

HELP THEM EAT AT HOME

For low-income kids, during the summer, SEBTC fills in for school meals

What is the SEBTC pilot?

The Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer for Children (SEBTC) is a demonstration project of the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) conducted in Connecticut, Delaware, Michigan, Missouri, Nevada, Oregon, Texas, Washington and the Cherokee and Chickasaw nations. In areas where the pilots have been conducted, families with children eligible for free or reduced-price meals through the National School Lunch program received for the summer an EBT card with funds toward the purchase of breakfasts and lunches they would have received from school when school was in session. The program works through a state's already existing EBT system. In 2011, it reached 5,300 kids, and, in 2012, 66,000. Data is not yet available on the 2013 continuation of the demonstrations.

What are the advantages of SEBTC?

The traditional summer meals program requires that children go to a site to eat a meal. This works well when the children will already be at a site for summer school, camp, etc. Setting up food sites for kids to go to in low-income communities, however, introduces numerous logistical challenges and forces families out of their normal eating practices. It is the main reason for the program's low participation (reaching roughly only 15 percent of kids it is intended to help).

SEBTC, on the other hand, is convenient. By allowing them to purchase food in essentially the same way that they normally would, it empowers parents to provide for their families.

Does SEBTC work?

Demonstrations were varied by site to include active and passive consent to participate and models that used either SNAP (purchase any food) and WIC (purchase from a select basket of foods deemed nutritious). These differences led to substantial variation in participation across sites, with high coverage at passive sites (upward to 90 percent), while 13.6 percent of the control group ate at identified SFSP sites or similar sites. SNAP sites had better participation than WIC ones.

Very Low Food Security—an extreme subset of the category 'food insecure'—was 8.6 percent in the spring for children involved in the demonstrations. For children in the control group, the rate of very low food security increased to 9.5 percent over the summer. For children who received SEBTC benefits, it went down to 6.4 percent, which is quite significant because it indicates wider improvement to the food insecure kid population and was not limited to the most effective demonstration models.

What do the children eat?

The demonstrations surveyed participants on their food consumption over the prior 30 days. SEBTC kids ate better. Compared to the control group, they averaged 13.2 percent more fruits and vegetables (excluding fried potatoes), 29.6 percent more whole grains and 7.5 percent less sugar from sugar-sweetened beverages. WIC models did slightly better. The one substantial improvement with WIC demonstrations was kids averaged 36.8 percent more whole grains than at SNAP demonstrations.

Based on the USDA's *Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children (SEBTC) Demonstration: 2012 Final Report*, which is available at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/summer-electronic-benefits-transfer-children-sebtc-demonstration-evaluation-findings-full>.