

Schools - Free/Reduced Priced Meals

DESCRIPTION

Free and reduced price lunch (FRPL) plans are available through the National School Lunch Program to any student whose family income is between 130 and 185 percent of, or below the poverty threshold. In public health, these rates are used to assess needs or identify vulnerable populations. The data are also used to classify schools; a student population with 25 percent or fewer students eligible for FRPL is considered a low poverty school, and a student body of 75 percent or more eligible students is considered a high poverty school.¹

HOW ARE WE DOING

In Ramsey County, more than half of students qualify for FRPL. Data from public schools over the past nine years shows little fluctuation, with an average of 55.7 percent of students qualifying for FRPL, compared to the Minnesota rate of 36.8 percent.² Another way to use FRPL data are to look at the percent of students eligible for ‘free’ lunch (below 130 percent of poverty), separately from those eligible for ‘reduced priced’ lunch (between 130 percent and 185 percent of the poverty line). This identifies income gaps within schools. In Ramsey County in 2016, the population of students that are free lunch eligible (higher poverty requirements) was 48.7 percent. This was six times the size of reduced priced lunch eligible students at 8.2 percent. The highest rates were found in Saint Paul Public Schools and in charter schools.

DISPARITIES

Schools with low socioeconomic status students are significantly less likely to offer salads and healthy foods as schools with middle or high socioeconomic status students.³ Charter schools have the largest population of free lunch eligible students in Ramsey County. In 2016, they made up 60 percent of the student population at their schools.

RISK FACTORS

While participation levels have been steady the past several years, there was a significant increase in students eligible for Free and Reduced lunch after the 2008 recession that weakened the economy.⁴ Increases in prices for “paid meals” has also contributed to the rising Free/Reduced Lunch percentages.⁴

WHAT RAMSEY COUNTY GOVERNMENT IS DOING

Families receiving the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program are presumptively eligible for free or reduced price lunch and can use proof of SNAP eligibility when applying for free or reduced priced lunch. Ramsey County libraries provide free lunches to children during the summer to fill the nutritional gap during the break from school.

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Information to note

- Compared to all of Minnesota, Ramsey County’s student eligibility for Free and Reduced Lunch is about 34% higher than the state’s average.
- Public schools in Ramsey County have about 5 times as many free/reduced eligible students as nonpublic schools.

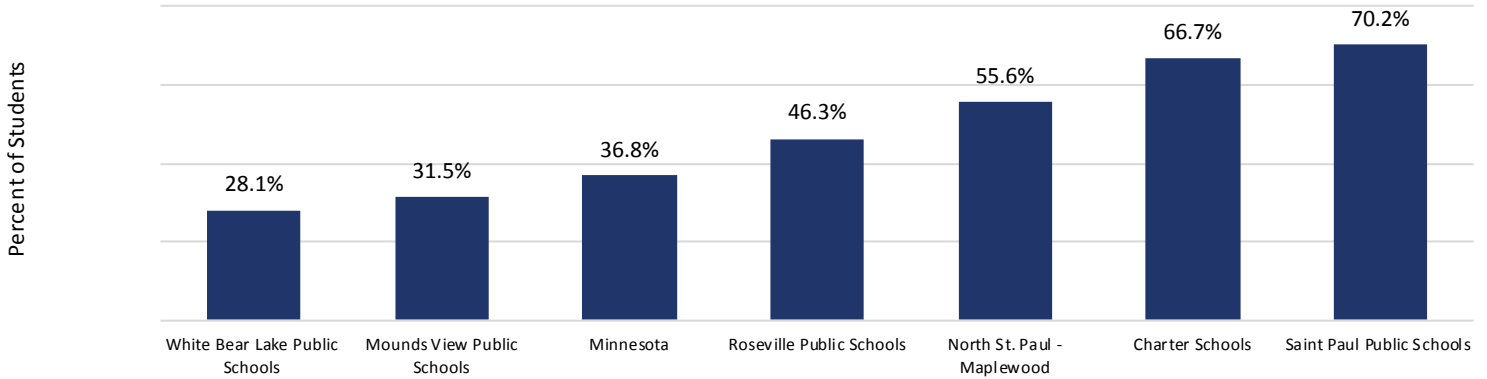
¹ Free and Reduced Price Lunch Eligibility. Minnesota Department of Health Web site. <https://apps.health.state.mn.us/mndata/lunch-metadata#eligible>. Accessed June 15, 2017.

² Data Reports and Analytics. Minnesota Department of Education Web site. <http://w20.education.state.mn.us/MDEAnalytics/Data.jsp>. Accessed June 15, 2017.

³ Improvements and Disparities in Types of Foods and Milk Beverages Offered in Elementary School Lunches, 2006–2007 to 2013–2014. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site. https://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2016/15_0395.htm. Accessed June 15, 2017.

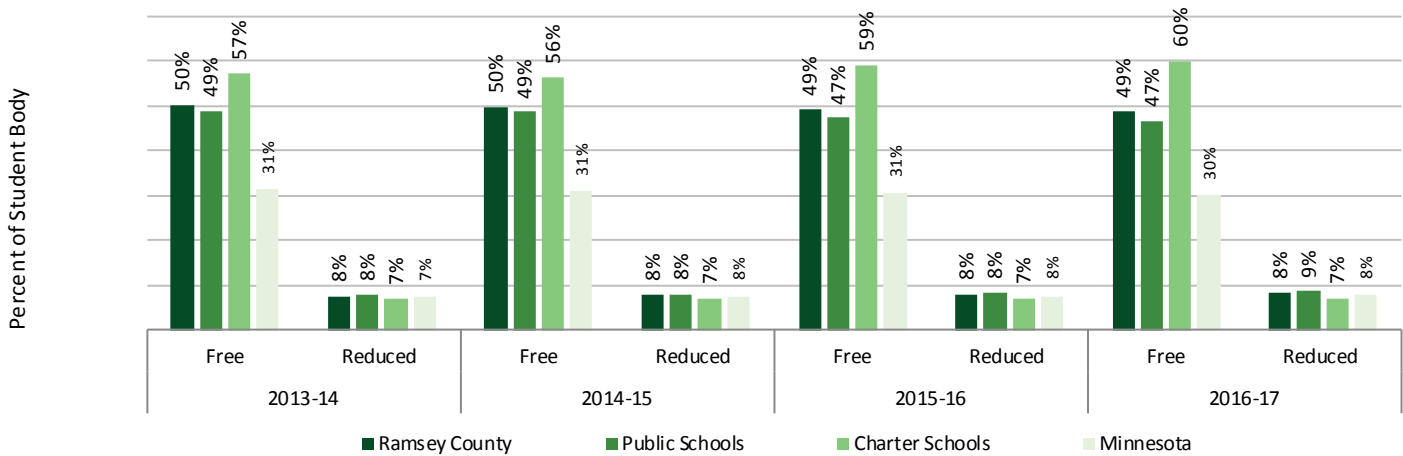
⁴ National School Lunch Program: Trends and Factors Affecting Student Participation. Food Research and Action Center Web site. http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/national_school_lunch_report_2015.pdf. Accessed June 15, 2017.

Student Population Eligible for Free/Reduced Priced Lunch, Ramsey County, 2016-17



Source: Data Reports and Analytics. Minnesota Department of Education Web site.⁵

Free and Reduced Priced Eligible Student Rates, Ramsey County, 2013-17



Source: Data Reports and Analytics. Minnesota Department of Education Web site.⁵

⁵ Data Reports and Analytics. Minnesota Department of Education Website. <http://w20.education.state.mn.us/MDEAnalytics/Data.jsp>. Accessed June 15, 2017.