

FY16 Budget

BPS Finance

Change in methodology for FY16 poverty calculation

For the 2013-2014 school year, Massachusetts began participating in the Community Eligibility Option (CEO), which allows schools to provide meal service to all students at no charge, regardless of economic status. As a result, household applications that have generally been used to determine eligibility for free and reduced lunch prices are no longer being collected. This opportunity to eliminate the collection of individual student applications was recognized by DESE and districts as one of many benefits offered by the CEO. However, these applications were previously used to also measure poverty both for Title I allocations and for the poverty weight within Weighted Student Funding (WSF). This change meant that BPS needed a new method for calculating poverty for allocating both Title I and WSF dollars.

What methodologies were available?

The US Department of Education provided guidance around a few different options for disbursing Title I allocations to schools:

- Children ages 5-17 in poverty as counted in the most recent Census data approved by the Secretary.
- Children eligible for free and reduced-price lunches under the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act. Eligible students are students approved as eligible for free meals who are not subject to verification (i.e., in Community Eligibility schools, “directly certified” children). This definition includes students directly certified through SNAP, TANF and Medicaid.
- Children in families receiving assistance under the State program funded under Title IV, Part A of the Social Security Act (TANF).
- Children eligible to receive medical assistance under the Medicaid program.
- A composite of any of the above measures.

We also had the option to conduct our own survey as a proxy form for the free and reduced lunch applications. Community eligibility, however, represents a means to both increase child nutrition and reduce burden at the district, school, and household levels. As such, an important purpose of the federal guidance is to ensure that SEAs and LEAs can take advantage of these twin purposes while still operating Title I programs effectively and efficiently. It is also believed that it would be very difficult to collect complete and accurate income data from every household without the incentive of establishing eligibility for free/reduced lunches and this method was highly discouraged by USED and DESE.

Methodology chosen by BPS:

The Federal Government recommends that "direct certification" data, such as data from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and Medicaid Enrollment, be used. Using the direct certification data, in compliance with USED and DESE, will be how Title I Allocations are determined this year, and in future years.

This change in methodology resulted in an increase in poverty level measurements for some schools, and a decrease for others. Changes could be explained by a number of factors, including a school's survey response rate in past years, or the sensitivity of the new measure to poverty levels.

School allocation calculations and adjustments made to minimize impact due to change in methodology:

In both Title I and WSF, adjustments were made in response to this change in methodology.

Title I: School allocations were determined based on the school's number of direct certified students, multiplied by a per pupil amount. In order to minimize impact made by moving to this new methodology, additional support was given to schools that were impacted by more than 5% from what they would have received with the previous free and reduced lunch estimates. These schools received 50% of this back if they were impacted by 10% or more and 25% back if they were impacted by 5-10%.

Weighted student funding: BPS applies the percent of current enrolled students to the future year enrollment projection to estimate how many students in poverty the school will have for the WSF calculation. In addition, WSF applies a second weight to students attending a school with a high concentration of poverty. The threshold for eligibility for the “concentration of poverty” weight was reduced from 60% to 50% within our WSF allocation for each school. We made this change because, under the new methodology, less students are categorized as poor and the number of schools over the 60% threshold decreased.