

Expanding Access to the Child Nutrition Programs Improving the Area Eligibility Test for Summer and Afterschool Programs, and Child Care Homes

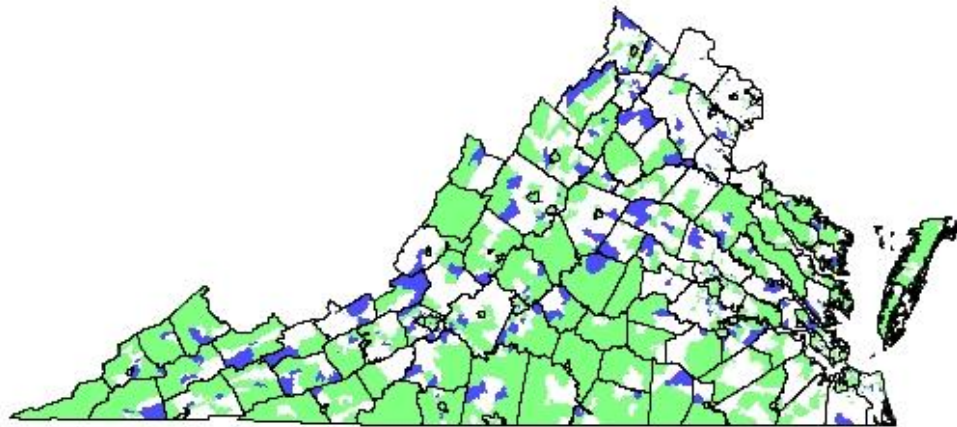
Congress is considering child nutrition reauthorization legislation. One of the Food Research & Action Center's top recommendations is to improve the area eligibility test. As it stands, the 50 percent area eligibility test limits low-income children's access to nutritious food, particularly in rural areas. Improving the test from its current 50 percent to 40 percent would considerably expand *low-income children's* access to nutritious food.

What is Area Eligibility?

Federal nutrition programs offer reimbursement for snacks and meals for all children in afterschool and summer programs and child care homes that are located in a low-income area, defined as an area with more than 50 percent of children eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. This 50 percent area eligibility test is the most restrictive test the programs have ever had. Prior to 1981, for example, the threshold for an area participating in Summer Food was 33 percent.

Why Improve Area Eligibility to 40 Percent?

The 50 percent eligibility test means that many low-income children in poor areas do not have access to nutritious meals and snacks. Rural areas have an especially difficult time meeting the 50 percent requirement because poverty is less concentrated. In addition, the threshold for the nutrition programs should be made consistent with other federal education funding streams that support the same afterschool and summer programs. For example, 21st Century Community Learning Centers have a 40 percent threshold. Currently, a program that gets federal money for activities can't get it for nutrition. That makes no sense. Federal education programs that target low-income children should be able to utilize federal child nutrition funding. Improving the threshold to 40 percent would increase access to nutritious food for children, reduce hunger, improve health, attract children to programs, and reduce the administrative burden for programs.



The green areas on the map are currently eligible. If the area eligibility test was changed to 40 percent, the blue areas also would become eligible. The white areas are not eligible under either test.

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