NAVIGATING AREA ELIGIBILITY IN SUMMER AND AFTERSCHOOL MEALS

What is Area Eligibility?

Area eligibility indicates a location is eligible to operate an open meal site under the summer meals program (Summer Food Service Program and NSLP Seamless Summer Option) and/or an afterschool meals program (Area Eligible NSLP Snacks and the Child and Adult Care Food Program At-risk Afterschool Meals Program). Open meal sites can serve and claim reimbursement for meals provided to all children 18 and younger (for afterschool meals, all students who were 18 or younger at the beginning of the school year).

For a location to be area eligible, it must be in an area with greater than or equal to 50% of children eligible for free and reduced-price meals. Depending on the program, different data sources can be used to determine if a location is area eligible. Once a site has been determined as area eligible, the site remains eligible for five years from initial determination.

What data sources can be used to determine area eligibility?

School Data

- Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)
- NSLP Seamless Summer Option (SSO)
- CACFP At-risk Afterschool Meals
- Area Eligible NSLP Snacks

CACFP regulations require the NSLP administering agency coordinate with the CACFP administering agency to produce a list of area eligible school zones each year by February 15th. Generally, school data from the month of October is used to determine eligibility. SFSP regulations do not require the use of the same month, but state agencies are encouraged to use the same month designated for CACFP.

Schools that utilize the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) can use the school's identified student percentage (ISP) multiplied by 1.6 to determine area eligibility for their attendance zone. You must use the individual school's ISP times 1.6 even if it is part of a group for the purposes of CEP.

We encourage you to share this resource with others!

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Census Data
- Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)
- NSLP Seamless Summer Option (SSO)

The most recent census data may be used to determine eligibility for SFSP and SSO. Census data cannot be used to determine eligibility for CACFP At-risk Afterschool Meals. If a site operates both summer and afterschool meal programs, they must use school data to determine area eligibility.

Are there tools to help determine area eligibility?

Yes! There are many resources that assist with determining if a site is located in an area eligible region. They include:

- No Kid Hungry's **Averaged Area Eligibility Map**
- USDA's **Area Eligibility Mapper**
- USDA's policy guidance ***Area Eligibility in the Child Nutrition Programs***

Tip: *Occasionally, a site is located immediately adjacent to an eligible area. In these cases, you may be able to operate an open summer meals site. Contact your state agency and see section "Use of Census Data: Geographic Areas Covered by Census Data" in this **USDA policy memo** to learn more and check out No Kid Hungry's **Averaged Area Eligibility Map** which uses this policy.*

What options exist for sites outside of area eligible regions?

Summer Meals

Summer meals programs can operate a closed enrolled site in locations that are not area eligible. Closed enrolled sites must collect free and reduced-priced meal applications from households. If the 50% threshold is met, the site can provide meals to all children enrolled at the site at no cost. Camps (both residential and non-residential) are not subject to area eligibility; however, they must collect free and reduced-priced meal forms from households. *See page 28 of USDA's **Summer Meals Administration Guide** to learn more.*

Afterschool Meals

Afterschool programs have two options if not located in an area eligible location– **Outside-School-Hours Care**, a component of CACFP, and **Afterschool Snacks**, a component of NSLP. Both can operate in areas that do not qualify as area eligible.

In Outside-School-Hours Care programs, meals are reimbursable only for children ages 12 and under and a variety of organizations can sponsor the program (e.g., School Food Authorities, non-profit organizations, and public institutions like libraries or parks). In addition, programs must collect enrollment and eligibility documentation, and meals are reimbursed according to each child's eligibility status. Although Outside-School-Hours Care programs may not operate on weekends only, they can operate on weekends in addition to weekdays, and they are also eligible to serve up to two meals and one snack daily.

Afterschool Snack programs can only be sponsored by School Food Authorities. Snacks can only be provided on school days. Sites must collect free and reduced-price meal forms for participating children, and snacks are reimbursed according to household income eligibility classifications.

Learn more about both programs with No Kid Hungry's
Understanding Afterschool Snacks and Meals.

Non-Federal Program Options

- Cover meal costs through charitable donations or grant funding.
- Partner with a local food bank, restaurant, or grocery store to serve meals, set up a food pantry, or provide grocery boxes.
- Refer families to a summer or afterschool meals site nearby.

Use this flowchart to find the best option for your site:

Is your site area eligible?
Check out
fns.usda.gov/area-eligibility
to find out!

Yes.
Great! The site's determinations is good for the next five years.

No.
Are you planning to serve meals over the summer or outside of school hours?

Over the summer

Outside of school hours
(afterschool or on weekends during academic year).

Closed Enrolled Site
(relies on free and reduced-priced meal form collection or area data from school or census data)

Camp (relies on free and reduced-price meal form collection)

Afterschool Snacks
(through NSLP, only available to SFAs)

Outside-School-Hours Care Program (through CACFP, available to SFAs, non-profits, and public institutions)