



Food and Nutrition Service

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Supplement A:  
Data Collection Methods and Data Quality

The study team administered two web-based surveys from October 2023 to January 2024 to collect the data reported in these research briefs. This supplement provides information about the surveys' data collection processes and the quality of the data.

## State agency survey data collection

The study team sent a survey to the 56 State agencies that administer the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, or Seamless Summer Option in the 50 States, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. All 56 State agencies responded to the survey.

### Survey content

The State agency survey captured information on school meal program operations in school year (SY) 2022–2023 and fulfilled the statutory reporting requirements of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) for use of COVID-19 nationwide waivers. The questions on program operations focused on challenges collecting household applications in States with universal free school meal policies; participation in the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program; subsidies States provided to SFAs to supplement those provided by USDA; and procurement. Survey questions about States' use of the Waiver to Allow Fiscal Action Flexibility for Meal Pattern Violations Related to COVID-19 Supply Chain Disruptions Impacting School Meals in SY 2022–2023 fulfilled the FFCRA reporting requirements ([U.S. Congress 2020](#)).<sup>1</sup>

### Survey data quality

State agencies generally provided substantive answers to the survey questions. Across all State agencies, respondents selected Don't Know as a response for just 6 percent of survey items. This is lower than the percentage of items with a response of Don't Know in the previous four surveys, which largely focused on COVID-19 waivers during March–September 2020 (17 percent), SY 2020–2021 (14 percent), and SY 2021–2022 (17 percent). Because only one COVID-19 waiver was active in SY 2022–2023, the current State agency survey was shorter than in previous years and the questions focused less on waivers and more on program operations. This change in burden and content may have affected the prevalence of Don't Know responses.

The sections of the survey with the highest prevalence of Don't Know responses were those containing questions about procurement, including compliance with the Buy American provision, which had Don't Know responses for about 13 percent of questions.

In general, States were able to select a response that fit their situation from the options provided. Among survey items with an Other–Specify field, respondents entered an open-ended response for 11 percent of survey items, which is similar to percentages in the previous four State agency surveys. These responses were reviewed and assigned to new or existing response options as applicable.

The questions that asked about (1) challenges with household application collection in States with universal free school meal policies, (2) the types of subsidies States provided to SFAs for breakfasts or lunches, and (3) reasons for returning unused Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program funds had the highest prevalence of Other–Specify responses, with at least 20 percent of State agencies selecting that option.

## School food authority survey data collection

The study team sent a survey to a nationally representative sample of 1,267 school food authorities (SFAs). More than four in five (86 percent; 1,100 SFAs) completed the survey. The study team conducted a nonresponse bias analysis to assess the potential for nonresponse bias. The weights used for the analyses were adjusted for nonresponse.

### **SFA survey content**

The SFA survey gathered information on school meal program operations and finances during SY 2022–2023. The topics covered in the survey included school participation, State-provided universal free meals, eligibility determination and verification, meal prices, funding and expenditures, procurement, and meal preparation and service.

### **SFA survey data quality**

SFAs answered most or all of the survey questions in general. Across all SFAs, 3 percent of survey items had missing responses, which is lower than the 10 percent of missing responses in the previous SFA survey about SY 2020–2021. The prevalence of missing responses varied by survey section, with the highest prevalence of missing responses (11 percent) in the section on State-provided universal free meals. The survey section on funding and expenditures had the lowest prevalence of missing responses (0.2 percent).

## References

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Congress. “Families First Coronavirus Response Act.” Pub. Law 116-127, 134 Stat. 185. March 18, 2020. <https://www.congress.gov/116/plaws/publ127/PLAW-116publ127.pdf>.