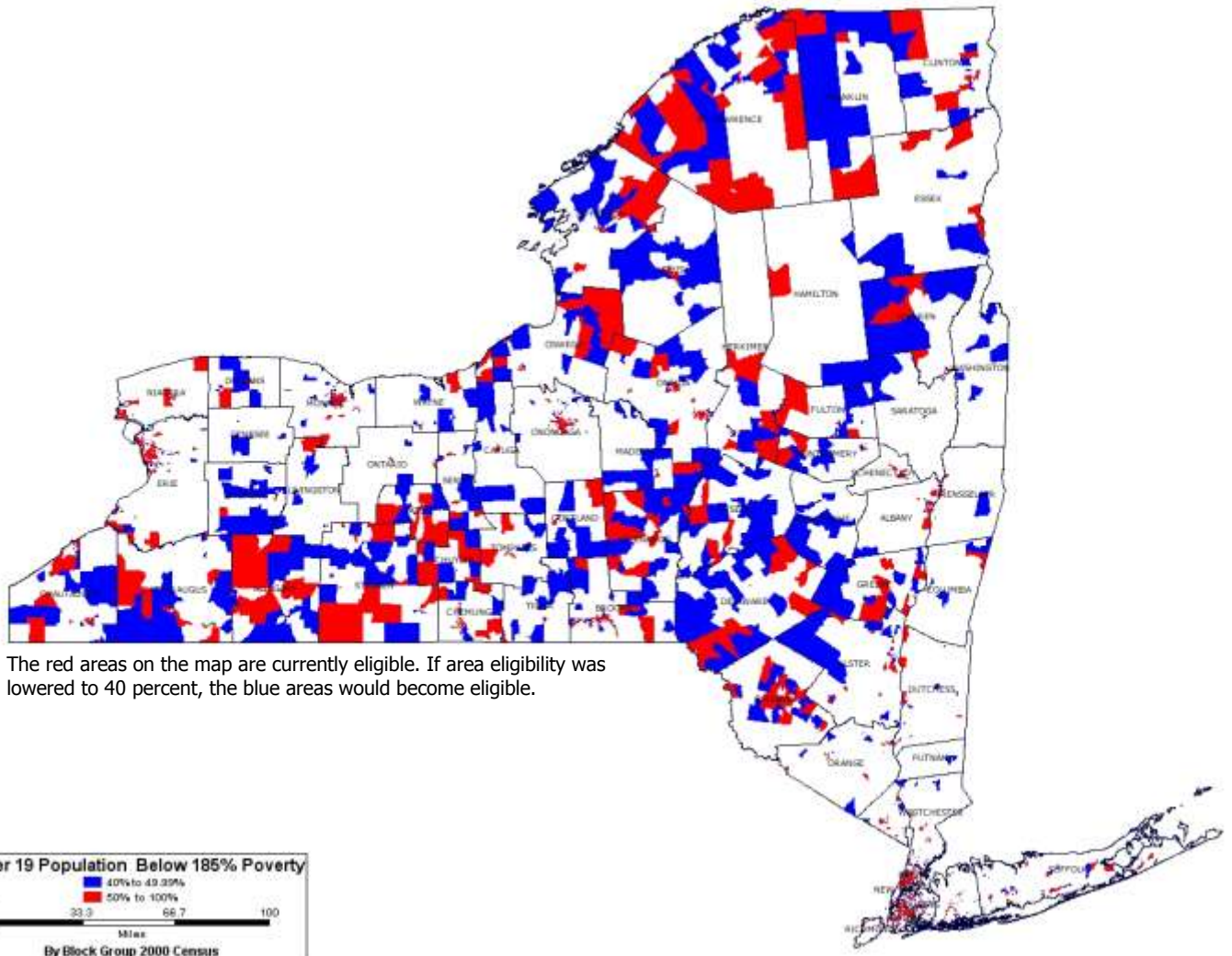


Expanding Access to Child Nutrition Programs Improving the Area Eligibility Test: 40 Percent of Children Rather Than 50 Percent Eligible for Free and Reduced Price Lunch



Child Nutrition Reauthorization Priority

Congress is preparing to take up child nutrition reauthorization this year. One of the Food Research and Action Center's top recommendations is to improve the area eligibility test from its current 50 percent to 40 percent. This change would considerably expand low-income children's access to nutritious food.

What is Area Eligibility?

Federal nutrition programs offer reimbursement for snacks and meals for all children in afterschool and summer programs and child care homes that are located in a low-income area, defined as an area with more than 50 percent of children eligible for free or reduced price school meals. This 50 percent area eligibility test is the most restrictive test the programs have ever had. Prior to 1981, for example, the threshold for an area participating in Summer Food was 33 percent.

Why Improve Area Eligibility to 40 Percent?

The 50 percent eligibility test means that many low-income children have lost access to nutritious meals and snacks. Rural and suburban areas have an especially difficult time meeting the 50 percent requirement because poverty is less concentrated. In addition, the threshold for the nutrition programs should be made consistent with other federal education funding streams that support the same afterschool and summer programs, such as 21st Century Community Learning Centers and Title I school-wide programs, so that federal education dollars are not spent on food and programs have consistency. Improving the threshold to 40 percent would increase access to nutritious food for children and reduce the administrative burden for programs.