

CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAM OPERATIONS STUDY II, SCHOOL YEAR 2015-2016 (SUMMARY)

Background

The Child Nutrition Program Operations Study II (CN-OPS II) 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 Agency (SA) and school food authority (SFA) policies, practices, and needs related to school nutrition service operations, financial management, meal counting, training and professional standards, food service equipment, and technology. Results are used to inform Child Nutrition program management and policy development.

Methods

The first year of CN-OPS II relies on data collected from May-October 2016 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) or School Breakfast Program (SBP).

While survey questions were primarily asked about school year (SY) 2015-2016, retrospective data were collected for SY 2013-2014 and/or SY 2014-2015 on topics such as participation, meal prices, and SFA finances to facilitate comparisons over time.

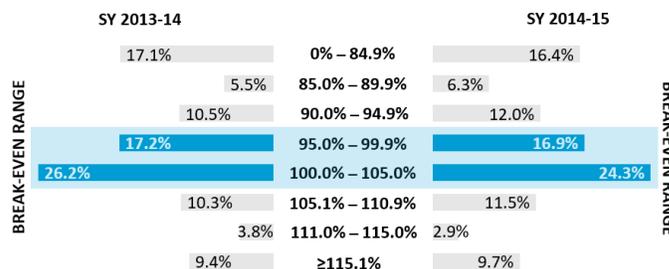
Fifty-five State CN directors and 1,984 SFA directors provided usable data for analysis in this report. The report includes both cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses.

Findings

Revenues and Expenditures

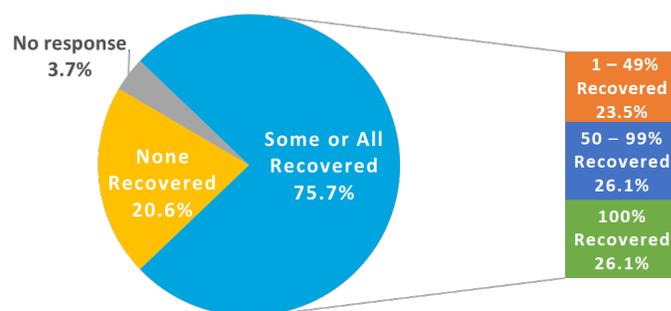
About two-thirds of SFAs reported having enough revenue to at least break even financially or even build a surplus in SY 2014-2015. Breaking even was defined as having revenues that were within 5 percentage points (95-105 percent) of total expenses. Forty-one percent of SFAs were in the break-even range, while another 24 percent of SFAs reported revenues greater than 105 percent of expenditures and 35 percent reported revenues less than 95 percent of expenditures. These rates were similar to those reported for SY 2013-2014 (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Distribution of School Food Authorities (SFAs) by annual revenues as a percentage of annual expenditures, School Year (SY) 2013–2014 and SY 2014–2015.



Three quarters of the SFAs with unpaid meals were able to recover some or all of the outstanding amounts. The median amount owed to SFAs in SY 2014-2015 was \$1,086. Approximately 26 percent of SFAs recovered the full amount owed, while another 26 percent recovered between 50 and 99 percent of the amount owed. Approximately 24 percent recovered less than 50 percent of the amount owed (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Percentage of School Food Authorities (SFAs) that recovered money owed from unpaid school meals in School Year (SY) 2014-2015.



Nearly all (99 percent) SFAs served a child a meal when the child was not certified to receive a free meal and could not pay for a meal. Among SFAs that track unpaid meal charges, 95 percent sent bills to parents to collect money owed. More than half (55 percent) provided students with alternate meals until the debt is paid. Approximately 34 percent used other administrative

actions and 33 percent attempted to retroactively approve the student for free or reduced price (F/RP) meals.

**While SFAs used a variety of methods to count and track meals served in cafeteria and non-cafeteria settings, four out of five SFAs use personal identification numbers (PINs).** In cafeteria settings, most SFAs (79 percent) reported using PINs to track the number of F/RP meals served to students; rosters or cashier lists (55 percent) and coded identification (ID) cards (34 percent) were also common. Approximately 5 percent reported using coded tickets, tokens, or some form of biometric technology.

In non-cafeteria settings, SFAs most frequently reported using rosters or cashier lists (52 percent), followed by PINs (43 percent) and coded ID cards (12 percent).

### Training and Professional Standards

**Every State Agency (SA) reported providing training and technical assistance (TA) to SFAs in SY 2015-2016.** All SAs reported providing training in administrative practices, such as application, certification, verification, meal counting, and meal claiming procedures. Almost all SAs reported providing training in identification of reimbursable meals at the point of services (98 percent), nutrition and accuracy of approvals for F/RP meals (96 percent), and health and food safety standards (93 percent).

**More than three-quarters of SAs (78 percent) reported providing training on the efficient and effective use of USDA Foods.**

**Only 41 percent of new directors of small SFAs met the new hiring standards in SY 2015-2016.** When asked about challenges in meeting the hiring standards, 86 percent of State CN Directors reported that it was difficult for SFAs to find qualified applicants in small or rural SFAs with smaller applicant pools.

Additionally, in mid and large size SFAs, 76 percent and 95 percent of new directors met the hiring standards, respectively.

**Not all school nutrition employees were on track to meet the minimum training and continuing education standards in SY 2015-2016.** The annual minimum training/continuing education requirement was 6 hours for SFA managers and 4 hours for other school nutrition program staff for SY 2015-2016, the year that the final rule on professional standards went into effect. Among SFAs that tracked continuing education and training activities among school nutrition personnel, approximately 92 percent of SFA managers, 89 percent of school nutrition program staff (working 20 or more hours per week), and 87 percent of part-time nutrition program

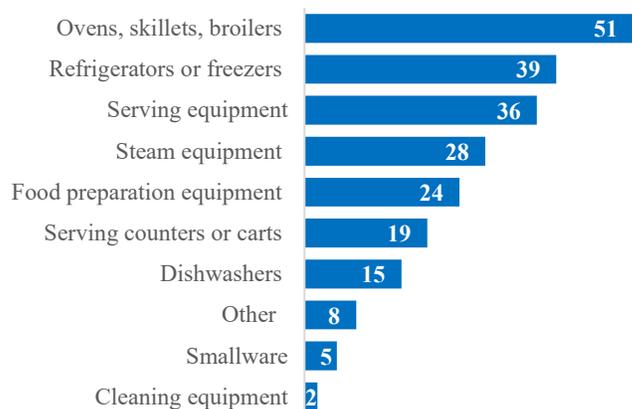
staff (working less than 20 hours per week) were expected to meet the standards by the end of the school year.

### Food Service Equipment

**Three out of five SFAs reported having food service equipment that needed replacement in SY 2015-2016.** Among SFAs with equipment replacement needs, the equipment most frequently reported as needing replacement included refrigerators or freezers (62 percent), serving equipment (51 percent), and ovens, skillets, or broilers (50 percent). Equipment replacement needs were reported most frequently by large (84 percent) and very large (92 percent) SFAs.

**Ten percent of SFAs received NSLP Equipment Assistance Grants in SY 2014-2015.** Among SFAs that received a grant, half had used or were planning to use the funds to purchase ovens, skillets, or broilers (Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Food service equipment purchased or intended to be purchased using National School Lunch Program (NSLP) Equipment Assistance Grant funds received in School Year (SY) 2014-2015.**



Percent of School Food Authorities  
(among those receiving equipment grants in SY2014-15)

### Additional Information

The full report provides additional information on participation in NSLP, SBP, and other school nutrition programs, meal prices, certification and verification, nutrition standards, food and beverage marketing, and State policies and administration of NSLP and SBP.

#### For More Information

J. Murdoch *et al.* (2019). Child Nutrition Program Operations Study, SY 2015-2016 Report. Prepared by 2M Research Services, LLC. Alexandria, VA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. Project Officer: Holly Figueroa. Available online at: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis>.