



Supporting Child Care Businesses While Advancing Nutrition

RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO THE CHILD AND ADULT CARE FOOD PROGRAM

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) supports families' food security and nutrition by reimbursing child care providers for serving healthy food to young children. The CACFP is a federal program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and is operated by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE).

The Early Childhood Investment Corporation (ECIC) partnered with Public Policy Associates (PPA), 1837 Partners, and the Michigan After School Partnership on a project to increase CACFP participation of child care providers in Michigan. The project was funded by the Michigan Health Endowment Fund. PPA conducted the research activities for this project, including:

- A literature review
- Analysis of secondary data
- Six roundtables with 49 child care providers
- Nine interviews with program or policy experts

Key Findings

PARTICIPATION AND ACCESS IN MICHIGAN

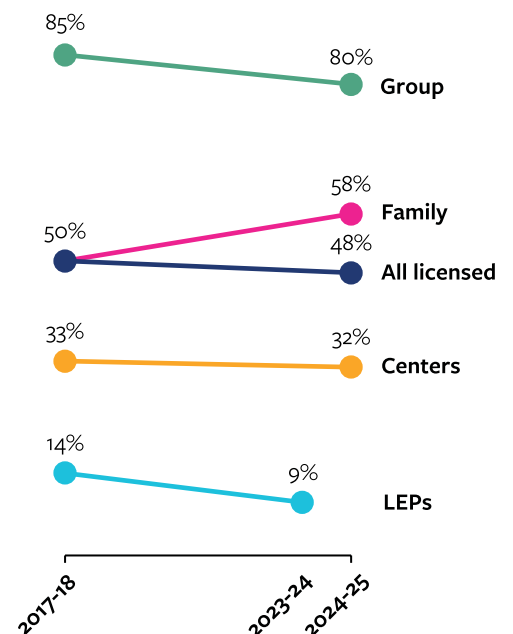
- Provider participation in the CACFP has declined since 2017-2018.
- Access to the CACFP for children, while limited, has remained relatively stable over time.
- Licensed home-based providers are most likely to participate in the CACFP; however, they typically serve smaller numbers of children than centers.
- Centers represent the greatest opportunity to expand access because they have lower participation rates and typically serve more children than home-based providers.
- License-exempt providers (LEPs) also offer an opportunity to increase access with the lowest participation rates in the CACFP.
- There are disparities in access to the CACFP, with urban areas having less access than rural areas.

BENEFITS TO CHILD CARE PROVIDERS

- Helps providers serve nutritious meals and provide nutrition education to the children in their care.
- Provides continuing education for the child care providers.
- Enhances providers' pride in their child care programs.
- Increases families' perceived value of providers' child care programs.
- Supports the financial sustainability of providers' businesses. Michigan child care providers received an estimated combined \$59.3 million in CACFP reimbursements in the 2023-2024 school year.

"... it has helped me financially. It has helped the children stay on course with their nutrition.... And it has eased the parents' mind about how well that their children are being taken care of here at my daycare." —child care provider

Percentage of Providers Participating in the CACFP





BENEFITS TO CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

- Improves the nutrition and knowledge of families and children
- Reduces household expenses and time spent planning and preparing meals
- Positive nutritional outcomes, such as improved diet and healthy weight for children
- Reduces food insecurity for children and families

PROVIDER CHALLENGES AND INEFFICIENCIES

- Rules related to the number, timing, and location of providing food
- Meeting healthy meal pattern requirements
- The unannounced sponsor home visit, especially for license-exempt providers
- Reimbursement inadequate to offset food costs
- Complex paperwork and recordkeeping requirements

“I think it’s a great program. I think it’s fabulous to be reimbursed. I think meals are important for children. I do think that a lot of the paperwork and monitoring responsibilities can be very overwhelming.”

—child care provider

Recommendations

The following recommendations could be implemented at the state level through administrative policy change from the MDE and Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential (MiLEAP) or through legislative action.

More coordination between state licensing and nutrition agencies

- Review and eliminate duplicative information collected by the CACFP and licensing.
- Implement a joint application to be a child care provider and participate in the CACFP.
- Coordinate CACFP and license-required training within MiRegistry.

Ease income-eligibility processes

- Assess and simplify the income-eligibility form that parents are asked to fill out.
- Implement direct certification in the CACFP for centers and home-based providers.
- Annually assess only Tier II home-based providers for eligibility to receive a higher reimbursement.

Seek waiver from the federal government of unannounced in-person monitoring for LEPs

Engaging in outreach to recruit non-participating providers

Offer meal timing and location flexibility and guidance

- Encourage and approve broad meal service times.
- Obtain feedback from providers on factors making it difficult to claim meals off site.
- Offer flexibilities and simplify the advance reporting of “field trips” during the meal service times.

Ease recordkeeping and reporting

- Examine state paperwork and reporting processes to identify further ways to reduce burden while meeting federal requirements.
- Increase support for using technology for provider recordkeeping and reporting, including point-of-service meal counting.

Increase state funding for the CACFP

- Increase the reimbursement to providers.
- Increase the administrative reimbursement for sponsors.
- Offer grants or one-time funding for providers and sponsors.

You can read the full report at
publicpolicy.com/featured-work/supporting-child-care-businesses-while-advancing-nutrition.