

# Healthy School Meals for All: Research & Implementation



**USDA Food  
and Nutrition Service**

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**Child Nutrition Programs**  
December 5, 2023



United States Department of Agriculture

# Agenda

- Research
- States' Perspectives
  - Minnesota: Free School Meals for All
  - New York: Incentivizing CEP
- Panel Discussion
- Q&As





# Universal Free School Meals

## Benefits and Lessons Learned

**Juliana Cohen, ScM, ScD**

Professor & Director of the Center for Health Inclusion, Research and Practice (CHIRP), Merrimack College  
Adjunct Professor, Department of Nutrition, Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health

# Conflicts of Interest/Disclosures

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**COI:** None

**FUNDING:** Healthy Eating Research, RWJF  
National Institutes of Health

# Background

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## **Systematic Review of Universal Free School Meals (UFSM):**

- Improved school meal participation and consumption
- Improved child diet quality and food security
- Improved school attendance and academic performance



**Source:** Cohen JF, Hecht AA, McLoughlin GM, Turner L, Schwartz MB. Universal school meals and associations with student participation, attendance, academic performance, diet quality, food security, and body mass index: A systematic review. *Nutrients*. 2021 Mar 11;13(3):911.

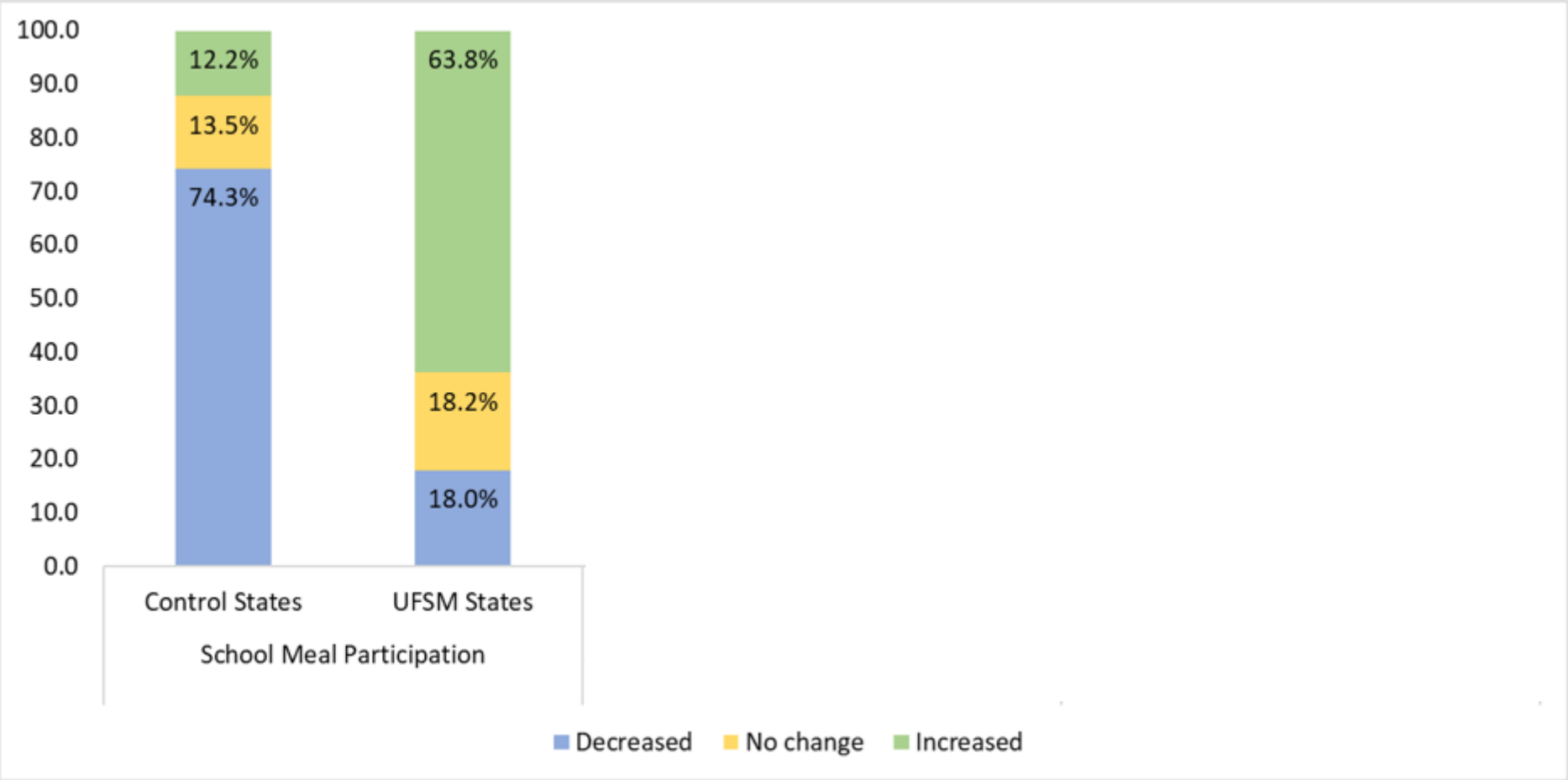
# Evaluation of UFSM in the U.S.

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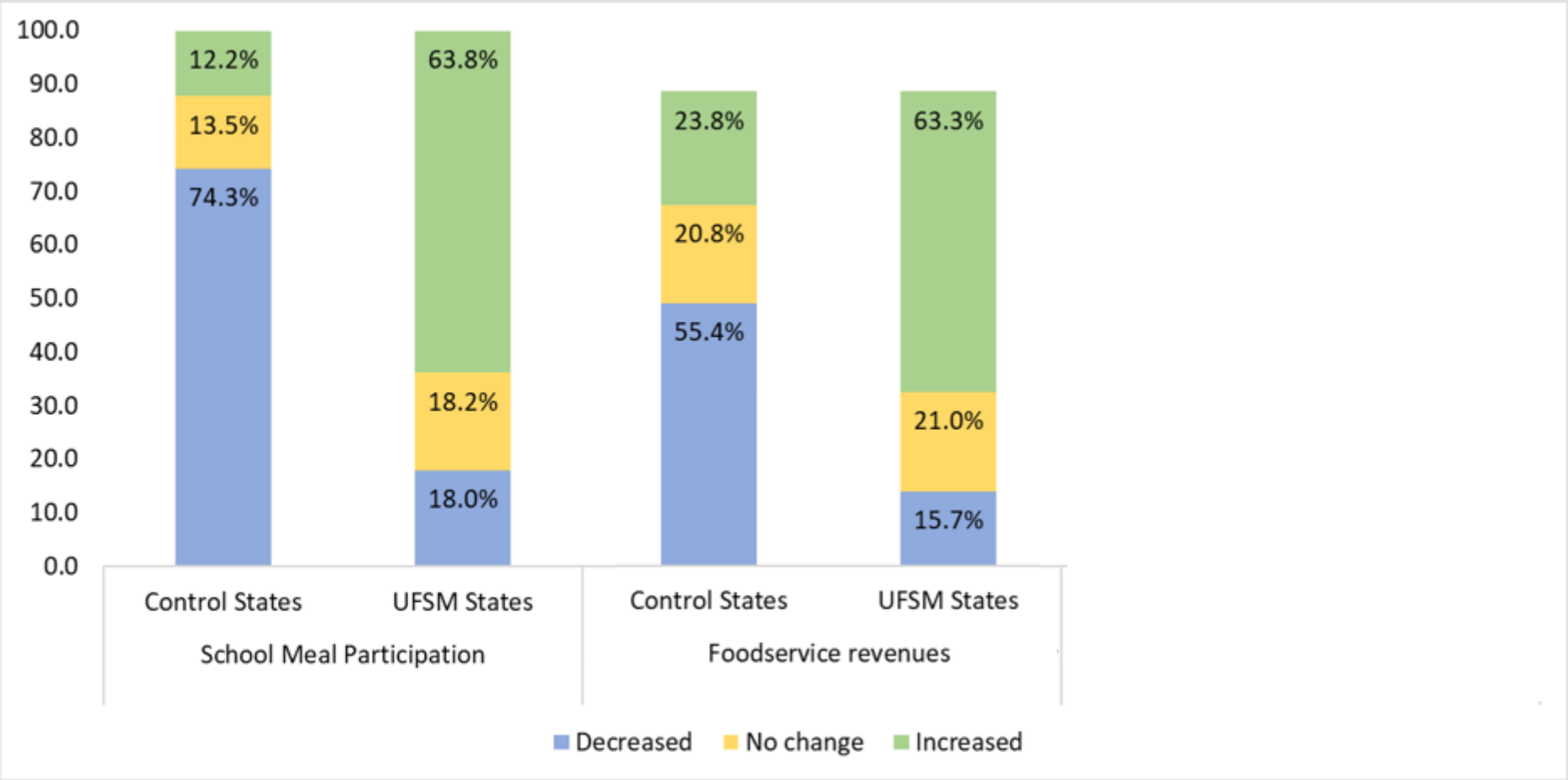
- Study conducted across 8 states (half with UFSM policies and half that de-implemented UFSM) during 2022-23SY
  - Surveys completed by SFAs (n=941), parents (n=3,377), and students (n=1,198)
  - Surveys assessed benefits/challenges with UFSM, revenues and unpaid meal debt, school meal application forms, and factors associated with school meal participation



# Results from SFAs

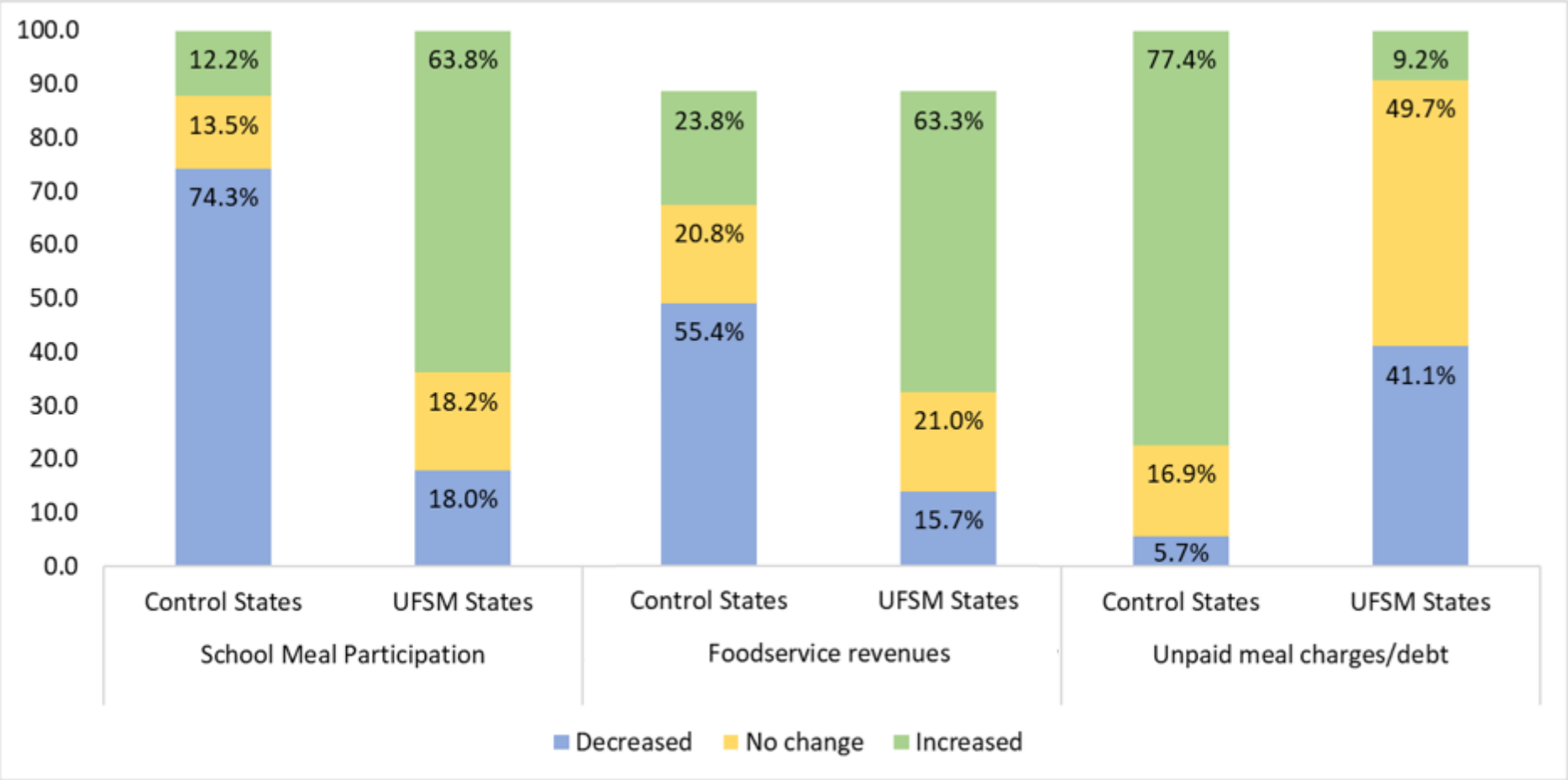


# Results from SFAs

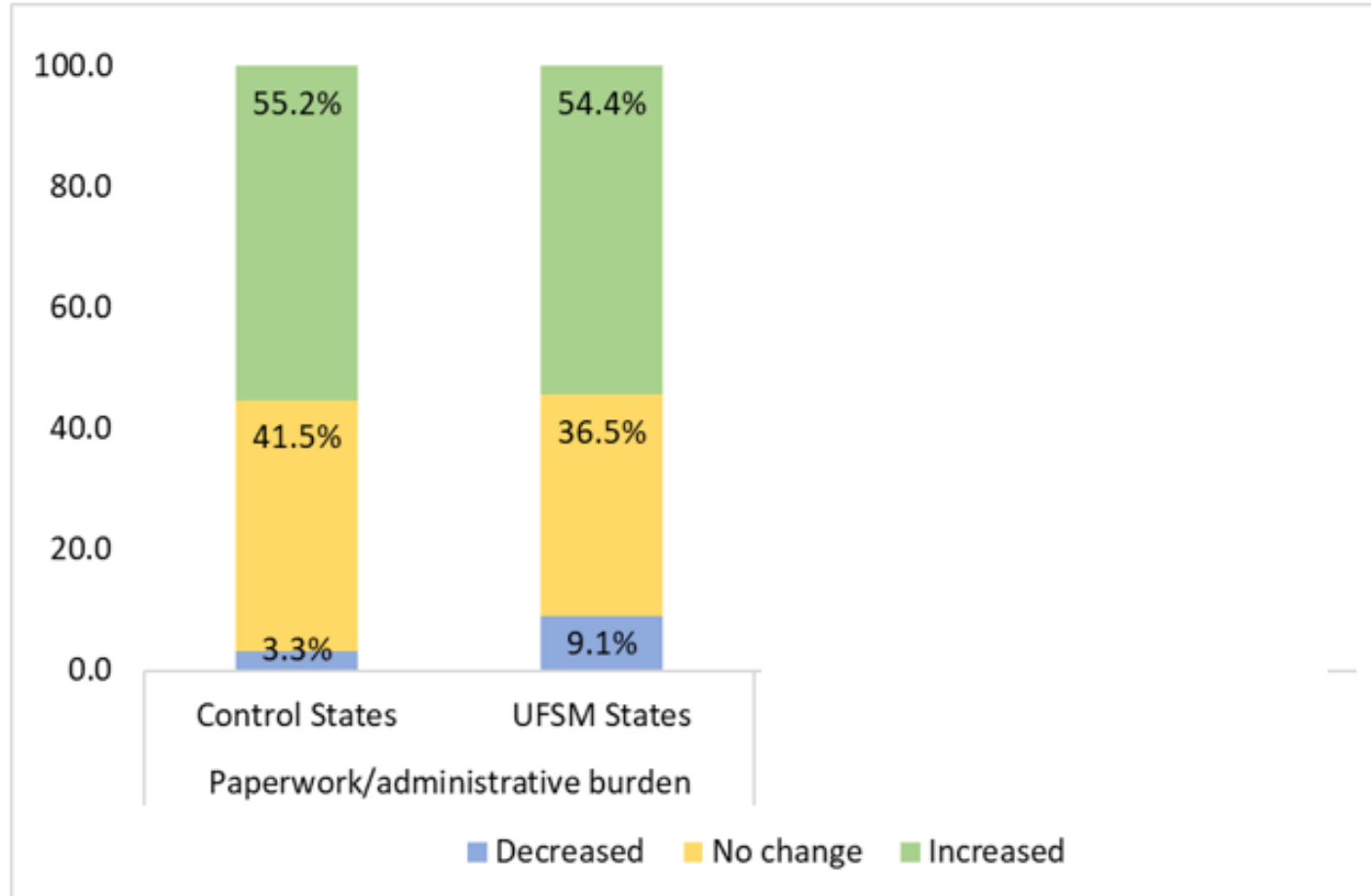




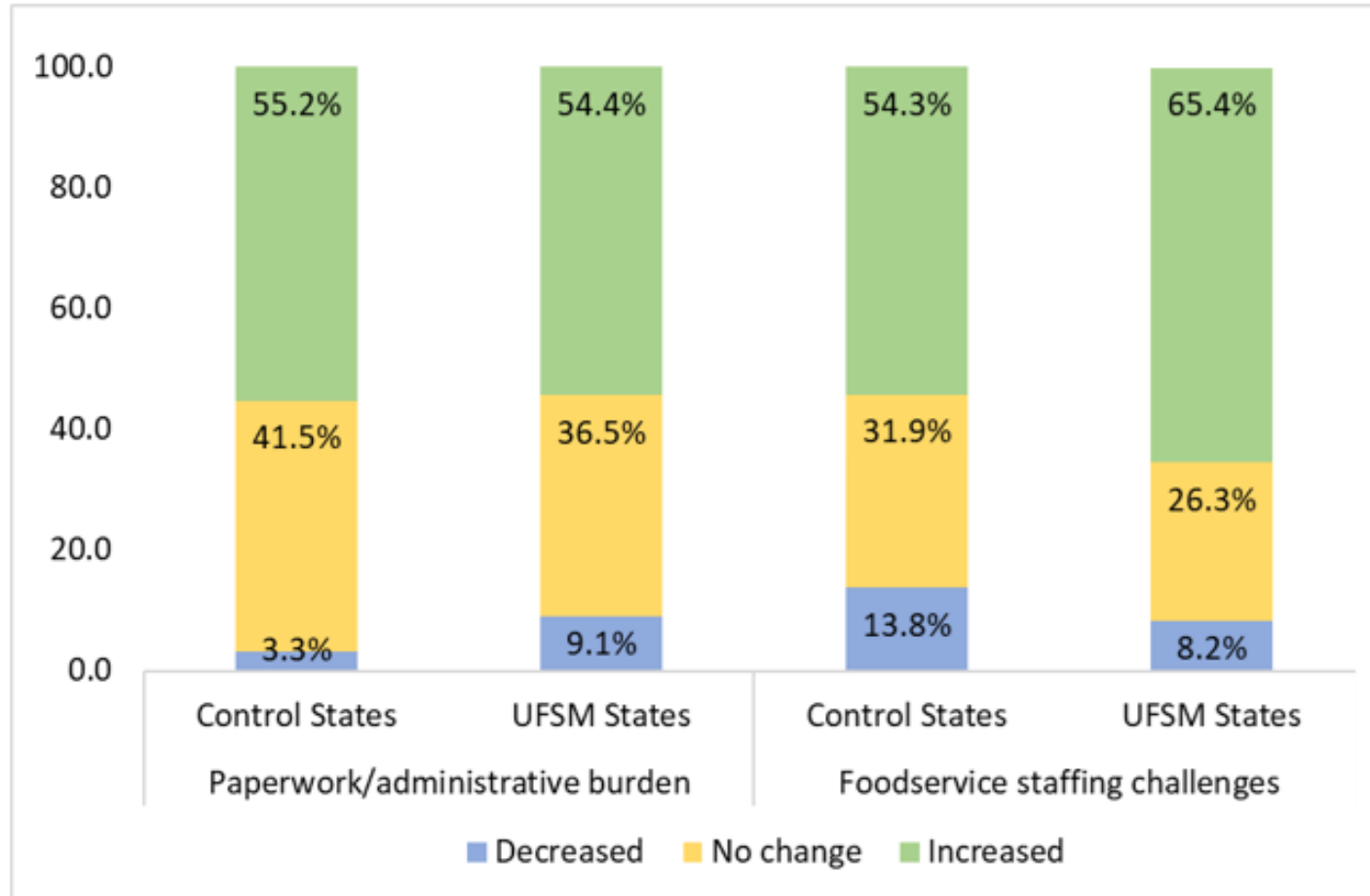
# Results from SFAs



# Results from SFAs (cont.)



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# Parent Perspectives

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- Overall, >80% of parents reported that UFSM **saved their family money and time, and reduced stress**
- 42% of **families eligible for free or reduced priced meals** reported that their child would be less likely to eat school meals if they were not free for all children.
- 61% of **families that were NEAR ELIGIBLE for free or reduced priced meals** reported their ability to have enough food for all in their household would be hurt if school meals were not free for all children.
- 34% of **families that were MIDDLE CLASS** reported their ability to have enough for all in their household would be hurt if school meals were not eligible for all children.

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# Parent Perspectives: School Meal Applications

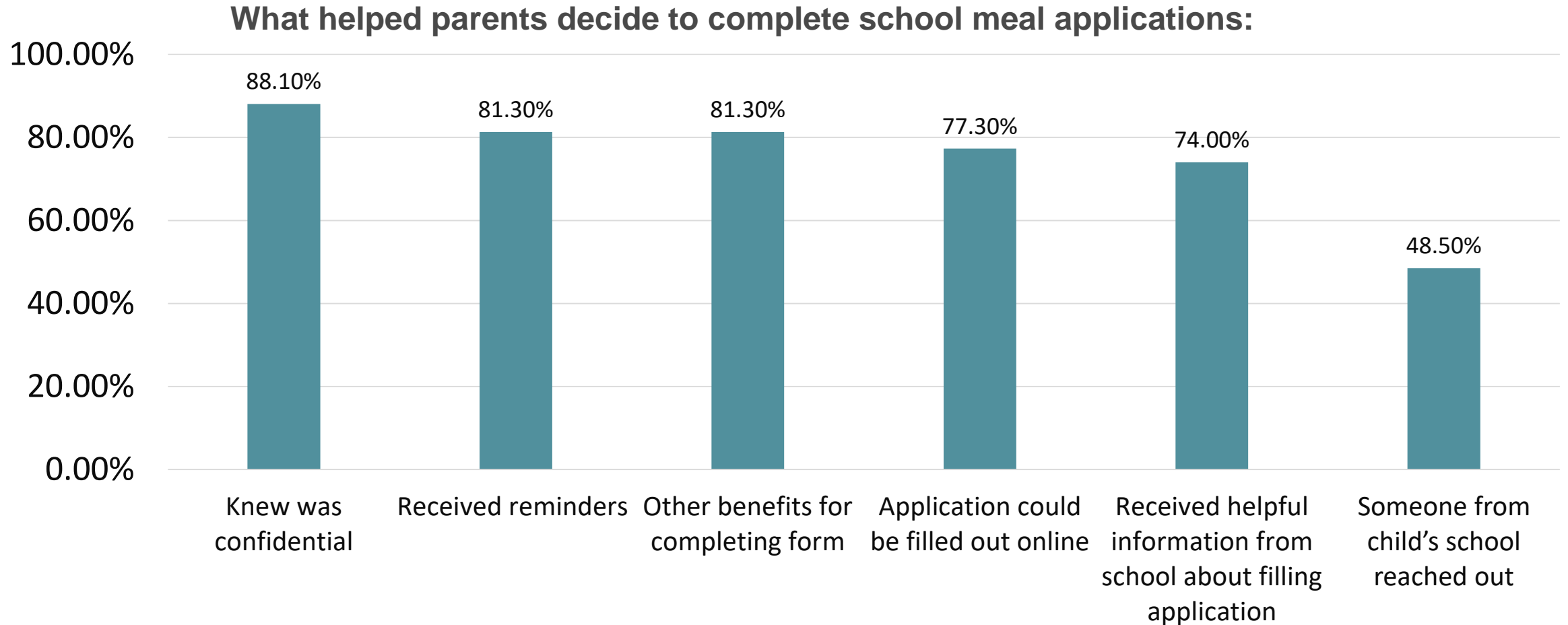
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***51% reported that they didn't understand why they needed to fill out an application if meals are free***





# Parent Perspectives: School Meal Applications



# Student Perspectives

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## *In States with UFSM:*

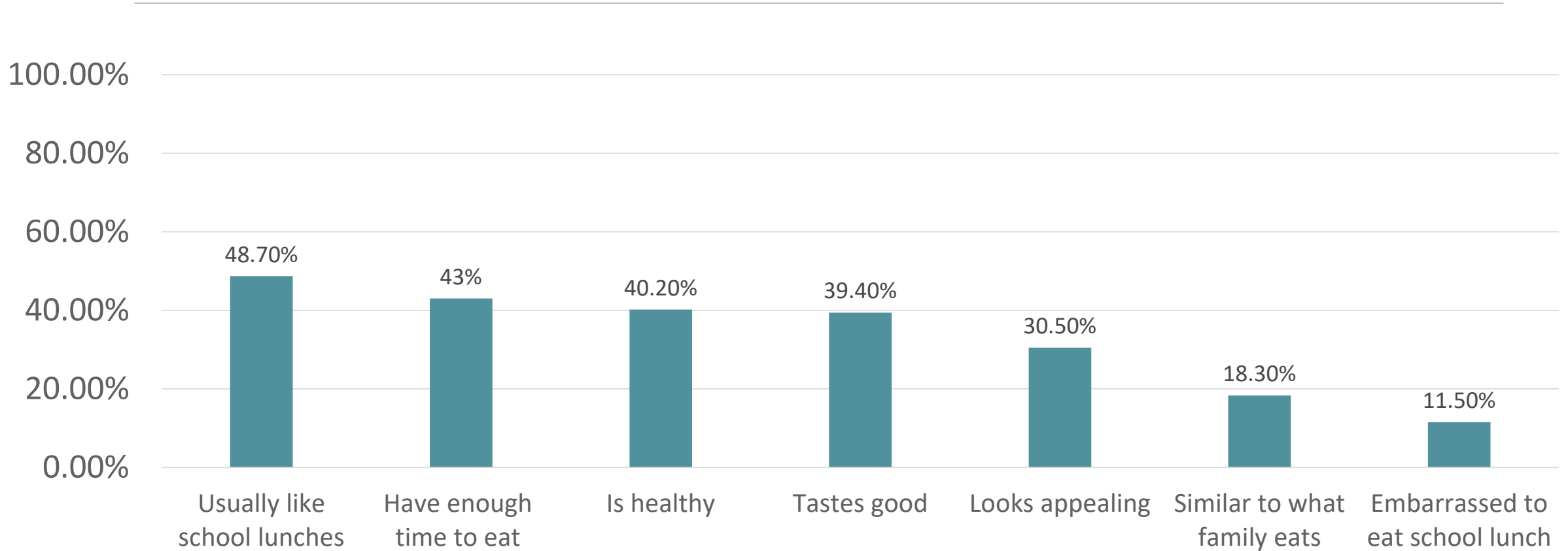
- **Only 12% felt that school meals were for students from low-income households**

## *In States without UFSM:*

- ***88% of students said they wished school meals were free for all students***



# Student Perspectives



# Additional Lessons Learned

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## **Policies that Compliment UFSM**

- Strong nutrition standards
- Ensuring both the cultural appropriateness and palatability of the meals
- Sufficient time for students to eat at school (e.g., 30 minute lunch breaks)
- Alternative breakfast models (e.g., breakfast in the classroom initiatives)
- Limiting the sale of ‘competitive foods’ (snacks or beverages sold in schools outside of the school meal program)
- Closed campus policies

**Source:** Cohen JF, Hecht AA, Hager ER, Turner L, Burkholder K, Schwartz MB. Strategies to improve school meal consumption: a systematic review. *Nutrients*. 2021 Oct 7;13(10):3520.

# Thank you

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[Jcohen@hsph.harvard.edu](mailto:Jcohen@hsph.harvard.edu)

@JulianaFW  





# Minnesota Free School Meals Program (MN-FSM)

Emily Honer | Director, Nutrition Program Services

# Ten Minnesota Commitments to Equity

1. Prioritize equity.
2. Start from within.
3. Measure what matters.
4. Go local.
5. Follow the money.
6. Start early.
7. Monitor implementation of standards.
8. Value people.
9. Improve conditions for learning.
10. Give students options.

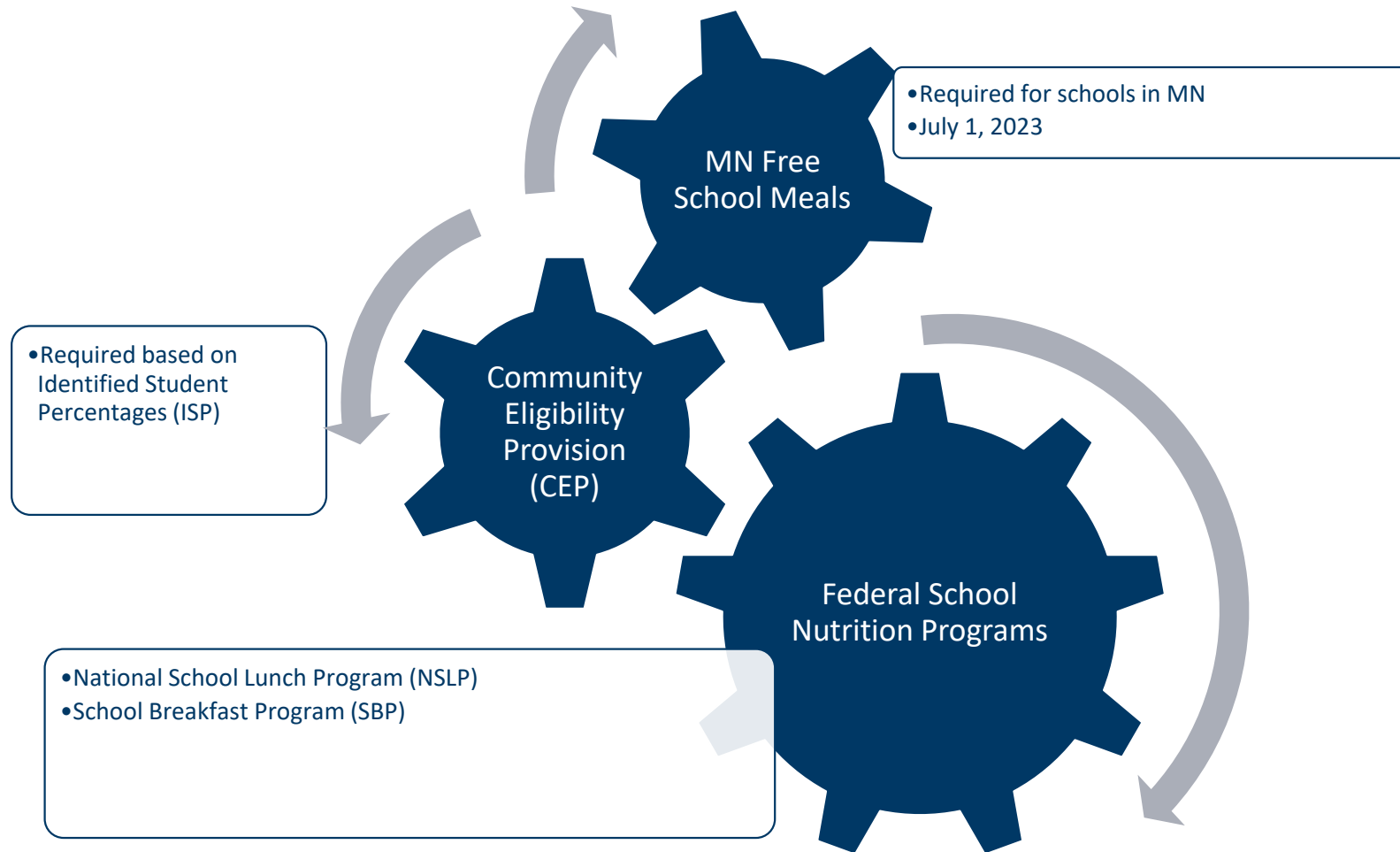


# Minnesota Free School Meals for Kids Program (MN-FSM)





# What is the MN-FSM



# Where to Participate

- CLiCS
  - Site application(s) and 1 sponsor application



*Cyber-Linked Interactive Child Nutrition System*

Food & Nutrition Service

## Program Links

### Child Nutrition Programs

- School Nutrition Program (SNP)
- Milk Program (MILK)
- Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)
- Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)
- Family Day Care Homes (FDCH)
- Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP)

### Direct Certification

### Verification Reporting

### Food Distribution School Year 2021 and Later

# Where to Find More Information?

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the address bar displaying [education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/FNS/SNP/free/](https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/FNS/SNP/free/). The page header features the Minnesota Department of Education logo and a navigation menu with items: Home, About, Students and Families, Licensing, Districts, Schools and Educators, Data Center, and COVID-19. A breadcrumb trail reads: [MDE](#) > [Districts, Schools and Educators](#) > [Food and Nutrition](#) > [School Nutrition Programs](#) > [Free School Meals for Kids Program](#). The main content area is titled "Free School Meals for Kids Program" and contains the following text: "On Friday, March 17, 2023, Governor Walz signed the Free School Meals bill into law. This will take effect with the July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024 school year. This legislation provides the reimbursement for a free breakfast and lunch to students who receive meals through their school's participation in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the School Breakfast Program (SBP). Schools that participate in the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National School Lunch Program (NSLP) must now participate in the state funded Free School Meals Program." Below this text is a link for "Free School Meals FAQ - 5/24/23" with the description "Regularly Updated Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for the Free School Meals Program." A left-hand sidebar menu lists various categories, with "School Nutrition Programs" expanded to show "Free School Meals for Kids Program" as the selected item.



# Community Eligibility Provision New York State Subsidy

Kimberly Vumbaco, Director  
Child Nutrition Programs



New York State  
EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Knowledge > Skill > Opportunity



State paid rate provides difference between free and paid rates for CEP meals reimbursed in the paid category

## CEP State Subsidy

	CEP Claim Category	Federal	State	Total
<b>Lunch</b>	Free	4.33	0.0599	<b>4.3899</b>
	Paid	0.48	3.9099	
<b>Breakfast</b>	Free	2.28	.1013	<b>2.3813</b>
	Paid	0.38	2.0013	

# NY Student Access to Free School Meals



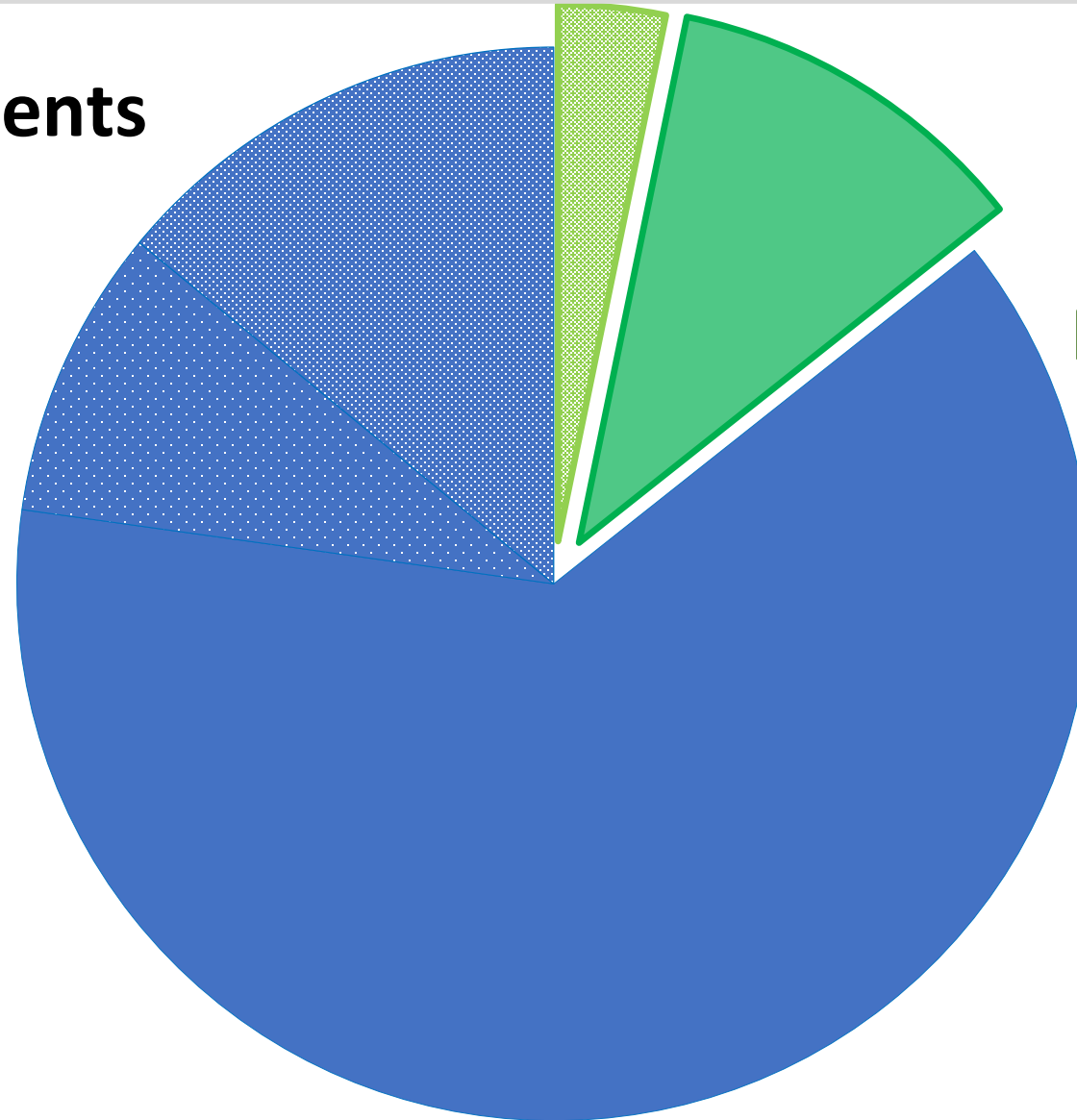
**2.76M Total Students**

**CEP Students**  
**2.37M (86%)**

40% ISP No Subsidy  
1.74M (63%)

40% ISP w/Subsidy  
+ 242,000 (9%)

25% ISP w/Subsidy  
+ 388,000 (14%)



**Non-CEP Students**  
**396,000 (14%)**

**Free/Reduced**  
**89,000 (3%)**

**Paid**  
**307,000 (11%)**



## Panel Discussion



# Questions?

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