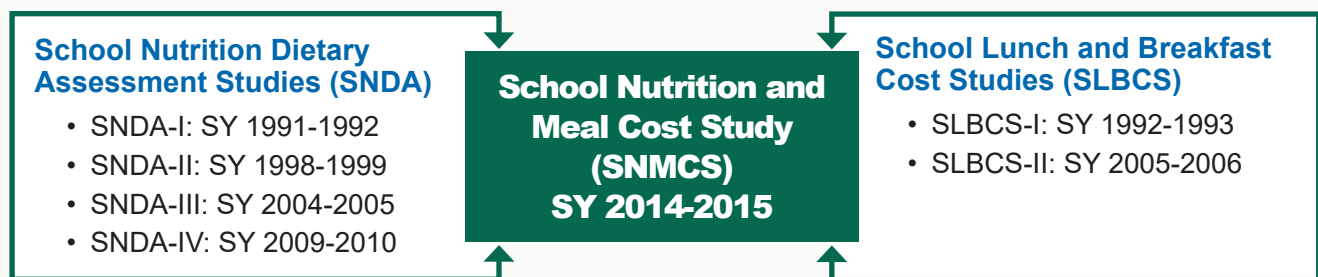


School Nutrition and Meal Cost Study

Study Design and Implementation

The School Nutrition and Meal Cost Study (SNMCS) was a comprehensive study of the school meal programs. This fact sheet provides an overview of the design and implementation of the SNMCS, including the research objectives, sample design, data collection approach, and response rates. Additional fact sheets describe the methods used to collect, process, and analyze data for several of the study's objectives.

The SNMCS merged two long-standing USDA studies into one comprehensive evaluation of the school meal programs.



SY = school year

Research Objectives

The study addressed four main research objectives:



Objective 1 Describe the school food environment, food service operations, and other characteristics of school food authorities (SFAs) and schools



Objective 2 Determine the food and nutrient content of school meals, the nutritional quality of the meals, and compliance with updated nutrition standards



Objective 3 Determine the cost to produce school meals and the extent to which revenues cover costs



Objective 4a Describe student participation, student/parent satisfaction, and students' dietary intakes



Objective 4b Describe the extent of plate waste in school meals

Sample Design

The SNMCS was designed to include nationally representative samples of public SFAs, schools, students, and meals in the 48 contiguous States and the District of Columbia. To minimize burden on SFAs and schools while maintaining data quality and precision, SFAs were divided into three groups. Each group participated in different data collection activities to address specific study objectives.

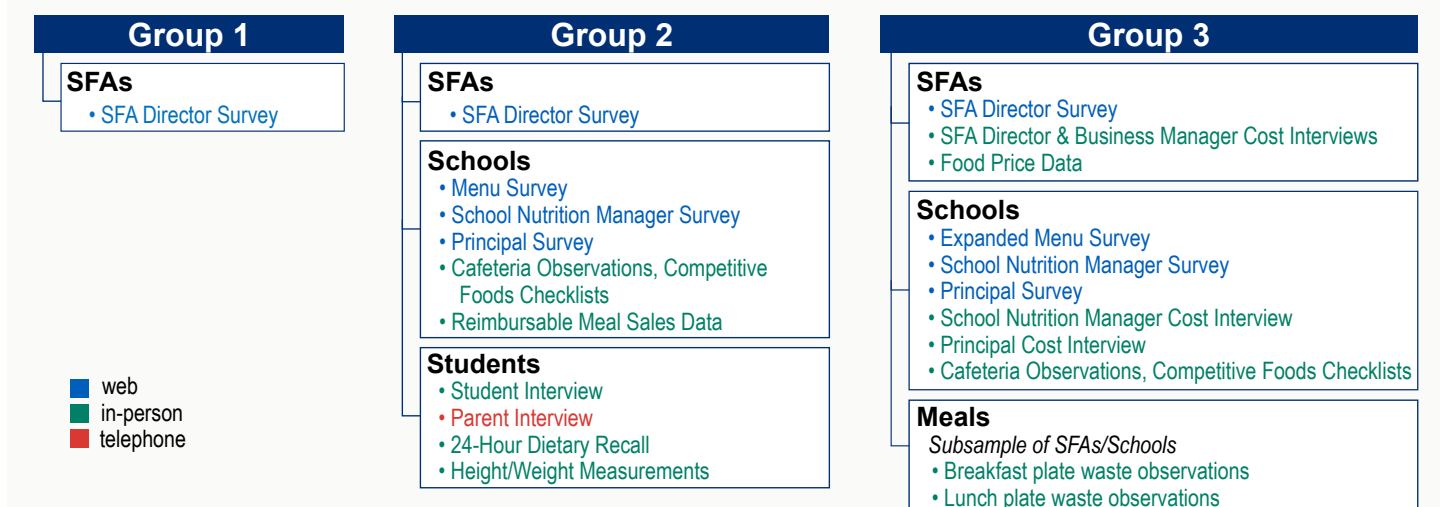
Sample Design: Three Distinct Groups of SFAs

Group	Objective 1 	Objective 2 	Objective 3 	Objective 4a 	Objective 4b 
SFAs	☒				
SFAs + schools + students	☒	☒		☒	
SFAs + schools + meals	☒	☒	☒		☒

SFAs were selected using probability-proportional-to-size (PPS) sampling. Schools within the SFAs were selected from each school type—elementary, middle, and high—using PPS sampling, with student enrollment as the measure of size. Students were sampled randomly within a subset of the sampled schools, and meals were randomly selected for plate waste observations within a separate subset of schools.

Data Collection

The SNMCS data collection was large and multifaceted, including 16 instruments implemented using web, in-person, and telephone data collection.



Response Rates and Sample Sizes

The study achieved response rates of 83 to 97 percent for all data collection activities with SFAs and schools.

The final analysis samples included:



For more information

More information on study design and implementation is available in the SNMCS methods report. To access reports, instruments, and webinars, visit www.fns.usda.gov/school-nutrition-and-meal-cost-study.

To request access to public-use datasets, email: OPSDDataRequest@usda.gov.