

**Arizona Department of Education
Health and Nutrition Services**

Free and Reduced-Price Percentage Report

SCHOOL YEAR 2025-2026

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INTRODUCTION

Health and Nutrition Services (HNS) is a division within the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) that is responsible for the administration of United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) Child Nutrition Programs (CNP). CNPs help to ensure children have access to nutritious meals and snacks in schools, summer programs, child care centers and homes, and afterschool programs.

PURPOSE

USDA regulations require the ADE to obtain a list of schools, including elementary, middle, and high schools in the state where at least 50 percent of their enrolled children are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. This information must be provided each year by February 15, and must be based on data from a designated month, most commonly the month of October [7 CFR 210.9(b)(21); 7 CFR 226.6(f)(1)(viii)(A); and 226.6(f)(1)(ix)(A)].

The Free and Reduced-Price Percentage report is annually released to fulfill these requirements set forth by USDA demonstrating the percentage of students certified for free or reduced-price meal benefits at a school site participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP).

Using School Meal Data for Child Nutrition Programs

The Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (NSLA) allows the use of school data to establish area eligibility in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and Summer Seamless Option (SSO). In order for a site to be determined area eligible, school data must indicate that the proposed meal site is located in the attendance area of a school where at least 50 percent of the children are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. If a site is determined area eligible, the site has the option to participate in summer meals and afterschool programs.

In the absence of complete School Year 2025-2026 (SY 2025-26) school-level free and reduced-price data, Provision 2 and Provision 3 program operators may use data established from the last school year for which eligibility determinations were made, referred to as the base year. A school that is operating the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) will determine area eligibility using its approved school-level Identified Student Percentage (ISP). Individual school data must be used to determine area eligibility, even if the school is participating in CEP as part of a group or district claiming with a shared ISP.

FORMULAS

CALCULATING SITE LEVEL FREE AND REDUCED PERCENTAGES

For schools operating NSLP, the free and reduced-price percentage reflects the proportion of students reported with meal benefits out of the total reported participants at the site on the October claim for reimbursement. For example, if 80 of the 100 students have been certified as eligible for free or reduced-price meals this school year, 80% of the students at the site have meal benefits.

Formula for NSLP Operations

The numerator is the number of participants reported eligible for free meals plus the number of participants reported eligible for reduced-price meals in October 2025. The denominator is the total number of participants reported at the site in October 2025.

$$\frac{\left[\begin{array}{l} \text{Number of students} \\ \text{reported as eligible} \\ \text{for free meals} \end{array} + \begin{array}{l} \text{Number of students} \\ \text{reported as eligible} \\ \text{for reduced-price} \\ \text{meals} \end{array} \right]}{\text{Total participants}}$$

Formula for Provision 2 and Provision 3

This report lists the calculated free and reduced-price percentage during the site's base year. The numerator is the number of participants reported eligible for free meals plus the number of participants reported eligible for reduced-price meals in October of the site's base year. The denominator is the total number of participants reported at the site in October of the site's base year.

$$\frac{\left[\begin{array}{l} \text{Number of students} \\ \text{reported as eligible} \\ \text{for free meals} \\ \text{during October of} \\ \text{the site's base year} \end{array} + \begin{array}{l} \text{Number of students} \\ \text{reported as eligible} \\ \text{for reduced-price} \\ \text{meals during} \\ \text{October of the site's} \\ \text{base year} \end{array} \right]}{\text{Total participants} \\ \text{during October of the} \\ \text{site's base year}}$$

Formula for CEP Operations

This report lists the established school level ISP multiplied by the factor (1.6) at time of CEP approval. The numerator is the number of identified students. The denominator is the total number of participants. This percentage is then multiplied by the factor of 1.6.

$$\left[\frac{\text{Number of identified students}}{\text{Total participants}} \right] \times 1.6$$

CONSIDERATIONS

USING SCHOOL MEAL DATA FOR NON-CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS

Many grants and programs are required to use poverty data as part of their process to determine program eligibility, services, and grant allocations. This report does not reflect income-based eligibility for all enrolled students in Arizona schools and does not include individual student-level nor household income data.

It is important for the requestor of poverty data to understand the alternative approaches USDA has established to allow for sites and districts to collect individual student eligibility once every four years. Traditionally this report has listed a percentage of students eligible for free and reduced-price meal benefits based on current year individual student data. Due to the adoption of special provisions, the report displays a surrogate percentage for schools that do not annually collect individual student data for providing free and reduced-price meal benefits. For example, the listed percentage may reflect student data from two or ten years prior or a percentage that did not use individual student data.

- **Provision 2:** During the first year, or base year, the school makes eligibility determinations and takes meal counts by type. During the next 3 years, the school makes no new eligibility determinations and counts only the total number of reimbursable meals served each day. At the end of each 4 year period, the state agency may approve 4 year extensions if the income level of the school's population remains stable.
- **Provision 3:** During the first year, or base year, the school makes eligibility determinations and takes meal counts by type. During the next 4 years, the school makes no new eligibility determinations and counts only the total number of reimbursable meals served each day. At the end of each 4 year period, the state agency may approve 4 year extensions if the income level of the school's population remains stable.
- **Community Eligibility Provision:** Schools that adopt CEP are reimbursed using a formula based on the percentage of identified students divided by the total number of participants that is then multiplied by 1.6. Identified students are students who are approved for free meals based on documentation of their receipt of benefits from SNAP, TANF, FDPIR, or Medicaid (certified as free). The term also includes homeless, migrant, runaway, Head Start children, and foster children. Children only certified as free due to income and household size will not be included as an identified student. Schools will use the ISP as of April 1 and multiply by a factor of 1.6 to calculate the percentage of students with "free" meal eligibility at the site for the following year. The remaining percentage reflects the percentage of "paid" students. The school has the option to use this claiming percentage up to four years before recalculating a new rate.

FREE AND REDUCED-PRICE PERCENTAGE CALCULATION

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

Each row on the report displays all sites that were approved to participate in the NSLP by serving and claiming program meals in the month of October. There are public schools in the state of Arizona that do not participate in the NSLP and, therefore, cannot be included in this report. Occasionally some non-associated school sites can contract with a school district or charter district that is not the district that they belong to for other educational programs. Therefore, in this report, these non-associated sites will be reported with the school district or charter district they have contracted with for school meals.

Column A, titled Sponsor Name, provides the legal name of the district or charter that operates the NSLP

Column B, titled Sponsor Entity ID, provides the entity ID that ADE assigned at the sponsor level

Column C, titled Sponsor CTDS, provides the 9 digit number that ADE assigns based on the sponsor's county, type, district/charter number, and site classification

Column D, titled Site Name, provides the school name where NSLP meal service is taking place

Column E, titled Site Entity ID, provides the entity ID that ADE assigned at the site level

Column F, titled Site CTDS, provides the 9 digit number that ADE assigns to the site based on the site's county, type, district/charter number, and site classification

Column G, titled Approved Special Provision Option Cycle in School Year 2025-2026, indicates if the site is in an approved Special Provision Option cycle based on the October 2025 NSLP claim. The values in this column include Community Eligibility Provision, Provision 2, Provision 3, or blank (sites that are blank are either operating regular NSLP or operating as a base year for Provision 2 or Provision 3).

Column H, titled Enrollment, indicates the total number of students eligible to participate in the NSLP as reported at the site level on the October 2025 NSLP claim. Enrollment includes students eligible for a free or reduced-price meal, as well as students considered full pay. The reported enrollment number may differ from other sources, such as AzEDS, as Head Start students and preschool students may be included in this total.

Column I, titled Calculated HNS Free and Reduced-Price Percentage, reports a calculated site level percentage based on an allowable data source.

Column J, titled Reference Date for Free and Reduced-Price Eligibility Data (%), indicates the month and year when the eligibility data used to determine the free and reduced-price percentage was collected. The reference date column is not applicable for sites that have a percentage based on current year eligibility data (e.g., sites operating regular NSLP). Please review formulas and considerations above for more information on when eligibility can be established for sites operating CEP or Provision 2 or 3 (non-base year). Note: This column of data was newly added to this report starting in School Year 2025-2026.

FREE AND REDUCED-PRICE PERCENTAGE CALCULATION

STATEWIDE PERCENTAGE

It is important for the requestor of the statewide free and reduced-price percentage to acknowledge site-level calculations and the considerations referenced on pages 2 and 3 regarding calculations for Provision 2 and 3 non-base year and CEP.

To provide a numerator (an estimated total number of students eligible for free and reduced-price meals in Arizona) for the statewide percentage, HNS first multiplied the free and reduced-price percentage (Column I) for each site by the site's current October NSLP enrollment (Column H). This product was then summed across all participating sites. For this year, the estimated state-level free and reduced-price eligible count is 645,436.

To calculate a denominator for the statewide percentage, HNS summed all participating site's October 2025 NSLP enrollment to provide a state-level enrollment. For this year, the estimated state enrollment for NSLP schools is 983,016.

HNS then divided the estimated state-level free and reduced-price count by the estimated state enrollment for NSLP schools. For this year, the estimated statewide free and reduced-price percentage is 66%.

Calculating the Numerator for AZ Statewide Free and Reduced Percentage

$$\begin{array}{lcl} 1. & \text{Site level free and reduced-price} & \times \text{Site level October 2025 NSLP} & = \text{Site level free} \\ & \text{percentage} & \text{enrollment} & \text{and reduced-} \\ & & & \text{price eligible} \\ & & & \text{count} \\ \\ 2. & \text{Site level free and} & + \text{All NSLP participating sites} & = \text{AZ numerator (total} \\ & \text{reduced-price eligible} & & \text{count of free and} \\ & \text{count} & & \text{reduced-price eligibles)} \end{array}$$

Calculating the Denominator for AZ Statewide Free and Reduced Percentage

$$\begin{array}{lcl} \text{Site level October NSLP} & + & \text{All NSLP participating sites} & = \text{AZ denominator (total} \\ \text{enrollment} & & & \text{AZ count of} \\ & & & \text{enrollment)} \end{array}$$

Calculating the Percentage for AZ Statewide Free and Reduced Percentage

$$\begin{array}{lcl} \text{Total AZ count of free and} & & \\ \text{reduced-price eligibles} & = & \text{Statewide \%} \\ \hline \text{Total AZ count of} & & \\ \text{enrollment} & & \end{array}$$

FREE AND REDUCED-PRICE PERCENTAGE CALCULATION

DATA PRIVACY

The masking of certain data is required by ADE policy. The policy is based on federal laws to protect the privacy of students. The USDA limits the disclosure of student eligibility for free and reduced-price meals or free milk. USDA regulation at 7 CFR 245.8(f)(8) prescribes the penalty for any individual who provides unauthorized disclosure as a fine of not more than \$1,000 or imprisonment for up to one (1) year, or both. In addition, disclosure of other certain protected data outside of ADE without the student's written consent violates ADE's policy formulated under the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) 20 U.S.C. §1232g. In addition to civil and criminal penalties, violation of FERPA can result in a loss of federal grant money. Ethical and legal considerations resulting from the USDA regulations and the FERPA law require ADE to mask data when released to the public.

The unmasked cells do not contain data for less than 10 students or greater than 98% of enrolled students. USDA policy memorandum [SP 99-03](#) states that "Providing aggregate [eligibility] information that does not identify individuals continues to be permitted without consent." Release of data showing 100% of students could potentially identify a student and is not permitted. Masked data are identified with an asterisk (*). Users of the data need to be aware that columns containing masked data will not give accurate aggregate results.