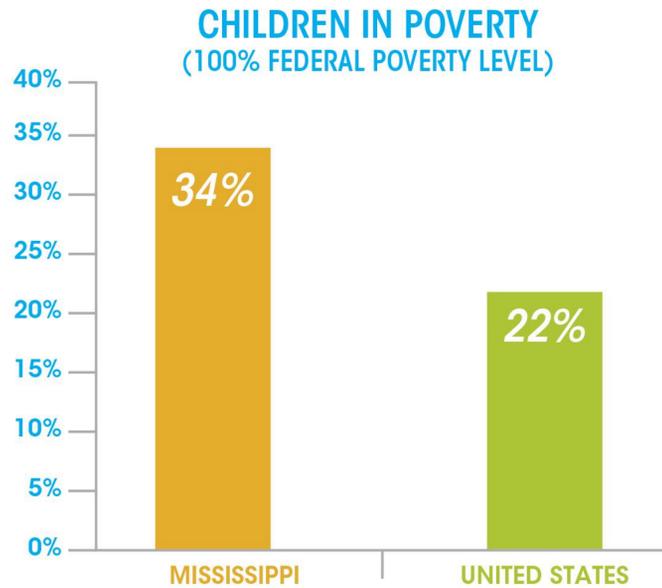


**Introduction**

Access to healthy, nutritious food remains a challenge for many children living in high-poverty communities. Mississippi leads the nation in obesity (35.1%), food insecurity (28.7%) and child poverty (34.7%). Increasing food access in high-poverty communities is key to supporting strategies to reduce obesity. The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), a universal meal program that provides free school meals, increases the availability of nutritious food in schools for children living in high-poverty communities.



**Child Poverty > State Average (34.7%)**



Source: KIDS COUNT



**Results**

Of the 1,058 schools in Mississippi, 539 schools are eligible to participate in CEP. During the 2014-2015 school year, 257 schools implemented CEP that serve over 135,000 students. However 52% of the schools eligible to participate opted not to implement CEP.

**Discussion**

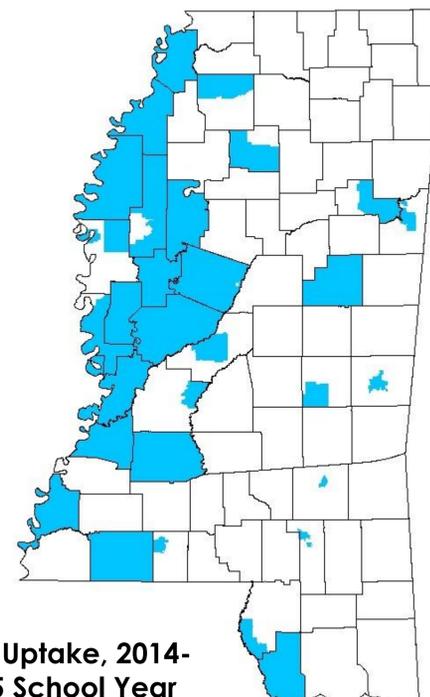
CEP streamlines the process of enrolling children in the free meal program. With an implementation rate of 48%, many schools are missing out on the policy opportunity to increase access to healthy, nutritious meals. Full implementation of CEP provides an opportunity to support strategies to reduce obesity in Mississippi's high-poverty communities.

**Approach**

CEP, a provision of the Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010, is an alternative approach to determining free and reduced price meals in schools in high-poverty areas based on household applications. School eligibility for CEP is determined based on if a minimum of 40% of students were eligible for free meals in the prior year to implementing CEP. All schools within a school district or selected schools within a school district may participate in CEP.



LEAS with Eligible Schools



CEP Uptake, 2014-2015 School Year

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