

## APPENDIX O10. APEC III FACT SHEET (FOR SFAs AND SCHOOLS)

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Third Access, Participation,  
Eligibility and Certification  
Study Series

# APEC III FACT SHEET /FAQs

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## STUDY BACKGROUND

- The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) play a critical role in America's strategy to ensure that children have access to nutritious meals.
- These programs, which provide free and reduced-price meals for students from low-income families, must balance competing objectives: (1) ensuring that children and families who receive benefits are eligible; (2) maintaining ease of access for those who are eligible; and (3) keeping the costs and burden of determining eligibility reasonable both for Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and families.
- Meeting the first objective can sometimes increase administrative costs and make it more difficult for eligible children to participate. Simplifying access or streamlining procedures, however, can sometimes result in more benefits going to people who do not qualify, increasing costs of the program.

## STUDY OVERVIEW

- The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), has contracted with Westat, Inc. to conduct the third Access, Participation, Eligibility and Certification Study Series APEC III (also known as the National School Meals Study to households) for SY 2017-2018.
- This study is conducted under the Improper Payment Information Act of 2002 (PL 107-300) and the Improper Payment Elimination and Recovery Act of 2010 (PL 111-204). Both require that FNS identify and reduce erroneous payments in these programs, including both underpayments and overpayments.
- The study will include nationally representative samples of school districts, schools, and students within sampled schools.
- The findings will help FNS provide guidance to school districts and schools on how to enhance program administration and target benefits effectively.
- Following data collection and data analysis, a final report on the research findings will be produced in 2020.

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### **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

#### **1. What is the purpose of this study?**

The goal of the APEC III study is to provide FNS with reliable, national estimates of erroneous payments in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the School Breakfast Program (SBP) in school year (SY) 2017-2018. The data collected will be used to:

- Generate a national estimate of the annual amount of erroneous payments;
- Provide a robust examination of the student (household), school, and School Food Authorities (SFAs) characteristics that may contribute to or mitigate error;
- Conduct a sub-study on the differences in error rates among SFAs using different implementation strategies in their school meals program; and
- Complete qualitative analyses to better understand the sources of errors and how to potentially address them.

#### **2. Who is sponsoring this study?**

This study is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Nutrition Service (FNS).

#### **3. Who is conducting this study?**

Westat, Inc. is conducting this study. Westat is among the nation's leading research organizations, with over 50 years of experience conducting research for government agencies. Westat's work is behind many of the federal government statistics you hear in the news. For more information about Westat, go to [www.westat.com](http://www.westat.com).

#### **4. Who will be the participants of this study?**

The participants will be randomly selected. They will include Child Nutrition Agencies, about 275 School Food Authorities (SFAs), 625 schools (both Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) schools and non-CEP schools) and 4,800 households of sampled students.

#### **5. What will be the role of the participants in the study?**

*State Child Nutrition Agencies.* At the State-level, we will be asking for electronic meal claim data for the 2017-2018 school year submitted to USDA.

*SFAs and Schools.* Data collection will not include any classroom visits, teacher interviews or student assessments/interviews. It will not impact the school curriculum. It is a one year study that will occur during the 2017-2018 school year. Data collection efforts at the SFA and school will focus on school breakfast and lunch meal programs and will include the following:

- a. Pre-visit interview with sampled SFAs and school personnel;
- b. Review and abstraction of applications for meal benefits;
- c. Observation of meal service at schools;
- d. Brief interview with cafeteria managers to gather qualitative information about meal claiming procedures and process;
- e. Review and abstraction of school and SFA meal counting and claiming records;
- f. SFA Director survey (web-based) with questions regarding characteristics and processes; and
- g. An in-depth phone interview with a sub-set of SFA Directors to gather qualitative information on the process for eligibility determination and potential sources of error.

## **APPENDIX O10. APEC III FACT SHEET (FOR SFAs AND SCHOOLS)**

*Households.* There will be a household survey and interview with parents/guardians of students that applied for meal benefits. The household survey (note that the household survey component of APEC III is entitled National School Meals Study) will ask parents/guardians about their participation in the meal programs, their household size and income as well as participation in programs such as SNAP or TANF. The survey will be held with parents/guardians of a sample of students from non-CEP schools and will be conducted in person at the respondent's home (or other preferred location).

Respondents will receive a base incentive for completing the survey (\$30), as well as an additional incentive (\$20) for taking the time to gather and provide the income documentation. The incentive amounts are pending Office of Management and Budget (OMB) approval.

There will be in-depth phone interviews with a sub-set of parents/guardians about their general experience with the application process, and to identify any areas that may have been confusing. Respondents will receive a separate incentive of \$20 for participating in the household in-depth interview.

### **6. Why should I participate?**

Participation of selected districts and schools is required under Section 305 of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010. USDA's FNS depends upon the Access, Participation, Eligibility and Certification (APEC) Study Series to meet these requirements and report their findings to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).

SFA and school staff is "the voice" of many districts and schools like yours across the country. The study will help FNS ensure that benefits are provided to those students that need them most, and your experiences and opinions about the lunch and breakfast programs are extremely valuable to the study. This study will help Congress make informed decisions when they consider changes to the school breakfast and lunch programs.

The study will not affect meal reimbursements received by participating districts and schools nor school meal program benefits received by students or households. This is a research study, and is not an audit or monitoring visit.

### **7. Will the information we provide to you be secure and private?**

All information gathered from school districts, schools, and households is for research purposes only and is kept private. Additionally, all responses will be grouped with those of other participants, and no individual schools, districts, or students will be identified in public documents or public use data files.

We will inform parents of the study and our privacy procedures. Participation in the study will not affect meal reimbursements to participating districts and schools nor will it affect the meal program benefits received by participating students and households.

### **8. What if I have more questions? Who do I contact for more information?**

For more information about the study, contact the APEC III Research Team at 1-855-820-6138 or email us at [schoolmealstudy@westat.com](mailto:schoolmealstudy@westat.com). We are available Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm Eastern Time.