFA financials, and State policies and administration of NSLP and SBP.

## For More Information

J. Murdoch *et al.* (2016). Special Nutrition Program Operations Study, SY 2013-14 Report. Prepared by 2M Research Services, LLC. Alexandria, VA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. Project Officers: Tojja Riggins and John Endahl. Available online at: [www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis](http://www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis).