



Congressional Status Report: Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children Demonstrations

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Congressional Status Report:
Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer For Children

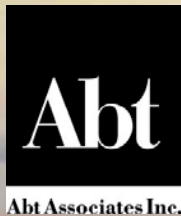
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The development, health, and well being of children depends on access to a safe and secure source of food. In 2010, one in five households with children (8.0 million) was food insecure, and nearly half of those—3.9 million—included food-insecure children (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2011). In all, approximately 8.5 million children were food insecure, including 1.3 million with very low food security. The problem of food insecurity increases during the summer months when children do not have access to free or reduced-price (FRP) meals provided by the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) or the School Breakfast Program (SBP) (Nord and Romig 2006); the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) reaches far fewer children than these school-year programs (Gordon and Briefel 2003; Food Research and Action Center 2010). Many communities provide other types of food assistance and programs during the summer months to meet the nutritional needs of low-income children. With locations and resources limited, however, gaps remain, and the full extent of need is not addressed.

As part of its efforts to end child hunger, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is studying alternative approaches to providing food to children in the summer months. The 2010 Agriculture Appropriations Act (P.L. 111-80) authorized and provided funding for the USDA to implement and rigorously evaluate the two-year Summer Food for Children Demonstration, one component of which is the Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children (SEBTC). This report describes the progress and status of the SEBTC demonstration and its evaluation in the first year and highlights the implementation experiences (through midsummer 2011) of the five state agencies that received grants to implement the demonstration in this first “proof-of-concept” (POC) year. This status report to Congress addresses the following research questions:

1. What is the status of the POC demonstrations as of midsummer? What are early successes and challenges?
2. During the first month of the summer, what is the dollar value of the demonstration benefit issued and redeemed?
3. What are the household characteristics of the study population before the school year ended?
4. What is the level of household food security during the school year, and what is the range across sites?
5. What are the average household monthly food expenditures during the school year?
6. What is the nutritional status (diet quality) among children in the study population during the school year?

SEBTC Demonstration and Benefits in 2011

In response to the prevalence of food insecurity among low-income children during the summer months and limitations in coverage of the SFSP, Congress mandated USDA to implement a demonstration that uses the existing electronic benefits transfer (EBT) delivery systems for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) to help households buy food for their eligible children during the summer.

The SEBTC benefit supplements rather than replaces the SFSP program in the demonstration areas, as many SFSPs provide not only food assistance for children, but also summer programs and activities that foster physical movement and social interaction—important factors in child development. One critical advantage of the SEBTC approach, however, is that it does not require that children be physically present at sites where meals are served. FNS expects that by directly augmenting the food purchasing power of households, the SEBTC approach will feed a higher proportion of eligible children.

The SEBTC benefit is provided to households of children from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade who are certified for FRP school meals in the demonstration school food authorities (SFAs). SFAs are responsible for the provision of school meals and can include one or more schools or districts. A benefit of approximately \$60 per eligible child is provided monthly on an EBT card and administered by grantees in the summer when schools are not in session. In 2011, the average length of benefits was 85 days, and the average benefit amount was \$170 per eligible child for the summer.

The 2011 Grantees

FNS designed the two-year demonstration in two phases. In the initial POC phase in 2011, the demonstration is being implemented on a limited scale by five grantees—that is, the state agencies or groups of agencies implementing the demonstration—each of which can offer SEBTC benefits to households representing 2,500 eligible children certified for FRP meals through the NSLP. The POC sites are in the following locations:

- Windham and New London counties, Connecticut
- Grand Rapids, Michigan
- Kansas City, Missouri
- Linn and Jefferson counties, Oregon
- El Paso County, Texas

The Connecticut and Oregon sites are mostly rural, and the Michigan, Missouri, and Texas sites are urban or mostly urban. The number of eligible children ranges from approximately 11,000 in Connecticut to 38,000 in Texas.

Three of the five states—Connecticut, Missouri, and Oregon—are administering SEBTC through their SNAP EBT systems. Missouri and Oregon issue benefits on existing EBT cards for participants already receiving SNAP benefits, with households that do not have active SNAP EBT cards receiving new cards for SEBTC. Connecticut issues a separate EBT card designed for the demonstration to all participants (both SNAP and non-SNAP). Under both models, participants can redeem \$60 in benefits per eligible child per month in SNAP-approved foods at any SNAP-authorized retailer.

The other two states—Michigan and Texas—are using their WIC EBT systems to administer the demonstration, termed the ‘SEBTC WIC’ model. In both of these sites, participants get a separate EBT card loaded with their summer benefits. They are able to purchase only “allowable” foods prescribed in an SEBTC food package, equivalent to \$60 per eligible child per month, at WIC-authorized retailers. The package includes milk, 100% juice, cheese, cereal, eggs, whole wheat bread, beans, peanut butter, and canned fish; there is also a cash voucher for fresh fruits and vegetables, worth \$14-\$16 per child per month.

The Status of Grantee Operations as of Midsummer 2011

Despite conducting demonstration activities for the first time, under extreme time pressure and facing many challenges, the five POC grantees passed a series of major milestones in preparation for administering and evaluating the SEBTC benefit. In particular, they were able to identify eligible children and households, complete the consent process, notify households of whether they would be receiving the SEBTC benefit, complete modifications to EBT systems, and start issuing benefits for the majority, if not all, of the households selected to receive them.

Identifying Eligible Children and Households and Obtaining Consent

The success of the SEBTC demonstration and its evaluation depends on the ability of grantees and their partners to develop accurate lists of households that qualify for the benefit and ensure that contact information is up to date. All households in the demonstration area with children from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade who are certified for FRP meals can qualify for the SEBTC benefit. Even if the demonstration were not being rigorously evaluated, the step of identifying these households would be critical. It ensures that the full eligible population has a chance to participate and that benefits, in the correct amounts, can be issued to those selected.

Since the benefits are provided to guardians for all of the eligible children in the household, grantees and SFAs used a two-step process of first identifying children who qualify for FRP meals and then grouping them into households. This process challenged some of the grantees, in part because children can be certified for FRP meals in two different ways (through an NSLP application or through direct certification) and could appear on eligibility lists twice, and in part because school districts sometimes had multiple records for the same family in their school contact systems. The result was relatively high numbers of duplicate households on some grantees' lists, which sometimes could only be removed manually. Despite these issues, grantees and participating SFAs were successful in creating lists of eligible children, working with the evaluation team to group them into households, and sending consent letters to those targeted for the demonstration.

Another challenge was resolving details of eligibility for SEBTC benefits. All children in kindergarten through 12th grade certified for FRP meals were eligible for the SEBTC benefit. However, as participating SFAs began developing lists, questions arose about the eligibility of certain student populations, including graduating 12th graders and children enrolled in pre-kindergarten, as well as other groups who are eligible for FRP meals, including children enrolled in foster care, homeless youth, and emancipated youth. The grantees also needed guidance in handling situations in which families claimed to have more children than were listed on consent materials, and in determining whether and how to issue benefits for families who moved out of the demonstration area before receiving their SEBTC cards. Grantees also asked if benefits for foster children should be issued separately from those of other children in the household so the card could follow the child if the guardian changed, and how households with homeless children should be configured. FNS provided feedback to grantees on eligibility as these cases emerged.

The consent process was more difficult than anticipated for most grantees, creating delays for all sites that resulted in time pressures on subsequent steps required to deliver benefits. The issues encountered differed between states using active versus passive consent. The three grantees who used active consent recruited 24 to 37% of eligible households for the demonstration, but had to do more outreach than originally anticipated to achieve a sufficient number. Whether low rates of active consent indicated that households were not interested in the program or did not understand or open

written materials is not clear. Also unclear is whether active consent households are typical or atypical of households likely to participate in the program, should it be implemented nationally.

Two grantees chose a “passive” consent process in which households had to return a signed form only if they wished to “opt out,” or not participate, in the demonstration and evaluation. Grantees that used passive consent were more likely to achieve high numbers of consenting households, given that few families chose to opt out; however, because they did not receive forms from consenting households, contact information was more likely to be inaccurate in these sites. Incorrect addresses may have caused some letters to families to miscarry, and it is not clear, even if letters did arrive, whether the families understood the information. Thus, grantees that used passive consent had more difficulty locating these families to inform them about the benefit. Some grantees worked with community partners to actively promote the benefit among the demonstration group so that families selected were aware of and would take up the benefit.

Notifying Households and Delivering Benefits

Once sites had completed the consent process, households were randomly assigned either to receive the SEBTC benefit (the benefit group) or not (the non-benefit group). Random assignment was used to enable the evaluation to rigorously assess the program’s impacts. Grantees and their partners notified households of their random assignments and began the process of setting up new accounts or modifying existing ones for those selected to receive the benefit.

Grantees made use of existing SNAP and WIC EBT technologies and telecommunications networks to issue benefits and cards. However, a range of modifications had to be made to accommodate the specific needs of the demonstration. While EBT processors in all five sites were able to complete system modifications and testing before the start of the summer benefit, the process was not seamless. For grantees using SNAP systems to issue SEBTC benefits, children who were randomly assigned to the benefit group and their parents or guardians first had to be matched manually to state eligibility systems for SNAP and other public assistance benefits. The manual processes were prone to human error and, indeed, when information was matched or updated, resulted in inconsistencies, accidental duplications, and deletion of cases.

Some states also had difficulty getting the cards to all families due to some having moved or addresses in the data being inaccurate, requiring efforts to locate households through alternative addresses and phone calls. In one site, almost 15% of households assigned to the benefit group never received their cards because they did not send back the required information from the second mailing. However, nearly all households in four of the sites ultimately received their EBT cards.

Use of the SEBTC Card

All five grantees successfully started administering benefits on the day after the 2010–2011 school year ended. Through the first issuance cycle (14 days in Connecticut and 30 days in the other sites), at least 70 percent of households selected in every demonstration area to receive SEBTC benefits actually used them. The utilization rate ranged from 73% in Texas to 97% in Oregon, with the highest household participation rates in the two SNAP model sites, Oregon and Missouri, where benefits were loaded onto existing SNAP cards. The amounts of benefits used by households, which ranged from 68% in Michigan to 97% in Oregon, were also highest in these SNAP sites. The two WIC sites had lower redemption rates in the first issuance cycle. In all five sites, more than half of the households redeemed at least 75% of their benefits.

The total benefits issued in the first cycle ranged from \$62,292 in Connecticut (with a shorter issuance period) to \$152,340 in Missouri. The average benefit issued per household ranged from \$48.98 in Connecticut to \$103.00 in Missouri and depended upon the length of the first benefit period, the type of benefit (SEBTC-SNAP or SEBTC-WIC), and the number of eligible children in the household. A future report will provide updated figures for the full summer benefit period.

Difficult Timeline and Unanticipated Costs

Implementation was extremely fast paced in this POC year. Grants were awarded in December 2010, with summer benefits to begin before the middle of June 2011. With less than six months to complete preparations, the grantees and their partners persevered strenuously to meet established schedules. When facing issues or questions requiring resolution, they proved adaptable to change and generally communicated quickly and effectively to move the demonstration to the next stage.

States also encountered several unanticipated demonstration costs. Some tasks took more staff time than initially planned, particularly those related to the creation and cleaning of household files for random assignment, as well as more financial resources than budgeted. This caused many states to spend additional non-grant funds or to use in-kind resources from state staff or partner organizations. State budget difficulties and natural disasters also affected implementation in four states.

Cross-Agency Collaboration, Partnerships, and Program Communication

The SEBTC program required two systems that generally operate separately—FRP meals eligibility and either SNAP or WIC—to work together. Consequently, grantees had to work across agencies and organizations that may not have collaborated previously and had different processes, data systems, and cultures to navigate. Reconciling these different organizations and their data systems was sometimes complicated, but most states felt they were able to communicate effectively and achieve a common goal. Several also indicated that through this demonstration they were able to develop the framework for long-term partnerships that will benefit them in the future, in this program as well as others.

Characteristics of the SEBTC Population During the School Year

Food security is defined as access by all members of the household at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. *Food-secure* households are those in which both adults and children are food secure. *Food-insecure* households are those in which the adults *or* children *or* both report limited access to food, resulting in a) reduced quality or variety of diet (low food security), or b) reduced food intake or disrupted eating patterns (very low food security) (Nord 2009). Reducing very low food security among children (VLFS-C)—the most severe level of food insecurity—is the main outcome of interest for the SEBTC demonstration.

A baseline survey had to be conducted before the end of the 2010–2011 school year to obtain an estimate of household food security in the SEBTC evaluation sample during the school year. The survey found rates of food insecurity in spring 2011 to be relatively high. Six of 10 households (58%) experienced food insecurity, and most of them had food-insecure children. Overall, 41 to 45% of households had food-insecure children, and 6 to 8% experienced VLFS-C. The prevalence of household food insecurity among eligible households in the SEBTC demonstration areas (58%) was considerably greater than that shown in national data for 2010 for low-income households

(39%) (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2011), suggesting that grantees selected the sites for the SEBTC demonstration in communities that particularly needed such a program.

Respondents to the SEBTC baseline survey were mainly female, between the ages of 30 and 49 years old, and Hispanic, although the age distribution varied somewhat across sites. About half of the households contained one adult only, most often a female with some high school education, and most reported at least one employed adult. Not surprisingly, households participating in the SEBTC demonstration were economically disadvantaged. Nearly three-quarters were below the federal poverty level, and almost all participated in one or more nutrition assistance programs, including SNAP, WIC, and FRP school meals. In addition, 14% of households reported food pantry use, and 2% reported emergency kitchen use during the school year. Besides high participation in FRP school meals, 13% of children were reported to have received benefits from an afterschool or child care program and 10% from a backpack program.

Counting money spent at grocery stores, other food outlets, fast food restaurants and other eateries, the median weekly household food expenditure was \$126, averaging \$31 per person. In 2010, the national value for low-income households was \$33 per person (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2011). At baseline, children's daily consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages (for example, soft drinks, fruit-flavored drinks, and sports drinks with added sugar) was high (43%). Although most (77%) were reported to consume milk daily, it was more likely to be whole or 2% -fat milk rather than the recommended low-fat or fat-free milk. And although about half (54%) of children consumed fruit one or more times a day and 83 % consumed vegetables daily during the month when they were still in school, consumption of fruits and vegetables was well below recommended levels. Future reports will assess the changes in quality of diet between the school year and the summer and compare summer consumption by children receiving SNAP to that of those receiving WIC benefits.

Next Steps for the Demonstration

In June 2011, FNS released a request for applications to award up to 10 new grants to states, potentially doubling the number of beneficiaries in each site for the full demonstration year in 2012. Ongoing technical assistance efforts with POC grantees as well as a meeting with continuing and new grantees selected for the full demonstration will provide opportunities to share the lessons described here in preparation for the 2011–2012 demonstration year.

I. INTRODUCTION

Children's development, health, and well-being depends on access to a safe and secure source of food. In 2010 one in five households with children (8.0 million) were food insecure, and nearly half, 3.9 million, included food-insecure children (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2011). Nearly 8.5 million children were food-insecure, including 1.3 million children with very low food security. The problem increases during the summer months when children do not have access to free or reduced price (FRP) meals provided by the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) or the School Breakfast Program (SBP).¹ Although the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) provides meals and snacks to children during the summer, it reaches far fewer children than the school year programs (Gordon and Briefel 2003; Food Research and Action Center 2010). Many communities also provide other types of food assistance and child programs during the summer months to meet the nutritional needs of low-income children. However, locations and resources are limited, so there are still gaps in many communities. Multiple programs attempt to address the full extent of need in many communities, but there are still gaps.

As part of its efforts to end child hunger, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is studying alternative approaches to providing food assistance to children in the summer months. The 2010 Agriculture Appropriations Act (P.L. 111-80) authorized and provided funding for the USDA to implement and rigorously evaluate the Summer Food for Children Demonstration, one component of which is the Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children (SEBTC). FNS contracted with Abt Associates, Mathematica Policy Research, and Maximus to study how the demonstration program has unfolded over time and its impact on the food security of program participants.

This report describes the progress and status of the SEBTC demonstration and its evaluation in the first year, and highlights the implementation experiences (up through midsummer 2011) of the five State agencies that received grants to implement the demonstration in 2011, the random assignment process and data collection for the evaluation, and the evaluation sample characteristics at baseline. This introductory chapter details the issue of summer food insecurity among children, describes the goals and timeline of the SEBTC demonstration and its evaluation, and provides a road map for the remainder of the report.

A. Policy Context: Summer Food Insecurity among Children

Despite four USDA food programs that provide meals directly to children,² the prevalence of food insecurity remains high for households with school-age children. In 2010, 39% of households with children and incomes at or below 185% of poverty were food-insecure nationwide, indicating food insecurity among adults or children or both (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2011). In food-insecure households, parents often cut or skip their own meals to prevent their children from going without

¹ The NSLP and SBP provide subsidized meals to children in school. Children from low-income families obtain these meals free or at a reduced price (FRP). Children living in households with incomes at or below 130% of the poverty level are eligible to receive meals for free; those with incomes between 130 and 185% of poverty level are eligible for reduced-price.

² The four USDA food programs include the NSLP, the SBP, the SFSP, and the Child and Adult Care Food Program. For more information on these programs, visit the FNS website at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/>.

I. Introduction

food, and when there is not enough food for everyone in the family, the children may also cut or skip meals. Households in which the children's regular meal patterns are disrupted or food intake is reduced to below the amount caregivers consider sufficient are characterized as having VLFS among children (VLFS-C), the most severe level of food insecurity and the focus of the SEBTC demonstrations (Nord 2009). Nationwide, 20% of all households with incomes eligible for free or reduced-price school meals were food-insecure, and 2.1% had very low food security among children (VLFS-C) in 2010. Among households with incomes below poverty, the prevalence of food insecurity among children was 24% and VLFS-C, 2.8% (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2011).

An in-depth analysis of School Nutrition Dietary Assessment Study-III data on food security provides insights into household characteristics of food insecurity among school-age children (Potamites and Gordon 2010). Nearly all lived in low-income households; 90% lived in households with incomes at or below 185% of poverty, and most (72%) were at or below 130% of poverty. Nearly all food insecure children (93%) participated in NSLP, 80% participated in SBP, half (46%) received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, and 19% were in families that had used emergency food services in the last month. Use of the latter is an important indicator of a household's strained resources and the risk of VLFS-C.

National data from the Current Population Survey (CPS) provide evidence that food insecurity changes seasonally. Among households with income less than 185% of the poverty line, VLFS-C was 1.1 percentage points higher in the summer compared to the school year (Nord and Romig 2006). Seasonal differences related to the reduction in school meals were partially offset by households' participation in SFSP (Nord and Romig 2006). Further, rates of food insecurity were greater in States with fewer SFSP and summertime NSLP meals. The seasonal spike in higher food insecurity among households with school-age children in the summer has also been observed in some local communities; national data from the 2010 Feeding America survey show that 30% of food pantries, 26% of emergency kitchens, and 7% of shelters reported seeing many more children accompanying adults during summer months (Mabli et al. 2010).

The SFSP was implemented in 1968 to reduce the risk that children in low-income households would miss meals during the summer when they have little or no access to the NSLP and SBP.³ Research suggests that an expanded SFSP could, in principle, substantially reduce, though not eliminate, the summer spike in VLFS-C (Nord and Romig 2006), but logistical and other practical considerations present barriers to serving more children. Because the program is operated by schools, local governments, and local community-based organizations in churches and recreation centers, finding additional operators and locations to dramatically expand it has been difficult. Furthermore, even in areas where substantial expansion of the SFSP may be feasible, rates of participation by eligible children would likely remain below those for the NSLP and SBP. An earlier evaluation reported several barriers to SFSP participation, such as lack of transportation to sites, lack of publicity about the program, limited site operation days/hours, lack of program activities, and parents' concerns about neighborhood safety (Gordon and Briefel 2003). In addition, most SFSP sites operate for fewer than eight weeks, leaving low-income children without access to the program for some summer weeks. FNS is currently funding evaluations of demonstrations to expand the SFSP, including home delivery of summer meals to children in rural areas, and providing food

³ The SBP began as a pilot program in 1966 and was established as a permanent program in 1975 (http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/summer/about/program_history.html).

backpacks to children to cover days when SFSP sites are not operating. The effectiveness of providing grants to SFSP providers (sponsors) to enhance activities at sites, and financial incentives to encourage operation for more than eight weeks are also being tested.⁴

B. The SEBTC Demonstration

In response to the prevalence of food insecurity among low-income children during summer months and limitations in coverage of the SFSP, Congress mandated USDA to implement a demonstration that uses the existing benefit delivery systems for the SNAP and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) to enhance the food purchasing power of households with eligible children during the summer. More specifically, a benefit for children in the summer months is delivered through the electronic benefits transfer (EBT) procedures used by the SNAP and WIC programs.

This benefit (SEBTC) supplements rather than replaces the SFSP program in the demonstration areas. It is important to consider that many SFSPs provide not only food assistance for children, but also summer programs and activities that foster physical movement and social interaction—important factors in child development. One critical advantage of the SEBTC approach, however, is that it does not require that children be physically present at sites where meals are served. By directly augmenting the food purchasing power of households with eligible children, FNS expects, a higher proportion of the children will actually have greater access to food, thus achieving the ultimate goal of reducing the prevalence of food insecurity among children.

The SEBTC benefit is provided to households of children from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade who are certified for FRP school meals in the demonstration school food authorities (SFAs).⁵ The amount of the benefit—a \$60 value per month per child in the household—is comparable to the cost of providing free lunches plus breakfasts under the NSLP and SBP. Benefits—provided monthly on an EBT card and prorated for partial months—are administered by grantees in the summer for the period when schools are not in session.⁶

The benefit is administered differently in sites using the WIC and SNAP models. In WIC sites, participants can purchase only foods prescribed in a special food package at WIC-authorized retailers using a WIC EBT card. The SEBTC package was specified by FNS based on existing WIC foods (see Appendix A.1), and includes milk, juice, cheese, cereal, eggs, whole wheat bread, beans, peanut butter, and canned fish. It also includes a \$16 voucher for fresh fruits and vegetables. In 2011, both of the sites implementing the WIC approach worked with FNS to customize the package to meet the tastes of the local population (for example, substituting whole grain tortillas for whole wheat bread) and local food costs. SEBTC participants must purchase foods specified in the final package from WIC-authorized vendors. In addition, the WIC EBT cards can be used only in the State where they were issued. In SNAP sites, participants can redeem \$60 in benefits for SNAP-approved foods at any SNAP-authorized retailer in the country. Participants can purchase a much wider range of foods than permitted in the WIC model, including meats, fish and poultry, all types

⁴ More information on these evaluations and projects can be found on the FNS website at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/>.

⁵ SFAs are responsible for the provision of school meals and can include one or more schools or districts.

⁶ The term “grantee” refers to the state agency or group of agencies implementing the demonstration.

I. Introduction

of bread (not just whole wheat), and seeds and plants that produce food for the household to eat.⁷ In the SNAP sites, grantees could choose to use current cards (referred to as the SNAP-hybrid model) or issue new, distinctively different cards (referred to as the SNAP model). In the SNAP-hybrid model, SEBTC benefits are loaded onto existing EBT cards for participants already receiving SNAP, and only participants who are not on SNAP are issued a new card. In the SNAP model, a separate SEBTC card is issued to all demonstration participants using existing SNAP EBT systems, whether or not the participant has an active SNAP EBT card.

The demonstration is being implemented in two phases. In the initial proof-of-concept (POC) phase in 2011, the demonstration was implemented in five sites, each providing benefits to approximately 2,500 eligible children (Figure I.1; see Appendix A.2 for State maps showing specific SEBTC demonstration locations).⁸ Two of them—Michigan and Texas—are implementing the WIC model; two—Missouri and Oregon—are implementing the SNAP-hybrid model; and Connecticut is implementing the SNAP model (with a separate card for SEBTC). In Chapter II we provide additional information about the participating States, their partner agencies, and the SFAs. In a second phase, FNS plans to expand the size of the demonstration in 2012 by adding as many as 10 new sites, and potentially doubling the number of child beneficiaries at each site. Requests for applications for the 2012 SNAP and WIC SEBTC demonstrations were released in the summer 2011(FNS 2011a, 2011b); grantee selection will be made by the end of 2011.

Figure I.1. Map of SEBTC Demonstration Sites in the POC Year



⁷ For a full list of SNAP-approved foods, visit the FNS website at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/faqs.htm#10>.

⁸ The term “site” refers to the local areas where the demonstration is being implemented.

C. Overview of the Evaluation

In authorizing the SEBTC Demonstrations, Congress mandated USDA to conduct a rigorous independent evaluation of the demonstration. The evaluation design includes three components: an impact study, an implementation study, and a cost study. Below we describe the evaluation objectives and research questions, the overall study design, and the purpose of and data sources used for this report.

1. Research Objectives

The evaluation has four broad objectives:

1. To assess the feasibility of implementing three different models: a separately operating program using the WIC system, a separately operating program using the SNAP system, and a hybrid system in which SEBTC benefits are included in benefits for SNAP participants
2. To examine the feasibility of implementing SEBTC benefits, and to document costs, the approaches used, and the challenges and lessons learned during the demonstrations
3. To describe receipt and use of SEBTC benefits
4. To examine the impact of SEBTC benefits on children and their families' food security, food expenditures, and children's nutritional status

Each research objective is to be addressed in the POC year (December 2010-November 2011). This report addresses the first, second, and third research objectives of the study with the exception of the cost data which are not yet available for the full POC year. The fourth objective will be addressed, to the extent possible, using the data collected in the summer survey. Both the impact data and the cost study data will be included in the Final 2011 Evaluation Report planned for winter 2011.⁹

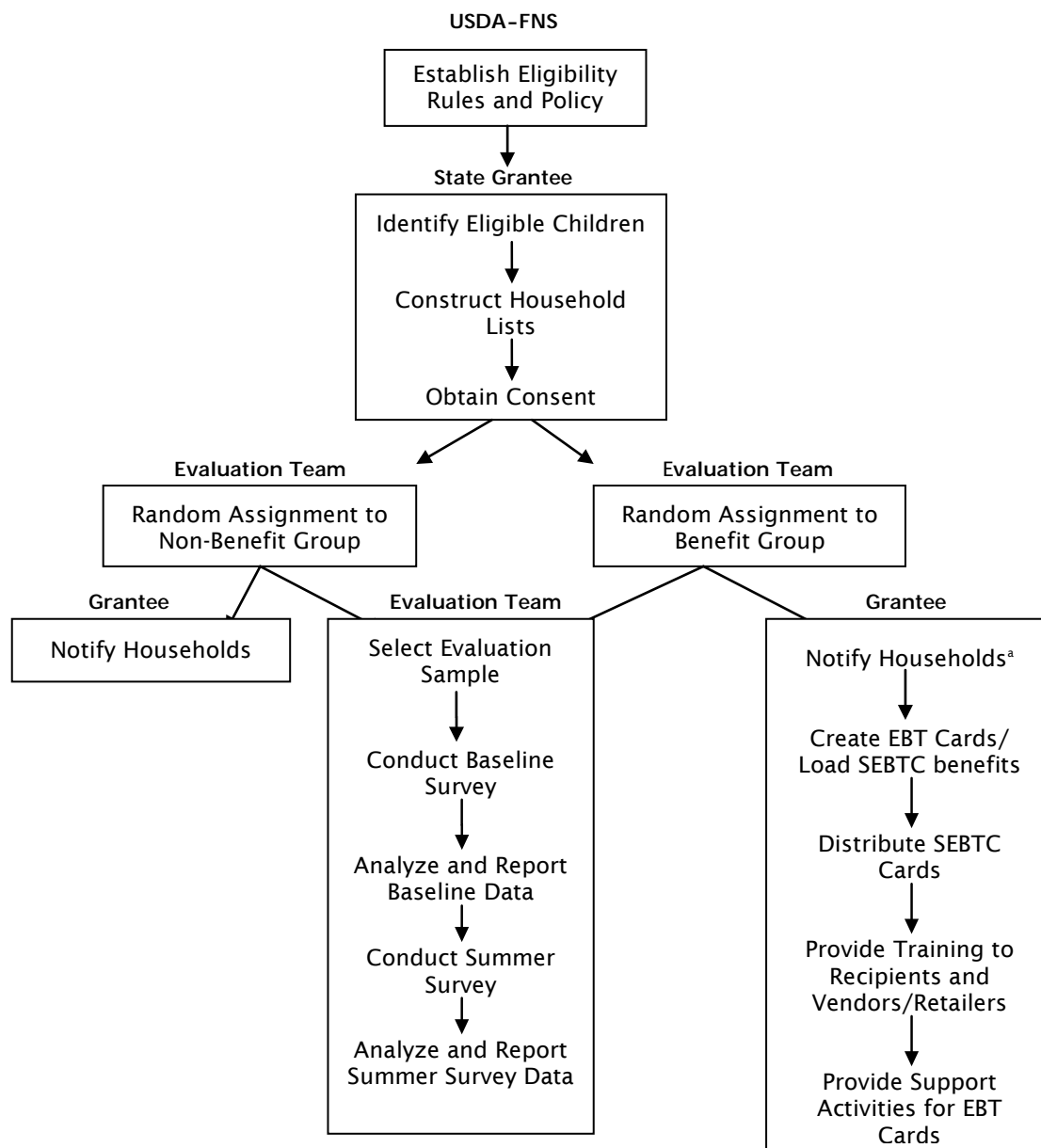
2. Research Design

The evaluation uses a random assignment design to provide the most credible and rigorous estimates of the impact of the demonstrations. To accomplish this, FNS, the grantees, and the evaluation team began work in December 2010 to complete a series of tasks related to implementing the demonstration and evaluation before the end of the 2010-2011 school year when SEBTC benefits became available to households. Figure I.2 lays out the flow of activities that had to be accomplished during 2011. First, FNS established eligibility rules and policy, and then, participating SFAs had to identify eligible children, group them into households, and obtain consent for participation in the demonstration and evaluation. Households that had one or more children certified for FRP meals and consented to participate were randomly assigned either to a benefit group that receives the SEBTC benefit or to a non-benefit group that does not. In each demonstration site, grantees notified families if they were eligible to receive the benefit and began the process of loading benefits onto and distributing EBT cards. At the same time, the evaluation

⁹ A relatively small sample in the POC year will limit the evaluation's ability to detect impacts on VLFS-C in the POC year, compared to the full demonstration year. See Chapter VI for more information.

team selected a random subsample of households for the evaluation study, including a treatment group drawn from those who would receive the benefit and a control group that would not. The evaluation team next surveyed the selected households before the end of the school year and again during the summer. These surveys gathered data for eligible households and children on household food security and food expenditures, children's food consumption and eating behaviors as measures of diet quality and nutritional status, as well as other outcome measures. Rigorous estimates of the impacts of the SEBTC will be made by comparing the values of these measures from the summer survey between treatment households and control households.

Figure I.2. Flow of Activities in 2011



SEBTC = Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) for Children

^a Not all grantees notified the non-benefit group.

To supplement the impact analysis, the evaluation involves a rigorous implementation study. Successful implementation of the demonstrations requires the involvement and cooperation of a number of State and local agencies and contractors in each demonstration site. The implementation study assessed the operational feasibility of the demonstration and identified the challenges encountered and lessons learned in the POC year. The evaluation team is collecting a variety of data from organizations involved in the demonstrations. These include information gathered during the team's technical assistance to grantees to implement the demonstration and the evaluation design, stakeholder interviews during two rounds of in-depth site visits to each grantee, telephone interviews toward the end of implementation, and administrative reports and documents. An Early Implementation Report described the program start-up through the first week of benefits administration in June 2011 (Bellotti et al. 2011).

The evaluation also includes a detailed analysis of SEBTC transaction data. This analysis will aim to describe patterns of household receipt and use of the summer benefits. Through the benefit period, EBT processors transmit administrative records to the evaluation team on benefit acceptance, usage, and other information on the full sample of households assigned to the benefit group.

A cost analysis, to be included in the Final 2011 Evaluation Report, will provide information on the total and component costs of implementing and operating the demonstration. This analysis will use quarterly and annual administrative cost reports to identify expenditures of grant funds by the grantee and its partners for personnel and other resources used to implement and operate the demonstrations. Each grantee will also provide a quarterly report showing SEBTC amounts obligated and redeemed—for the reporting month and cumulatively for the year.

3. Purpose of and Data Sources for This Report

This report covers the status of the demonstration in the POC year through midsummer 2011.¹⁰ Table I.1 provides a crosswalk between the evaluation study's research objectives and the research questions answered in this report. We specifically address the following research questions:

1. What is the status of the POC demonstrations as of midsummer? What are early successes and challenges?
2. During the first month of the summer, what is the monthly dollar value of the demonstration benefit issued and redeemed?
3. What are the household characteristics of the study population at baseline, before the school year ended?
4. What is the level of household food security at baseline and what is the range across sites?
5. What is the average household monthly food expenditures at baseline?
6. What is the nutritional status (diet quality) among children in the study population at baseline?

¹⁰ The first-year report, prepared in winter 2011, will cover the entire POC implementation period.

To answer these questions, we will draw upon several data sources. To answer the first question, the evaluation team used three data sources, including (1) technical assistance visits and calls made principally to assist in the consent and random assignment process; (2) spring and summer process study interviews with grantees and their key partners, including EBT processors; and (3) written documents, such as grant applications and materials used to obtain parental consent to participate in the demonstration.

To assess the monthly benefits issued and redeemed, the team used EBT data for households selected to receive the SEBTC benefit. EBT data for the first issuance cycle of the summer were used to assess activation and use of EBT benefits, redemption patterns, and exhaustion of benefits in the first month of the demonstration. This information will be fully updated after summer and included in the Final 2011 Evaluation Report.

To answer research questions three through six, we performed an analysis of household characteristics, food security, food expenditures, and nutritional status at baseline, based on a survey of household respondents in the evaluation sample. The baseline survey was conducted by telephone before the end of the school year and took approximately 30 minutes to complete. (A summer survey was conducted before the school year began, and will be used for the impact analysis.) The data collection methods and procedures used in the POC year are described in Appendix B.

Table I.1. Research Objectives and Questions for the SEBTC Demonstration

Evaluation study research objectives	Research questions addressed in this report	Chapter in this report
1. To assess the feasibility of implementing three different models: a separately operating program using the WIC system, a separately operating program using the SNAP system, and a hybrid system in which SEBTC benefits are included in benefits for SNAP participants	1. What is the feasibility of the SNAP and WIC models based on the first month of SEBTC operation in the summer?	II and III
2. To examine the feasibility of implementing SEBTC benefits, and to document costs, ^a the approaches used, and the challenges and lessons learned during the demonstrations	2. What is the status of the POC demonstrations as of midsummer? What are early successes and challenges?	
3. To describe receipt and use of the SEBTC benefits	3. During the first issuance cycle of the summer, what was the monthly dollar value of the demonstration benefit issued and redeemed?	IV
4. To examine the impact of SEBTC benefits on children and their families' food security, food expenditures, and children's nutritional status	4. What are the household characteristics of the study population at baseline? 5. What is the level of household food security at baseline and what is the range across sites? 6. What are the average household monthly food expenditures at baseline? 7. What is the nutritional status (diet quality) among children in the study population at baseline?	V

^aThe cost study analysis will be included in the Final 2011 Evaluation Report.

D. Report Contents

Beyond this introduction, findings in this report are presented in a series of six additional chapters. In Chapter II we provide an overview of the selected grantees and their partner agencies and describe the variations in the overall program models they chose to implement. In Chapter III we describe the implementation experiences and unanticipated challenges in the POC year that might have implications for next year's implementation, when it expands to as many as 15 sites. While we present background information by grantee, we do not identify grantees when discussing issues or challenges. In Chapter IV we describe households' use of EBT benefits, and in Chapter V we describe the characteristics of the study population at baseline. In Chapter VI we provide information about the status of the evaluation, including the random assignment process and plans for the impact study. Finally, in Chapter VII, we summarize the project accomplishments in the POC year and describe plans for 2012. The appendices provide supporting data tables and documentation.

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II. THE PROOF-OF-CONCEPT GRANTEES

To provide context for later chapters, in this chapter we describe variations in the organizational structures developed by the five State agencies that received SEBTC grants, and the choices they made in developing their program models. We provide in this chapter an overview of the grantees and their partner agencies, describe the local areas where demonstration activities are being implemented, then summarize the types of programs being implemented. Table II.1 is a snapshot of the major grantee characteristics discussed in the chapter.

A. Grantee Organizational Structures

When awarding the POC grants, FNS gave the States flexibility to choose the agency that would lead the effort and serve as official grantee, as well as latitude to define the organizational roles of other State and local partners, and to decide which contiguous SFAs to include. Table II.1 is a summary of State grantee agencies and partners and the characteristics of participating localities. (Appendix A.2 includes a map of the local demonstration area in each State.) In this section we describe the variation among the five demonstration States.

Planning and implementing SEBTC is a large undertaking, requiring the involvement of several State offices. Three of the five States—Connecticut, Missouri, and Oregon—chose the agency that administers the SNAP or WIC program as the lead grantee. One—Texas—decided on co-leads with the WIC agency working in collaboration with the agency that administers the NSLP and SFSP. The last grantee—Michigan—selected the State education agency that administers NSLP and SFSP to serve as the lead.

Additional agencies are also involved in each of the five States (see Major State and Local Partners in Table II.1). Three States, in addition to Michigan, include the State education agency as a partner on the grant, and its involvement varies from working intensely with SFAs and local partners on the consent process to simply advising the lead agency in program design and administration. In Michigan and Texas, the WIC agencies also play a large role in implementing the demonstration since they administer the benefit through the WIC EBT system. In Missouri, the grant manager is from a partner agency and reports directly to the governor's office, instead of being a staff member from the lead grantee agency.

Four of the grantees also chose to partner with local community organizations to help with outreach and encourage participation. In Missouri, the Local Investment Commission (LINC) has a large presence in Kansas City and uses its network of staff within the participating schools to support the demonstration effort. Connecticut partners with End Hunger Connecticut! to help encourage parents to participate in the demonstration. Oregon has partnerships with several local community organizations; one of the most important is its partnership with the Tribal Government, which helped the State gain support and participation from tribal families on the Warm Springs Reservation. Texas partners with the West Texas Food Bank, which was responsible for notifying the group that received SEBTC, distributing the EBT cards and training participants to use them, and providing more general support and outreach to participants.

FNS required in its Request for Applications (RFA) that grantees select one or more SFAs to participate in the demonstration (see Number of SFAs in Table II.1). These SFAs had to include at least 10,000 eligible children and, if more than one SFA was selected, the SFAs had to be

Table II.1. The Grantees, Their Partners and Participating Local Areas

Grantee	Major State and Local Partners	Area Served	Number of SFAs	Urban/Rural	Percent of Children Eligible/Certified for FRP Meals ^a	Approximate Number of Eligible Children ^b	Program Model ^c
Connecticut Department of Social Services	CT State Department of Education End Hunger! Connecticut	Windham and New London Counties	17 ^d	Mostly Rural	10 to 73	11,000	SNAP
Michigan Department of Education	MI Department of Community Health	Grand Rapids	1	Urban	80	16,000	WIC online
Missouri Department of Social Services	MO Department of Health and Senior Services MO Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Local Investment Commission	Kansas City	3	Mostly Urban	78	21,000	SNAP-hybrid
Oregon Department of Human Services	Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon Oregon Hunger Task Force Oregon Food Bank Oregon State University Extension Service Oregon Department of Education	Linn and Jefferson Counties	10	Mostly Rural	51	13,000	SNAP-hybrid
Texas Department of Agriculture Texas Department of State Health Services	West Texas Food Bank of El Paso Ysleta Independent School District	El Paso County	1	Mostly Urban	83	38,000	WIC offline

Source: Grant proposal documents and technical assistance efforts with grantees.

^aApproximations based on information on children eligible or certified for FRP meals provided in grant proposals.

^bCalculation based on information in grant proposals and provided by grantees during technical assistance efforts.

^cMissouri and Oregon are using a SNAP-hybrid model, which means that SEBTC benefits are loaded onto existing EBT cards for those participants already receiving SNAP. Under the SNAP-hybrid model only participants who are not on SNAP are issued a new card. In Connecticut, a separate SEBTC card is issued to all demonstration participants using existing SNAP EBT systems. In the WIC sites, Michigan uses a conventional online system that uses a central host computer to store food prescription balances and authorize purchases, so transactions are processed via an online connection to the host. Texas uses an offline system with “smart cards” that have an embedded chip that includes the information about the specific foods available to the card holder and does not have real-time communication with the EBT host system during the transaction.

^dThe Connecticut grantee initially proposed to enroll 23 contiguous SFAs. During the course of early implementation, six decided not to participate, leaving a final count of 17 SFAs.

geographically contiguous. All five grantees met or exceeded the FNS requirement that participating areas include at least 10,000 eligible children, with the number of eligible children in the target areas ranged from about 11,000 in Connecticut to about 38,000 in Texas.¹¹ The number of participating SFAs varied from 1 each in Michigan and Texas to 17 in Connecticut, mostly relating to the degree to which the target area was urban.

B. Overview of the Demonstration Sites and Local Context

The context of the local areas selected by each grantee can influence both the implementation of the demonstration and the impact it has on the target population. The characteristics of the geographic areas and local populations vary dramatically across grantees. In addition, many local factors can affect both the need for SEBTC and the ability of selected households to use their benefits to access food and make healthy food selections.

1. Geographic Area and Local Population

The five POC demonstration areas cover a variety of geographic areas that include urban centers, rural areas, and one Indian tribal reservation. Sites include large urban areas (Michigan, Texas, and Missouri), and relatively large, predominantly rural areas (Connecticut and Oregon). The size of the local population varies from just over 136,000 residents in the two counties served in Oregon to 750,000 in El Paso.¹²

The racial and ethnic characteristics of local populations also vary substantially across the grantees. According to U.S. Census data, the two counties covered by the Connecticut grantee are predominantly white (94%). Some local areas in Oregon also have largely white populations; however, with the presence of the Warm Springs Reservation, 15% of residents in Jefferson County and 1% in Linn County are of American Indian descent. Local areas in Michigan and Missouri have somewhat higher proportions of minorities, with 20% and 31% black, and 13% and 7% Hispanic, respectively. The Texas locale includes a largely Hispanic population (82%).¹³

2. Availability of the Summer Food Service Program

As detailed in Chapter I, the SEBTC demonstration was intended to compliment the services already provided by the existing SFSP program. Some demonstration areas had a relatively large number of SFSP sites to serve meals to children during the summer; others had limited availability of SFSP. In particular, fewer than half of Connecticut's communities met the SFSP requirement for open and enrolled sites, which is that more than half of children live in families with incomes at or below 185% of poverty. In addition, two rural SFAs in Oregon did not have SFSP sites due to low

¹¹ As grantees were deciding which areas to include, they had to consider FNS guidance that Provision 2 and Provision 3 schools were excluded from the POC year. In these schools, all students receive free lunch without applying for them or being directly certified in the current school year. FNS chose to exclude these schools because student-level data on FRP eligibility are not available. FNS may consider adding special provision schools in future years. For more information on Provisions 2 and 3, visit the FNS website at http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/governance/prov-1-2-3/Prov1_2_3_FactSheet.htm.

¹² In Texas, the participating SFA—Ysleta Independent School District—is one of nine in El Paso County.

¹³ The eligible school populations (that is, low-income children certified for FRP) in the participating schools may vary from the overall population.

rural participation rates and the loss of grant funding to provide mobile sites (i.e., food trucks that deliver meals). Missouri reported a relatively large number of SFSP sites but these covered areas beyond the three SFAs participating in the demonstration. State representatives also reported a strong SFSP presence in the demonstration areas in Texas and Michigan.

Within the demonstration areas, SFSP sponsor agencies are typically schools or community-based organizations, camps, churches, and army bases. Most sponsors administer several sites within the local communities. The local site venues include parks, libraries, housing complexes, community centers, food trucks, and driveways. Most SFSP local sites qualify as “open” sites and can serve any child who seeks services because they can demonstrate that at least 50 percent of children living in the local area are eligible for FRP school meals. Sites operate anywhere from one week to all summer. SFSP sites in Missouri and Texas generally operate for one month or less, Connecticut and Michigan sites operate for up to 10 weeks, and Oregon sites are open all summer long.

SFSP sponsors in three States reported increases in site participation in 2011 due to aggressive marketing, new sites opening, and families in greater need; however, stakeholders in all five agreed that gaps remain in the availability and accessibility of summer food services for children. Many respondents from each State listed barriers to access that are consistent with research findings (Gordon and Briefel 2003). For instance, local SFSP sponsors and site managers reported that some parents discourage “latch key” children from leaving the home unaccompanied. Local agencies may be hesitant about applying to be sponsors because they lack information about the best locations to attract adequate participation. Rural locations may have fewer sites accessible by public transportation, and many urban sites have unsafe neighborhoods. Severe heat or inclement weather conditions can reduce attendance. Finally, many schools lack the funding to administer summer school and other programs that traditionally provide venues for SFSP services.

3. Availability of Food Retailers in Demonstration Areas

State and local partners reported greater availability of food retailers in the more urban WIC demonstration areas than in the SNAP demonstration areas.¹⁴ In particular, WIC States reported more mid-sized to large grocery stores, superstore chains, and wholesalers, as opposed to small grocery, convenience, and specialty stores. Michigan reported a high proportion of large retailers overall, and Texas has roughly one large retailer for every two smaller retailers. By contrast, stakeholders reported that the vast majority of retailers in areas using the SNAP model are smaller. Moreover, respondents in SNAP States reported that several factors limit access to retailers, including the rural nature of participating communities in two of the SNAP States, lack of public transportation, and the existence of food deserts. Respondents in urban WIC demonstration areas reported fewer barriers, but there were some, including language barriers among customers, and retailers not offering food delivery services. Although demonstration areas in each State had farmers markets, those in WIC demonstration areas do not accept WIC EBT cards, and only some markets in SNAP demonstration areas accept SNAP EBT cards.

¹⁴ Findings presented in this section are based on qualitative reports obtained in stakeholder interviews during the in-depth site visits. Since one of the objectives of the evaluation study is to assess differences between the SNAP and WIC models, it is often useful to organize grantee findings based on the model used in the demonstration. Analysis of quantitative data on the geographic locations of SNAP- and WIC-authorized vendors will be conducted for future evaluation reports.

4. Availability of Nutrition Education During the Summer

The SEBTC does not provide nutrition education to participants, nor is assessing nutrition education or knowledge a part of the evaluation study. However, it is useful to consider the general level of opportunities for nutrition education in the local community since it might influence benefit take-up and use. Grantees and their partners reported that some opportunities for nutrition education are available to children and families when school is out for the summer. Nutrition education is offered primarily through the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), and the WIC and SNAP programs, in the form of counseling, partnerships with university extension service classes, and website content. States also reported some nutrition education opportunities through such community venues as churches, health settings, YMCAs, and garden clubs that are funded by health advocacy organizations, health insurance providers, and grants from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Less common were nutrition education components linked to SFSP and Kids Café.¹⁵

C. Variations in the SEBTC Model

The POC grantees offered SEBTC benefits either through SNAP or WIC EBT systems. Within that framework, grantees were charged with determining key features of their program model, including, for SNAP grantees, whether to administer benefits with existing or new EBT cards. Another key contextual factor was the length of the summer school vacation at the local SFAs.

1. Overview of Program Models

FNS issued two separate RFAs to engage States to implement summer benefits through either the SNAP or WIC EBT systems in the POC year (FNS 2010a, 2010b). As pointed out in Chapter I, Connecticut, Missouri, and Oregon were awarded grants to offer benefits using SNAP EBT systems, whereas Michigan and Texas were awarded grants to offer summer benefits through WIC EBT systems. The SNAP sites issued \$60 per month per eligible child in SEBTC benefits on an EBT card using SNAP technology. The WIC sites allowed households to purchase specific packages of WIC-allowable foods that have a maximum cost of \$60 per month per eligible child using WIC EBT technology.

States that chose to use the SNAP system to issue benefits took one of two approaches: either to issue benefits on existing SNAP cards (termed the SNAP-hybrid model) or to issue separate cards for SNAP benefits and SEBTC benefits (termed the SNAP model). Missouri and Oregon chose the SNAP-hybrid approach. For this approach, the State issued \$60 in benefits per eligible child per month on existing EBT cards for participants already receiving SNAP benefits. Only households that did not receive SNAP received their SEBTC benefits on new EBT cards—identical in design to the SNAP cards. Connecticut used the “SNAP” approach under which all SEBTC participants, regardless of whether they had an active SNAP EBT card, received a new EBT card specifically designed for the demonstration.

The other two States—Michigan and Texas—used WIC EBT systems (termed the WIC model). The RFA allowed for States using the WIC model to provide EBT benefits using existing WIC EBT

¹⁵ Kids Café programs provide free meals and snacks and nutrition education to low-income children at locations where they already congregate in the after school hours (Feeding America 2011).

cards, if the household was already participating in WIC (FNS 2010b). However, SEBTC benefits were issued on a new EBT card regardless of whether the household already had an existing WIC EBT card in these two WIC model States. Each household received one food package per eligible child per month.

2. Active Versus Passive Consent

Before random assignment could occur, SFAs had to obtain consent from households to participate in the demonstration and to release contact information to the grantee and evaluator. Three—Connecticut, Michigan, and Oregon—chose to use an “active” consent process: households had to return a signed form if they wanted to “opt in” or have the opportunity to receive the benefit. Households that did not return the form were excluded from the study. Two sites—Missouri and Texas—chose a “passive” consent process: households had to return a signed form if they wished to “opt out” or not participate in the demonstration and evaluation.¹⁶ Those that did not return the form were automatically included in the study. The consent method had implications for the initial phase of implementation, as discussed in Chapter III.

3. Duration of Benefits Based on School Calendars

The duration of SEBTC benefits was directly tied to the school calendars within the target area. Food assistance was to be provided when children do not have access to school meals; therefore, the length of the benefit period depended on when 2010-2011 school year ended and 2011-2012 school year began in the participating SFAs. FNS provided guidance that States could issue benefits as early as the date that the first participating school let out for summer and end benefits on the day when the last participating school begins session again in the fall (FNS 2010a, 2010b).

The duration of benefits for the POC year ranged from 78 days in Missouri to 91 days in Michigan and Oregon, a difference of 13 days or approximately \$25 in benefits per child. As shown in Table II.2, the earliest school ended its 2010–2011 session on May 31 in Missouri. The latest school returned for the new 2011–2012 session on September 9 in Michigan. The average length of benefits across all five grantees was 85 days, and the average benefit amount was \$170 per child for the summer.

¹⁶ As discussed later in this chapter, in Texas, in order to get the benefit card, household heads had to be in contact with the grantee and receive training. However, whether or not they actively took this step, they already had consented to have a chance to receive the benefit and have their contact information released to the evaluator, and could not be eliminated from the evaluation sample without biasing the random assignment design.

Table II.2. Duration of the Summer Benefit

State	Last Day of School 2010-2011 (range across schools)	First Day of School 2011-2012 (range across schools)	First Day of Benefits	Last Day of Benefits	Number of Summer Benefit Days	Total Amount of Summer Benefit per Eligible Child
Connecticut	6/9/2011-6/24/2011 ^a	9/6/2011	6/17/2011	9/5/2011	81	\$158
Michigan	6/10/2011	9/10/2011	6/11/2011	9/9/2011	91	\$180
Missouri	5/31/2011-6/15/2011	8/16/2011-8/17/2011	6/1/2011	8/17/2011	78	\$154
Oregon	6/6/2011	9/6/2011	6/7/2011 ^b	9/5/2011	91	\$178
Texas	6/10/2011	8/22/2011	6/1/2011 ^c	8/21/2011	82	\$180

Source: Dates gathered during technical assistance efforts with the grantees. Amount of summer benefit calculated based on those dates.

^a Three of the school districts in Connecticut were scheduled to close prior to June 17, representing 3% of the student enrollment of the participating school districts. Although school was subsequently delayed in some schools until June 24th, FNS allowed the State to keep the June 17th as the benefit start date because the majority of eligible children were out of school by that date.

^b Oregon benefits were loaded onto EBT cards and available to households on June 1st; however, benefits were prorated based on the June 7th start of the summer.

^c Benefits were available to households on June 1st in Texas.

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III. IMPLEMENTATION EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES

During the POC year, the five grantees had to implement a new program model in a tight timeframe. As shown in Figure I.1, they worked through a series of activities to identify eligible participants and administer the benefit. They achieved a number of noteworthy successes but also experienced a range of challenges. This chapter describes the implementation experiences of the five grantees up through midsummer 2011. It describes each of the key steps necessary to identify eligible participants and obtain consent, adjust EBT systems, and administer the SEBTC benefits by the end of the 2010-2011 school year, as well as partnership, budget, and timing considerations that affected implementation.

A. Identifying Eligible Children and Households and Obtaining Consent

Before administering the SEBTC benefit, grantees and participating SFAs had to identify eligible children, group them into households, obtain household consent to participate in the demonstration and release their data to the grantee and evaluator. Once random assignment was completed, they also had to notify participants of their assignment to either the benefit or non-benefit group. All five grantees were successful in completing this process, although they faced several unexpected obstacles along the way.

1. Identifying Eligible Children and Households

As a first step toward implementation, grantees had to identify children in the demonstration area who were certified for FRP meals, and therefore eligible for the summer benefit. Because the program is administered to households, child-level data had to be grouped into households. These household-level data were needed for three purposes: (1) the initial mailing to obtain household consent for participation in the demonstration, (2) random assignment for receipt of the benefit, and (3) sampling and surveying households for the evaluation. The time needed for, and complexity of, this process were highly influenced by the types and quality of data available from the participating school districts, as well as the level of sophistication of their management information systems.

The success of the SEBTC demonstration and its evaluation relies on the ability of grantees and their partners to develop accurate lists of eligible households and ensure that contact information is up-to-date. Even if the demonstration were not being rigorously evaluated, this step is vital. If grantees are successful in these tasks, the full eligible population has a chance to participate in the demonstration, and, if selected, benefits in the correct amounts can be issued. For the evaluation, correct listings of households and contact information are essential for random assignment and also to enable high response rates for the survey, which is the principal source of outcome data.

All five grantees were able to identify eligible children and compile household lists with the assistance of the evaluation team; however, this was one of the most problematic processes during early implementation. All of the grantees and SFAs anticipated the need to prepare lists of eligible children. However, most encountered unexpected difficulties relating to the data available in school systems. Most SFAs have multiple student databases containing relevant demographic and contact information on eligible children and their households; NSLP and student records data often are housed separately and are collected or updated at different times, with one source often being more accurate than the other. Due to privacy concerns, the student record data, thought to be the most accurate, was not made available to grantees prior to the consent process. The SFAs also demonstrated different levels of sophistication in their ability to manipulate their data and therefore were not always able to provide the grantee and evaluator with the most up to date information.

Some of the grantees also included duplicate records of the same households and children on the lists, sometimes with slightly different contact information, so that it was not always clear if there was one household or two unique households.

In addition to issues related to providing and obtaining the most up-to-date information, grantees faced two additional challenges when forming lists of consenting households. The first was deciding when multiple families should be regarded as one household. The evaluation team decided it was important to preclude the possibility that a household made up of more than one family was inadvertently separated and therefore only part of the household would potentially receive the benefit. For this reason, when the team received lists of households, all children who appeared to be at the same address and unit were kept together as one household for the purposes of random assignment. Therefore, all families at that address would be assigned to receive the benefit or not to receive it. (More discussion on this issue is found in Chapter VI.) Grantees could subsequently decide whether to issue one or more EBT cards, based on additional information obtained from State record systems or directly from guardians.

The second challenge involved addressing the differences in data from NSLP applications versus data from direct certification. Households certified through an NSLP application include all children on a single application. Therefore, SFAs could group children into households using the application, regardless of whether or not the school records system included a family code (although in some cases, more than one application was submitted per household). However, NSLP records on children who are directly certified for FRP meals based on their SNAP and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) status did not usually include a family code. Although SNAP and Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) records group children into households, the agencies providing these records do not routinely share a household identifier with school districts. If the SFA's school records system did not include a household ID, assembling children into households was much more complicated.

Also contributing to the challenge of the task was the need to resolve details of eligibility for SEBTC benefits. The RFA for the POC year specified that all children in kindergarten through 12th grades certified for FRP meals were eligible for the SEBTC benefit (FNS 2010a, 2010b). However, as participating SFAs began developing lists, questions arose about the eligibility of specific student populations, including graduating 12th graders and children enrolled in pre-kindergarten, and other groups of children who are eligible for FRP meals, including children enrolled in foster care, homeless youth, and emancipated youth. The grantees also required guidance on how to handle situations when families claimed to have more children than were listed on consent materials, and whether and how to issue benefits for families who moved out of the demonstration area before they received their SEBTC cards. Grantees also asked if benefits for foster children should be issued separately from other children in the household so the card could follow the child if the guardian changed, and how households with homeless children should be configured. FNS provided feedback to grantees on eligibility as these cases emerged.

2. Obtaining Household Consent

As detailed in Chapter II, households with children eligible to receive the SEBTC benefit had to consent to participate in the demonstration and evaluation before their names could be submitted for random assignment. All of the grantees successfully completed the consent process and obtained at least the minimum number of households needed so that (1) the benefit could be issued to 2,500 children, and (2) 2,000 households (from both the benefit and non-benefit group) could be asked to

participate in the evaluation.¹⁷ Table III.1 provides the number of eligible and consenting children and households per site.

The issues encountered during the consent process differed between States that used active consent and those that used passive consent.¹⁸ Grantees that used passive consent (Missouri and Texas) were more likely to achieve high numbers of “consenting” households, given that few families (1-2%) chose to opt out of the demonstration.¹⁹ However, it is not clear whether the households that did not opt out had actually chosen to participate, or had ignored or never received the consent mailing. In Missouri, the letters to more than 10% of families were returned because of bad addresses and those families were removed from the study sample because they did not have a chance to opt out and would not receive a benefit card sent by mail. In Texas, the postal service did not return any mail with incorrect addresses for the consent mailing, which is not uncommon when there are large mailings, although, as noted below, it did return 15% of the mail sent by the grantee notifying families that they received the benefit, indicating that some portion of households included in the study never received the opportunity to opt out.

Table III.1. Consent Rates by Grantee

Grantee	Approximate # of Eligible Households in Demo Area	Approximate # of Eligible Children in Demo Area	Percentage of Households that Consented	Percentage of Children in Households that Consented
Passive Consent Grantees				
Missouri	10,864	19,745	89	89
Texas	20,236	38,291	99	99
Active Consent Grantees				
Connecticut	8,011	11,117	30	38
Michigan	10,603	16,417	37	47
Oregon	8,923	12,758	24	35

Source: Data obtained through technical assistance efforts and files submitted by grantees for random assignment, Spring 2011.

By contrast, the active consent process ensured that families received a consent letter and actively desired a chance to receive the SEBTC. However, many households that would have desired the benefit in active consent sites may not have opened the consent materials, understood the information, or taken the time to return forms even though they would have used the benefit if issued to them. As a result, consent rates for active consent sites were lower than some grantees

¹⁷ The evaluation’s goal was to complete at least 5,000 interviews in the summer, using a two-stage sample design. More information on the data collection approach is found in Chapter VI.

¹⁸ Grantees chose to use either an “active” consent process, in which households had to return a signed form if they wanted to “opt in” or have the opportunity to receive the benefit, or a “passive” consent process, whereby households had to return a signed form if they wished to “opt out” or not participate in the demonstration and evaluation.

¹⁹ Texas families had to opt out of having their contact information released to the grantee and evaluator. If they did not opt out, they could have been selected to participate in the demonstration and evaluation, whether or not they provided additional information required by the grantee and took up the benefit.

anticipated (from 24 to 37% of eligible households). Many grantees and SFAs were inexperienced with the process of obtaining consent from families to participate in a demonstration, and furthermore, it appeared that grantees, partners, and SFAs put varying levels of effort into the consent process. A more intense level of outreach applied consistently may have yielded higher rates in the active consent sites.

3. Notifying Households of the SEBTC Benefit

Once grantees developed the list of consenting households and random assignment was conducted, grantees had to notify households that would be receiving the benefit and provide information on next steps. All five grantees notified families assigned to the demonstration group by the middle of May. Two of the grantees had to contact households in the demonstration group a second time prior to issuing the benefit, to obtain additional information (parents' dates of birth, for example, parent social security number, or other information), which made it difficult to issue cards before the end of the school year. All grantees had at least some letters returned as undeliverable. The proportion of returned notification letters reached as high as 15% (in Texas), although some of these families were subsequently located.

Some parents who received advance letters for the evaluation survey were confused about whether they were getting the SEBTC benefit because they had not received a notification letter. The confusion was due in part to the overlapping timeline between household notification letter distribution and baseline interview implementation. (As noted in Chapter I, baseline survey implementation had to occur before the school year ended.) A small proportion of parents assigned to the non-benefit group called the grantee hotlines to express frustration because they misunderstood the advance letter for the survey and thought they were selected to receive the benefit. In one State, the non-benefit group did not receive notification that they had not been assigned the benefit but did receive an advance letter about the survey. In addition, some parents mistook the gift card that they received for completing the survey for the SEBTC EBT card.²⁰

B. Administering the SEBTC Benefit

Once households were notified of their random assignment, grantees still had to complete several key steps to administer the SEBTC benefit before the end of the school year and provide supports to participants throughout the summer. This section discusses the process of enrolling and training participants, rates of participation throughout the summer, the supports that grantees provided to participants as they accessed their benefits, and efforts to encourage use of the benefit.

1. Enrolling and Training Participants

Once households were notified and additional information was obtained, if necessary, grantees enrolled households and their children into the demonstration so benefits could be administered. At the end of the school year, all of the sites had completed the required steps for all or most of the households assigned to receive the benefit. Getting to that stage, however, was not without challenges.

²⁰ For more information about the survey and incentives provided to those who completed the survey, see Appendix B.

III. Implementation Experience and Challenges

For the grantees using the SNAP systems to issue SEBTC benefits, children who were randomly assigned to the benefit group and their parents or guardians had to be matched manually to State eligibility systems before benefits could be issued. This matching was not always straightforward because some data elements needed for matching (such as parents' dates of birth) are not part of school records and had to be obtained from parents or found otherwise. The manual processes used to match children to parents or guardians created the potential for human error, and, indeed, resulted in some inconsistencies when information was matched or updated, and issues with duplicate or dropped cases. Missouri and Oregon generated cases in the SNAP systems using dummy identifiers for data elements such as date of birth so the system would accept the case. This created minor problems in Missouri when parents lost their cards and had to replace them because their date of birth identifier did not match what was in the SNAP system. One State was also unable to match 19 children in 8 households assigned to the benefit to records in the State eligibility system and had to drop these households from the demonstration; the site replaced these children with households from the non-benefit group to ensure reaching the goal of issuing benefits to 2,500 children.

Once households were matched to the State database, States using SNAP systems to issue SEBTC benefits manually entered benefit values for all cases into their State eligibility system or the EBT administrative terminal to administer the benefit. Again, this manual process required significant staff time and was subject to data entry errors. Grantees would have preferred that their systems allow automated matching or systematic database entry and quality assurance review as with other programs. States with WIC systems used other approaches: Texas developed a program that loaded the file of selected households into the SEBTC database for issuing cards and benefits; Michigan developed a system mirroring the WIC eligibility system so SEBTC cases could be identified, set up, and issued benefits.

In Connecticut, one of the two States that needed additional information after notification, the grantee was still missing required information at the end of June (approximately two weeks after the school year ended) from 196 of the households (14%) assigned to the demonstration and was unable to issue cards to them at that time. The State continued attempts through the end of July to contact households that had not returned the required information. While 3 households responded that they no longer wanted the benefit or had moved out of the demonstration area, the grantee and its partners were able to obtain required information from 90 additional households, leaving 7% that could not be located.

Texas required households to attend in-person training to receive their card. Through the first week of benefits, 858 households (56%) had attended training and received a card. Through continued efforts by the grantee and its partners, the State was eventually able to distribute cards to all but 234 (15%) at trainings. In total, the State partner conducted 27 one-hour sessions in either English or Spanish, each attended by 20 to 100 participants. They also followed up with individual trainings on request, in the local office or the participant's home. The training went well overall, but the grantee and its partners suggested that in the second year of the demonstration, families already on WIC could participate in a separate, shorter training focusing only on SEBTC program aspects. In addition to cards not distributed at trainings, 26 households declined the benefit and 122 households moved out of the demonstration area, for a total of 382 of households (25%) not receiving the benefit (households that declined the benefit or moved out of the demonstration area are not counted in computing the proportion of households that were not trained).

Another State also hosted one 30-minute training session for participating households but attendance was not required to receive an SEBTC card. The grantee cited low attendance and also

reported that parts of the presentation that relied on videos, created for a special SEBTC website, did not occur because families did not have easy access to the internet at home. Families were instructed to use the website to watch the videos at a later time at home.

2. Benefit Issuance and Participation Rates

The majority of households who were assigned to the benefit group received an EBT card and used benefits in the first benefit issuance cycle. In fact, the number of households and children assigned benefits was approximately equal to the number of households and children issued benefits, except in Connecticut. However, even where these numbers were approximately equal, some assigned households were not issued benefits, and some additional households received benefits in order to provide benefits to all eligible children in a household (as explained below). The number of households issued benefits ranged from 1,226 in Oregon to 1,527 in Texas. The number of children issued benefits ranged from 2,239 in Connecticut to 2,505 in Michigan. Table III.2 presents the total number of households and children issued benefits in each site during the first issuance cycle.

Table III.2. SEBTC Issuance and Participation Among Households

Site	Unit	Number Assigned Benefits	Number Issued Benefits	Percent Issued Benefits	Number Using Benefits in First Issuance Cycle	Percent Issued Benefits in First Cycle that Used Benefits
Connecticut	Households	1,425	1,280	89.8	962	75.2 ^a
	Children	2,501	2,239	89.5	1,747	78.0
Michigan	Households	1,360	1,360	100.0	1,152	84.7
	Children	2,502	2,505	100.1	2,188	87.3
Missouri	Households	1,446	1,479	102.2	1,269	85.8
	Children	2,505	2,539	101.4	2,216	87.3
Oregon	Households	1,207	1,226	101.6	1,188	96.9
	Children	2,503	2,481	99.1	2,420	97.5
Texas	Households	1,543	1,527	99.0	1,118	73.2
	Children	2,508	2,480	98.9	1,877	75.7

Sources: Household data files for demonstration group, SEBTC issuance and transaction data for the first issuance cycle (see Table IV.1), 2011

Notes: The issuance cycle is the period starting when the first month's benefits were available and ending on the last day before the second month's benefits were available. The number of days in each State's cycle varies; therefore, results should be viewed with the understanding that these data may change over the course of the full POC period. See Chapter IV for more details.

Differences between the number assigned benefits and the number issued benefits are due to two factors: (1) Households were not issued benefits if they refused the benefit or left the demonstration area before the end of school; (2) In some sites, households were added when eligible children were determined to be in different households than as listed in the original household file. All households that were issued benefits are counted, even if their SEBTC cards were later returned undelivered or if they did not pick up their cards where this was required.

^a The data for Connecticut included only the first 14 days of the demonstration; the household participation rate was 91.4% for the month of July, indicating a higher rate after recipients had more time to use the cards.

There are several reasons why the number of households and children assigned to the benefit group does not match the number issued. In some cases the intended recipients moved out of the demonstration area prior to the start of the pilot; in a few instances, individuals refused the cards and chose not to participate in the program. Some letters containing EBT cards were returned with no forwarding address. If the grantee could not locate the families, the cards were destroyed and no benefits were issued. As mentioned previously, in Connecticut, some families did not return additional information required to issue the cards. On the other hand, some households were added. If eligible children who were originally in the same household became members of different households, each of those households would be eligible to receive benefits. In some cases, eligible school-age children were added if they were identified in households assigned to get the benefit.

Of the households issued benefits, at least 73% in each site used their cards in the first issuance cycle to access benefits. Table III.2 shows that participation rates ranged from 73% in Texas to 97% in Oregon. Overall, the two SNAP-hybrid sites had the highest participation rates. This could be due in part to the model; households use the same card to access SNAP and SEBTC (if they are SNAP recipients) and the SEBTC benefits are the first benefits used. Although Michigan uses a WIC model, and therefore participation did not happen automatically as with the SNAP-hybrid sites, the participation rate was nearly as high as Missouri's. Connecticut and Texas had the lowest participation rates—75% and 73%, respectively, for reasons described in the section above.

3. Providing Participant Supports After Benefit Administration

Once households were issued cards, grantees and their partners provided support to families and continued dealing with a range of issues and special cases as households attempted to activate their cards and use their benefits. Some of these strategies tapped the existing supports available through the SNAP or WIC programs; others were developed specifically for the SEBTC demonstration. Issues requiring resolution included problems with personal identification numbers (PINs) for the card, households claiming that not all eligible children in the family were receiving benefits, changes in children's guardians, and households not accessing their benefits.²¹

All five States used the existing SNAP or WIC customer support telephone numbers to address EBT card issues, and four also instituted new SEBTC telephone numbers to answer questions from families in the benefit group. Michigan provided additional supports to families, including an SEBTC website and a third phone number for questions about eligibility, but found that there were not many users of the website and the three phone numbers were confusing. Texas provided in-person customer support through the local partner that provided training.

Three States (Oregon, Michigan, and Missouri) tracked the questions posed by households on their hotlines: Oregon received about 50 calls and Michigan and Missouri received between 800 and 1,100. High call volumes were attributed to numerous hang-ups and non-demonstration families wanting to know how to sign up for SEBTC. Many calls were also from consenting households inquiring about whether they were selected for the benefit, and, as previously noted, from non-benefit group households confused about the baseline survey. In addition, a smaller number of

²¹ Similar issues with changes in guardians and households clarifying the numbers of eligible children also arose during benefit notifications.

households assigned to the benefit group asked why they had not yet received EBT cards, reported problems with EBT card activation, or asked which SEBTC foods could be purchased.

All five States reported at least some challenges related to PINs, whether they were automatically generated and sent to households (Missouri and Texas) or guardians could choose their own PINs (Connecticut, Michigan, and Oregon). Reported problems included parents' difficulty remembering PIN numbers or understanding the verification of identity, or how to enter the PIN number. Households unable to PIN their cards or change their PIN were instructed to contact a member of the demonstration team for one-on-one assistance.

All five States also received requests from some households to add benefits to their card because eligible children in their family were not accounted for, although only Missouri reported this as a common issue. In some cases, the children who had not been included in the original benefit issuance attended private or charter schools; in other cases, there was an error in the SFA's list of eligible children or in the process of grouping children into households. After learning about such requests, FNS determined in late May that grantees could issue benefits for these additional children. Four of the five developed procedures to add benefits for these children.

Oregon's SNAP system addressed instances when a child in a SNAP household moved to another household or changed guardians, as this is the way the system is set up for all SNAP cases. If the household composition in the SNAP case changed in the State database, the SEBTC benefits were automatically adjusted.

4. Efforts to Encourage Use of Benefits

States with available time and resources made efforts to encourage the use of SEBTC benefits. Four grantees (Connecticut, Missouri, Texas, and Oregon) sent reminders to households either by mail or text message with the date when their benefits would expire or to draw down the funds before they were no longer available. Two States made efforts beyond sending reminders. Missouri actively encouraged households to use their benefits during the summer period beyond their expiration notifications. The grantee's community partner reached out to individual households that had not yet accessed their benefits to determine the reasons and found that many of these households did not speak English and that prevented them from understanding the demonstration materials and nature of the program. A smaller proportion reported that they simply did not want the benefit. There were no cases identified where the guardians told the community partner that they had not received the card. Texas conducted a community event to encourage use of benefits and healthy eating. (Detailed analysis of benefit usage in the first issuance cycle is found in Chapter IV.)

C. EBT System Modifications and Support Activities for EBT Cards

Conventional online EBT is similar to a debit card transaction in that it uses a magnetic stripe card and requires a PIN to authenticate the transaction. The transaction is sent at the time of the purchase through commercial credit/debit networks for authorization by the EBT system's central (or "host") computer. SNAP EBT, as implemented by all States and territories, follows this model. As with credit/debit cards, SNAP cards are portable, meaning that a card issued in one State can be

used in any State. SNAP benefits may be used only to purchase food items at SNAP retailer locations that are authorized by FNS.²²

WIC EBT systems are different. The WIC program issues a tailored set of foods to each recipient, from a list of those that can be paid for by the WIC program. WIC EBT systems must therefore assure that only specific WIC “allowable foods” prescribed for an individual are paid for with the benefit card. A State with WIC EBT may use online transaction technology, similar to the way that SNAP EBT systems operate, or an offline transaction using a “smart card.” A smart card has an embedded chip that includes information about the specific foods available to the card holder and a processor.²³ The Michigan SEBTC grantee has an online system. The Texas grantee is using an offline, or smart card, approach.

Each of the States and their respective EBT processors and contractors completed any necessary system modifications in time to issue SEBTC cards and benefits at the end of the 2010-2011 school year.²⁴ These modifications may have included (1) account setup, (2) card issuance and re-issuance, (3) benefit processing, (4) cardholder support, (5) benefit expiration and expungement, and (6) benefit settlement and reconciliation.

1. Account Setup

Two types of modifications were necessary to enable account setup processes for SEBTC. First, systems in all five States required a new SEBTC program designation so SEBTC funds or WIC food items purchased with SEBTC funds could be tracked within the systems from issuance through redemption and settlement. Second, both States using WIC technologies also required new software to originate accounts and issue SEBTC benefits to the EBT systems without meeting all the issuance rules of the WIC program. States using SNAP technologies did not modify their systems beyond the program designation. Two of these States were able to use a direct file transfer from their State SNAP eligibility systems to set up SEBTC accounts; the third used a manual data entry process through the SNAP EBT administrative terminal function to avoid enrolling SEBTC participants in their State system.

2. Card Issuance and Re-issuance

As previously noted, cards were issued by mail by four of the five grantees; in Texas they were distributed in-person after participants attended training. Of note, Connecticut had to issue cards a second time because of an error: it sent the company that produced the EBT cards a different account number than was sent to the EBT processor for account setup and benefit issuance and the first cards distributed did not work. Although this problem was identified on the first day of benefit use and new cards were mailed the next day, this created confusion for households and delayed

²² See <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/retailers/store-eligibility.htm> for more information on SNAP retailer eligibility.

²³ Because the WIC EBT purchase transaction occurs between the smart card and the card acceptance terminal, there is no real-time communication with the EBT host system during the transaction. As a result, the transaction is referred to as an off-line transaction.

²⁴ Because the types of allowable purchases mimic SNAP and WIC Program food types, no changes were required to retailer electronic cash register systems, point of sale hardware or software, or third party processor systems, or to the Michigan and Texas WIC Universal Product Code (UPC) databases.

receipt of benefit by a few days. The error may have also reduced the rate of participation in the first month. In another State, about 40 cards were also issued to SEBTC participants with the incorrect program logo; new cards were issued quickly, and these households were told they could use either card.

Replacement cards for online systems were handled according to the State's existing procedures. The online system replaces cards overnight, and, therefore, cards are replaced faster than in the offline system. Texas used an offline system, in which lost and stolen cards were reported directly to the State WIC program for re-issuance of replacement cards since the local WIC clinics that normally re-issue cards were not involved with SEBTC. Once benefits were loaded onto cards, the cards were shipped back to the local partner to distribute.

3. Account Processing

Each EBT processor had to establish a new sub-account within its system to separate SEBTC benefits and funds from SNAP and WIC and, in SNAP-hybrid sites, establish rules for families that received both SEBTC and SNAP about which benefits were to be used first. For these latter States, the EBT processors used a "first-in first-out" process that draws down funds when a SEBTC recipient who is also receiving SNAP uses a card based on the order that benefits were issued. If a household was receiving both SNAP and SEBTC, any existing SNAP balance would have to be drawn down before the household could access SEBTC. During the summer months, the processors issued SEBTC benefits before SNAP benefits to allow SEBTC to have first priority for use. In the State using a separate SNAP and SEBTC card, card accounts contain only SEBTC benefits. Benefits are drawn on a first-in first-out basis but benefit priorities do not apply.

4. Cardholder Support

EBT processors required few changes in cardholder support in the four grantee States using online EBT for SEBTC. Processors provided new scripts for live customer service representatives to answer cardholder questions. One EBT processor also changed its integrated voice response (IVR) to point SEBTC program cardholders to PIN selection functions. In addition, two EBT processors added messages to their IVR prompts to inform callers that enrollment was closed, after customer service representatives received calls from parents and guardians asking how they could enroll in the program. Since Texas (the State using the off-line EBT system) decided that WIC customer service staff would re-issue cards instead of staff at the WIC clinics, it trained three customer service representatives to respond to cardholder requests and to handle re-issuances. Across all five States, processors reported little if any change from normal call center volumes, with the exception of the one EBT processor fielding calls during the first few days after the initial mailing of invalid cards.

5. Benefit Expiration and Expungement

When benefits are issued through an EBT system, the processor must ensure that benefits expire and can no longer be accessed by the participant, according to program rules. The processor must also expunge or remove the benefits from the system entirely according to these rules. WIC EBT benefits are issued with a beginning and end date and expire as of the end date. The SEBTC demonstration followed this same model with benefits expiring before the first day of the next summer month. For SNAP, benefits do not have a predetermined expiration date, but EBT systems expunge SNAP benefits if they remain unused for a period of one year. Because demonstration benefits must expire at the end of the summer and be expunged on a set date, system modifications

were needed for three grantees using a SNAP-model approach, to allow that SEBTC benefits were expunged but any other program benefits, including SNAP, to remain in the account.

6. Settlement and Reconciliation

The settlement and reconciliation processes are the final steps in benefit administration. For SNAP, EBT systems post a SNAP issuance file each day to a special account, called a letter of credit (LOC). Each day, the EBT system posts a LOC file to this account to draw the funds necessary to settle payments to retailers accepting SNAP transactions. At the same time, EBT systems create and post a redemption data file to the Store Tracking and Redemption Subsystem II (STARS), which FNS uses to monitor retailer redemption activity. The amount paid to the EBT processor's account for settlement to retailers must reconcile against the amount paid to retailers in STARS.

The U.S. Treasury Department and FNS required that SEBTC funds be tracked, settled, and reconciled separately from SNAP because monies are coming from two different funding sources. For SNAP EBT systems to automate the settlement process, a separate SEBTC LOC must be posted daily to the special account and a separate file for SEBTC redemptions must be sent to STARS. However, it was not clear when grantees were responding to the RFA that separate LOC and STARS files would be required. Both SNAP EBT processors were able to accommodate this change after negotiations with FNS, although one had to rely on a manual process for one of its States.

The settlement and reconciliation processes are slightly different for the WIC EBT systems. Once separate LOCs were established for the demonstration, no modifications to the WIC EBT systems were needed for SEBTC settlement.

D. Other Factors Influencing Implementation

A range of other factors affected the implementation of the SEBTC demonstration, including the training of retailers who would redeem benefits from participants, the relationships established between State and local partners, the budget and staff time required, interaction with the SFSP, and the very condensed timeline for the demonstration.

1. Training of Retailers

Retailers redeeming SNAP or WIC benefits could potentially be affected by SEBTC. All five States informed retailers about the demonstration to prepare them for potential questions from customers or cashiers. The grantees distributed letters to retailer locations and printed press releases in retailer association newsletters that described SEBTC and addressed retailers' potential questions.

Both WIC States also hosted in-person training for retailers during the week before the benefit period began. During the trainings, demonstration staff discussed that SEBTC cards should read like WIC EBT cards despite the different logos, gave retailers guidelines about whether to process a WIC or SEBTC cards first, explained how the program could potentially increase grocers' WIC vendor business, and discussed which food items were included in the SEBTC food package. Texas hosted three training sessions with 72 of the 78 retailers in the demonstration area attending, as well as a follow-up training for the staff at one superstore. Retailers who attended the main training reported it went well and was understandable. Michigan hosted two training sessions with 32 of 76 retailers. Retailers who did not attend training said the written documentation was sufficient. None

of the three SNAP States provided retailer training beyond distributing letters and press releases mentioned above because the SEBTC benefits were redeemed in the same way as SNAP benefits, requiring no modification of EBT systems or cashier procedures at retailers.

Retailers in all States were able to use the existing SNAP and WIC helpline phone numbers if they had questions about SEBTC. Michigan and Oregon also supplied retailers with SEBTC help lines, although they reported very few calls to these numbers. Michigan also dedicated a part of the SEBTC website to the retailer audience.

2. State and Local Partnerships and Communication Flow

One of the key challenges in issuing the SEBTC benefit was that it necessitated collaboration between two systems that generally operate separately—FRP meals eligibility and either SNAP or WIC. This required the reconciliation of different federal and State program rules and approaches, such as data requirements. It also meant that staff in several agencies had to work together, often for the first time. In many cases, there were unanticipated systems issues, related to the types of information required by SNAP or WIC and FRP systems, and different organizational cultures. During this POC year, grantees and their partners worked hard to overcome those inconsistencies and to create a system where different programs worked together to achieve a common goal.

Although there were organizational challenges, all of the grantees and major partners were clear that the ultimate goal was the successful launch of the SEBTC program in the demonstration area. To achieve this, States took a variety of approaches to dividing responsibilities across participating organizations. While many were comfortable with the division of labor, key staff members in some sites appeared to have differing opinions on the success and appropriateness of those approaches. Four States had anticipated that at least one of their major partners would have been more involved in the demonstration than turned out to be the case. Also, staff members in three sites questioned choices about which State agency was the most appropriate to lead the program.

Despite these issues, most participating agencies were able to understand the strengths and weaknesses of each partner and develop strategies to successfully implement the demonstration. All States indicated that the staff members at various agencies generally worked well together and were able to strengthen current or develop new relationships among partner agencies. Frequent communication from very early stages of implementation aided this process.

The extent and quality of communication with participating SFAs also varied across grantees, creating some inconsistencies in how each SFA approached the development of lists of eligible children and households as well as the consent process. In States with only a single participating SFA, the SFA was an active partner from the start of the demonstration, and expectations for its involvement were clear. In States with more than one participating SFA, some of the SFAs appeared to be less clear about grantee expectations and the processes to be followed for key tasks. At the same time, grantees had less information than needed about how SFAs were approaching the consent process.

3. Level of Effort Needed, State Budget Issues, and Competing Demands for State Staff Time

States compensated for budget-related challenges by leveraging additional time and resources from State and local partners. At least one major partner in four of the five States reported that the grant budget was not sufficient because they had not anticipated the level of effort required during

the first few months of the demonstration, particularly for EBT systems changes and household list preparation. Most States recommended that at least one full-time staff member be dedicated to the demonstration to serve as the point person for all partners and to keep the project on track.

State budget concerns and natural disasters affected implementation in four of the five States. Early retirements and layoffs in Connecticut and Texas required demonstration staff to take on additional responsibilities that limited the time they could spend on SEBTC. Mandatory furloughs in Oregon limited staff time for the demonstration as well. In Missouri, staff from several of the lead agencies had to assist in emergency aid efforts related to several natural disasters, and, therefore, had to spend significant in-kind hours to successfully complete demonstration activities.

4. Interaction with the Summer Food Service Program

In all five States, the agency responsible for administering SFSP was the grantee or a partner in the SEBTC demonstration. As FNS intended, States reported viewing the two programs as complementary, rather than in competition. States reported various ways in which SFSP was promoted among SEBTC households. SFSP staff members and advocates typically played an advisory role during the grant application process and demonstration planning phase. Moreover, Oregon used the demonstration as an opportunity to actively promote SFSP among the eligible population during the notification process, in which all households in both the benefit and non-benefit groups received information about how to access SFSP sites. Texas had an active SFSP marketing campaign. Connecticut and Michigan expressed interest in this type of cross-marketing to promote awareness and participation in 2011-2012.

However, few local SFSP sponsors and site managers interviewed for the evaluation were aware that the SEBTC demonstration was being implemented unless they were SFAs directly involved in demonstration startup activities. Non-SFA sponsors who were aware of the program had few details or expressed misperceptions about the nature of and eligibility criteria for the program.

5. The Pace of Implementation

The implementation pace was extremely fast in this POC year. Grants were awarded in December 2010, and summer benefits were to begin before the middle of June 2011. With less than six months to complete preparations, the grantees and their partners displayed tremendous perseverance in their efforts to meet established schedules. When facing issues or questions requiring resolution, they demonstrated an ability to adapt to change, and generally communicated quickly and effectively to move the demonstration to the next stage.

Yet, most grantees expressed frustration about the timeline, especially when new requirements emerged. Staff in these States and local areas felt that with more time they could have anticipated more of the challenges, developed more effective ways of conducting implementation, and tapped other resources. In this first year, some steps in the implementation process took longer than expected, particularly the creation and cleaning of household files for random assignment.

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IV. USE OF EBT BENEFITS

The EBT systems used to deliver SEBTC benefits to eligible households with children provide data on how and when benefits were activated or used for the first time, how much was spent each time, what proportion of benefits was used, and when households exhausted all of the benefit. In this chapter we present the patterns of SEBTC benefit use at the household level, using the SEBTC transaction data for the first issuance cycle. Connecticut is a special case in this report because of the short period of the issuance cycle; this will be updated for Connecticut and all other sites for the Final 2011 Evaluation Report.

A. First Issuance Cycle of SEBTC Benefits

For all five sites, we obtained and analyzed records of SEBTC transactions during the first benefit issuance cycle, that is, the period starting when the first month's benefits were available and ending on the last day before the second month's benefits were available. Connecticut's first issuance period was half as long as the other sites in the first month of the benefit (14 days versus 30 days), and therefore the results shown are not directly comparable to the other sites for this report. The dates covered by the data included in this report are listed in Table IV.1.

Table IV.1. Period of the First Issuance Cycle of SEBTC Benefits, By Site

State	SEBTC Model	Period	Value Per Eligible Child for First Issuance Period
Connecticut	SNAP	06/17/11-06/30/11 (14 days)	28
Michigan	WIC	06/11/11-07/10/11 (30 days)	47.67 ^a
Missouri	SNAP-Hybrid	05/31/11-06/29/11 (30 days)	60
Oregon	SNAP-Hybrid	06/01/11-06/30/11 (30 days of activity; benefits pro-rated for 23 days from 06/08-06/30)	46
Texas	WIC	06/01/11-06/30/11 (30 days)	52.25 ^a

Source: FNS communications with States and EBT transaction data, 2011.

^a Reflects dollar value of redeemed items in the WIC food package in the respective states.

The transaction data differed between the SNAP and WIC model sites. Grantees using the SNAP model provided data on the date, time, and dollar value of each credit and debit to the account.²⁵ A purchase transaction represents the total amount spent in a particular location at one time for any number of SNAP-eligible items. The WIC model sites also provided data on the date, time, and dollar value of each transaction. Unlike the SNAP data, the WIC data have separate transactions for each category of foods issued and redeemed, allowing for the analysis of redemptions at the aggregate and food category levels for the SEBTC WIC model sites.²⁶

²⁵ Credits include issuances, returns credited by retailers, and adjustments for processing errors. Debits include purchases, cancelled issuances, and adjustments.

²⁶ In Michigan there is a set of issuance transactions for each child in the household. In Texas there is a single set of issuance transactions for each card, and each household usually received one card. The transaction data provide the actual amount paid to the retailer for the food items.

B. Patterns of SEBTC Benefit Use

In Table IV.2 we show the distribution of households by redemption rate (that is, percentage of benefits redeemed). In keeping with overall participation rates described in Chapter III, overall redemption rates were highest in Oregon and lowest in Texas and Connecticut. In general, there were two distinct groups of demonstration households: those that did not use any benefits, and those that used most or all. The percentage of households not redeeming any benefits ranged from 3.1% in Oregon to 26.8% in Texas. Conversely, the percentage of households redeeming all of their benefits ranged from 7.9% in Michigan to 82.0% in Oregon. In all five sites, more than half of the households redeemed at least 75% of their benefits. The distribution was skewed toward higher redemption rates in Missouri and Oregon than in the other three sites. Michigan had the highest percentage of households (11.4%) with partial redemptions greater than \$0 and less than 50% (partial redemptions amounted to less than 5% in the other sites).

Table IV.2. Percentage of Households by Percentage of Benefits Redeemed in the First Issuance Cycle (Percentage of Demonstration Households)

Site	Percentage of Benefits Redeemed					100%
	None	>0 and ≤25%	>25 and ≤50%	>50 and ≤75%	>75 and <100%	
Connecticut ^a	24.9	1.6	2.6	4.3	33.6	33.0
Michigan	15.3	2.5	8.9	21.3	44.1	7.9
Missouri	14.2	0.5	0.4	1.2	21.8	61.9
Oregon	3.1	0.1	0.0	0.7	14.2	82.0
Texas	26.8	0.9	2.0	4.3	49.3	16.8

Source: SEBTC transaction data for the first issuance cycle (see Table IV.1), 2011.

^a In the full month of July, 8.6% of households in Connecticut had no redemptions, and 95% of benefits were redeemed. Connecticut's participation and redemption rates were higher in July compared to the two weeks in the first issuance period in June. Due to the timing of data and the report it was not possible to present July data for all grantees; data for the full summer benefit period will be included in the Final 2011 Evaluation Report for all sites.

The total amount of benefits issued in the first issuance cycle ranged from \$62,292 in Connecticut to \$152,340 in Missouri. In Table IV.3 we present the average SEBTC benefits issued to and redeemed by demonstration group households. The average benefit issued per household ranged from \$48.98 in Connecticut to \$103.00 in Missouri. As described in Chapter II, the benefit per child varied across sites because of the length of the first benefit period and the benefit package (Table IV.1). In each site, the household benefit varied, depending on the number of eligible children.

As shown in Table IV.3, the average redemption per household was around \$90 in Missouri and Oregon (\$88.26 and \$89.93, respectively), around \$60 in Michigan and Texas (\$60.16 and \$59.16), and much less (\$34.94) in Connecticut (with the shorter first-issuance period).²⁷ The differences

²⁷ In the full month of July, the average benefit issued per household in Connecticut was \$110.13, and the average benefit redeemed was \$104.61. Due to the timing of the data and the report it was not possible to present July data for all grantees, but data for the full summer benefit period will be included in the Final 2011 Evaluation Report.

IV. Use of EBT Benefits

across the sites in average redemption per household reflect both the differences in benefits and the redemption rates, which were, as previously noted, highest in Oregon and lowest in Texas and Connecticut.

Table IV.3. Distribution of Demonstration Households by Redemption Amount

Site	Average \$ Issued per Household	Average \$ Redeemed per Household	25 th Percentile of \$ Redeemed	Median \$ Redeemed	75 th Percentile of \$ Redeemed	Maximum \$ Redeemed
Connecticut	48.98	34.94	1.80	28.00	56.00	188.77
Michigan	87.80	59.96	26.54	43.65	86.61	357.95
Missouri	103.00	88.26	60.00	60.00	120.00	360.00
Oregon	93.09	89.93	46.00	92.00	137.65	412.12
Texas	84.87	59.16	0.00	50.41	99.61	305.93

Source: SEBTC transaction data for the first issuance cycle, 2011.

Note: Calculations are based on all households with positive amount net issued, including those with \$0 redeemed.

Also detailed in Table IV.3 is information about the amount of benefits redeemed by households at the 25th, median, and 75th percentiles. In the SNAP sites, the distributions of dollars redeemed among households were quite different. In Connecticut, where one-quarter of the households redeemed no benefits, households at the 25th percentile redeemed \$1.80 or less. In contrast, the redemptions for similar households in Missouri and Oregon were close to the full benefit for one child in both Missouri and Oregon. The median household redeemed the full benefit for one child in Connecticut (\$28.00) and Missouri (\$60.00), whereas the median was the benefit for two children (\$92.00) in Oregon. Similarly, the 75th percentile of dollars redeemed per household was the full benefit for two children in Connecticut (\$56.00) and Missouri (\$120.00) but higher in Oregon (\$137.65). As shown in Table IV.1, the average amount for the SEBTC benefits in the two WIC sites, Michigan and Texas, was \$50.41 and \$52.25, respectively. In these sites, the median amount redeemed was slightly below the benefit for one child (\$43.65 and \$50.41, respectively).

As shown in Table IV.4, redemption rates for SNAP households were higher than for non-SNAP households in Missouri and Oregon, but the two groups had similar redemption rates in Connecticut. A small percentage of SNAP households did not use any benefits in Missouri (2.7%) and Oregon (0.9%), while substantially greater percentages of non-SNAP households did not use any benefits (32.7% in Missouri and 13% in Oregon). At the other extreme, the gap between SNAP and non-SNAP households was even larger in the percentage using all benefits (78.1% versus 28.8% in Missouri, and 90.5% versus 43.8% in Oregon).

Non-SNAP households in these two sites were, however, still more likely than not to redeem 75% of benefits or more. In Connecticut, the percentages of households in all categories of redemption rates were similar, and non-SNAP households were more likely than SNAP households to redeem all of their benefits (34.6% versus 29.6%).

Table IV.4. Percentage of Demonstration Households by Percentage of Benefits Redeemed in the First Issuance Cycle (Percentage of Households), by SNAP Status

	Percentage of Benefits Redeemed					
Site	None	>0 and ≤25%	>25 and ≤50%	>50 and ≤75%	>75 and <100%	100%
Connecticut						
SNAP households	23.6	2.9	2.4	4.6	36.9	29.6
Non-SNAP households	25.6	1.0	2.7	4.2	32.0	34.6
Missouri						
SNAP households	2.7	0.4	0.1	0.4	18.3	78.1
Non-SNAP households	32.7	0.8	1.0	2.9	28.8	28.8
Oregon						
SNAP households	0.9	0.1	0.0	0.3	8.2	90.5
Non-SNAP households	13.0	0.0	0.0	2.2	41.1	43.8

Source: SEBTC transaction data for the first issuance cycle, 2011.

Note: SNAP status was determined by matching SEBTC and SNAP transaction records by case number. Thus, any SEBTC households with no SNAP transactions during the initial benefit cycle are labeled as non-SNAP households. SNAP status is not available for SEBTC-WIC model sites (Michigan and Texas).

C. Patterns of Benefit Redemption by Food Category in WIC Sites

In Table IV.5 we provide data on the redemption rate and participation rate (that is, percent of households with any redemption) by food category for the sites using the WIC SEBTC model. Overall, Michigan had substantially more households with some redemptions than Texas (84.7% versus 73.2%), but essentially the same percentage of benefits redeemed (68.3% versus 69.7%). In Michigan, the percentage of benefits redeemed ranged widely across food groups, from 39.9% of whole grain products (breads, tortillas, rice, and oatmeal) to 78.7% of juice. The range was smaller in Texas, from 60.5% of canned fish (tuna and salmon) to 74.2% of eggs. In both sites, the top four foods, in terms of percentages redeemed were among the following five categories: milk, cheese, eggs, juice, and fruits and vegetables. Percentages of households with *any* redemptions in each food category were usually but not always higher than the percentage of benefits redeemed. Appendix C contains additional information on the dollar value of benefits issued and redeemed for each food category.

IV. Use of EBT Benefits

Table IV.5. Benefit Redemption and Participation Rates in the First Issuance Cycle, by Food Category (SEBTC-WIC Model Sites in the POC Year)

Food Type	Unit	Per Child	Percent Redeemed ^a	Percent of Households with Any Redemptions
Michigan Redemption and Participation Rates by Food Categories^{a,b}				
Milk Skim, 1/2%, 1%, 2%	Gallon	2	75.4	81.5
Cheese	Lbs	0.5	69.2	66.5
Eggs	Dozen	1	77.3	77.3
Juice 64oz Bottle/ Equivalent	Container	1	78.7	75.8
Cereal	Oz	36	66.8	74.7
Dry/Canned Beans & Peanut Butter	unit	1.5	53.1	64.5
Tuna/Salmon	Oz	15	60.6	58.2
Bread/Tortillas/Rice/ Oatmeal	lbs	2	39.9	61.7
Fruits/Vegetables	\$	14 ^b	74.9	82.6
Total			68.3	84.7
Texas Redemption and Participation Rates by Food Categories^a				
Milk Skim, 1/2%, 1%, 2%	Gallon	3	70.5	72.4
Cheese	Lbs	1	73.5	71.5
Eggs	Dozen	1	74.2	71.9
Juice 64oz Bottle/ Equivalent	Container	1	72.1	69.4
Cereal	oz	36	72.1	70.9
Dry/Canned Beans & Peanut Butter	unit	2	60.8	68.4
Tuna/Salmon	oz	18	60.5	65.9
Bread/Tortillas/Rice/ Oatmeal	lbs	3	68.8	68.9
Fruits/Vegetables	\$	16	71.0	72.4
Total			69.7	73.2

Source: SEBTC transaction data for Michigan and Texas in the first issuance cycle, 2011.

^a The percentage redeemed was computed using the total number of units redeemed as a percentage of the total number issued, computed for the whole sample, and not just those with any redemption.

^b Michigan renegotiated the SEBTC food package with FNS to insure that the package did not exceed the reimbursable amount per child (\$60) due to local food prices.

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V. CHARACTERISTICS OF HOUSEHOLDS AT BASELINE

In this chapter we describe the characteristics of households in the SEBTC demonstration, using data from the spring 2011 baseline household survey, a core component of the impact study for the SEBTC evaluation. The evaluation research design called for two surveys during the POC year, each involving a minimum of 5,000 interviews with the families who had been selected to be in the evaluation study. In the full demonstration year (2011-2012), when the SEBTC will be implemented in as many as 15 demonstration areas, the evaluation will survey approximately 27,000 households during the school year, and again in the summer. The baseline survey had to be conducted before the end of the 2010-2011 school year to obtain an estimate of household food security during the school year, and the summer survey had to be completed at least 30 days after the end of the school year but before the new school year began. The major purposes of the 2011 baseline interviews include:

- Providing descriptive information about the households that consented to participate in the SEBTC demonstration
- Obtaining a preliminary prevalence rate of VLFS among children in the school year. When the summer interviews are completed, these data will be used to determine the extent to which the SEBTC demonstrations closed the gap between the school-year and the summer prevalence of VLFS among children
- Determining the equivalence of the treatment and control groups with respect to the random assignment process
- Demonstrating that key elements of the data collection approach could be successfully accomplished before the full demonstration year, when the scale of the data collection effort will be five times greater

This chapter provides an overview of the household survey, the development and use of analysis weights, and summary information about the characteristics of households at baseline. In the next chapter we describe the balance between treatment and control groups and specific aspects of the data collection that contributed to baseline survey response rates.

A. Overview of Household Survey

The analysis sample for the POC year is a subsample of families who consented to participate in the evaluation, some of whom were randomly assigned to receive the SEBTC benefit and some who were not. The evaluation sample included equal numbers from each of the two groups, also selected at random. We attempted to complete baseline interviews with respondents from all families in the evaluation sample. A total of 5,837 households completed the baseline interview, resulting in a weighted response rate of 67.5%. Baseline survey estimates account for the evaluation's complex

sample design and use final baseline weights¹ that represent the population of eligible households or children participating in the demonstration. (See Chapter VI for weighting and response rate details.)

The telephone survey took approximately 30 minutes to complete, was conducted in English or Spanish, and included questions on household characteristics, household participation in nutrition assistance programs, household food security, monthly food expenditures, and children's nutrition program participation, breakfast eating, and food consumption. Interviews were conducted with the adult respondent in the household who knew the most about what the focal child² ate and drank. Respondents received a \$10 incentive (gift card) for completing the baseline survey. Additional survey data collection details can be found in Appendix B.

In this chapter we describe the demographic characteristics of households and children at baseline, based on the data collected during the baseline interview in spring 2011. Overall, as described in greater detail below, the study population in the POC year is highly disadvantaged, as evidenced by high rates of poverty and participation in nutrition assistance programs, and high levels of food insecurity. Six of 10 households experienced some food insecurity at baseline.

B. Household Characteristics

The data tables in this chapter are summary findings for the study population that completed a baseline interview, and they reflect the characteristics of the study population in the POC year. The sample is not nationally representative nor necessarily representative of the FRP population in each State. Baseline findings for additional characteristics for both the total study population and for each site are provided in Appendix D, along with the p value for the F-test indicating whether there was significant variation in the household characteristic across the five sites.

1. Household Size and Composition

Across all five sites, the mean number of people in the household was 4.4, ranging from 4.3 to 4.6 ($p < 0.001$)³ (Table V.1; Appendix Table D.1). This number includes all reported adults and all children (regardless of their ages). Almost half of the households reported having more than one adult (46.5%), and almost half (49.7%) had one adult who was female. The remaining households (3.8%) had one adult who was male. Household adult composition varied significantly across sites, with Missouri reporting almost two-thirds (63.3%) of its households with one female adult, compared to Oregon (37.6%) (Appendix Table D.1).

The mean number of children in households was 2.5, and this included children of all ages—those attending school and certified for FRP school meals, younger children who had not yet started

¹ Specifically, two weights were created—one for household-level analysis and a second for analyses of the focal child data. These weights are constructed such that each of the five sites is weighted equally in the analysis (that is, the sum of the weights in each site is the same).

² One eligible child per sampled household was randomly selected to be the focus of the child-level questions.

³ A p value of .05 or lower indicates strong evidence of variation among sites. Differences among sites are only mentioned if the p value meets the standard of below .05.

school, and any other children living in the household.⁴ The mean number of children varied across sites and ranged from 2.3 in Texas to 2.7 in Michigan (See Appendix Table D.1).

Table V.1. SEBTC Household Characteristics in POC Sites

Characteristic	Estimate	SE
Household Size^a		
Mean number of people in household	4.4	0.09
Household Composition^a		
Household with one adult, female	49.7%	1.67
Household with one adult, male	3.8%	0.41
Household with more than one adult	46.5%	1.92
Number of Children^a		
1 child	22.9%	3.37
2 children	33.9%	2.50
3 or more children	43.2%	3.62
Mean number of children in household	2.5	0.10
Last Month Household Income^a		
Median	\$1,297	25.07
Mean	\$1,553	36.46
No income (Last Month)	3.0%	0.24
Last Month Household Income^a		
Below poverty line ^b	73.5%	1.48
101-130% of poverty ^b	13.3%	0.73
131-185% of poverty ^b	9.4%	0.66
Above 185% of poverty ^b	3.7%	0.40
At least one employed adult	69.8%	1.71
Any person with a physical or mental disability	28.3%	2.23

Source: SEBTC, Spring Baseline Survey, 2011 (n=5,837).

Note: Findings are based on final baseline weights.

^a The respondent reported the household's characteristics and circumstances in the last 30 days (and last month for income). Means and medians include households with zero income.

^b Poverty level was calculated based on reported household income last month before taxes, household size, and the HHS poverty guidelines (<http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/11poverty.shtml>). A small percentage of households provided annual income which was used to calculate monthly income for the poverty distribution.

2. Household Income

Eligibility rules specifically limit participation in the SEBTC program to those eligible for FRP lunch (that is, at or below 185% of the federal poverty line). It would therefore be expected that the survey sample would be relatively disadvantaged, and, in fact, mean household income in the last month prior to the survey was \$1,553, with 3% reporting no income (Table V.1). Nearly three-

⁴ Children were defined as 18 years or younger or still in school (if older than age 18) and living with an adult in a household. Households also included group homes if children living in the home were certified for FRP school meals.

fourths of the survey population (73.5%) had monthly incomes below the FPL⁵, ranging from 64.6% of households in Connecticut to 81.7% in Michigan (Appendix Table D.1).⁶ The proportion of households with children below the poverty line in this study population is substantially greater than the 56% reported among children certified for FRP school meals in the 2005-06 school year (Ponza et al. 2007).

3. Other Household Characteristics

Most respondents had at least one employed adult in the household (69.8%), Texas reported the highest percentage of employed adults (79.7%) and Michigan reported the lowest (64.6%) (Appendix Table D.1). About 28% of households reported a person with a physical or mental disability, and this varied significantly across sites: 14.9% of households in Texas and 35.9% of households in Michigan. Almost all households (98%) reported having access to a working refrigerator (See Appendix Table D.1).

4. Characteristics of the Survey Respondent

Most of the baseline survey respondents were female (89.2%) and approximately 70% were between the ages of 30 and 49 (Table V.2). There was some age variation across sites: over one-quarter of Michigan respondents (26.6%) were between the ages of 18 and 29 and Texas had the smallest proportion of respondents in that age category (14.3%). Texas had the highest proportion of respondents in the 50 to 59 years old range, as well as in the 60 years old and older categories (12.0%); Michigan and Missouri reported the least in those age categories (7.9%) (See Appendix Table D.2 for site-level details.)

In terms of race/ethnicity, the largest group identified themselves as Hispanic (40.4%) with the next largest group being non-Hispanic white (32.6%) (Table V.2). Michigan was the most racially and ethnically diverse with approximately equal proportions of respondents reporting being Hispanic, non-Hispanic black, and non-Hispanic white; Texas was the least racially diverse, with 94.6% of respondents reporting being Hispanic (See Appendix Table D.2.)

In terms of education attainment, approximately equal proportions completed high school (or GED) or some college, but the highest proportion of respondents did not complete high school (33.5%) (Table V.2). Michigan had the highest proportion of respondents who had not completed high school (40.5%) (See Appendix Table D.2).

About half the respondents reported being single (53.4%, including never married, separated or divorced, or widowed), with the remaining reporting they were married or living with a partner. (46.5%) (Table D.2). Substantial variation existed across the sites: Oregon had the highest proportion of respondents married or living with a partner (58.5%), and Missouri the lowest (32.0%). (See Appendix F for site-level details.)

⁵ The Federal Poverty Level (FPL) is adjusted for household size. An FPL is calculated for the contiguous United States, Alaska, and Hawaii. The 2011 FPL for a family of 4 is \$22,350 per year (i.e., \$1,863 per month) in the 48 contiguous States.

⁶ In comparison, 20.1% of families with children reported being under the poverty level nationally based on the 2009 CPS (Census Bureau 2010, Table 4, p. 15).

Table V.2. Characteristics of SEBTC Respondents and Children Eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Meals in POC Sites

Characteristic	Percent	SE
Gender		
Female (Respondent)	89.2	0.45
Male (Respondent)	11.8	0.45
Age of Respondent ^a		
18-29 years	18.2	1.55
30-39 years	43.1	1.69
40-49 years	26.7	1.13
50-59 years	9.2	0.84
60 years or older	2.8	0.42
Race/Ethnicity of Respondent ^b		
Hispanic	40.4	7.14
Non-Hispanic black	21.6	5.32
Non-Hispanic white	32.6	4.97
Other, non-Hispanic	5.4	0.80
Education Level of Respondent ^c		
Less than high school	33.5	1.47
Completed high school (or GED)	30.3	1.08
Some college (including 2-year degree)	30.2	0.94
Four-year degree or higher	6.0	0.49
Marital Status of Respondent		
Married	36.9	2.32
Living with partner	9.6	1.06
Separated or divorced	25.7	1.40
Widowed	2.5	0.27
Never married	25.2	2.64
Age of Children ^a		
3-4 years	3.1	0.59
5-8 years	32.3	1.26
9-12 years	30.8	1.07
13-15 years	18.8	1.00
16-17 years	9.8	0.95
>17 years	5.3	0.62

Source: SEBTC, Spring Baseline Survey, 2011 (n=5,837)

Note: Findings are based on final baseline weights.

^a Age of respondent and children were calculated from date of birth and the date the survey was administered.

^b Responses to the separate race and ethnicity questions were combined to create a race/ethnicity variable, according to OMB reporting rules (See http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/fedreg_race-ethnicity).

^c Education level categories were condensed from the survey response categories to create those displayed.

5. Characteristics of Children Certified for FRP Meals

Children in the sample certified for FRP meals were approximately equally distributed throughout school-age years; a small percentage were pre-school age. These younger children were enrolled in a school-based pre-school and received subsidized meals, from NSLP or SBP or another source of support, and therefore eligible for the SEBTC demonstration (Table V.2).

6. Participation in Nutrition Assistance Programs

Household Program Participation. At baseline, approximately three-quarters of households (72.9%) reported participating in at least one federal or emergency nutrition assistance program in the 30 days prior to the interview (Table V.3; Figure V.1). Respondents most commonly reported using SNAP (63.9%), followed by WIC (22.8%). Participation rates varied across sites, with the highest proportion of Oregon respondents reporting participation in SNAP (78.2%), and receiving food from food banks or food pantries (20.2%). Michigan respondents reported the highest participation in WIC (31.4%) (See Appendix D.4).

Table V.3. Reported Participation in Household and Child Nutrition Programs in POC Sites

Characteristic	Percent	SE
Household Benefits^a		
Reported receiving SNAP ^b	63.9	2.01
Reported receiving WIC ^c	22.8	1.40
Reported receiving food from food pantry/food bank	13.7	1.59
Reported receiving food at emergency kitchen	1.8	0.31
No reported food assistance benefits	27.1	2.51
Children's Benefits^a		
Reported receiving free or reduced-price lunch	93.4	0.58
Reported receiving free or reduced-price breakfast	85.7	1.27
Reported receiving afterschool meal or snack program	12.9	2.19
Reported receiving backpack food program	10.0	1.75
No reported food assistance benefits	4.3	0.38

Source: SEBTC, Spring Baseline Survey, 2011 (n=5,837)

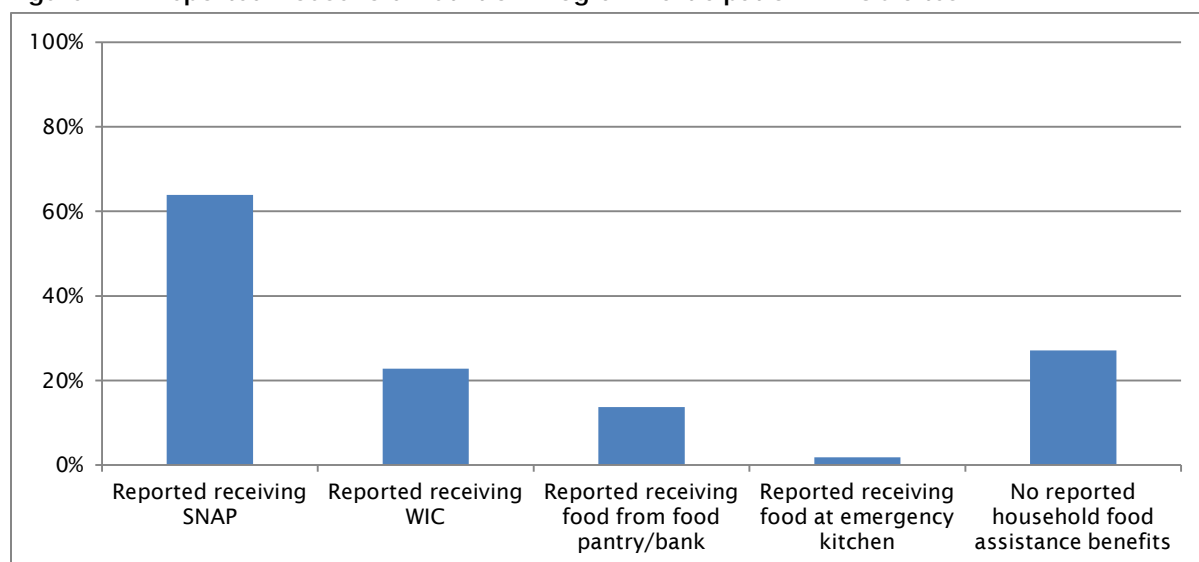
Note: Findings above are based on final baseline weights. Proportions for household benefits are based on household weights and proportions for children's benefits are based on child-level weights.

^a The respondent reported if anyone in the household or if the focal child received food assistance from any of the programs in the last 30 days.

^b Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

^c Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children.

Figure V.1. Reported Household Nutrition Program Participation in POC Sites



Source: SEBTC, Spring Baseline Survey, 2011 (n=5,837)

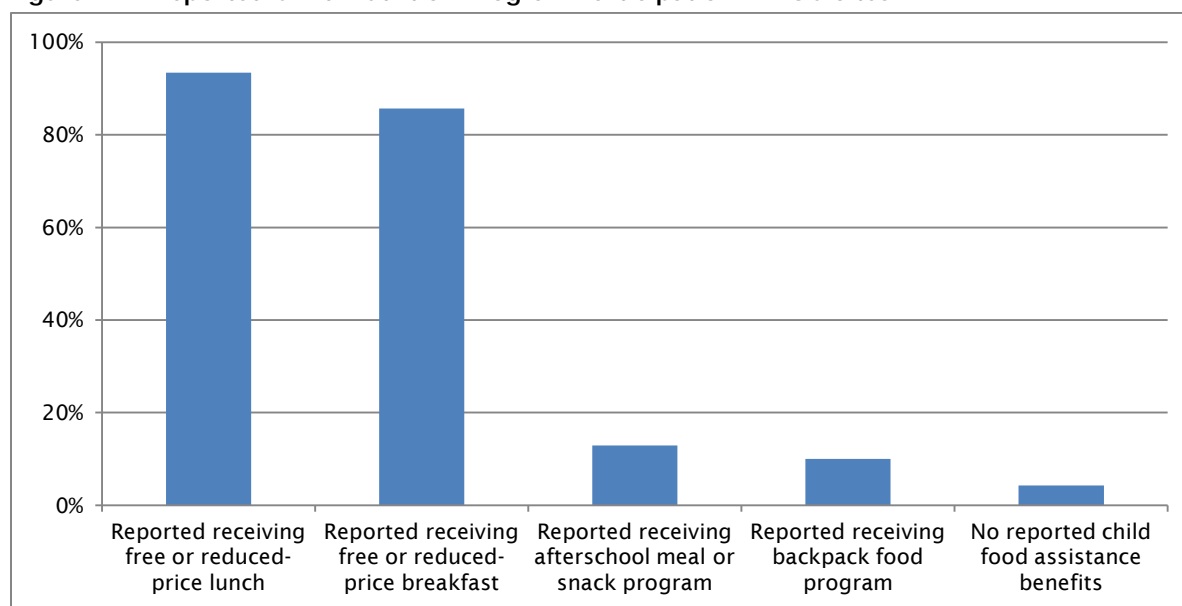
Note: Refer to footnotes in Table V.3 for details and abbreviations.

Participation in Programs for School-Aged Children. The highest program participation rates are in SBP and NSLP. This is not surprising given that eligibility for SEBTC was limited to children certified for FRP meals (Table V.3; Figure V.2). Only 4.3% of respondents reported that their child did *not* participate in school meal programs,⁷ after-school or snack programs, or a backpack program (Table V.3); almost all reported their child received FRP lunch (93.4%) and somewhat fewer reported school breakfast (85.7%).⁸ Of those reporting receiving meals from either program, 87.8% (SE, 1.25) said they received both SBP and NLSP (data not reported in Table V.3. See Appendix Table D.5). In addition, 12.9% reported participation in an afterschool meal or snack program. Nutrition program use varied across sites. Households in Missouri and Michigan reported the highest program participation in afterschool meal or snack programs (19.3% and 23.9%, respectively) and backpack food programs (21.6% and 15.8%, respectively). (See Appendix Table D.5).

⁷ Participation in the SFSP and other summer nutrition programs will be reported based on the summer interviews.

⁸ Households with children certified for FRP school meals were eligible for the SEBTC, but it is possible that some children living in the household were not receiving or participating in FRP school meals for a number of reasons (for example, the child was home-schooled or dropped out of school). One child per household was selected to be the focal child for the child-level baseline survey questions.

Figure V.2. Reported Child Nutrition Program Participation in POC Sites



Source: SEBTC, Spring Baseline Survey, 2011 (n=5,837).

Note: Refer to footnotes in Table V.3 for details.

7. Food Security

Food security is defined as access by all members of the household at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life (Nord 2009).⁹ *Household* food security is determined by the food security status of the adults and the children living in the household. *Food secure* households are those in which both adults and children are food secure. *Food insecure* households are those in which the adults *or* children *or* both report limited access to food resulting in: a) reduced quality or variety of diet (low food security), or b) reduced food intake or disrupted eating patterns (very low food security). These levels of food insecurity are assessed for both the adults and the children living in the household. Reducing the most severe level of food insecurity among children, VLFS-C, is the main outcome of interest for the SEBTC demonstration, and establishing whether that result was achieved is the main goal of the SEBTC impact study.

At SEBTC baseline, more than half of the households participating in the SEBTC demonstration (58.2%)¹⁰ reported food insecurity among adults, children, or both. The majority of

⁹ The food security status of each interviewed household is determined by the number of food-insecure conditions and behaviors reported by the household, using the standard 18-item, 30-day survey module developed by USDA (Economic Research Service 2008).

¹⁰ This study uses a method of coding food security status called the adult/child cross-tabulation approach, which differs slightly from that in USDA reports using the CPS data. The adult/child cross-tabulation approach, which has been under development at USDA as a means of eliminating a misclassification that affects a small number of cases, has been recommended by USDA for the current study. The new approach does not affect the number of households classified as VLFS-C, but does slightly alter the total number of households classified as food insecure. In the present

food insecure households experienced food insecurity among children, and 7.3% of all SEBTC households experienced VLFS-C. VLFS-C ranged from 4.6% in Connecticut to 8.7% in Michigan and was significantly different across sites (Appendix D.6). Food insecurity among children ranged from 40.6% of households in Connecticut to 48.4% of households in Oregon (Appendix D.6).

In Table V.4 and Figure V.3 we show the overall status of the SEBTC households and the children in them. The prevalence of household food insecurity among the SEBTC evaluation sample is higher than recently reported national measures for households with children and incomes below 185% poverty (58.2% in SEBTC and 39.0% in the 2010 CPS) (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2011). Three-fourths of households with food insecure children were below the poverty line (75%) in the SEBTC (Figure V.4) compared to 42% in the 2006-07 CPS (Note: Figures exclude 11% of CPS households that did not report income.) The CPS is a representative sample of households with children in the U.S., whereas the SEBTC reflects households with school-age children certified for FRP school meals in the demonstration site.

Table V.4. Food Security in SEBTC Households in POC Sites

Characteristic	Percent	SE	95% CI
Food secure households ^a	41.8	1.05	39.6 - 43.9
Food insecure households (adults <i>or</i> children <i>or</i> both insecure) ^a	58.2	1.05	56.1 - 60.4
Food insecurity among adults only	15.3	0.75	13.7 - 16.8
Food insecurity among children	42.9	0.78	41.3 - 44.6
Low food security among children	35.6	0.94	33.7 - 37.6
Very low food security among children	7.3	0.51	6.3 - 8.4

Source: SEBTC, Spring Baseline Survey, 2011 (n=5,830)

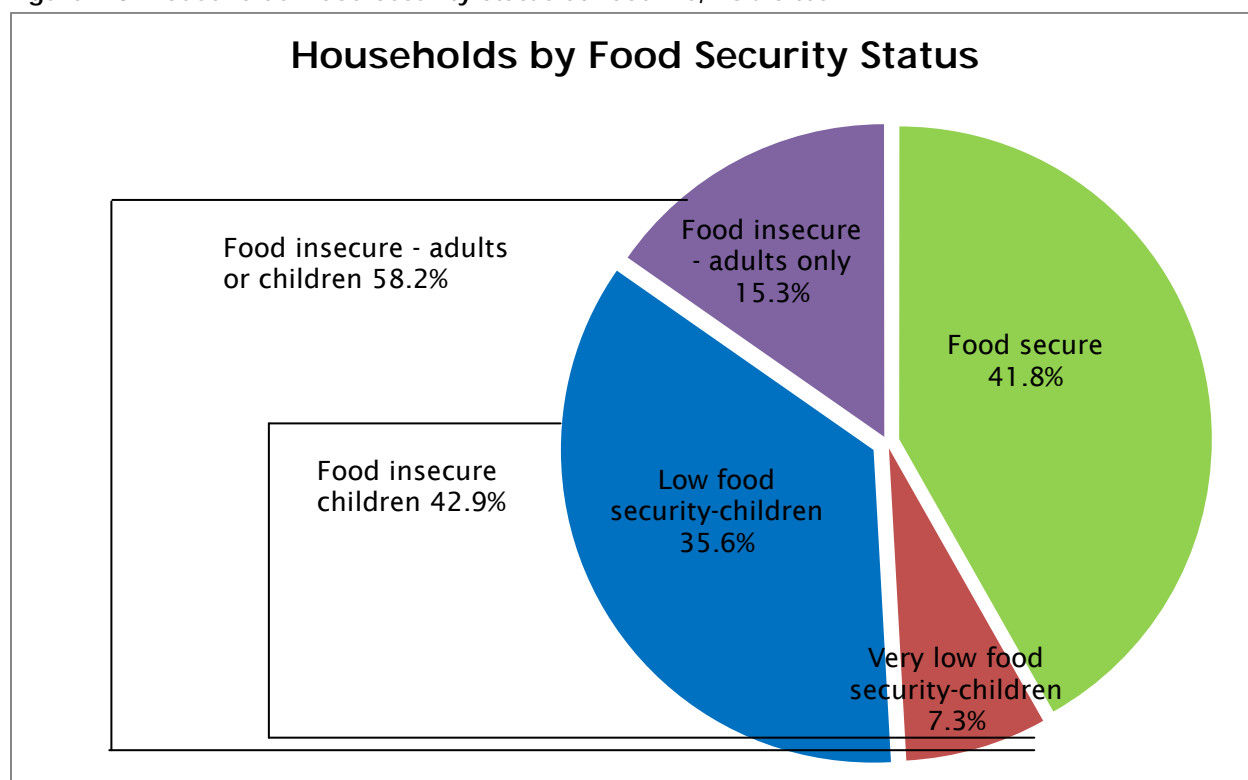
Note: Findings above are based on final baseline weights.

^a Food security was assessed using the USDA 18-item food security instrument and a cross-tabulation of adult and child food security status.

(continued)

analysis, applying the scoring method normally used in the CPS would classify 62.0% of SEBTC households as food insecure, compared to the 58.2% reported in Table V.4 based on the adult/child cross-tabulation approach.

Figure V.3. Households' Food Security Status at Baseline, POC Sites



Source: SEBTC Spring Baseline Interview, 2011 (n=5,830).

Note: Percentages reflect the proportion of households determined to be food secure or food insecure, and the proportion of households with food insecurity among children (low or very low food security) and with food insecurity among adults only.

In general, SEBTC findings about characteristics of households that experienced food insecurity are consistent with national CPS data with respect to education level and adult employment. National data from the 2006-07 CPS show that in households with food insecure children, 85% had a working adult and less than half had an adult with more than a high school education (Nord 2009). For the SEBTC evaluation sample, one third of household respondents had more than a high school education, and 38% had less than a high school education (Figure V.5; Appendix Table D.7). About half of the SEBTC respondents (48%) in households with food insecure children were Hispanic compared to 30% Hispanic in the 2006-07 CPS (Figure V.6; Appendix Table D.7).

In Table V.5 the food insecurity status of the adults and children is shown separately, comparing the baseline SEBTC prevalence estimates to those from the 2009 CPS, using the 30-day measure. There are two main findings. First, in both studies the prevalence of food insecurity and VLFS is much higher for adults than for children, indicating that adults reduce or cut their food intake to minimize the effects of food shortages on the children in the family. Second, the VLFS rates for both adults and children are higher in the SEBTC sites in 2011 than for the national picture in 2009. Approximately double the proportion of households in the SEBTC study population experienced adult food insecurity compared to *all* families with school-age children and incomes less than 130% of the poverty line and families that received SNAP at some time during the year. The proportion of households experiencing food insecurity or very low food security among children

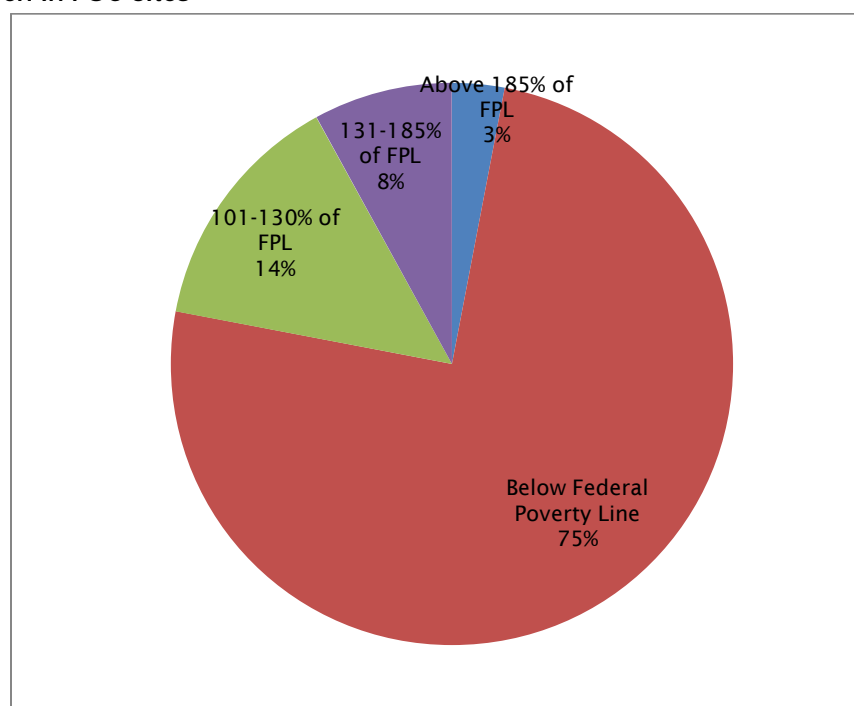
was nearly three times as high in the SEBTC sites compared to families reporting SNAP benefits or families with incomes below 130% poverty nationally. These differences may reflect higher levels of economic hardship in the nation since 2009, the inherent economic status of the SEBTC study population, or a combination of the two factors. The CPS is a nationally representative sample of U.S. households; the SEBTC demonstration is operating in chosen communities that grantees determined to need such a program.

Table V.5. Prevalence Rates of Food Insecurity and Very Low Food Security in the SEBTC at Baseline and in a Low-income Population in the 2009 CPS

Survey and sample	Adults		Children	
	Food insecure	Very low food security	Food insecure	Very low food security
----- percent of households -----				
Baseline SEBTC Survey	53.4	23.7	42.9	7.3
CPS-FSS households with school-age children and annual incomes less than 130 percent of the poverty line; 30-day measures of food security	25.9	10.3	16.6	2.6
CPS-FSS households with school-age children that received SNAP at some time during the year; 30-day measures of food security	28.3	10.9	17.6	2.5

Source: SEBTC Baseline Survey, 2011 (n=5,830) and Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement data for 2009 (Nord 2009, 2011).

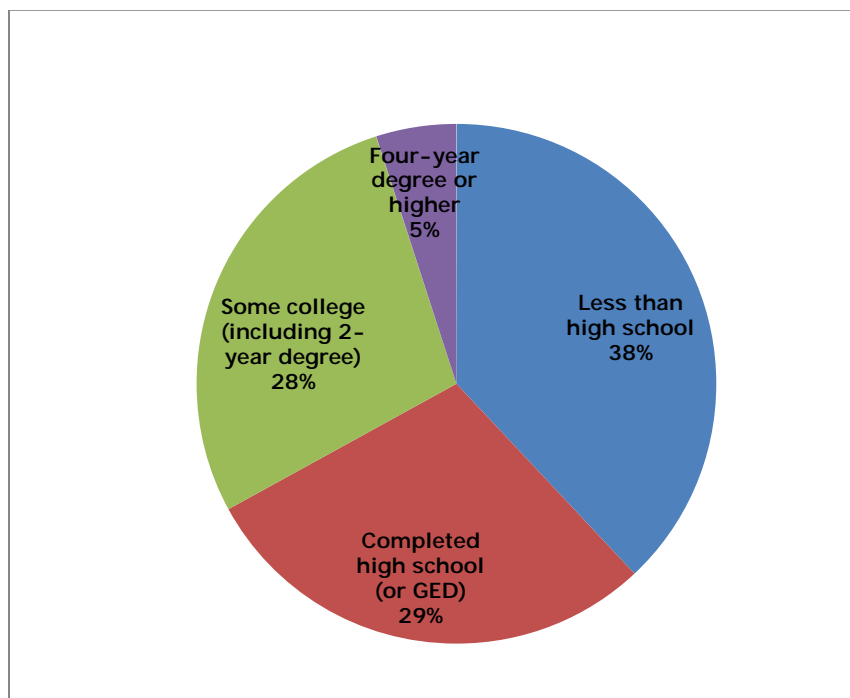
Figure V.4. Distribution of Household Monthly Income Category Among Households with Food Insecure Children in POC Sites



Source: SEBTC Baseline Survey, 2011.

Note: See Appendix Table D.7 for details. FPL=federal poverty level

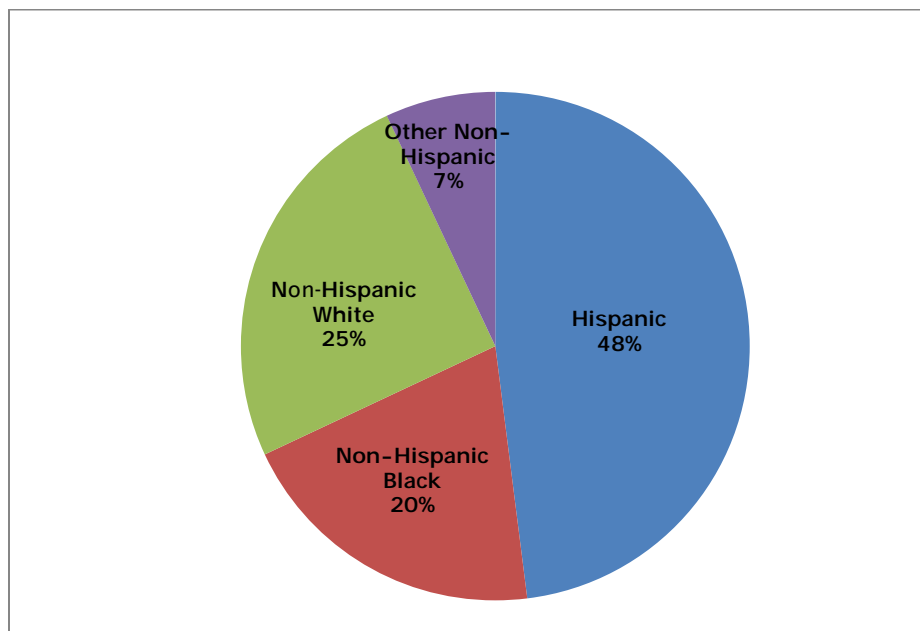
Figure V.5. Household Respondents' Education Level Among Households with Food Insecure Children in POC Sites



Source: SEBTC Baseline Survey, 2011.

Note: See Appendix Table D.7 for details.

Figure V.6. Household Respondent Race/Ethnicity Among Households with Food Insecure Children in POC Sites



Source: SEBTC Baseline Survey, 2011.

Note: See Appendix Table D.7 for details.

8. Weekly Food Expenditures

Household respondents were asked to report the amount of money they spent on food in the last 30 days at various food outlets: supermarkets/grocery stores (including Walmart, Target, and Kmart), other types of stores (convenience stores, food clubs, bakeries, mini markets, farmers markets, vegetable stands, and meat markets), and restaurants (fast food and other types) (Table V.6). Weekly expenditures were higher for food purchased from supermarkets/grocery stores than for other types of stores or for restaurants. The median expenditure for foods purchased at supermarkets/grocery stores, (presumably for ‘at home’ food consumption) was \$93.30, and \$6.70 at other stores. Median weekly food expenditures at restaurants (\$9) averaged about one-tenth of the expenditures at grocery stores (\$93). (See Figure V.7).

Table V.6. Weekly Food Expenditures, by Food Outlet, Total Expenditures, and Per-Person Expenditures in POC Sites

Characteristic ^a	\$ per week	SE
Supermarkets/Grocery Stores ^b		
Mean	109.0	2.83
Median	93.3	1.70
Other Stores ^b		
Mean	18.6	0.64
Median	6.7	0.51
Restaurants ^b		
Mean	14.0	0.67
Median	9.1	0.53
Total Food Expenditures ^c		
Mean	141.4	3.06
Median	126.0	1.28
Total Per-Person Food Expenditures ^{c,d}		
Mean	35.4	0.50
Median	31.3	0.35

Source: SEBTC, Spring Baseline Survey, 2011 (n=5,837)

Note: Findings are based on final baseline weights.

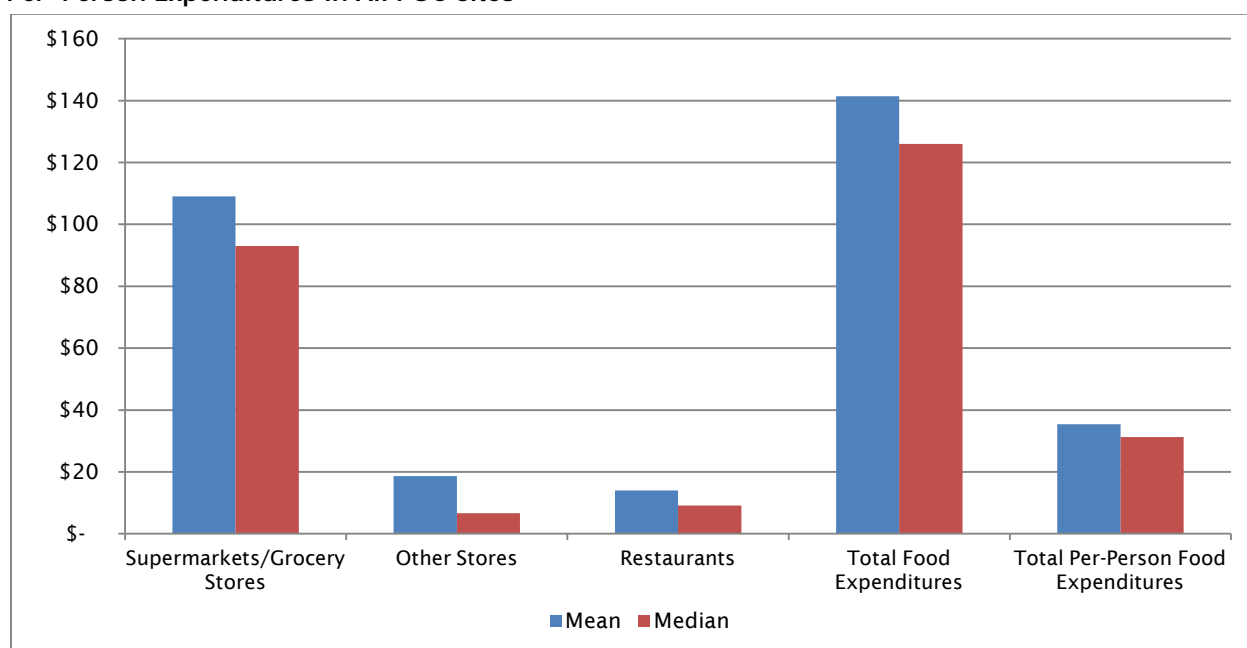
^a Expenditures were calculated for food purchases only. The respondent reported weekly purchases in the last 30 days at various types of stores and restaurants and then non-food expenditure was calculated to obtain weekly expenditures on food items only.

^b Values reflect all respondents who reported for the subcategory.

^c Total food expenditures exclude respondents who were missing data for any of the three subcategories shown.

^d Per-person expenditures are the total food expenditures divided by the number of people who live together in the household and share food.

Figure V.7. Mean and Median Weekly Food Expenditures, by Food Outlet, Total Expenditures, and Per-Person Expenditures in All POC Sites



Source: SEBTC, Spring Baseline Survey, 2011 (n=5,837).

Note: Findings are based on final baseline weights. See footnotes in Table V.6 for details.

Counting food expenditures from food outlets, fast food restaurants and other eateries, the median weekly food expenditure was \$126, averaging a weekly food expenditure of \$31 per person. There was no substantial variation in total weekly food expenditures across sites (See Appendix D.8). Nationwide households with incomes at or below 185% of poverty had a median weekly food expenditure of \$33 per person based on data from the 2010 CPS (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2011).

9. Children's Dietary Quality

The SEBTC baseline questionnaire includes a set of questions on children's reported frequency of consumption of certain types of foods and food groups as well as whether children ate breakfast in the last month. These dietary measures reflect children's dietary quality and serve as an indicator of their nutritional status, one of the outcomes to be measured in the impact study. Children and adolescents who eat breakfast have improved nutrient intake, are less likely to be overweight, and are more likely to maintain their weight (USDA and HHS 2010). Findings show that most children (92.3%) typically ate breakfast (see Appendix Table D.9). This is not a surprising finding given the high percentage of children (86%) reported to receive FRP school breakfast.

The baseline survey asked about children's consumption of items from major food groups, such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains (for fiber), dairy (for calcium), and protein-containing foods that are made available in the WIC Food Package (Appendix A.1). Respondents also reported on their

children's consumption of food and beverage sources of added sugars,¹¹ which are a major source of discretionary calories (Malik et al. 2006; Pereira 2006; Vartanian et al. 2007). Table V.7 highlights particular foods made available in the WIC Food Package as well as food and beverage sources of added sugars. Figure V.8 is a comparison of how often children consume fruits, vegetables, and grains, and Figure V.9 is a comparison of how often children consume 100% fruit juice, milk, and sugar-sweetened beverages. A complete list of foods included in the questionnaire and the corresponding percentages of the frequencies of children consuming these foods during the last month is included in Appendix D.9.

Table V.7. Reported Frequency of Food Consumption by Children in All Sites

	Percentage of children consuming in the last 30 days				
	Never	Less than once per week	1 to 6 times per week	1 to 2 times per day	3 or more times per day
Fruits and vegetables					
Fruit ^a	2.1	2.2	42.2	45.6	7.9
100% fruit juice	6.9	4.7	39.6	36.7	12.2
Vegetables^b	0.1	0.2	16.4	69.2	14.1
Fried potatoes	7.0	18.1	70.7	4.1	0.1
Other vegetables ^c	5.5	4.0	52.0	37.0	1.5
Green leafy or lettuce salads	16.2	8.6	59.6	15.2	0.4
Dairy foods					
Milk	3.2	1.0	18.7	59.5	17.7
Cheese	4.0	5.1	64.9	23.9	2.1
Grain products					
Cereal ^d	2.9	2.0	50.7	43.2	1.2
Whole wheat bread or tortillas	13.0	5.3	51.7	27.6	2.4
Items with 'added sugar'					
Cookies, cake, pie, doughnuts, or brownies	7.7	16.4	63.4	11.5	0.9
Sugar-sweetened beverages ^e	9.1	6.1	41.6	32.0	11.2

Source: SEBTC, Spring Baseline Survey, 2011 (n=5,837).

Note: This table highlights foods in the WIC food package as well as foods with added sugars. A complete list of foods examined in the baseline questionnaire is available in Appendix D.9.

^a Includes fresh, frozen, and canned fruit.

^b Includes green leafy or lettuce salads, fried and non-fried potatoes, cooked dried beans, tomato sauce, salsa, and other vegetables such as tomatoes, carrots, corn, and broccoli.

^c Includes non-leafy vegetables such as tomatoes, carrots, corn, and broccoli.

^d Includes hot and cold cereals.

^e Includes soft drinks and fruit-flavored drinks such as ades, sports drinks, and other beverages with added sugar.

¹¹ Added sugars are put into foods and beverages during processing, preparation, or at the table to improve palatability. Examples include high fructose corn syrup, white and brown sugar, honey, and crystal dextrose (USDA and HHS 2010).

Figure V.8. Reported Frequency of Food Consumption by Children in All Sites

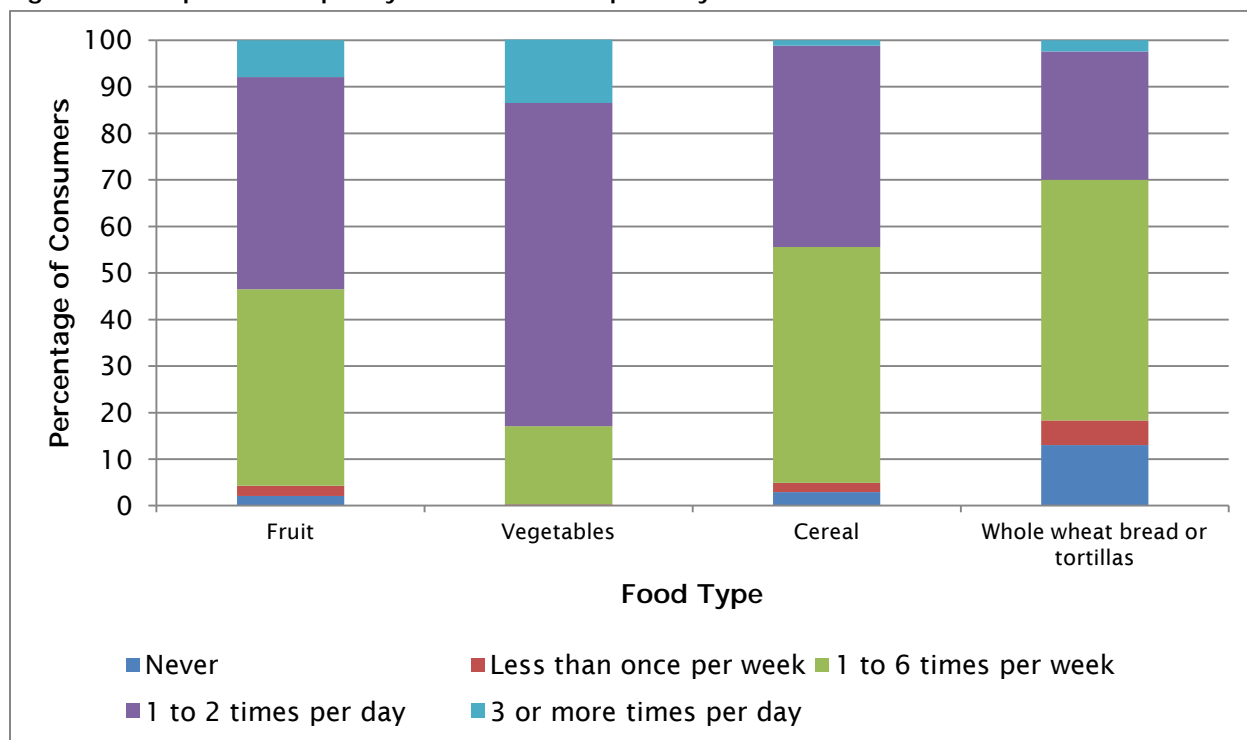
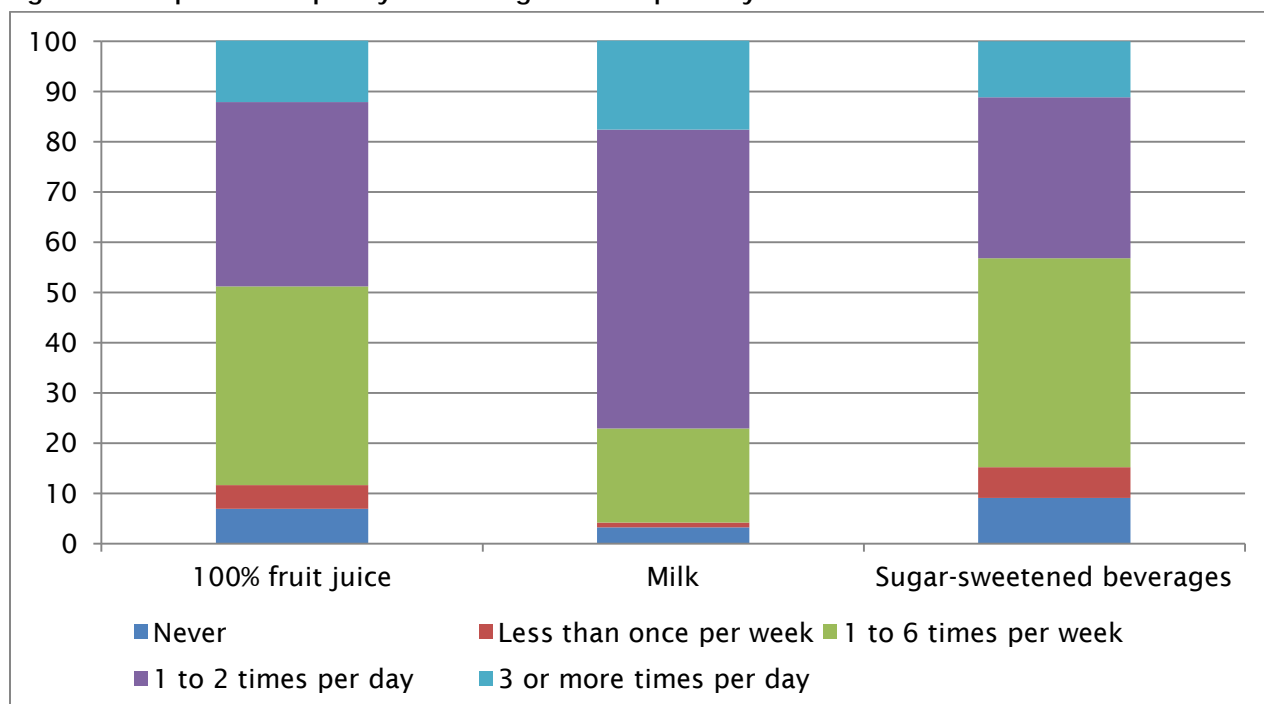


Figure V.9. Reported Frequency of Beverage Consumption by Children in All Sites



The 2010 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommend that children consume several servings of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, dairy, and protein each day. Daily serving size recommendations vary by children's age.¹² The SEBTC findings show that children typically consumed fruits and vegetables on a daily or weekly basis (Figure V.5). About half (53.5%) consumed fruit one or more times a day and 42.2% of children consumed fruit one to six times per week. A small percentage of children were reported to not have had any fruit (2.1%) or fruit juice (6.9%) in the past month (Table V.7). Eighty-three percent of children consumed vegetables one or more times daily; three-fourths consumed fried potatoes one or more times a week (Table V.7). Thirty percent of children consumed whole wheat bread or tortillas on a daily basis, and about half consumed these items weekly (Figure V.8). Thirteen percent consumed no whole wheat bread or tortillas in the last month.

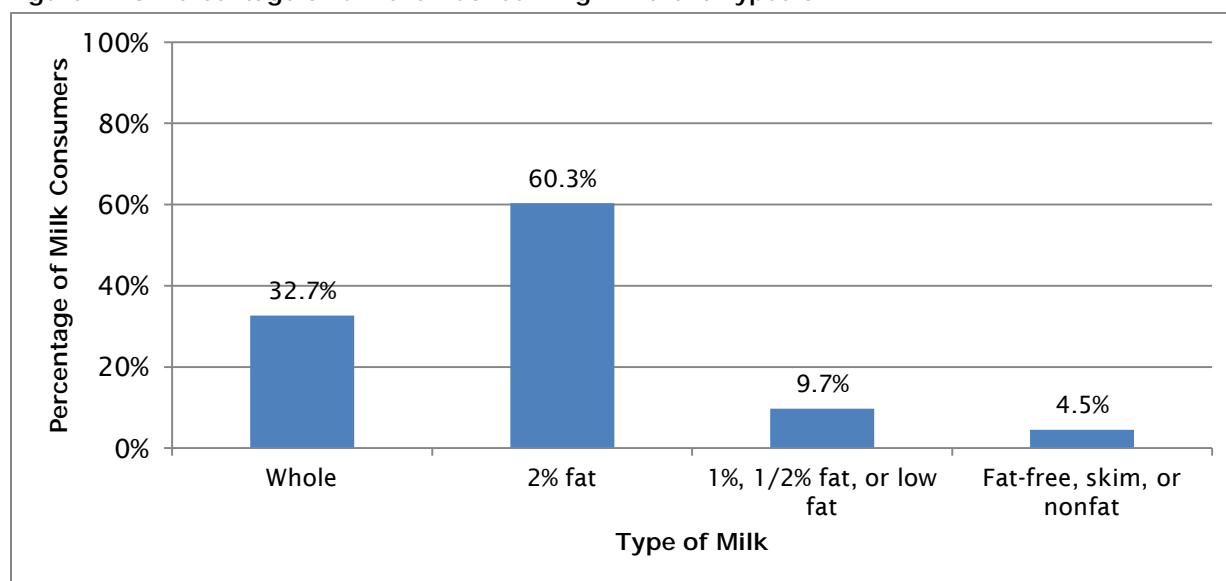
Just over three-fourths of children (77.2%) consumed milk at least once a day, and about one-fifth (18.7%) had milk at least once per week (Table V.7). Among children who consumed milk, the predominant type consumed was 2% fat milk (60.3% of milk consumers), followed by whole milk (32.7%) (Figure V.10) (Appendix Table D.9). Less than 15 percent of children consumed low-fat or non-fat milk (1% fat, 1/2% fat, skim milk), the types recommended for children ages 2 years old and older (USDA and HHS 2010). SEBTC demonstration children consumed milk less frequently, and higher fat milk more often, when compared with a nationally representative population of NSLP participants assessed with 24-hour dietary recalls during the 2004-05 school year (FNS 2007).¹³ For example, a larger proportion of NSLP participants consumed milk on a given day (88%), and of these consumers, fewer consumed 2% fat milk (42%) and whole milk (19%). More NSLP participants reported consuming 1% fat milk (48%) and skim or nonfat milk (23%).

In the past 30 years, children's consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages (like soda, fruit-flavored drinks, and sports drinks) has risen dramatically (Nielsen and Popkin 2004; Wang et al. 2008). Sugar-sweetened beverage consumption may reduce the intake of important nutrients in milk (Marshall et al. 2005). Results from the baseline survey indicate that daily sugar-sweetened beverage consumption is common (43.2%) although milk is more likely to be consumed daily (77.2%) (Figure V.10). Moreover, sugar-sweetened beverages contribute to excess caloric intake and weight gain (Malik et al. 2006; Pereira 2006; Vartanian et al. 2007), and some evidence suggests this is because consumers do not compensate for excess liquid calories by reducing the amount of food they eat (Mattes 1996; DiMeglio and Mattes 2000; Bellisle et al. 2001).

¹² The ranges, by food group, for 4- to 18-year-olds are as follows: vegetables = 1 to 2.5 cups; fruit = 1 to 2 cups; whole grains = 2.5- to 4-ounce equivalents, such as a slice of bread, a cup of cereal, or 1/2 cup of rice; milk = 2.5 to 3 cups; protein = 4- to 6.5-ounce equivalents, such as 1 ounce of fish, 1/4 cup cooked beans, 1 egg, 1 tablespoon of peanut butter, or 1/2 ounce of nuts or seeds (USDA and HHS 2010).

¹³ Data from the 2007-2008 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey show that among children ages 2-19 years and all household income levels, 32% of milk consumers drank whole milk, 45% drank 2% milk, and 20% drank low-fat milk, based on a 30-day food frequency instrument similar to that used in the SEBTC survey (Kit et al. 2011).

Figure V.10. Percentage of Children Consuming Different Types of Milk



Source: SEBTC Spring Baseline Survey, 2011.

Note: Calculated among those who reported any milk consumption. Findings are based on final baseline weights.

10. Summary

Respondents to the SEBTC baseline survey in the POC year were mainly female, between the ages of 30 and 49 years old, and Hispanic, although there was some variation in the age distribution across sites. About half of the households contained one adult only, most often a female. About one-third of the adult respondents (34%) had less than a high school education, 30% graduated high school, and 36% had some college or higher. Households averaged 4.4 people with 2.5 children, and most reported at least one employed adult.

Not surprisingly, households participating in the SEBTC demonstration were economically disadvantaged and reported relatively high use of nutrition assistance programs. Nearly three-quarters of households were below the FPL and most participated in one or more nutrition assistance programs, including SNAP, WIC, and FRP school meals. In addition, 14% of households reported food pantry use and 2% reported emergency kitchen use in the month prior to their interview. Relatively high rates of food insecurity among SEBTC households were observed at baseline. In addition to high participation in FRP school meals, 13% of children were reported to have received benefits from an afterschool or child care program, and 10% from a backpack program. Six of 10 households (58%) in the SEBTC evaluation sample experienced food insecurity and most of them had food insecure children. Overall, 41 to 45% of households had food insecure children and 6 to 8% experienced VLFS-C.

Counting food expenditures from food outlets, fast food restaurants and other eateries, the median weekly food expenditure was \$126, averaging a weekly food expenditure of \$31 per person. In 2010, the national value for low-income households at or below 185% of poverty was \$33 per person (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2011). At baseline, children's consumption of daily sugar-sweetened beverages (for example, soft drinks, fruit-flavored drinks, and sports drinks with added sugar) was

high (43%). Although most children (77%) were reported to consume milk daily, it was more likely to be whole or 2% milk rather than the recommended low-fat and fat free milks. About half (54%) consumed fruit one or more times a day and 83% percent of children consumed vegetables daily during the month when children were still in school; however, consumption of fruits and vegetables is below recommended levels. Future reports will assess the changes in diet quality between the school year and the summer, and also compare the summer consumption of children based on their receipt of the SNAP or WIC summer.

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VI. STATUS OF THE EVALUATION: THE RANDOM ASSIGNMENT PROCESS AND DATA COLLECTION FOR THE IMPACT STUDY

The POC year was designed as a test of the feasibility of implementing SEBTC on a small scale in advance of launching the full demonstration year. FNS also planned for the five POC year sites to serve as a means to test key evaluation methods necessary for a rigorous study, and to learn about ways to improve methods, if that turned out to be necessary. Important insights could be gleaned from the evaluation including (1) whether the evaluators could be successful in implementing random assignment of households that consented to be in the demonstration and in the household data collection; (2) whether it would be possible to reach the targeted number of households in a very short timeframe (in some cases, within four weeks), and the impact of that timing on response rates; and (3) whether key questions in the household instrument might not achieve sufficient response rates to be meaningful.

Because the stakes are so high, FNS requested that the evaluators report on these aspects of the POC evaluation in the Congressional Status Report. The POC year involved the random assignment of households with 12,500 children from five demonstration areas to receive the benefit. From these 12,500 children, a subsample of households was selected for the evaluation study's household interviews, with the goal of achieving 5,000 completed surveys in the spring and again in the summer. In the full demonstration year, the numbers will be much higher; the evaluation team will assign 75,000 children from households from as many as 15 demonstration areas, and aim to complete 27,000 household interviews in the spring (at baseline) and again in the summer. An unsuccessful random assignment process, or the failure to collect adequate household data, would greatly undermine the rigor of the evaluation.

In this chapter we discuss each of the three aspects vital to success: random assignment, number of household respondents and response rates, and survey item response rates. More details are provided in related appendices.

A. Random Assignment

1. The Randomization Process

As described in Chapter III, the process of consent and random assignment required several steps. First, participating SFAs constructed lists of households with children certified for FRP meals. After obtaining consent from families (by either passive or active processes) the SFAs sent the lists to the evaluation team. The team then randomly assigned the families to be in the benefit group or non-benefit group, with the objective of assigning 2,500 children to receive the benefit. Next, the team randomly selected a subsample of households from the benefit and non-benefit group (that is, the treatment and control groups) to participate in the household survey, with the objective of obtaining at least 5,000 baseline interviews. In this section we assess the degree to which the random assignment process was successful in (1) assigning families to the benefit and non-benefit groups and (2) selecting the subsample for the survey (the treatment and control groups).

The essence of random assignment is that otherwise identical units are assigned “randomly”—that is, the equivalent of a coin toss—to either the benefit group or the non-benefit group. If the random assignment process is done successfully, the two groups should not differ systematically in any of their background characteristics, measured or unmeasured. As a result, any subsequent

differences in outcomes between the two groups that are statistically significant (that is, not due to chance variations) can be interpreted confidently as impacts of the intervention.

As previously described, random assignment for SEBTC was completed for households that consented to participate in the evaluation. As detailed in Chapter III, the consent process varied among sites. In the active consent sites—Connecticut, Michigan, and Oregon—families that returned consent materials (that is, actively “opted in” to the demonstration) were randomized. In the passive consent sites—Missouri and Texas—families who did **not** return materials indicating they did **not** want to participate (that is, did not actively “opt out” of the demonstration) were randomized.

To ensure that some children in a household were not inadvertently assigned to the benefit group while others from the same household were assigned to the non-benefit group, the decision was made that all of the children of given adult members of a household who prepare and/or eat meals together would be assigned to either the benefit group or the non-benefit group. Doing this was complicated by some ambiguity in the lists of consenting households constructed by the participating SFAs, because some children inadvertently were included more than once, and because lists did not always clearly indicate which children belonged to a specific household. These issues were more salient in the passive consent sites, where the very nature of the process precluded households eligible for random assignment from correcting or providing updated information. (As described in Chapter III, confidentiality procedures required that SFAs construct the household lists and obtain consent before sharing information with the grantee. The evaluation team consulted extensively with the sites to aid them in these tasks.)

After the sites sent lists of consenting households to the evaluation team, the lists were further processed, with particular attention paid to two issues: (1) identification of duplicate records and (2) creation of households. When in doubt, larger units/“households” were created for randomization to preclude some members of the household being inadvertently assigned to either the benefit or the non-benefit group.

Before households were randomized, the sample was stratified to ensure there was balance between benefit and non-benefit groups in the number of eligible children in the household and among SFAs (or groups of SFAs in Connecticut and Oregon). Resulting stratification cells were combined if they included less than 1.5 percent of the total sample (Table VI.1). (See Bellotti et al. 2011 for more detail.)

Once the processing of the final household lists and stratifying the sample were completed, households were randomly selected to reach the target number of children in the benefit group (that is, 2,500 per site). The balance of the households (and the children in them) were assigned to the non-benefit group. In practice, an initial sample was drawn and a global F-test computed to assure that there were no systematic differences in observed characteristics between the benefit and non-benefit groups (described below). If the global F-test suggested evidence of imbalance (although random), or if the sample draw resulted in many fewer than 2,500 children in the benefit group, a new random sample was drawn. (Because the stratification group was “households with 3 or more children,” it was not possible to randomly assign households and get the exact number of 2,500

children.) This process resulted in the following number of sample draws per site: one sample in Oregon and Connecticut, 2 in Michigan, 3 in Texas, and 13 in Missouri.¹⁴

Table VI.1. Number of Strata in the Demonstration Sites in the POC Year

Site	Total Number of Strata	Number of Strata with 1 Eligible Child in the Household	Number of Strata with 2 Eligible Children in the Household	Number of Strata with 3 or More Eligible Children in the Household
Connecticut	24	9 ^a	11 ^b	4 ^c
Michigan	3	1	1	1
Missouri	9	3	3	3
Oregon	18	6 ^d	6 ^d	6 ^d
Texas	3	1	1	1

Source: SEBTC, 2011.

^aIncluding 10 very small strata combined into 2 strata.

^bIncluding 9 very small strata combined into 2 strata.

^cIncluding 15 very small strata combined into 2 strata.

^dIncluding 5 very small strata combined into 1 stratum.

The number of households and children consenting to participate in the demonstration is shown in Table VI.2. For households, there are two counts by site—one as received from the sites (“Number of Consenting Households”), and the other (“Number of Grouped Households”) after the evaluation team combined households to eliminate duplicates and to err on the side of assuring that all individuals living together were assigned to the same status (benefit or non-benefit).

Table VI.2. Number of Consenting Households and Eligible Children in the Demonstration Sites

Site	Number of Consenting Households ^a	Number of Grouped Households ^b	Number of Children
Connecticut	2,422	2,383	4,244
Michigan	4,237	3,965	7,709
Missouri	11,234	10,673	19,350
Oregon	2,148	2,148	4,452
Texas	23,286	19,923	37,791

Source: Data submitted by grantees for random assignment and data generated by the evaluation team from the random assignment process, SEBTC, 2011.

^a Represents the number of households or count provided by the grantee.

^b Represents the number of households after the evaluation team combined households to eliminate duplicates and assure that individuals living together would all be assigned to either the benefit or non-benefit group.

¹⁴One of the rejected samples in Texas and Missouri was due to failed F-tests; the others were due to sample size. In Michigan, the rejected sample was also due to a failed F-test. Missouri was one of the first sites for which random assignment was conducted. Households were randomized multiple times in order to “hit” the target of 2,500 children in the benefit group. Later, the process was substantially improved to handle the strata that included households with 3 or more children so as to avoid multiple randomizations.

The larger number of households and children in Texas and Missouri appears to be due to two factors. First, the Texas and Missouri demonstration areas had more eligible children than the other three demonstration areas. Second, Texas and Missouri were passive consent sites, where the overwhelming share of households was deemed to have given passive consent (89% in Missouri; 99% in Texas). In contrast, fewer than half of households in active consent sites (Connecticut, Michigan, and Oregon) gave consent (24% to 37% gave consent across the three active sites). (See Chapter III for more detail.)

2. Balance Between the Benefit and Non-Benefit Groups and Between the Treatment and Control Groups

If randomization is done properly, the benefit group and the non-benefit group should be similar in background characteristics. Balance tests were conducted using information obtained from the grantees about children's characteristics (age, grade, gender, school lunch status, and so on). Grantees were able to provide between 8 and 13 baseline characteristics. The results of the balance tests for characteristics available for each of the five grantees are shown in Table E.1 in Appendix E. When considered alone there is some limited evidence of imbalance;¹⁵ the key joint test, however, shows no evidence of imbalance. Specifically, the global F-test considers all of the results jointly (allowing for correlation between the outcomes) to test the balance between the benefit and non-benefit groups. Across the five sites, the p-values for these global F-test range from 0.6219 to 0.9868—all of which are well above the conventional 0.050 cutoff; thus, there is no evidence of imbalance.

As described earlier, the second step in the random assignment process is to select a subsample from the benefit and non-benefit group to be surveyed (the evaluation's treatment and control groups). If the study population is properly sampled, the treatment and control groups also should be similar in the background characteristics. As shown in Appendix Table E.2 the results of those tests for each tested characteristic show no evidence of imbalance. Across the five sites, the p-values for the corresponding global F-tests range from 0.6897 to 0.9895—all of which are well above the conventional 0.050 cutoff.

The previous sections have shown balance—in variables recorded in the sample lists—in those assigned to the benefit and non-benefit groups, and then from those groups to the subsample of treatment and control households who were selected to participate in the survey. In this section, we consider treatment/control balance among survey *respondents*. Field procedures were identical for the treatment and control groups, so there is no reason to expect systematic differences in survey responses between these groups. However, a differential response rate between treatment and control groups could create imbalances between the two groups on key variables. If randomization to the survey sample is properly done, as shown above, and there is no systematic difference

¹⁵ With a large enough number of characteristics, some of the characteristics would be expected to differ between the benefit/non-benefit groups merely based on chance. At the conventional 0.05 cutoff, there are no indications of imbalance in Connecticut (out of 10 the characteristics), Missouri (out of 8 characteristics), and Oregon (out of 8 characteristics); there is one indication of unbalance in Michigan (out of 12 characteristics), and 2 indications of unbalance in Texas (out of 13). (See Appendix Table E.1). Note that these counts consider the fact that the characteristics are categorical. They, therefore, delete one category from each characteristic, because the sum of the probabilities across each characteristic must be 100%.

between households that responded to the interview in the treatment and control groups, then the two groups should be similar on survey characteristics as well. Therefore, in addition to ensuring balance between sample households in the benefit and non-benefit groups and the treatment and control groups in background characteristics, the evaluation team also tested for balance in the sample of survey respondents on additional characteristics available only from the survey. The primary outcome measure for the impact study for the SEBTC is the household measure of VLFS-C, which has a prevalence of 7.3% (weighted) in the baseline survey sample. As noted in Chapter V, although this is higher than recent national prevalence estimates for low-income households with children, it still represents a relatively low prevalence. If the prevalence of low and very low food security among children, and, especially VLFS-C, were unbalanced at baseline between the treatment and control groups, the impact analysis would be difficult to interpret. In Table VI.3 we show the balance between treatment and control groups pooled across all sites on baseline household levels of food security. Across all of the categories and pooling across sites, the p-values range from 0.292 to 0.779; all are well above the conventional 0.05 cutoff (See Appendix Table F.6). Similarly, pooling across sites, the global F-test has a p-value of 0.741; again well above the conventional 0.05 cutoff. In summary, there is no evidence of treatment/control imbalance on these key food security measures at baseline.

Table VI.3. Balance Between Treatment and Control Groups on Household Food Security

Household Food Security	All		Treatment		Control		Total % Point Difference	P Value
	Percent	SE	Percent	SE	Percent	SE		
Food-secure households	41.8	1.05	42.0	1.43	41.6	1.22	0.4	P =0.779
Food-insecure households (adults or children or both insecure)	58.2	1.05	58.0	1.43	58.4	1.22	-0.4	P =0.779
Food insecurity among adults only	15.3	0.75	14.8	0.92	15.8	0.87	-1.0	P =0.292
Food insecurity among children	42.9	0.78	43.2	1.07	42.7	1.19	0.5	P=0.734
Low food security among children	35.6	0.94	36.1	1.14	35.2	1.19	0.9	P =0.531
Very low food security among children	7.3	0.51	7.2	0.51	7.5	0.70	-0.3	P =0.634

Source: SEBTC, Spring Baseline Survey, 2011 (n=5,837).

Note: Findings are based on final baseline weights. Household food security is based on the standard 18-item, 30-day household measure using the cross-tabulation of findings for adults and children to categorize households.

In addition to doing formal checks on balance between the treatment and control groups for household food security, we also did F-tests to test for any imbalances between the two groups on household and school-age children's program participation (See Appendix Tables F.4. and F.5 for details). The data show little evidence of differences in program participation in most of the programs, including SNAP, WIC, food pantries, food kitchens, NSLP, SBP, and afterschool snack programs). There is some evidence of a higher proportion of emergency kitchen usage in the last 30 days reported by the control group (1.3% in the treatment group versus 2.2% in the control group;

$p=0.012<0.050$). Emergency kitchens are primarily used by adults (rather than children) as an emergency food source (Briefel et al. 2003; Mabli et al. 2010). In summary, these results suggest no evidence of imbalance or problems with random assignment to the benefit/non-benefit group, or with assignment to the treatment/control group, but some imbalance in measures of the participation of two less commonly used nutrition programs.¹⁶

B. Household Survey Response Rates

The household survey used a two-phase sampling plan. The first phase was telephone data collection and the second was in-person field interviews. The sample design involved dividing the sample for each site into replicates or random subsamples. The sample was released for data collection on a replicate-by-replicate basis. All replicates were included in the telephone data collection effort (phase 1), but only half the replicates were marked as eligible for in-person data collection (phase 2). Therefore, only phase 1 nonrespondents in replicates eligible for phase 2 were included in phase 2.

The two-phase design was selected as a cost-saving measure: in-person data collection is substantially more expensive than telephone data collection. Designating replicates as field-eligible prior to the start of data collection allowed work to be conducted within the short data collection schedule. Designated cases were moved to the field immediately after the case finished the telephone protocol, rather than subsampling nonrespondents only after all the telephone work was completed. The design is approved by the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR 2011). Following AAPOR guidelines to compute response rates for two-phased sample designs involves more steps than are needed for the usual single-phase sample design. More specifically, it requires assigning weights to households in the second-phase sample that are the inverse of the eligibility for in-person followup. For a detailed description of the disposition of the baseline sample and the resulting weights constructed to calculate response rates, see Appendix H.

1. Weighted Response Rates

The weighted response rates by site and by treatment and control status, using the AAPOR definition, are shown in their entirety in Table VI.4. The overall response rate was 67.5% and varied by site, with the highest response rates in Michigan and Oregon (73.0% and 71.1%, respectively) and the lowest in Missouri (61.6%).

Table VI.4. Weighted Response Rates, All Sites and by Site (%)

Weighted Response Rates	All Sites	Connecticut	Michigan	Missouri	Oregon	Texas
All Cases	67.5	64.2	73.0	61.6	71.1	68.2
Treatment (weighted)	70.6	66.5	76.9	65.8	75.6	69.2
Control (weighted)	64.4	61.9	69.1	57.4	66.7	67.2

Source: SEBTC Baseline Survey Disposition, Spring 2011.

¹⁶ Even when random assignment is properly implemented, some treatment/control differences on survey questions are possible. Participation in these two programs is rare, so the differences in number of observations is small and the normal approximation used to compute the tests may be unreliable.

2. Reasons for Survey Nonresponse

For the baseline data collection for the POC year, there were three primary reasons for nonresponse: (1) low-quality contact information, (2) short data collection window, and (3) refusals.¹⁷

Low Quality Contact Information. At the end of the data collection period, 31.7% of the households were not located or reached, so the evaluation team could not confirm that they were the ones selected for the study (see Table VI.5).¹⁸

Table VI.5. Survey Location Status, Overall and Active/Passive Consent

	All Sites	Active Consent	Passive Consent
All Households	9,743	5,763	3,980
Target Household Located	6,658	4,084	2,574
Target Household Never Located	3,085	1,679	1,406
Percent Never Located (unweighted)	31.7%	29.1%	35.3%

Source: SEBTC Baseline Survey Disposition, Spring 2011.

Some of the households that were not located or reached might have been avoiding responding to the survey, but could not be categorized as refusals. However, many households could not be reached due to poor quality contact information. This problem was more severe in passive consent sites where problems in the original contact information from SFAs made it much more likely an interviewer never was able to contact the household. This was true even when passive consent sites had a relatively longer data collection period than other sites and interviewers had more time to try to reach the households.

In addition, prior to the start of data collection, it was assumed that every case provided by the grantee would be eligible for the SEBTC benefit. In fact, about 2% (n=104) of the cases confirmed to be the target households were not eligible for the benefit because they no longer had a child living there. In addition, some FNS policies on eligible families were clarified after the baseline data collection had begun and it was not possible to change the screening questions on the survey at that time; therefore some families would have been screened out.¹⁹ This is the “e” factor applied to unconfirmed household counts when calculating the response rate. Furthermore, it is expected that the actual ineligibility rate may be significantly higher due to the inability to reach many households to verify their eligibility. The household location efforts continued over the summer, and once those

¹⁷ Nonresponse does not include households that were willing to complete the survey, but were found to be ineligible due to various factors.

¹⁸ See Appendix H for more details about the sample disposition.

¹⁹ The primary examples are households with eligible children enrolled in the participating SFA during the school year, but moved out of the demonstration area prior to receiving the SEBTC card.

data are analyzed the team can identify more households that were ineligible at baseline. More accurate information on ineligibility will lead to calculating a more accurate response rate.

Finally, the quality of household contact information also caused problems in accurately constructing households for the passive consent sites—Texas and Missouri—as described in Chapter III. It was unclear whether records of the two States were duplicative due to differences in contact information for households with similar names or similar last names of guardians and children, or for other reasons, such as contact information was recorded on different dates for children in the same household, or the household moved or broke up in the intervening time. The lists also contained households for which the named parent or guardian did not know the named focal child, likely because of transcription errors compiling the original contact lists from paper forms.

Short Data Collection Time Period. The time between receiving the household contact information file and the end of the school year was uncharacteristically short when compared to similar types of data collections. The data collection protocols included mail, telephone calls to valid phone numbers (up to 15 dialing attempts, sometimes to multiple phone numbers), database location services, and, finally, in-person location for field-eligible replicates. The baseline data collection periods for each of the sites are shown in Table VI.6. The short timeframe constrained the data collection team from being able to work through all the protocols. In Connecticut and Oregon, with less than four weeks of data collection, very few records reached the in-person stage.

Table VI.6. Data Collection Period

	Connecticut	Michigan	Missouri	Oregon	Texas
Start of Data Collection	5/25	5/9	4/27	5/11	4/18
End of Data Collection	6/9	6/10	5/31	6/6	6/9
Days of Data Collection	15-22 ^a	32	34	26	52

Source: SEBTC Spring Baseline Survey, 2011.

^a The data collection period for some Connecticut school districts was less than 22 days. The number of actual days of data collection ranged from 15 to 22.

Comparing the length of the data collection period (reported in Table VI.6) to the response rates (reported in Appendix Table H.3) suggests that the length of the data collection period had a large impact on response rates, especially the effectiveness of the field location efforts. For example, Texas (passive consent site), with relatively poor quality contact information, but by far the longest data collection period at 52 days, and, therefore, with much more time than other sites for field-locating, ended with a 20 percentage point difference between replicates that were eligible to go onto field location, compared to the replicates that were not. In Connecticut, with only 22 days, there was very little time to locate households in person, resulting in only a 4% difference between the replicates that went to field location and those that did not. (See Appendix H for information about response rates by replicate).

Refusals. Reported refusals accounted for less than 20% of the nonresponse. As is standard in household surveys, the true refusal rate is probably higher because of households that refused simply by avoiding the survey (never answering the phone) rather than explicitly refusing (answering the phone and refusing to participate). Some individuals refuse to answer any telephone survey, but in

this case, some refused for reasons specific to the SEBTC study. For instance, some guardians expressed concern about the legitimacy of the survey, and, in particular, how their contact information was obtained. In some cases, when addresses were inaccurate but the study was successful in obtaining accurate contact information, some respondents were contacted by telephone and had not seen either consent materials from the grantee or the advanced mailing about the survey.

There were also issues about too many phone calls. Some of our attempted contacts occurred at the same time that grantees were notifying families about whether they would receive the SEBTC card. In some cases, there were also calls to obtain additional information in order to issue the cards. This high volume of SEBTC-related calls appears to have caused some potential respondents to refuse to participate in the survey.

The POC year provides information that can be used to improve response rates in the full demonstration year. The evaluation team already has identified areas where the consent process can be modified, and will work more closely with the grantees to improve list construction to improve the quality of contact information and to shorten the consent and random assignment process so the baseline data collection period can be longer. Streamlining processes should also result in less overlap of the survey field period with grantee activities to notify households about whether they were selected to participate in the demonstration. Finally, the team plans to shorten parts of the survey instrument to reduce the administration time and respondent burden without sacrificing survey content. Even with these improvements, the data collection period will still be compressed in the full demonstration year, since grantees will meet with the evaluation team in early 2011 and baseline interviews must be completed before the end of the school year.

C. Survey Item Nonresponse Rates

The baseline survey included modules on household, respondent, and child characteristics, household food security and food expenditures, participation in nutrition assistance programs, and children's food consumption. Appendix I is a detailed summary of item response rates (unweighted) for each of the survey items. Of particular importance are questions related to food security, as these are the most important for developing the measures of food security. Item response rates for that segment were high, ranging from 98.3% to 99.9%. Only 5 out of 95 items in the baseline survey had response rates lower than 90%. Response rates were lower for questions on race and income. The household respondent and focal child's race items each had item response rates of 80%. The lowest response rates were for income-related items. A higher proportion of respondents reported on last month's income (89%) than incomes in the last year (66%) when asked directly. However, the majority of respondents who did not provide an exact income level (84%) were able to provide a response using income categories for the past year; 68% were able to provide a response using monthly income categories.²⁰

²⁰ Monthly income categories were in \$500 increments from less than \$500 to more than \$3,000. Annual income categories ranged from "less than \$10,000" to "more than \$150,000" in increments of \$10,000 to \$50,000.

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VII. SUMMARY OF PROJECT ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO DATE AND PLANS FOR 2012

The SEBTC demonstration was designed by FNS in response to a mandate from the U.S. Congress to test new ways to reduce hunger among low-income children during the summer months. This report has outlined the progress of the five-site demonstration through its first year of operation. Inasmuch as the demonstration was designed by FNS to allow this POC year to serve as a learning opportunity for both the implementation and for the evaluation, this final chapter details the key POC year's successes and challenges, and the implications for the remaining evaluation activities as SEBTC moves toward the full demonstration in 2012.

A. Key Implementation Successes and Challenges

As often happens in the first year of a program, grantees encountered unanticipated difficulties, including identifying eligible households, obtaining consents, delivering SEBTC benefits to selected households, improving participation rates of households selected to receive SEBTC, working in short timeframes with limited resources, and collaborating with new partners. The grantees devised strategies to move past all of those issues; in the interest of helping future implementations ease more efficiently past some of these bumps. Each of the complications is summarized below.

1. Delivering the Program to Eligible Children and Households Despite Contact Information of Uneven Quality

The grantees targeted and provided benefits to some of the most vulnerable populations in their States. The SEBTC is designed to serve households with children certified for FRP; however, the baseline data shows that the majority of participating households in the demonstration areas had incomes well below the FRP eligibility thresholds. As a group, the participating households also had high levels of food insecurity among children, with 7.3% of households at baseline experiencing VLFS-C) compared to 2.1% of households under 185% poverty nationally in 2010 (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2011). Almost three-fourths of households (73.5%) had household income below 100% of the federal poverty level. The higher rate of VLFS-C for the SEBTC demonstration is most likely related to such factors as the high rates of poverty in the selected sites, the comparative unavailability of local programs and resources to assist disadvantaged households, location (urban versus rural), and the possibility of greater economic hardships in 2011 compared to 2010. With relatively few summer feeding options in several of these communities, SEBTC benefits may have filled a gap for children from households that experience food insecurity even during the school year. Future results will measure the effect of the SEBTC on low-income households' and their children's food security.

a. Identifying households and obtaining consent

Identifying eligible children accurately and obtaining consent for their participation is vital to ensuring that the potentially eligible population has a chance to participate in SEBTC and that EBT cards can be issued to them. All of the grantees were able to identify eligible households in their demonstration areas and obtain consent from a sufficient number of families to complete random assignment for the evaluation, but there were complications.

In several States, the data obtained from the SFAs were inconsistent and sometimes lacked household identifications or current addresses and phone numbers. In addition, it appeared that

grantees, partners, and SFAs put varying levels of effort into the consent process. Even with contact information of uneven quality, all States produced lists and sent consent letters to the target number of households.

The consent process was more difficult than anticipated for most grantees. Those who used active consent recruited 24 to 37% of eligible households for the demonstration, but most had to do more outreach than originally anticipated to achieve a sufficient number for the evaluation. In two of the active consent sites, this issue lengthened the time period needed to get consents, causing time pressures on the subsequent steps required to deliver benefits. It is unclear whether low rates of active consent indicated that households were not interested in the program, did not understand the letter, or never opened the letter. In the passive consent sites, letters may not have always reached families due to incorrect address or contact information. It is not clear, even if letters did arrive, whether the recipients understood the information. Further, since grantees did not have an opportunity to update contact or other information necessary for the benefit, they did not always have the level of information needed to identify and reach households.

b. Delivering Benefits

Every State was able to make the necessary changes to the State eligibility and EBT systems used for SNAP or WIC to issue SEBTC benefits to households by the end of the school year; however, the process was not seamless. For grantees using SNAP systems to issue SEBTC benefits, children who were randomly assigned to the benefit group and their parents or guardians had to be matched manually to State eligibility systems for SNAP and other public assistance benefits before SEBTC benefits could be issued. The manual processes used to match children to parents or guardians created the potential for human error and, indeed, when information was matched or updated, resulted in inconsistencies accidental duplications, and deletion of cases.

Some States also had difficulty getting the cards to families, particularly in the passive consent States. Because families may have moved or the address in the data was not accurate, States had to attempt to locate households through alternative addresses and phone calls. In four of the sites, nearly all households received their EBT cards. In one site, almost 15% of households assigned to the treatment group never received their cards because they did not send back the required information from the second mailing. This group remains in the treatment group, and cannot be replaced by other households to either receive the benefit or participate in the evaluation study.

2. Participation and Redemption Rates

Once the first cycle of benefits was issued, almost three-quarters or more of households that were selected in every demonstration area to receive SEBTC benefits actually used them. This ranged from 73% in Texas to 97% in Oregon, with the highest participation rates in the two SNAP-hybrid model sites, Missouri (86%) and Oregon. The redemption rates, which ranged from 68% in Michigan to 97% in Oregon, were also highest in the SNAP-hybrid sites. The two WIC sites had the lowest redemption rates.

3. Difficult Timeline and Unanticipated Costs

States consistently commented on the challenges of working under tight time constraints during all phases of the project. Most grantees expressed frustration about the timeline and felt that with

more time they could have anticipated some of the issues that arose and developed more effective ways of dealing with them. Nonetheless, all of the States adapted as issues developed.

States also encountered several unanticipated demonstration costs. Some of the work took more time than initially planned, particularly tasks related to the creation and cleaning of household files for random assignment, and the tasks often took more staff time and financial resources than budgeted, causing many States to spend additional non-grant funds or to use in-kind resources from State staff or partner organizations. State budget difficulties and natural disasters also affected implementation in four States.

Most grantees also did not expect the amount of work required of them after the benefits were issued to households, including issues related to the use of card PINs, households requesting benefits for children that were not accounted for, and children moving or changing guardians. Although these were mainly minor issues, they required staff time most States did not anticipate in their original proposals.

4. Cross-Agency Collaboration, Partnerships, and Program Communication

The SEBTC program requires that two systems that generally operate separately—FRP meals eligibility and either SNAP or WIC—must work together. Consequently, grantees had to work across agencies and organizations that may not have collaborated previously and had different processes, data systems, and cultures to navigate. Reconciling these different organizations and their data systems was sometimes complicated, but most States felt they were able to communicate effectively and achieve a common goal. Several States also indicated that through this demonstration they were able to develop the framework for long-term partnerships that will benefit them in the future on this program as well as others.

Many of the sites also noted various problems relating to effectively communicating with partners and the community. States working with multiple SFAs appeared to have more instances of miscommunication or variation in process among the SFAs. Also, a few States had some difficulty explaining the goals and details of the program to parents and community partners. Some parents were confused about what the program entailed and how and where to use the benefits. Some were unsure what they were enrolling in and others thought because of the branding that the card must be used at a SFSP site. In addition, SFSP sponsors in most States were not informed about the SEBTC demonstration but many received questions about it from parents. Most sponsors interviewed agreed they would have liked to have known more about the program to better serve their clients.

B. Implications for Future Evaluation Activities

The evaluation also used the POC year as a learning experience. Activities from December 2010 to August 2011 provided information on how to refine survey data collection procedures to maximize response rates in the full demonstration year, as well as how to help grantees construct more accurate household lists and coordinate the survey and notification efforts with grantees. Ongoing technical assistance efforts with POC grantees as well as a meeting with continuing and new grantees selected for the full demonstration will provide an opportunity to share these lessons in preparation for the 2011-2012 demonstration year.

1. Key Factors Influencing Baseline Survey Efforts

Two major factors influenced the evaluation's baseline survey efforts: the length of the data collection period and the quality of household contact information. The evaluation team initially aimed to complete random assignment in time to allow for eight weeks of baseline data collection before the end of the 2010-2011 school year. However, as previously noted, grantees encountered many complications in identifying eligible children, grouping those children into households, and obtaining consent from a sufficient number of households to meet the evaluation requirements. As a result, random assignment was delayed, shortening the baseline data collection period. In the end, the duration of the survey effort varied from site to site, lasting from 15 days to 52 days. Comparing the length of the data collection period to the response rates suggests that the reduced length of data collection had an effect on response rates and the time available for field location efforts.

Beyond the length of the data collection period, baseline efforts were hindered by poor quality contact information. Nearly one-third of households selected for the evaluation study and baseline survey could not be located, largely due to incorrect contact information. The problem was greater in passive consent sites, most likely because those households were not required to verify their contact information as part of their response to the consent mailing.

Neither the grantees nor the evaluation team anticipated the extent of data quality issues that emerged as SFAs for each site developed their lists of eligible children and households. The evaluation team provided guidance as SFAs began pulling together their data and as State files were submitted for random assignment. However, more one-on-one discussion with technical staff at the SFAs before list creation starts as well as more direct and clear guidance from the team to the grantees based on the POC year's experiences with data issues can potentially improve the process, allow random assignment to occur more quickly, and help facilitate higher response rates.

2. Coordinating Baseline Survey Letters with Grantee Efforts to Notify Households of Random Assignment Results

As the baseline survey efforts began, grantees had not yet notified or were simultaneously notifying households of their random assignment status, leading to some misunderstandings. A small proportion of non-benefit group households expressed frustration because they mistook the advance letter for the survey and thought they were selected to receive the benefit; some mistook the survey gift card for the SEBTC EBT card. To avoid this confusion during the full demonstration year, the team will consider with grantees the implications for the timing of notifications.

C. Upcoming Evaluation Activities

The SEBTC evaluation will continue through the POC year and the full demonstration year. During summer 2011, the team collected a second wave of household data that will serve as the basis for the impact analysis for the POC year. The evaluation will also collect EBT data, cost data, and additional process data through fall 2011 to reflect the full implementation period. All of these data sources will be used for the Final 2011 Evaluation Report.

Data collection activities for the full demonstration year in 2011-2012 will mirror those of the POC year on a wider scale, incorporating improvements and enhancements based on the POC experiences. The evaluation team will randomly assign households representing 75,000 children from up to 15 demonstration areas, and complete 27,000 household interviews at baseline and again

VII. Summary of Project Accomplishments

in the summer. The team will also collect EBT data, cost data, and process data from all participating sites through a set of activities similar to those conducted in the POC year. The study will produce a two-year impact report based on these data as well as a comprehensive two-year report combining results from both the POC and full demonstration.

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