

C16. GROUP 3—STUDY OVERVIEW

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About the Study

The School Nutrition and Meal Cost Study (SNMCS)

The School Nutrition and Meal Cost Study (SNMCS) will continue the long-standing commitment of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA's) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to periodically assess school meal programs. This current assessment coincides with a period of considerable change for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the School Breakfast Program (SBP). In recent years, schools participating in these programs implemented sweeping regulatory changes designed to increase children's access to healthy foods at school and to promote adoption of healthy eating and physical activity habits. While FNS has conducted multiple studies of school nutrition and meal costs to date, SNMCS is the first such study after these major changes were implemented and the first to explore both nutrition and cost on a large national scale. This study will provide critical information of interest to USDA, the States, School Food Authorities (SFAs), and other program stakeholders that are not currently available.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, has contracted with Mathematica Policy Research and its research partners Abt Associates, Agralytica, and Relyon Media to conduct the SNMCS for SY 2014-2015. Participation in the study by selected states, districts, and schools is required under Section 305 of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (HHFKA).

SNMCS will collect a broad range of data from nationally representative samples of public SFAs, schools, and students and their parents during SY 2014-2015. These data will provide Federal, State, and local policymakers with needed information about how federally sponsored school meal programs are operating after implementation of the new meal pattern and nutrient requirements and other changes in regulations. Comparisons of results from SNMCS with previous School Nutrition and Dietary Assessment (SNDA) and School Lunch and Breakfast Cost (SLBC) studies will provide information to assess the effects of the new nutrition standards on foodservice operations, the nutrient content of school meals offered and served, meal costs and revenues, and student participation and dietary intake.

Participating in the Study

Mathematica and Abt are selecting a nationally representative sample of about 500 school districts nationwide and 3 to 4 schools per district. Data collection activities will be limited to only those necessary for success of the study, and individual SFAs and schools are not participating in all study activities. During SY 2014-2015, your SFA and schools will be asked to:

Complete a Menu Survey. This survey will collect detailed information on the foods offered and served in reimbursable lunches, breakfasts, and afterschool snacks (if offered) during a target week.

SFA Director, School Nutrition Manager and Principal Surveys. SFA directors, school nutrition managers and principals will be asked to respond to questions needed to characterize district policies, the school environment, and foodservice operations.

SFA Director, School Nutrition Manager and Principal Cost Interviews. SFA directors, school nutrition managers and principals will be interviewed to gather information about



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the full cost of foodservice, including indirect and administrative costs.

Competitive Foods Checklists. A member of the school staff will be asked to complete a simple set of forms detailing the availability to students of vending machine items and other sources of food such as school stores.

Cafeteria Observations. Data collectors will observe one lunch and one breakfast period (if the school participates in the School Breakfast Program) in selected schools to document characteristics of foodservice operations.

Plate Waste Observations. Data collectors will estimate the proportion of foods wasted by students in order to assess the nutrient and food group composition of foods wasted, and to assess the relationship between plate waste and characteristics of students, school food environments, and school foodservice operations.

Protecting Privacy

All information gathered from school districts and schools is for research purposes only and will be kept private to the full extent allowed by law. Responses will be grouped with those of other study participants, and no individual schools, districts, or students will be identified. We are not conducting audits or monitoring visits. Participation in the study will not affect meal reimbursements to participating districts and schools.

Disseminating the Findings

A series of final reports on the research findings will be released no later than February 2017.

About the SNMCS Research Team

Mathematica, Abt Associates, Agralytica, and Relyon Media are among the nation's leading research organizations. Each firm has over 25 years of experience conducting research for government agencies and studying child nutrition programs.

For More Information

For more information about the study, please contact:

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