



# Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children (SEBTC) Demonstration: 2012 Congressional Status Report

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# Contents

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS .....	ix
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....	xi
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.1 Policy Context: Summer Food Insecurity Among Children .....	2
1.2 The SEBTC Demonstration .....	5
1.3 Overview of the Evaluation.....	6
1.3.1 Evaluation Framework for the SEBTC Demonstration .....	6
1.3.2 Research Design .....	8
1.3.3 Research Objectives and Sources of Data .....	10
1.4. Summary of Findings from the POC Year .....	12
1.4.1 SEBTC Implementation and Use of Benefits in the POC Year.....	12
1.4.2 Households in the Study and Impacts of SEBTC in the POC Year .....	13
1.4.3 Costs of SEBTC in the POC Year .....	14
1.4.4 Implications of the POC Year for the Full Implementation Year.....	15
1.5 Report Contents .....	15
CHAPTER 2 THE DEMONSTRATION GRANTEES .....	17
2.1 Grantee Organizational Structures .....	17
2.2 Overview of the Demonstration Sites and Local Context .....	18
2.2.1 Geographic Area and Local Population/Characteristics of Participating SFAs.....	18
2.2.2 Characteristics of SFSP in Demonstration Areas .....	22
2.2.3 Availability of Food Retailers in Demonstration Areas .....	26
2.2.4 Availability of Nutrition Education during the Summer .....	26
2.3 Variations in the SEBTC Model across Grantees.....	27
2.3.1 Overview of Program Models.....	27
2.3.2 Active Versus Passive Consent .....	27
2.3.3 Duration of Benefits Based on School Calendars.....	28

CHAPTER 3	SEBTC IMPLEMENTATION EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES .....	31
3.1	Key Findings.....	31
3.2	Research Methods .....	32
3.3	Consent Processes and Providing SEBTC Benefits to Households.....	33
3.3.1	Identifying Eligible Children and Households .....	33
3.3.2	Obtaining Household Consent .....	34
3.3.3	Notifying Households of the SEBTC Benefit .....	38
3.3.4	Issuing Benefits .....	38
3.3.5	Benefit Participation (Take-up) Rates and Use.....	39
3.3.6	Providing Participant Supports After Benefit Administration.....	41
3.3.7	Efforts to Encourage Use of Benefits .....	43
3.3.8	Training Retailers.....	43
3.4	EBT System Modifications and Strategies to Maintain Program Integrity .....	44
3.4.1	EBT System Modifications and Support Activities for EBT Cards .....	44
3.5	Other Factors Influencing Implementation .....	46
3.5.1	State and Local Partnerships and Leadership.....	47
3.5.2	Level of Effort Needed and State Budget Issues .....	47
3.5.3	The Pace of Implementation.....	48
3.5.4	Partnering with SFAs .....	48
3.5.5	Learning from the POC Year.....	49
CHAPTER 4	USE OF EBT BENEFITS .....	51
4.1	Key Findings.....	52
4.2	Research Methods .....	53
4.3	Overall Patterns of SEBTC Benefit Use in the First Issuance Cycle .....	53
4.4	Differences in Redemptions Between SNAP and Non-SNAP Households .....	57
4.5	Comparison of Redemption in POC Sites in 2011 and 2012 .....	57
4.6	Patterns of Benefit Redemption Overall and by Food Category in WIC Sites .....	59
CHAPTER 5	CHARACTERISTICS OF HOUSEHOLDS AT BASELINE.....	63
5.1	Key Findings.....	63
5.2	Research Methods .....	64
5.2.1	Random Assignment.....	65
5.2.2	Survey Instrument.....	65
5.2.3	Household Survey Data Collection.....	66

5.2.4	Response Rates.....	66
5.2.5	Return Rates for Households Receiving SEBTC in the POC Year .....	68
5.2.6	Spring Weights.....	69
5.2.7	Analysis Sample Size.....	69
5.3	Household Characteristics .....	70
5.3.1	Household Size and Composition.....	70
5.3.2	Household Income .....	71
5.3.3	Other Household Characteristics .....	72
5.3.4	Characteristics of the Survey Respondent.....	72
5.3.5	Characteristics of Children Certified for FRP Meals .....	74
5.3.6	Participation in Nutrition Assistance Programs .....	74
5.3.7	Food Security.....	75
5.3.8	Weekly Food Expenditures .....	77
5.4	Summary.....	79
CHAPTER 6 SUMMARY OF PROJECT ACCOMPLISHMENTS .....		81
6.1	Summary of Results for SEBTC Demonstrations to Date .....	81
6.1.1	Implementation of SEBTC.....	81
6.1.2	Impact of SEBTC.....	84
6.2	Upcoming Evaluation Activities .....	86
REFERENCES .....		89

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# List of Exhibits

1.1	Map of SEBTC Demonstration Sites in the Full Implementation Year .....	7
1.2	Logic Model for the SEBTC Evaluation.....	8
1.3	Flow of Activities in 2012 of FNS, Grantees, and Evaluation Team, Post Grant Award .....	9
1.4	Research Objectives and Questions for the SEBTC Demonstration .....	16
2.1	The Grantees, Their Partners, and Participating Local Areas in 2012 .....	19
2.2	Characteristics of Demonstration Areas Compared to the Nation .....	23
2.3	Duration of the Summer Benefit, 2012 .....	29
3.1	Consent Rates by Grantee .....	35
3.2	Percent of Households and Children who Received SEBTC Benefits in 2011 and Consented to Participate in 2012 .....	37
3.3	Households and Children Assigned, Issued, and Redeeming Benefits in the First Benefit Cycle, Summer 2012.....	41
4.1	First Cycle of SEBTC Benefits, by Site in 2012 .....	54
4.2	Percentage of Demonstration Households by Percentage of Benefits Redeemed in the First Benefit Issuance Cycle .....	55
4.3	Distribution of Demonstration Households by Redemption Amount .....	56
4.4	Percentage of Demonstration Households by Percentage of Benefits Redeemed in the First Issuance Cycle (Percentage of Households) by SNAP Status .....	58
4.5	Comparison of 2011 and 2012 Redemption in POC Sites Based on First Issuance Cycle.....	58
4.6	Benefit Redemption in the First Issuance Cycle, by Food Category (SEBTC-WIC Model Sites).....	61
5.1	Weighted Response Rates, by Site and All Sites, Spring 2012 .....	67
5.2	SEBTC Household Characteristics .....	71
5.3	Characteristics of SEBTC Respondents and Children Eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Meals .....	73

5.4	Reported Participation in Household and Child Nutrition Programs .....	75
5.5	Food Security in SEBTC Households.....	76
5.6	Very Low Food Security Among Children in SEBTC Households in POC Sites, in 2011 and 2012 .....	76
5.7	Prevalence Rates of Food Insecurity and Very Low Food Security in the SEBTC Spring Survey and in a Low-income Population in the 2009 CPS.....	77
5.8	Weekly Out-of-Pocket Food Expenditures, by Food Outlet, Total Expenditures, and Per-Person Expenditures.....	78
5.9	Weekly SNAP Benefit Amount, Out-of-Pocket Food Expenditures, and Total Food Expenditures .....	79

# Glossary of Acronyms and Abbreviations

CATI	Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing
CI	Confidence Interval
CPS	Current Population Survey
DOB	Date of Birth
DSA	Data Sharing Agreement
EBT	Electronic Benefits Transfer
EMS	Eligibility Management System
FNS	Food and Nutrition Service
FPL	Federal Poverty Level
FRP	Free or Reduced-Price
FRPL	Free or Reduced-Price Lunch
FY	Fiscal Year
ID	Identification Number (Family Identifier)
IRB	Institutional Review Board
ISD	Independent School District
IT	Information Technology
ITO	Indian Tribal Organization
IVR	Integrated Voice Response
LOC	Letter of Credit
MIS	Management Information System
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NCES	National Center for Education Statistics
NSLP	National School Lunch Program
PIN	Personal Identification Number
POC	Proof of Concept
RFA	Request for Application
SBP	School Breakfast Program
SD	School District
SE	Standard Error
SEBTC	Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children
SFA	School Food Authority
SFSP	Summer Food Service Program
SNAP	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
SNAP-ED	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program - Education
SSN	Social Security Number
STARS	Store Tracking and Redemption Subsystem
SY	School Year
TA	Technical Assistance

TANF	Temporary Aid to Needy Families
UPC	Universal Product Code
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture
VLFS-C	Very Low Food Security Among Children
WIC	Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children

# Executive Summary

## E.1 Introduction

Children’s development, health, and well-being depend on access to a safe and secure source of food. In 2011, 8.0 million households with children were food insecure<sup>1</sup> (one in five such households) and nearly half of these, 3.9 million, included children who were food insecure at times during the year (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2012). Nearly 8.6 million children lived in households with food-insecure children, and 0.8 million children lived in households with very low food security among children (VLFS-C).

To address needs in the summer, when school is out of session, the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) provides meals and snacks to children who receive the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) or the School Breakfast Program (SBP) during the school year.<sup>2</sup> The SFSP enriches the lives of millions of low-income children in communities across the U.S., however, it reaches far fewer children than the school meals programs (FNS 2011a; Gordon and Briefel, 2003; Food Research and Action Center, 2012). Many communities also provide other types of food assistance and programs for children during the summer months to meet the nutritional needs of low-income children. Locations and resources are limited, though, so there are still gaps in many communities.

As part of its efforts to end child hunger, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is studying alternative approaches to providing food assistance to children in the summer months. The 2010 Agriculture Appropriations Act (P.L. 111-80) authorized and provided funding for USDA to implement and rigorously evaluate the Summer Food for Children Demonstration, one component of which is the Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children (SEBTC). FNS contracted with Abt Associates, Mathematica Policy Research, and Maximus to study how the demonstration program unfolded over time and its impact on program participants.

### E.1.1. The SEBTC Demonstration

The SEBTC benefit was provided to households with children in pre-kindergarten through 12th grade who were certified for free or reduced-price school meals in the demonstration school food authorities (SFAs).<sup>3</sup> The amount of the benefit—an approximately \$60 value per month per eligible child in the household—was comparable to the combined cost of free lunches and

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<sup>1</sup> Food-insecure households are those with low or very low food security among adults or children or both.

<sup>2</sup> The NSLP and SBP provide subsidized meals to children in school. Children from low-income families obtain these meals free or at a reduced price (FRP). Children living in households with incomes at or below 130% of the poverty level are eligible to receive meals for free; those with incomes between 130 and 185% of poverty level are eligible for reduced-price meals.

<sup>3</sup> SFAs are responsible for the provision of school meals and can include one or more schools or districts.

breakfasts under the NSLP and SBP. Benefits were provided monthly on an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card and prorated for partial months. Benefits were administered by grantees<sup>4</sup> in the summer for the period when schools were not in session.

The SEBTC benefit was administered either using the State’s existing EBT system for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) or the EBT system for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Grantees worked with their existing EBT vendors, which made modifications to the State’s WIC or SNAP EBT systems. In WIC-model sites, participants could purchase a group of specific foods in specific quantities based on the existing WIC food packages and could only purchase them at WIC-authorized retailers. The WIC EBT cards could only be used in the State where they were issued. In contrast, participants in demonstration areas using the SNAP EBT systems could use their \$60 in benefits to purchase a much wider array of foods from any SNAP-authorized retailer in the country.

Grantees using their SNAP systems for SEBTC implemented either a “SNAP” model or a “SNAP-hybrid” model. In the “SNAP-hybrid” model, SEBTC benefits were automatically loaded onto the SNAP cards of current SNAP recipients and non-SNAP recipients received a standard SNAP card that only included SEBTC benefits. For the “SNAP” model, SEBTC households received SEBTC on a separate EBT card, even if they also had a SNAP card. Similarly, all of the grantees using WIC distributed a separate SEBTC card, even if households received WIC.

### E.1.2. SEBTC Demonstration Areas and Grantees

The demonstration was implemented in two phases. In the initial proof-of-concept (POC) phase in 2011, five grantees (Connecticut, Michigan, Missouri, Oregon, and Texas) implemented a demonstration in a site within their State.<sup>5</sup> In the second year, FNS expanded the size of the demonstration by adding nine new sites and roughly doubling the number of child beneficiaries at each site. In 2012, all but one of the POC grantees (Texas) implemented SEBTC in a second site (an Expansion site), and five new grantees (Chickasaw Nation, Cherokee Nation, Delaware, Nevada, and Washington) each had one site (See Exhibit E.1).

The SEBTC sites included urban areas (Michigan POC, Missouri POC and Expansion, Oregon Expansion, and Washington), and relatively large, predominantly rural areas (Cherokee Nation, Chickasaw Nation, Connecticut POC, Michigan Expansion, Oregon POC, and Texas). Three new sites contained a mix of urban, suburban, and rural communities (Connecticut Expansion, Delaware, and Nevada).

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<sup>4</sup> The term “grantee” refers to the State agency or group of agencies implementing the demonstration. In 2012, two of the 10 grantees were Interagency Tribal Organizations (ITOs) with demonstration sites in Oklahoma. For this report, the term “State” or grantee refers to the 10 grantees composed of eight States and two ITOs.

<sup>5</sup> The term “site” refers to the local areas where the demonstration is being implemented.

## Exhibit E1. Map of SEBTC Demonstration Sites in the Full Implementation Year



## E.2 Evaluation Overview

The evaluation has five broad objectives:

1. To assess the feasibility of implementing the three different models of SEBTC benefit delivery
2. To examine the implementation of SEBTC, including approaches used, and the challenges and lessons learned during the demonstrations
3. To describe receipt and use of SEBTC benefits
4. To examine the impact of SEBTC benefits on children and their families' food security, food expenditures, use of other nutrition programs, and children's nutritional status
5. To determine and document the total and component costs of implementing and operating the demonstrations

The evaluation relies on several sources of data. To answer the first two research objectives, the evaluation team used three data sources, including (1) technical assistance visits and calls

made principally to assist in the consent and random assignment process; (2) process study interviews with grantees and their key partners, including EBT processors; and (3) written documents, such as grant applications. To describe the monthly benefits issued and redeemed, the evaluation team used EBT data for households selected to receive the SEBTC benefit. This report includes data for the first issuance cycle of the summer.

To describe the study population prior to the demonstration, households were interviewed in the spring, before the school year ended. Households were interviewed again in the summer to address the fourth objective, the impact analysis. Survey questions related to, among other topics, food security, nutrition assistance program participation, and what children ate. Impact and cost study findings were reported for the POC year (see summary below) and will be reported for the full implementation year in a forthcoming evaluation report.

The evaluation uses a random assignment design to provide the most credible and rigorous estimates of the impact of the demonstrations. Households that had one or more children certified for FRP meals and consented were randomly assigned either to a benefit group that received the SEBTC benefit or to a non-benefit group that did not. A random subsample of these households was then selected for the evaluation study, including a treatment group that received the benefit and a comparison group (i.e., the control group) that did not.

To date, several reports have been published on the SEBTC demonstration:

- *2010 Report to Congress. Report on the Summer Food for Children Demonstration Projects for Fiscal Year 2010* ( U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, March 2011)
- *2011 Report to Congress. Report on the Summer Food for Children Demonstration Projects for Fiscal Year 2011* (U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, December 2011)
- *Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children: Early Experiences through June 2011 in the Proof-of-Concept Year* (Bellotti et al., September 2011)
- *2011 Congressional Status Report: Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children Demonstrations* (Briefel et al., October 2011)
- *Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children (SEBTC) Demonstration: Evaluation Findings for the Proof-of-Concept Year* (Collins et al., June 2012)

### E.3 Summary of Results for the POC Year

In the first year of the demonstration (2011), the grantees and their partners implemented a new initiative, requiring efforts to set up and operate a variety of administrative processes for the first time. The POC year tested whether the SEBTC could be implemented successfully by the five State and local grantees entrusted with its actuation and whether the initial evaluation, targeting 5,000 households, could be done with fidelity, enabling a robust evaluation targeting 27,000 households in the full implementation year. The POC test achieved both of these goals and provided lessons for the full implementation in 2012. The last report to Congress included

information about the implementation of SEBTC in the POC year. Since then, the evaluation completed the EBT, impact, and cost analysis for the POC year. The major findings are described below.

### E.3.1. Impact of SEBTC in the POC Year

The impact analysis relies on a random assignment design, considered the gold standard for estimating the impacts of programs and policies—i.e., for determining in this case how much difference the SEBTC benefit makes to child and household outcomes compared to a control group that represents what those outcomes would have been absent SEBTC. Households that took part in the SEBTC demonstration were relatively disadvantaged, compared to the national population of households with children under 18. Among the group taking part in the POC year demonstration, SEBTC was found to have the following effects on the study's outcomes:

- **Food insecurity.** SEBTC reduced VLFS-C, the study's primary outcome, during the summer of 2011. The prevalence of VLFS-C was reduced from 7.0% in the control group to 5.6% in the treatment group. Thus, SEBTC eliminated VLFS-C for about one-fifth of the children who would otherwise have experienced it. Analyses of related measures of food security—general food insecurity among children plus measures of both severe and general food insecurity among adults and households as a whole—indicate similar proportional reductions in these broader measures. For example, food insecurity among children was reduced from a 38% to a 31% prevalence by the SEBTC intervention.
- **Children's nutritional intake.** Based on responses to the 2011 summer survey, children in SEBTC ate more fruits and vegetables and more frequently ate whole grains during the summer than those in the control group, though positive changes in diet in other areas (reductions in baked goods and sugar-sweetened drink consumption and increases in the share of children drinking nonfat or low-fat milk) were not observed.
- **Location of children's lunch in summer.** Children in households receiving SEBTC in the POC year were 1.8 percentage points more likely than control households to eat lunch at home or other places where the household paid for the meal.
- **Household's food expenditures.** SEBTC in the POC year showed no clear impact on households' food expenditures or use of the WIC program and a small impact on the use of the SNAP program, with families assigned to SEBTC being more likely to participate in SNAP than those in control households.

### E.3.2. Demonstration Costs in the POC Year

In 2011, the five POC grantees experienced a wide range of start-up and administrative costs. Start-up costs included modifying computer systems and databases to interface with each other and developing consent and outreach materials including logos and card designs. Administrative costs accounted for approximately 54% of total costs (that is, benefit costs plus administrative costs), but the proportions varied considerably across sites, ranging from 38% in Connecticut to 74% in Michigan. These percentages include both grant and non-grant funded cost. Non-grant administrative costs were largely State staff costs. In general, grantees working

with local community partners had lower administrative costs overall, while those working with the private contractors (other than the EBT processor) had higher costs.

Over the full summer, the cost per school-aged child (both administrative and benefit cost) in a household redeeming benefits was \$311 on average, and ranged from \$239 to \$413 across sites. Administrative costs were higher in WIC-model sites, but redemption rates were lower, contributing to higher average costs for households redeeming benefits in WIC-model sites compared to SNAP-model sites. However, because there are only five sites in the POC year, it is not possible to draw any definitive conclusions about the relative costs of the WIC- and SNAP-models.

## E.4 Findings in the Full Implementation Year through Midsummer 2012

### E.4.1. SEBTC Implementation and Use of Benefits

The implementation analysis addresses the first two research objectives: to assess the feasibility of implementing different models of SEBTC, including the WIC, SNAP, and SNAP-hybrid models, and to document the approaches used for SEBTC implementation and the challenges and lessons learned. To implement the demonstration, grantees needed to identify the households eligible for the demonstration and inform them of the SEBTC benefit. From there, they had to gain households' consent to take part in a random assignment evaluation, deliver SEBTC benefits to selected households, encourage households selected to receive SEBTC to use it. The results from both the POC and the full implementation year indicate that SEBTC is feasible, although a grantee's choice of active or passive consent,<sup>6</sup> the number of SFAs involved, and available staffing resources are associated with the level of success in identifying eligible children and issuing benefits before the end of the school year.

Many grantees found creating household lists a major challenge. In many of the sites, whether active or passive, difficulties were caused by incomplete or inaccurate data from student-level databases, and limited time available for the consent process and to encourage parents to return consent forms. For active consent sites, obtaining consent from parents was challenging. Despite difficulties, seven of the 10 grantees, operating nine of the 14 sites, were able to obtain consent from at least the minimum number of children and families needed to be part of the demonstration and evaluation (Exhibit E.2). Household consent rates ranged from 93% to 97% in sites using passive consent and 23% to 57% in sites using active consent. The consent rates for three of the POC sites, two of which used passive consent, were the same or higher in 2012 than in the 2011 POC year and were lower for two of the sites that used active consent.

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<sup>6</sup> In active consent sites, households returned a signed form agreeing to "opt in" for an opportunity to receive the benefit. In passive consent sites, households returned a signed form if they wished to "opt out" and not take part in the demonstration and evaluation.

Between 50% and 85% of households that received the SEBTC benefit in the first year consented to participate in the second year, depending on the site. In the two sites using active consent for this group, the consent rates were 50% and 62%. Return rates in passive consent sites suggest that 15% to 25% of the households either moved out of the site or were otherwise no longer eligible for SEBTC in 2012.

### Exhibit E.2 Consent Rates by Grantee

Grantee	Approximate Number of Eligible Households in Demonstration Area	Approximate Number of Eligible Children in Demonstration Area	Percentage of Households Consenting <sup>a</sup>	Percentage of Children in Households Consenting <sup>a</sup>
<b>Passive Consent Grantees</b>				
<b>Cherokee Nation</b>	11,645 <sup>b</sup>	17,456	90	96 <sup>c</sup>
<b>Missouri</b>				
POC	12,893	22,309	96	97
Expansion	15,105	22,000	97	97
<b>Nevada</b>	15,204	23,739	93	93
<b>Texas</b>	24,500	37,020	94	96
<b>Active Consent Grantees</b>				
<b>Chickasaw Nation</b>	13,020	21,878	31	38
<b>Connecticut</b>				
POC	10,121	17,408	33	33
Expansion	11,193	21,715	23	23
<b>Delaware</b>	18,565	25,934	25	33
<b>Michigan</b>				
POC	9,809	16,459	57	58
Expansion	12,731	20,942	42	50
<b>Oregon</b>				
POC	15,102	24,459	24	28
Expansion	12,007 <sup>b</sup>	23,708	28	27
<b>Washington</b>	14,000	29,380	23	22

Source: Data obtained through technical assistance efforts and files submitted by grantees for random assignment, spring 2012.

<sup>a</sup> In passive consent sites, the consent rate reflects those that opted out and undeliverable mail (to the extent it could be known).

<sup>b</sup> This is an estimate of the number of eligible households. The grantee was not able to obtain accurate estimates of the number of eligible households for all of their SFAs; therefore the evaluation team calculated the number of eligible households based on the ratio of children to households from the consenting population.

<sup>c</sup> Cherokee Nation included one active consent site that achieved a 25% consent rate. The consent rate calculation includes data from the passive consent sites only. When including the one active consent site, the consent rate is 90%.

All 10 grantees were able to recruit and enroll households in the spring and administer SEBTC benefits during the summer of 2012, although five sites did not reach their consent targets. The 14 sites issued benefits to a total of 37,339 households with 64,845 children identified as eligible. Nine sites provided benefits to about 5,300 children, while the other five sites (that did not reach their consent targets) provided benefits to between 2,500 to 4,300 children, depending on the site. Among the households that were issued benefits, 75% used their benefits at least once during the *first* benefit issuance cycle of the demonstration.

In 2012, SEBTC benefits were available for 85 days on average, with a range of 80 days in Connecticut, Texas, and Washington to 102 days in the Michigan Expansion site. The average benefit amount was approximately \$173 per child for the summer, ranging from \$150 in Cherokee Nation to \$210 in the Michigan Expansion site. Findings for the summer benefit period will be reported in the forthcoming evaluation report for the full implementation year.

#### E.4.2. Households in the Study

Key findings describing the characteristics of households in the study population are based on responses to the completed spring interviews from households in 13 of the 14 sites<sup>7</sup> in the full implementation year. There was an average of 4.4 people in the household—including adults and children of all ages, some of whom were not school-age—with a mean of 2.4 children. About half the adult respondents were single (52%); the other half (48%) were married or living with a partner. In terms of educational attainment, the population was nearly evenly divided among those who had not completed high school (28%), had completed high school but not gone to college (32%), and had some college education (33%).

The largest group of respondents identified themselves as non-Hispanic white (41%), with the next largest group being Hispanic (32%). There was substantial variation in racial/ethnic composition across sites: in Texas, 95% of respondents were Hispanic; in Missouri, 71% of respondents were non-Hispanic black; and in the Chickasaw Nation, a sizeable proportion of respondents were American Indian (15%).<sup>8</sup>

Households that took part in the SEBTC demonstration were relatively disadvantaged, compared to the national population of households with children under 18. Reported mean household monthly income was \$1,608, with 3% reporting no income that month. Nearly three-fourths of the households (72%) had monthly incomes below the federal poverty line,<sup>9</sup> ranging from 61% of households in Washington to 83% in the Michigan POC site. In contrast, in 2011, 18.1% of all families with related children under 18 had incomes below the federal poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Over two-thirds (71%) of the survey respondents reported at least one employed adult in the household.

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<sup>7</sup> Survey data from Cherokee Nation were removed from the pooled analysis of baseline descriptive characteristics due to a low response rate (39.9%); however, descriptive data for Cherokee Nation were included in the report as appropriate and shown in the appendices.

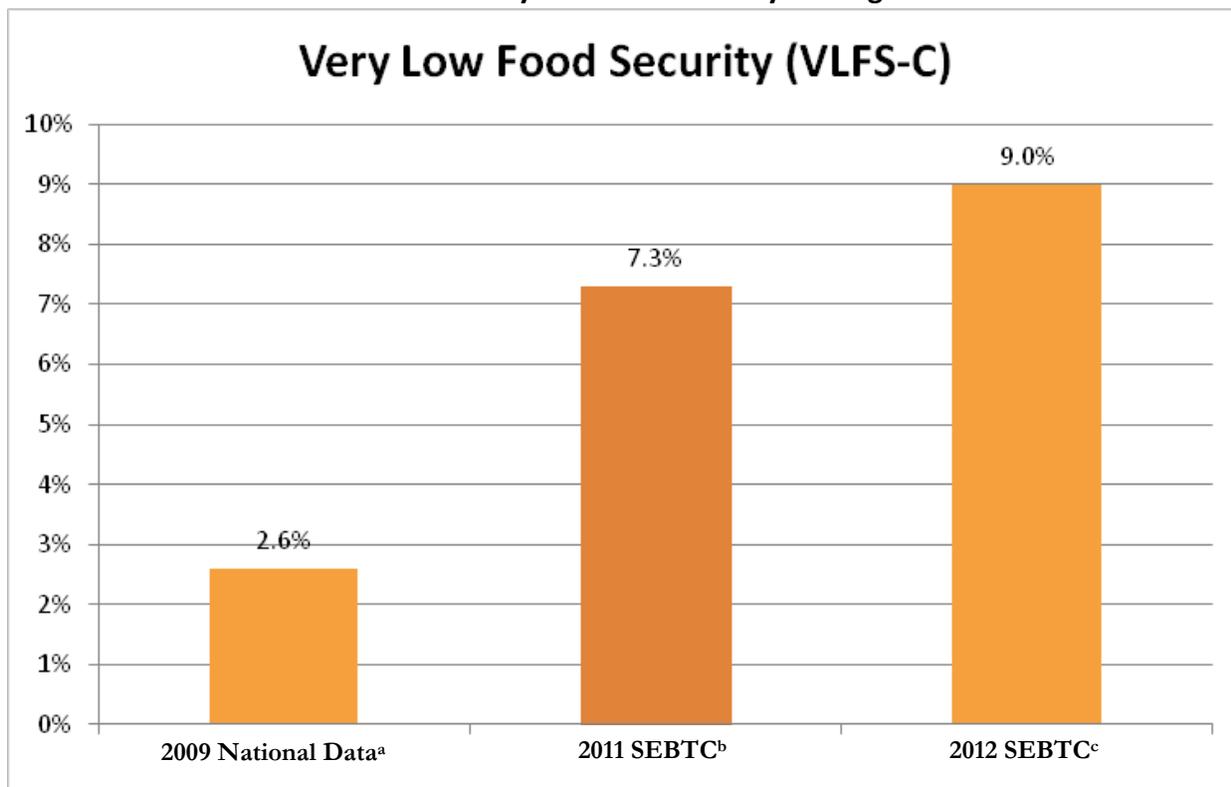
<sup>8</sup> In addition, 25% of households in the Cherokee Nation demonstration area also identified themselves as American Indian.

<sup>9</sup> The Federal Poverty Level (FPL) is adjusted for household size. An FPL is calculated for the contiguous United States, Alaska, and Hawaii. The 2011 FPL for a family of 4 was \$22,350 per year (i.e., \$1,863 per month) in the 48 contiguous States.

In addition to children’s participation in an FRP meals program, nearly two-thirds of the households (61%) reported receiving SNAP benefits and 19% reported using food pantries, soup kitchens, or other emergency food services in the 30 days prior to the spring interview. Nearly one quarter (21%) reported receiving WIC.

More than half of households (59%) reported food insecurity in the past 30 days among adults, children, or both, with the majority of the insecure households experiencing food insecurity among children. Among all households in the study population, 9.0% experienced VLFS-C, which ranged from 3.8% in the Michigan Expansion site to 12.9% in Nevada. This finding is significantly higher than the 2.6% reported for low-income households with children in the 2009 Current Population Survey based on the 30-day measure (see Exhibit E.3). The estimated prevalence of VLFS-C during the full implementation year was higher than the 7.3% estimated during the POC year. Among the five POC sites only, the estimated prevalence of VLFS-C (9.0%) was also higher in 2012 than in 2011.

**Exhibit E.3 Prevalence Rates for Very Low Food Security Among Children**



Source: Current Population Survey (CPS), Food Security Supplement, 2009; SEBTC Spring Survey, 2011 (n=5,830); SEBTC Spring Survey, 2012 (n=25,966).

Note: Based on 30-day measures for all surveys.

<sup>a</sup> Households with school-age children and annual incomes below 130% of the federal poverty level. The annual national measure for the 2011 CPS Food Security Supplement is 2.7% for households with children below 130% of the federal poverty level.

<sup>b</sup> Based on data from five grantees and five sites in the POC year.

<sup>c</sup> Based on data from 10 grantees and 13 sites in the full implementation year.

Respondents also reported the amount of money they spent out-of-pocket on food in the 30 days prior to their spring interview, excluding food purchases made with SNAP or WIC. Counting food expenditures from all food outlets, including fast food restaurants and other eateries, the median weekly out-of-pocket food expenditures for a household was \$60, ranging from \$47 to \$82 across sites. Across all sites, the median weekly out-of-pocket food expenditure was approximately \$15 per person compared to \$37 per person nationally in 2011 for households with incomes at or below 185% of the federal poverty level (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2012).

## E.5. Upcoming Evaluation Activities

The second wave of household data collected in summer 2012 from more than 27,000 households will serve as the basis for the impact analysis for the full implementation year. Also, the evaluation will collect EBT data, cost data, and additional process data through fall 2012 to reflect the full implementation period. These data sources will be used for the evaluation report for the full implementation year planned for spring 2013. The upcoming analysis of the EBT data will use transaction data for the full benefit period in 2012.

The findings from the POC year are encouraging regarding the feasibility of the SEBTC approach and its potential effect on reducing VLFS-C in the summer months. Expansions to larger samples and more grantee sites in the full implementation year (2012) allow the research team to address the research questions more thoroughly and further equip FNS to make data-informed decisions about additional implementation plans for summer food benefits for children. In particular, the larger samples in the full implementation year provide an opportunity to see if the first-year findings are supported in a broader application of the SEBTC approach. In addition, the data will allow for more conclusive analysis of impacts on subpopulations of participating households and for testing ancillary hypotheses concerning the origins of any overall impact findings that emerge.

Finally, a comprehensive report synthesizing findings from the first two years of the SEBTC evaluation is planned for summer 2013. Journal articles and presentations to policy and other target audiences are planned also.

## Chapter 1

# Introduction

Children’s development, health, and well-being depend on access to a safe and secure source of food. In 2011, 8.0 million households with children were food insecure<sup>1</sup> (one in five such households) and nearly half of these, 3.9 million, included children who were food insecure at times during the year (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2012). Nearly 8.6 million children lived in households with food-insecure children, and 0.8 million children lived in households with very low food security among children (VLFS-C).

To address needs in the summer, when school is out of session, the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) provides meals and snacks to children who receive the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) or the School Breakfast Program (SBP) during the school year.<sup>2</sup> The SFSP enriches the lives of millions of low-income children in communities across the U.S., however, it reaches far fewer children than the school programs (FNS, 2011a; Gordon and Briefel, 2003; Food Research and Action Center, 2012a). Many communities also provide other types of food assistance and child programs during the summer months to meet the nutritional needs of low-income children. Locations and resources are limited, though, so there are still gaps in many communities.

As part of its efforts to end child hunger, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is studying alternative approaches to providing food assistance to children in the summer months. The 2010 Agriculture Appropriations Act (P.L. 111-80) authorized and provided funding for USDA to implement and rigorously evaluate the Summer Food for Children Demonstration, one component of which is the Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children (SEBTC). FNS contracted with Abt Associates, Mathematica Policy Research, and Maximus to study how the demonstration program has unfolded over time and its impact on program participants.

FNS planned a “proof of concept” (POC) year of the SEBTC to test whether the summer benefit intervention could be implemented successfully by State and local grantees, and whether the 2011 evaluation, targeting 5,000 households, could be done with fidelity. The full implementation year (2012) expanded the demonstration to 10 State agencies, implementing

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<sup>1</sup> Food-insecure households are those with low or very low food security among adults or children or both.

<sup>2</sup> The NSLP and SBP provide subsidized meals to children in school. Children from low-income families obtain these meals free or at a reduced price (FRP). Children living in households with incomes at or below 130% of the poverty level are eligible to receive meals for free; those with incomes between 130 and 185% of poverty level are eligible for reduced price (FNS, 2012a).

the demonstration in a total of 14 sites,<sup>3</sup> and targeted 27,000 households for the evaluation. This report describes the progress and status of the SEBTC demonstration and its evaluation in 2012, highlights the implementation experiences (through midsummer 2012) of the 10 grantees, describes the random assignment process and data collection for the evaluation, and the baseline characteristics of households in the evaluation. It also summarizes the results of the POC year (Bellotti et al., 2011; Briefel et al., 2011; Collins et al., 2012). This introductory chapter, serving as a foundation for the rest of the report, details the issue of summer food insecurity among children, describes the goals and timeline of the SEBTC demonstration and its evaluation, and provides a road map for the remainder of the report.

## 1.1 Policy Context: Summer Food Insecurity Among Children

Food security is defined as access by all members of the household at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life (Nord, 2009).<sup>4</sup> *Household* food security is determined by the food security status of the adults and the children living in the household. *Food secure* households are those in which both adults and children are food secure. *Food insecure* households are those in which the adults or children *or* both report limited access to food resulting in: a) reduced quality or variety of diet (low food security), or b) reduced food intake or disrupted eating patterns (very low food security – VLFS). These levels of food insecurity are assessed for both the adults and the children living in the household, and also used to assess the total or full household.

In 2011 the prevalence of food insecurity among households with children and incomes at or below 185% of poverty was 40% nationwide, indicating food insecurity among adults or children or both (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2012). In food insecure households, parents often cut or skip their own meals to prevent their children from going without food, and when there is not enough food for everyone in the family, the children may also cut or skip meals. Households in which the children’s regular meal patterns are disrupted or food intake is reduced to below the amount caregivers consider sufficient are characterized as having VLFS among children (VLFS-C), the most severe level of food insecurity (Nord, 2009). Nationwide, 20% of all households with incomes eligible for FRP meals were food insecure, and 2.2% had VLFS-C in 2011. Among households with incomes below the poverty line, the prevalence of food insecurity among children was 24% and VLFS-C, 2.8% (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2012).

National food insecurity estimates for subgroups defined by household composition, income, *and* race/ethnicity are not usually reported due to small sample sizes and resultant reduced statistical reliability. Further, food insecurity estimates for local communities are primarily

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<sup>3</sup> The term “grantee” refers to the State agency or group of agencies implementing the demonstration. In 2012, two of the 10 grantees are Interagency Tribal Organizations (ITOs) with demonstration sites in Oklahoma. For this report, the term “State” or grantee refers to the 10 grantees composed of eight States and two ITOs.

<sup>4</sup> The food security status of each interviewed household is determined by the number of food-insecure conditions and behaviors reported by the household, using the standard 18-item, 30-day survey module developed by USDA (Economic Research Service, 2012a).

based on anecdotal evidence, small studies, and/or different measures. The SEBTC evaluation can contribute important information on the range and variability in households' and children's food insecurity across racial/ethnic, income, *and* geographic subgroups in the U.S. using the standard USDA food security measure.

National data for 2011 indicate that the prevalence of food insecurity among children was higher among Hispanic and non-Hispanic black households with children compared to other racial/ethnic or non-Hispanic white households (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2012).<sup>5</sup> The most recent CPS data available for American Indian/Alaska Native households with children below 185% of the poverty level show that 43% had child food insecurity in 2001-2004 (compared to 36% for all other race/ethnic groups combined (Gordon and Oddo, 2012).

An in-depth analysis of School Nutrition Dietary Assessment Study-III data on food security provides some insights into household characteristics of food insecurity among school-age children (Potamites and Gordon, 2010). Nearly all lived in low-income households; 90% lived in households with incomes at or below 185% of poverty, and most (72%) were at or below 130% of poverty. Nearly all food insecure children (93%) participated in NSLP, 80% participated in the School Breakfast Program (SBP), half (46%) received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, and 19% were in families that had used emergency food services in the last month. Use of the latter is an important indicator of a household's strained resources and the risk of food insecurity. Other local characteristics associated with food insecurity among low-income households with children include higher local housing costs, fuel costs, lack of access to public and private transportation and/or supermarkets and grocery stores (Bartfeld et al., 2010; Webber and Rojhani, 2010). Risk of food insecurity has been associated with living in urban areas and rural areas, depending on other resources and local characteristics such as unemployment rates (Bartfeld et al., 2010; Nord, 2009).

Research on seasonal differences in food security among households with children is limited. One analysis of national data from the 1995 through 2001 Current Population Survey (CPS) suggests that food insecurity changes seasonally in States that provide fewer SFSP meals and summer school lunches. The reported effect among households with income less than 185% of the poverty line was a 1.1 percentage point higher rate of VLFS among adults (rather than children) in the summer compared to the school year (Nord and Romig, 2006). Nord and Romig (2006) conjecture that the seasonal differences in food security may be related to the reduction in school meals that were not offset by households' participation in SFSP. A parallel analysis<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> This statement reflects all income groups combined. National data on food insecurity among households with children were not reported by race/ethnicity *and* income subgroups (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Data from the 1995-2001 CPS were analyzed with two key differences: (1) restricting the sample to households with annual income not exceeding 130% FPL and with at least one child ages 3 to 17, and (2) using a 30-day measure of child food insecurity as the outcome measure instead of adult VLFS. The minimum age in the SEBTC evaluation is 3, and the child-specific items in the CPS food security instrument were restricted to children 17 years old or less. It was not possible to assess VLFS-C (using the eight child survey items) because of data availability, so an alternate measure was constructed, using five survey items referred to as child food insecurity (Collins et al., 2012).

found, without controlling for household and child characteristics, that child food insecurity was higher in the summer (3.9%) compared with the spring (3.4%), and the difference was on the threshold of statistical significance ( $p$  value 0.07). After adjustment for covariates in the model, the difference in the spring/summer prevalence of child food insecurity increased slightly from 0.5 percentage points to 0.6 percentage points ( $p$  value 0.07) (Collins et al., 2012).

Other research suggests that low-income households with school-age children cope with food shortages in the summer by visiting food pantries in some local communities (Hoisington et al., 2006; Kempson et al., 2003). In the 2010 Feeding America survey, 30% of food pantries, 26% of emergency kitchens, and 7% of shelters reported seeing many more children accompanying adults during summer months (Mabli et al., 2010).

SFSP was implemented in 1968 to reduce the risk that children in low-income households would miss meals during the summer when they have little or no access to the NSLP and SBP.<sup>7</sup> In July 2011, approximately 9.5% of school-age children who were eligible for SFSP received it (Food Research and Action Center, 2012b).<sup>8</sup> FNS has funding evaluations of demonstrations to strengthen SFSP, including home delivery of summer meals to children in rural areas, and providing food backpacks to children to cover days when SFSP sites are not operating. The effectiveness of providing grants to SFSP providers (sponsors) to enhance activities at sites, and financial incentives to encourage operation for more than eight weeks are also being tested.<sup>9</sup>

The SFSP provides free, nutritious meals and snacks to help children age 18 and younger get the nutrition they need to grow, learn, and play throughout the summer months when school is not in session (FNS, 2011a; Food Research and Action Center, 2012a). Many of these programs provide not only food assistance for children, but also summer programs and activities that foster physical movement and social interaction—important factors in child development. Logistical and practical considerations still present barriers to SFSP serving more children during the summer. Because the program is operated by schools, local governments, and local community-based organizations in churches and recreation centers, finding additional operators and locations to dramatically expand it has been difficult. Furthermore, even in areas where substantial expansion of the SFSP may be feasible, rates of participation by eligible children would likely remain below those for the NSLP and SBP. An earlier evaluation reported several barriers to SFSP participation, such as lack of transportation to sites, lack of publicity about the program, limited site operation days/hours, lack of program activities, and parents' concerns about neighborhood safety (Gordon and Briefel, 2003). In addition, most SFSP sites

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<sup>7</sup> The SBP began as a pilot program in 1966 and was established as a permanent program in 1975 ([http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/summer/about/program\\_history.html](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/summer/about/program_history.html)).

<sup>8</sup> Based on July average daily attendance figures for summertime NSLP participation reported by FNS, but not adjusted for absenteeism because summer absentee figures are not available for SFSP as they are for NSLP; estimate assumes that SFSP accounts for approximately 65% of summer nutrition meals. About 14.6% of eligible children participated in summer nutrition meals in 2011 (Food Research and Action Center, 2012b).

<sup>9</sup> More information on these evaluations and projects can be found on the FNS website at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/>.

operate for fewer than eight weeks, leaving low-income children without access to the program for some summer weeks.

## 1.2 The SEBTC Demonstration

In response to concern about food insecurity among low-income children during summer months, Congress provided \$85 million to USDA to improve access to food for low-income children in the summer months when school is not in regular session (P.L. 111-80). In addition to the SFSP demonstrations described earlier, FNS planned and implemented a demonstration that uses the existing electronic benefit delivery systems for the SNAP and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) to enhance the food purchasing power of households with eligible children during the summer. More specifically, a benefit for eligible children in the summer months is delivered through the electronic benefits transfer (EBT) procedures used by the SNAP and WIC programs.

This benefit (SEBTC) supplements rather than replaces the SFSP programs in the demonstration areas. Many SFSP programs provide summer activities as well as food assistance, but one critical advantage of the SEBTC approach is that it does not require that children be physically present at sites where meals are served. By directly augmenting the food purchasing power of households with eligible children, FNS expects a higher proportion of the children will actually have greater access to food, thus achieving the ultimate goal of reducing the prevalence of food insecurity among children.

The SEBTC benefit is provided to households of children from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade who are certified for FRP school meals in the demonstration school food authorities (SFAs).<sup>10</sup> The amount of the benefit—an approximately \$60 value per month per child in the household—is comparable to the cost of free lunches plus breakfasts under the NSLP and SBP. Benefits—provided monthly on an EBT card and prorated for partial months—are administered by grantees in the summer for the period when schools are not in session.<sup>11</sup>

The benefit is administered either using the State's existing EBT system for WIC or the EBT system for SNAP to deliver SEBTC. Grantees worked with their existing EBT vendors, which made modifications to the State's WIC or SNAP EBT systems. In WIC-model sites, participants can purchase specific quantities of specific foods based on the existing WIC food packages and can only purchase them at WIC-authorized retailers in the State where they were issued. The SEBTC package was specified by FNS based on existing WIC foods prescriptions and includes milk, juice, cheese, cereal, eggs, whole wheat bread, beans, peanut butter, and canned fish. It also includes a \$16 voucher for fresh fruits and vegetables (see Appendix 1A). The grantees implementing the WIC approach also worked with FNS to customize the package to meet the

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<sup>10</sup> SFAs are responsible for the provision of school meals and can include one or more schools or districts.

<sup>11</sup> More information on these evaluations and projects can be found on the FNS website at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/>.

tastes of the local population (for example, substituting whole grain tortillas for whole wheat bread) and local food costs.

Grantees using their SNAP systems for SEBTC implemented either a “SNAP” model or a “SNAP-hybrid” model. In the “SNAP-hybrid” model, SEBTC benefits are automatically loaded onto the SNAP cards of current SNAP recipients and non-SNAP recipients receive a standard SNAP card that only includes SEBTC benefits. For the “SNAP” model, SEBTC households get SEBTC on a separate EBT card even if they also have a SNAP card. In the sites using the SNAP or SNAP-hybrid models, participants can redeem \$60 in benefits for SNAP-approved foods at any SNAP-authorized retailer in the country. Participants can purchase a much wider range of foods than permitted in the WIC model, including meats, fish and poultry, all types of bread (not just whole wheat), and seeds and plants that produce food for the household to eat.<sup>12</sup>

The demonstration was implemented in two phases. In the initial proof-of-concept (POC) phase in 2011, the demonstration was implemented by five grantees (Connecticut, Michigan, Missouri, Oregon, and Texas) in a total of five sites.<sup>13</sup> In the second year, FNS expanded the size of the demonstration by adding nine new sites and roughly doubling the number of child beneficiaries at each site. In 2012, all but one of the POC grantees (Texas) implemented SEBTC in a second site, and five new grantees (Chickasaw Nation, Cherokee Nation, Delaware, Nevada, and Washington) each had one site (See Exhibit 1.1). In Chapter 2, we provide additional information about the participating grantees, their partner agencies, and SFAs; program model; and consent process.

## 1.3 Overview of the Evaluation

In authorizing the Summer Food for Children Demonstrations, Congress directed USDA to conduct a rigorous independent evaluation. The evaluation design for the SEBTC demonstration includes three components: an impact study, an implementation study, and a cost study. This report focuses on the SEBTC implementation (as of midsummer 2012), and the baseline characteristics of the study population in 2012. Below we describe the evaluation framework, the overall study design, and the research questions for this report. The 2012 impact and the cost analyses will be addressed in the evaluation report for the full implementation year.

### 1.3.1 Evaluation Framework for the SEBTC Demonstration

Children’s food security and nutritional status are outcomes associated with a complex set of inter-relationships between household resources to obtain adequate and safe foods for all household members, and the policies, nutrition assistance programs, and institutions (e.g., schools, child care facilities) in the community where the family lives and eats (Finney Rutten et al., 2010). Low-income families may experience reduced access to affordable and healthful foods such as fresh fruits and vegetables and whole grains (Beaulac et al., 2009). Those living in

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<sup>12</sup> For a full list of SNAP-approved foods, visit the FNS website at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/faqs.htm#10>.

<sup>13</sup> The term “site” refers to the local areas where the demonstration is being implemented.

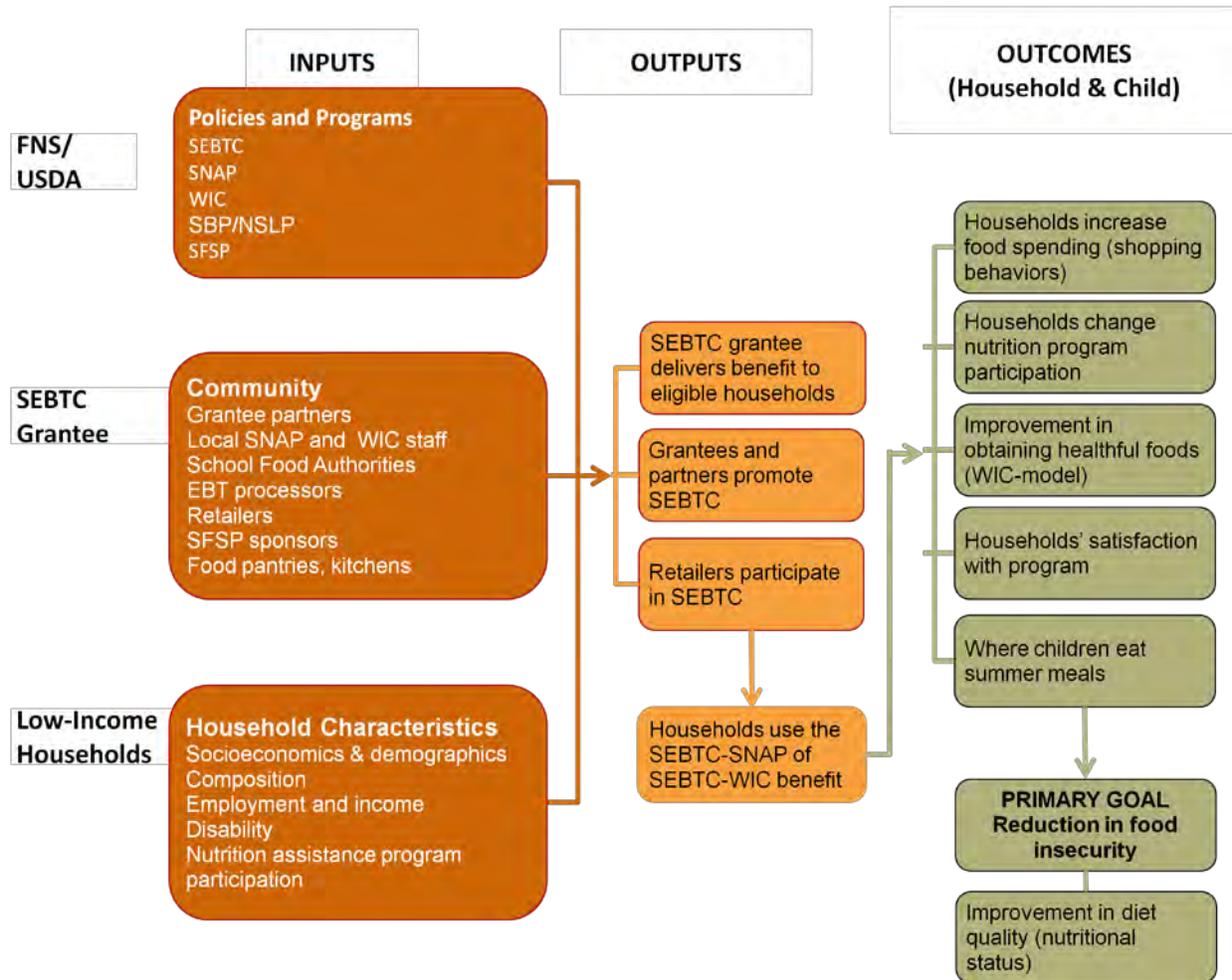
rural areas may face additional barriers including lack of transportation to attend SFSP and other summer nutrition programs (Wauchope and Stracuzzi, 2010). Children’s consumption of affordable and healthful foods is associated with household socioeconomic characteristics, food availability, and access to food or meals (e.g., FRP meals, child care meals/snacks, SFSP meals/snacks).

**Exhibit 1.1. Map of SEBTC Demonstration Sites in the Full Implementation Year**



Exhibit 1.2 illustrates how children’s food security and nutritional status is related to nutrition policies and programs, community institutions, and household characteristics, and how the impact of the SEBTC may be determined by these factors. SEBTC provides a benefit to eligible households that first affects household behaviors. Households may use the benefit to alter their food budget, grocery shopping practices, and/or eating practices at home or away from home. These household changes may affect the amounts and types of foods purchased by the household and therefore available to children living in the household. Children also consume meals at school or summer sites, and other locations outside the home. Ultimately, the availability of (or lack of) food affects children’s food security and nutritional status. The goal of the SEBTC is to provide EBT benefits so that low-income households can spend more on food, improve diet quality and nutritional status, and reduce food insecurity among children.

**Exhibit 1.2. Logic Model for the SEBTC Evaluation**



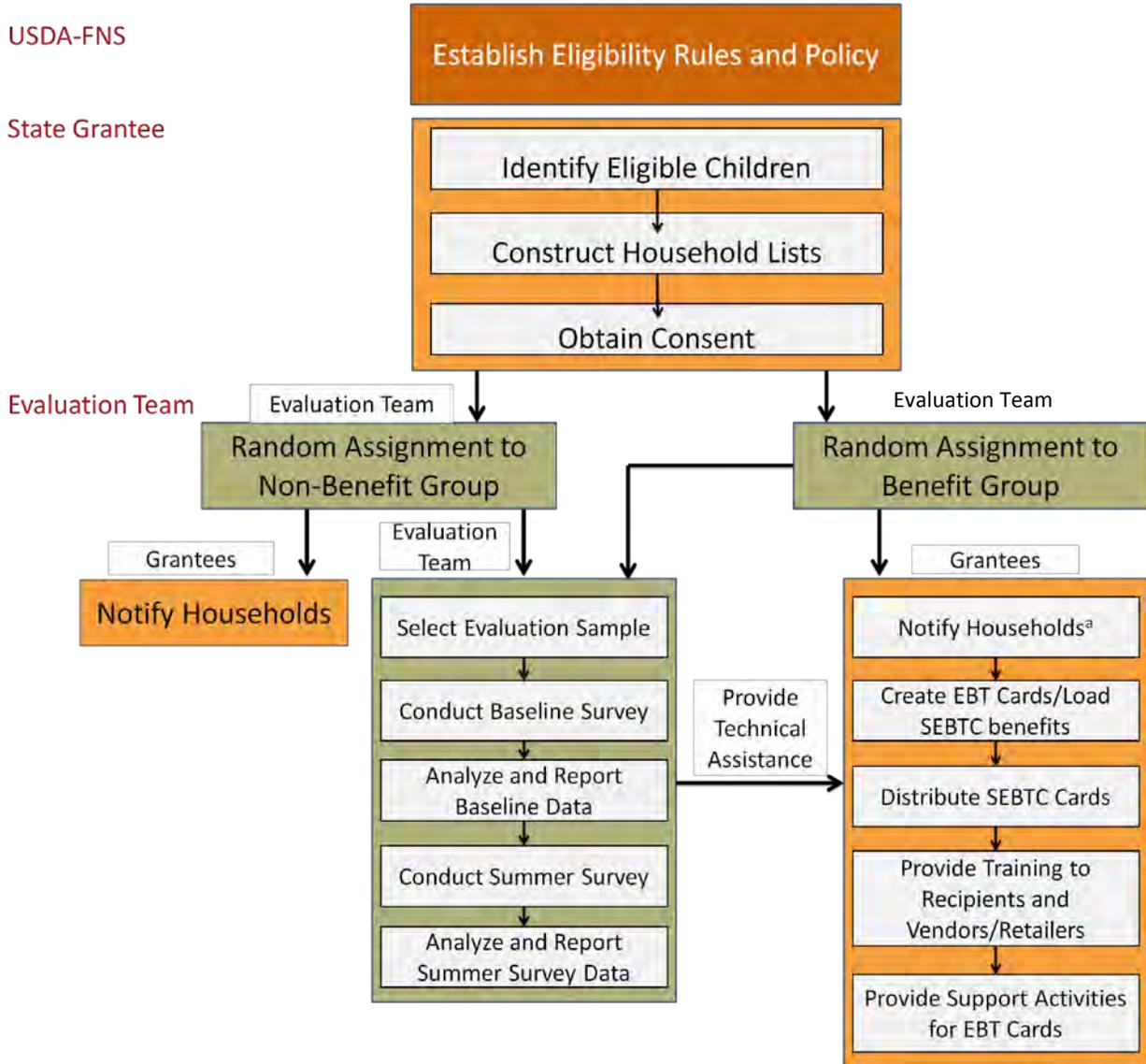
### 1.3.2 Research Design

The evaluation uses a random assignment design to provide the most credible and rigorous estimates of the impact of the demonstrations. In the full implementation year (2012), FNS provided funding for benefits for up to 75,000 children (5,300 per site). The evaluation team planned to survey approximately 1,930 households per site, as described further below. The household data collection sample includes approximately 27,000 households, surveyed before the intervention (i.e., during the school year) and again during the intervention (i.e., in the summer).

To accomplish these tasks, FNS, the grantees, and the evaluation team began work in December 2011 to complete a series of tasks related to implementing the demonstration and evaluation before the end of the 2011-2012 school year when SEBTC benefits became available to households. Exhibit 1.3 lays out the flow of activities that had to be accomplished during 2012. First, FNS established eligibility rules and policy, and then participating SFAs had to

identify eligible children, group them into households, and obtain consent to take part in the

**Exhibit 1.3 Flow of Activities in 2012 of FNS, Grantees, and Evaluation Team, Post Grant Award**



SEBTC = Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) for Children

<sup>a</sup> Not all grantees notified the non-benefit group.

demonstration and evaluation. Households that had one or more children certified for FRP meals and consented to be randomly assigned either to a benefit group that received the SEBTC benefit or to a non-benefit group that did not. In each demonstration site, grantees notified

families if they were eligible to receive the benefit and began the process of loading benefits onto and distributing EBT cards. At the same time, the evaluation team selected a random subsample of households for the evaluation study, including a treatment group that would receive the benefit and a control group that would not. The evaluation team next surveyed the selected households before the end of the school year and again during the summer. These surveys gathered data for eligible households and children on household food security and food expenditures, children's food consumption and eating behaviors as measures of diet quality and nutritional status, as well as other outcome measures. Rigorous estimates of the impacts of the SEBTC will be made by comparing the values of these measures from the summer survey between treatment households and control households.

To supplement the impact analysis, the evaluation involves a detailed implementation study. Successful implementation of the demonstrations requires the involvement and cooperation of a number of State and local agencies and contractors in each demonstration site. The implementation study assessed the operational feasibility of the demonstration and identified the challenges encountered in 2012 and how the lessons learned in the POC year contributed to 2012 efforts. The evaluation team collected a variety of data from organizations involved in the demonstrations. These include information gathered during the team's technical assistance to grantees to implement the demonstration and the evaluation design, stakeholder interviews during a June/July in-depth site visit to each grantee, telephone interviews toward the end of implementation, and administrative reports and documents. The evaluation also includes a detailed analysis of SEBTC transaction data. This analysis describes patterns of household receipt and use of the summer benefits. Through the benefit period, EBT processors transmitted administrative records to the evaluation team on benefit acceptance, usage, and other information on the full sample of households assigned to the benefit group.

Finally, a cost analysis provides information on the total and component costs of implementing and operating the demonstration. This analysis uses quarterly and annual administrative cost reports to identify expenditures of grant funds by the grantee and its partners for personnel and other resources used to implement and operate the demonstrations. Each grantee provided a quarterly report showing SEBTC amounts obligated and redeemed—for the reporting month and cumulatively for the year.

### 1.3.3 Research Objectives and Sources of Data

This report addresses four research objectives for the 2012 demonstration year that could be addressed with the 2012 study data available as of midsummer:

1. To assess the feasibility of implementing three different models: a separately operating program using the WIC system, a separately operating program using the SNAP system, and a hybrid system in which SEBTC benefits are included in benefits for SNAP participants

2. To examine the implementation of SEBTC, including approaches used, and the challenges and lessons learned during the demonstrations
3. To describe receipt and use of SEBTC benefits<sup>14</sup>
4. To describe the study population's household characteristics, food security, food expenditures, and participation in nutrition assistance programs at baseline

The evaluation relies on several sources of data. To answer the first two research objectives, the evaluation team used three data sources, including (1) technical assistance visits and calls made principally to assist in the consent and random assignment process; (2) process study interviews with grantees and their key partners, including EBT processors; and (3) written documents, such as grant applications and materials used to obtain parental consent to be part of the demonstration.

To describe the monthly benefits issued and redeemed, the team used EBT data for households selected to receive the SEBTC benefit. For this report, EBT data were used to assess activation and use of EBT benefits for the first issuance cycle of the summer. The evaluation report for the full implementation year will address redemption patterns and exhaustion of benefits for the full summer benefit period. To describe the study population at baseline, surveys were conducted by telephone before the school year ended, and took approximately 25 minutes to complete with household respondents in the evaluation subsample.

Two earlier reports, "Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children: Early Experiences Through June 2011 of the Proof-of-Concept Year" (Bellotti et al., 2011); and "Congressional Status Report: Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children Demonstrations" (Briefel et al., 2011), also presented findings on the first three objectives. The "Early Implementation" report presented findings about the first several months of implementation by the five POC grantees. The 2011 "SEBTC Congressional Status Report" provided implementation details up through September and also described the characteristics of households taking part in the demonstration.

A future report, the evaluation report for the full implementation year, will address additional research questions on the impact of SEBTC benefits on children and their household's food security, food expenditures, and children's nutritional status, and how the impact varied by demonstration model, SNAP participation, poverty status, and selected household characteristics. In addition, the report will describe the total and component costs of implementing and operating the demonstrations. These research objectives are also provided in the evaluation report for the POC year (Collins et al., 2012); findings are summarized below in section 1.4.

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<sup>14</sup> This report provides findings for the first issuance cycle. The evaluation report for the full implementation year will provide findings for the full summer benefit period.

## 1.4. Summary of Findings from the POC Year

As described in the evaluation report for the POC year, referenced above, in summer 2011, five grantees participated in the SEBTC demonstration. The Connecticut and Oregon sites are predominantly rural, and the Michigan, Missouri, and Texas sites are urban or predominantly urban. The number of eligible children ranged from approximately 11,000 in Connecticut to 38,000 in Texas. Lead agencies were most often the State agency responsible for SNAP or for the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs. Each had a variety of partners, and included other State agencies as well as SFAs, EBT vendors, community organizations, and private contractors to help with planning and management.

### 1.4.1. SEBTC Implementation and Use of Benefits in the POC Year

Despite the extremely fast-paced timeline, as well as budgetary and other pressures on the State governments, all five grantees were able to recruit and enroll households in spring and administer SEBTC benefits during the summer of 2011. One of the greatest challenges grantees faced during implementation was working with SFAs to identify eligible children and compile household lists, in part due to unavailable or inaccurate data from school systems. Despite these issues, which caused delays, all of the grantees were able to obtain consent from at least the minimum number of children and families needed to be part of the demonstration and evaluation. In addition, all of the EBT vendors completed systems modifications needed to administer the SEBTC benefit.

In each of the sites, approximately 2,500 children were randomly assigned to receive benefits, for a total of approximately 12,500 across the five sites. Taken together, the five sites issued benefits to a total of 6,968 households with 12,463 children identified as eligible. Over the summer, 11,412 children lived in households that redeemed SEBTC benefits, representing 92% of all children issued benefits. Households redeemed a total of \$1.6 million in SEBTC benefits, with an average of \$235 per household over the summer.

Among the households that were issued benefits, 90% used their benefits at least once during the demonstration. Considering all households assigned to receive the SEBTC benefit (both those who used it at least once and those who did not use it all), households redeemed an average of 80% of benefits issued for the summer. For the 90% of households that *participated* at all, i.e., made at least one SEBTC purchase, the mean amount *redeemed* was 89% of benefits. There was a difference in the amount of benefits redeemed between the sites depending on their approach (SNAP, SNAP-hybrid, or WIC). The SNAP-hybrid and SNAP sites had the highest mean redemption rates among participating households (93% to 98%). The WIC-model States had substantially lower means (71% in Michigan and 85% in Texas).

SEBTC benefits were made available to households on their EBT cards on a monthly basis. While the mean amount redeemed among participating households was 89%, benefits were not always *exhausted* (i.e., completely used) at the end of any given month. Across all sites, 57% of households exhausted their benefits in at least one summer month, and 35% spent all of their benefits for the summer. Among households that exhausted their benefits, on average,

the benefits were spent 10 days after they were issued. In the SNAP model States, SNAP households were almost twice as likely to spend all of their benefits compared to non-SNAP households.

#### 1.4.2. Households in the Study and Impacts of SEBTC in the POC Year

Households that took part in the SEBTC demonstration were relatively disadvantaged, compared to the national population of households with children under 18. Reported mean household monthly income was \$1,572, with 4% reporting no income in the past month. Nearly three-fourths of the households (72.6%) had monthly incomes below the federal poverty line,<sup>15</sup> ranging from 65.3% of households in Connecticut to 78.6% in Michigan. In contrast, in 2010, 18.3% of families with related children under 18 had incomes below the federal poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).<sup>16</sup> Over two thirds (69.5%) reported at least one employed adult in the household.

Among the group taking part in the demonstration, SEBTC reduced VLFS-C, the study's primary outcome, during the summer of 2011. The prevalence of VLFS-C was reduced from 7.0% in the control group to 5.6% in the treatment group. In the five POC sites, SEBTC advanced the demonstration's main goal, reducing children's very low food security in the summer. However, while the direction of the impact is not in question, the size must be viewed with caution; differential non-response among households within the treatment and control groups who experienced different levels of food security may result in an over-estimate or under-estimate of the impact. In addition, the demonstration areas are not representative of the entire nation.

Analyses of related measures of food security—general food insecurity among children plus measures of both severe and general food insecurity among adults and households as a whole—indicate similar proportional reductions in these broader measures. For example, food insecurity among children was reduced from 38% to 31% prevalence by the SEBTC intervention. All of the food security results for the POC year are robust in terms of the direction of the impact.

SEBTC also showed some impacts on children's nutritional intake. Based on responses to the summer survey, children in SEBTC ate more fruits and vegetables and more frequently ate whole grains during the summer than those in the control group, though positive changes in diet in other areas (reductions in baked goods and sugar-sweetened drink consumption and increases in the share of children drinking nonfat or low-fat milk) were not observed.

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<sup>15</sup> The Federal Poverty Level (FPL) is adjusted for household size. An FPL is calculated for the contiguous United States, Alaska, and Hawaii. The 2011 FPL for a family of four is \$22,350 per year (i.e., \$1,863 per month) in the 48 contiguous States.

<sup>16</sup> As other evidence of disadvantage relative to the national population, nearly two-thirds of the households (63.8%) reported receiving SNAP benefits, nearly one quarter (23.5%) reported receiving WIC, and 16% reported using food pantries, kitchens, or other emergency food services at baseline prior to when SEBTC began.

Children in households receiving SEBTC were 1.8 percentage points more likely than control households to eat lunch at home or other places where the household paid for the meal. Although all households, including those receiving SEBTC, continued to have access to SFSP, it is plausible that those who received SEBTC did not feel as much need to use SFSP as households in the control group, and, indeed, the available data suggest that SEBTC reduced household participation in SFSP by 1 percentage point. However, the reported use of SFSP in the control group is about half the national estimates. This may be due to respondents' inability to identify an SFSP site as well as the fact that several of the areas were selected for the SEBTC demonstration because of the relatively low level of SFSP availability in the summer.

#### 1.4.3. Costs of SEBTC in the POC Year

Grantees reported detailed data on SEBTC implementation costs related to program staffing, contractual relationships between agencies, benefit outlays, and indirect cost rates to support the cost analysis. States encountered several unanticipated demonstration costs. Some tasks took more staff time than initially planned, particularly those related to the creation and cleaning of household files for random assignment. This caused some States to spend additional non-grant funds or to use in-kind resources from State staff or partner organizations because States tended to underestimate non-grant costs in their applications.

Administrative costs reflect start-up costs such as modifying several computer systems and databases, and developing consent and outreach materials including logos and card designs, and are typically highest in the first year of a new program. Administrative costs accounted for approximately half of total costs (i.e., benefit costs plus administrative costs), but the proportions varied considerably across sites. The average administrative cost of implementing the demonstration ranged from \$210,683 in Connecticut to \$716,040 in Michigan. SEBTC grant-funded costs ranged from \$118,801 in Oregon to \$607,189 in Michigan.

The total cost of the demonstration (administrative plus benefit costs) ranged from \$557,760 in Connecticut to \$964,501 in Michigan. Almost all of the grant administrative costs (67 to 90%) occurred before the benefits were issued to families. Non-grant administrative costs were largely State staff costs. Texas was the exception, funding their State administrative staff time through the grant. As described earlier, each grantee had a combination of State and community partners. In general, working with local community partners was associated with lower administrative costs overall, while working with the private contractors (other than the EBT processor) was associated with higher costs.

Over the full summer of 2011, the cost per school-aged child (both administrative and benefit cost) in a household redeeming benefits was \$311 on average, and ranged from \$239 to \$413 across sites. Administrative costs were higher in WIC-model sites, but redemption rates were lower, contributing to higher average costs for households redeeming benefits in WIC-model sites compared to SNAP-model sites.

#### 1.4.4. Implications of the POC Year for the Full Implementation Year

For the five POC-year sites taken together, the estimates provide very strong evidence that SEBTC improved VLFS-C as well as suggestive evidence of effects for other measures of food insecurity examined. While random assignment is considered the gold standard for estimating policy impacts, evaluation results in a small number of purposively selected sites do not necessarily generalize to the nation as a whole.

Because there were only five sites in the POC year, it was not possible to draw definitive conclusions about some of the research objectives, including:

- Spring and summer differences in households' food insecurity among children
- The impact of SEBTC on households' food expenditures or use of the WIC program and SNAP program
- Relative costs of the WIC- and SNAP-models

In the full implementation year, as described above, the study includes 14 sites and an evaluation sample of approximately 27,000 households, allowing more robust examination of impacts and their variation across sites and across demographic groups in the "Second Year Evaluation Report." If the results from the full implementation year are generally consistent with the POC year, that will strengthen the implication that SEBTC can have an impact on households with school-age children in many communities in the nation.

### 1.5 Report Contents

Exhibit 1.4 links the research objectives with research questions and the contents of this report. Beyond this introduction, findings in this report are presented in a series of five additional chapters. In Chapter 2, we provide an overview of the selected grantees and their partner agencies, and describe the variations in the overall program models they chose to implement. In Chapter 3 we describe the implementation experiences and challenges in 2012. In Chapter 4 we describe households' use of EBT benefits. In Chapter 5 we describe characteristics of the study population. In Chapter 6, we summarize key study accomplishments from the POC year through midsummer of the full implementation year. The appendices provide supporting data tables and documentation.

## Exhibit 1.4. Research Objectives and Questions for the SEBTC Demonstration

Evaluation Study Research Objectives	Research Questions Addressed in This Report	Chapter in This Report
1. To assess the feasibility of implementing three different models: a separately operating program using the WIC system, a separately operating program using the SNAP system, and a hybrid system in which SEBTC benefits are included in benefits for SNAP participants	<p>What is the feasibility of the SNAP and WIC models based on the first month of SEBTC operation in the full implementation?</p> <p>What is the status of the full implementations as of midsummer?</p>	3
2. To examine the implementation of SEBTC, including approaches used, and the challenges and lessons learned during the demonstrations	<p>What are early successes and failures?</p> <p>Did grantees benefit from their POC experiences?</p>	
3. To describe receipt and use of the SEBTC benefits	<p>How were the SEBTC benefits used in the first issuance cycle?</p> <p>In the first issuance cycle:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What was the monthly dollar value of the demonstration benefit issued and redeemed?</li> <li>• What was the pattern of benefit redemption by food category in WIC sites?</li> <li>• How do patterns compare to last year in POC sites?</li> </ul>	4
4. To describe households that took part in the demonstration and examine the impact of SEBTC benefits on children and their families' food security, food expenditures, and children's nutritional status	<p>What are the characteristics of households that consented to be part of the SEBTC demonstrations (i.e., food security, participation in nutrition assistance programs, and average monthly food expenditures) at baseline?</p> <p>What is the range of food security across sites? How does 2012 baseline food security compare to the 2011 baseline?</p> <p>Did they vary by type of demonstration or whether the site used active or passive consent?</p>	5
5. To determine and document the total and component costs of implementing and operating the demonstrations; and to determine the overall costs and facilitate comparisons of different operational models	Not included in this report; data not yet available	N/A

N/A = not applicable

## Chapter 2

# The Demonstration Grantees

In the 2012 full implementation year, 10 grantees received funding to implement SEBTC in a total of 14 sites. As noted in Chapter 1, all five POC sites received a grant in the second year, and all but one of them (Texas) applied for and received funding to implement an additional demonstration in an expansion area (referred to in the report as Expansion sites). FNS selected five additional grantees to implement demonstration sites—three States (Delaware, Nevada, and Washington) and two ITOs (Cherokee Nation and Chickasaw Nation).

In this chapter, State and local context for the 10 grantees implementing SEBTC in 2012 are provided. The variation between grantees across organizational structures, the characteristics of the local areas, and selected SEBTC models are described. Appendix 2A includes a profile for each grantee that provides additional details on these topics.

### 2.1 Grantee Organizational Structures

This section describes the organizational structures of the eight State agencies and two ITOs (referred to as States hereafter) that received SEBTC grants, as well as describing the 14 local sites. When awarding the SEBTC grants, FNS gave grantees the flexibility to choose the agency or agencies to lead the effort. They also could define the roles of other State and local partners and identify the local demonstration areas.

For the SEBTC demonstration, the lead agency was most often the one administering SNAP or WIC. In fact, 8 of the 10 grantees—Cherokee Nation, Chickasaw Nation, Connecticut, Delaware, Missouri, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington—chose the agency that administers the SNAP or WIC program as the lead grantee. Michigan selected the education agency that administers NSLP and SFSP to serve as its lead. Finally, Texas decided that both its WIC agency and its agency administering the NSLP and SFSP programs would co-lead the grant.

For all grantees, planning and implementing the SEBTC program was a large undertaking, requiring the involvement of additional State and local partners. All the grantees worked with their education agencies on the demonstration, with the involvement varying from working intensely with SFAs and local partners on the consent process to simply advising the lead agency in program design and administration. For instance, the two ITOs, Cherokee Nation and Chickasaw Nation, collaborated with Oklahoma's Department of Education and the Department of Child Nutrition Programs that also serve the Native American population in the demonstration area. In Washington and Connecticut, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the State Department of Education, respectively, were responsible for much of the consent process. In contrast, the Oregon Department of Education served primarily in a supervisory role.

In addition to working with State Departments of Education and SFAs, lead agencies relied on a variety of other partners and unique staffing configurations. For instance, in Missouri, the grant manager was from the Department of Health and Senior Services and reported directly to the governor's office, which was heavily involved in the demonstration. Six of the grantees also chose to partner with local community organizations to help with outreach, participant training, and encouraging households to take part in the demonstration. Exhibit 2.1 describes the grantees' major partners, characteristics of the local areas served, program model used, and whether they used an active or passive consent process.

For the 2012 full implementation year, FNS required that grantees select one or more geographically contiguous SFAs to participate in the demonstration. In order to meet sample size requirements for the impact evaluation, each site had to include at least 20,000 children certified for NSLP. FNS was interested in variation in urban/rural status, as well as the concentration of children eligible for NSLP (FNS, 2011a, 2011b). In addition, the POC grantees were required to provide a second year of SEBTC in the same POC site, and had to expand the areas with additional contiguous SFAs, if needed, to meet evaluation sample requirements. In addition, POC grantees were invited to apply for an additional, separate Expansion site. Eight of the sites identified at least 21,000 children (up to 37,000 in Texas) in contiguous SFAs for the demonstration; however, Cherokee Nation and Michigan POC identified just 17,500 and 16,500 eligible children, respectively.

## 2.2 Overview of the Demonstration Sites and Local Context

The characteristics of the demonstration areas potentially influenced both the implementation of the demonstration and its impact on the participating households. As in the POC year, the characteristics of the 14 demonstration sites also varied greatly in terms of geographic area, the availability of SFSP sites, food retailers, and nutrition education programs. All are described below.

### 2.2.1 Geographic Area and Local Population/Characteristics of Participating SFAs

The SEBTC sites included urban areas (Michigan POC, Missouri POC and Expansion, Oregon Expansion, and Washington), and relatively large, predominantly rural areas (Cherokee Nation, Chickasaw Nation, Connecticut POC, Michigan Expansion, Oregon POC, and Texas). Three new sites contained a mix of urban, suburban, and rural communities (Connecticut Expansion, Delaware, and Nevada). The size of the local population in the demonstration areas varied from just under 50,000 residents in Cherokee Nation to more than 800,000 in Texas.<sup>26</sup> Three demonstration sites (Cherokee Nation, Chickasaw Nation, and Oregon POC) include Native American populations ranging from approximately 2% of the demonstration population in Oregon to 27% in Cherokee Nation. None of the demonstration areas—including the two

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<sup>26</sup> In Texas, the participating SFA—Ysleta Independent School District—is one of nine districts that comprise El Paso County.

**Exhibit 2.1. The Grantees, Their Partners, and Participating Local Areas in 2012**

Grantee	State and Local Partners	2012 Site Designation	Area Served	Number of SFAs	Urban/Rural	Percent of Children Eligible for FRP Meals <sup>a</sup>	Approximate Number of SEBTC Eligible Children <sup>b</sup>	Program Model <sup>c</sup>	Consent
<b>Cherokee Nation WIC Program</b>	Oklahoma Education Department and Child Nutrition Program	New	29 of 51 SFAs in Adair, Cherokee, Delaware, Mayes, and Sequoyah Counties	29 <sup>d</sup>	Rural	54 to 93	17,500	WIC <sup>e</sup>	Passive <sup>f</sup>
<b>Chickasaw Nation Nutrition Services</b>	Oklahoma Education Department	New	Carter, Coal, Garvin, Johnson, Marshall, McClain, Murray, and Pontotoc Counties	41	Rural	30 to 96	22,000	WIC	Active
<b>Connecticut Department of Social Services</b>	Connecticut State Department of Education End Hunger! Connecticut	POC	2011: 17 of 57 SFAs in Windham, Tolland, and New London Counties 2012: 28 of 57 school districts in New London, Windham, and Tolland County	2011: 17 <sup>g</sup> 2012: 28	Mostly rural	10 to 73	2011: 11,000 2012: 17,500	SNAP	Active <sup>h</sup>
		Expansion	6 of 70 SFAs in Hartford, Litchfield and New Haven counties	6	Urban and rural	1 to 70	22,000		
<b>Delaware Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Social Services</b>	Delaware Department of Education Division of Management Services The Data Service Center	New	4 of 5 SFAs in New Castle County	4	Urban and rural	21 to 60	24,000	SNAP	Active
<b>Michigan Department of Education</b>	Michigan Department of Community Health	POC	City of Grand Rapids	2011: 1 2012: 1	Urban	2011: 80 2012: 86	2011: 16,000 2012: 16,500	WIC	Active
		Expansion	Bay, Arenac, Clare, Gladwin, Midland, and Tuscola counties	32	Rural	31 to 59	21,000		

Grantee	State and Local Partners	2012 Site Designation	Area Served	Number of SFAs	Urban/Rural	Percent of Children Eligible for FRP Meals <sup>a</sup>	Approximate Number of SEBTC Eligible Children <sup>b</sup>	Program Model <sup>c</sup>	Consent
<b>Missouri Department of Social Services</b>	Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services	POC	Kansas City	2011: 3 2012: 3	Mostly Urban	74 to 88	2011: 20,000 2012: 22,500		
	Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Local Investment Commission	Expansion	City of St. Louis	1	Urban	82	22,000	SNAP-Hybrid	Passive
<b>Nevada Department of Health and Human Services, Health Division WIC Program</b>	Nevada Department of Education Food Bank of Northern Nevada	New	Washoe, Douglas, and Lyon Counties	3	Urban and rural	35 to 48	24,000	WIC	Passive
<b>Oregon Department of Human Services</b>	Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon Oregon State University Extension Service	POC	2011: Linn and Jefferson Counties 2012: Deschutes, Jefferson, and Linn Counties	2011: 9 2012: 12	Mostly rural	40 to 81	2011: 13,000 2012: 24,500	SNAP-Hybrid	Active
	Oregon Hunger Task Force Oregon Food Bank Oregon Department of Education	Expansion	Marion County	1	Urban	60	24,000		
<b>Texas Department of Agriculture Texas Department of State Health Services</b>	West Texas Food Bank of El Paso Ysleta Independent School District	POC	1 of 5 SFAs in El Paso County	2011: 1 2012: 1	Mostly urban	2011: 83 2012: 82	2011: 38,000 2012: 37,000	WIC <sup>e</sup>	Passive
<b>Washington Department of Social and Health Services, Economic Services Administration, Community Services Division</b>	Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction	New	2 of 9 SFAs in Clark County	2	Urban	47	29,500	SNAP	Active

Source: Grant proposal documents and technical assistance efforts with grantees, 2011 and 2012.

<sup>a</sup> Approximations based on information on children eligible for FRP meals provided in grant proposals.

<sup>b</sup> Calculation based on information in grant proposals and provided by grantees during technical assistance efforts.

<sup>c</sup> The SNAP-hybrid model used the existing SNAP EBT card for SEBTC benefits; households receiving SNAP received additional SEBTC benefits on their existing card during the summer months, while households not receiving SNAP received a standard SNAP EBT card loaded with SEBTC benefits only. The SNAP and WIC models both used separate EBT cards for SNAP/WIC and SEBTC benefits.

<sup>d</sup> Cherokee Nation originally selected 51 SFAs within five counties. For various reasons, 22 SFAs chose not to participate.

<sup>e</sup> The State uses offline transaction technology for its WIC EBT, in which a smart card has an embedded “smart chip” that stores information about the specific foods and quantities available to the card holder. Because the WIC EBT purchase transaction occurs between the smart card and the card acceptance terminal, there is no real-time communication with the EBT host system during the transaction.

<sup>f</sup> One of the 29 SFAs in Cherokee Nation chose to use active rather than passive consent.

<sup>g</sup> Connecticut initially proposed to enroll 23 contiguous SFAs. During the course of early implementation, 6 decided not to participate, leaving a final count of 17 SFAs for the 2011 year. In 2012, the grantee expanded the POC site by adding approximately 21 SFAs to meet the required number of targeted children. Eleven of these subsequently dropped out of the demonstration prior to the consent process, leaving a total of 28 SFAs participating in the POC site in 2012.

<sup>h</sup> Connecticut used active consent for all new households and for households that consented in 2011 but did not receive the SEBTC benefit. For those households that received SEBTC benefits in 2011 and were eligible in 2012, the grantee used a passive consent process.

administered by ITOs—served Native American children exclusively; children from all races were included in the target population. Appendix 2B provides maps of the demonstration areas in each State.

Exhibit 2.2 compares participating SFA populations to national estimates, using the Common Core of Data (CCD) for the most recent school year available (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). The “all sites” number is calculated based on 2009–2010 CCD statistics for *all* households in the participating SFAs in the SEBTC demonstration areas, not just those eligible for FRPL or the SEBTC demonstration. Taken together, the participating SFAs were located in areas with relatively higher rates of households living below the poverty line, greater ethnic and racial diversity, and higher proportions of children receiving FRP meals than nationally.

Poverty rates in some demonstration areas were between 2 and 12 percentage points higher than the national average. For instance, while 11% of households had incomes below federal poverty guidelines nationally, the household poverty rate in the demonstration areas was 13%, suggesting that the study communities are, to a great extent, reflective of the nation, although not statistically representative. However, the household characteristics of the SEBTC study population, reported later in Chapter 5, show that 72% of survey respondents were below poverty based on their reported monthly income in spring 2012.

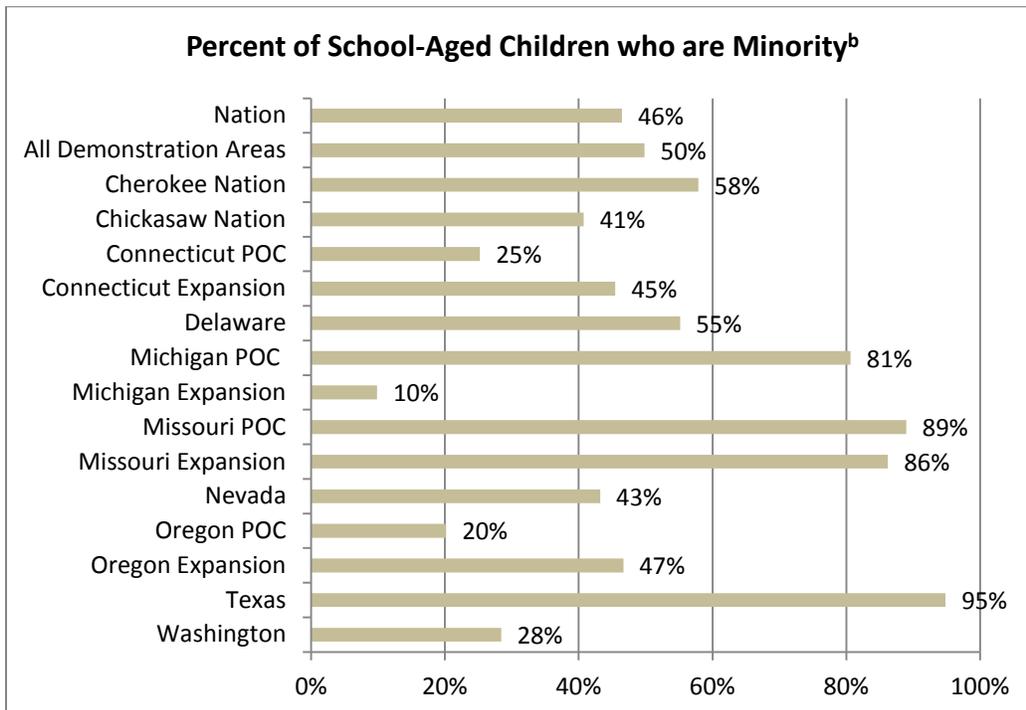
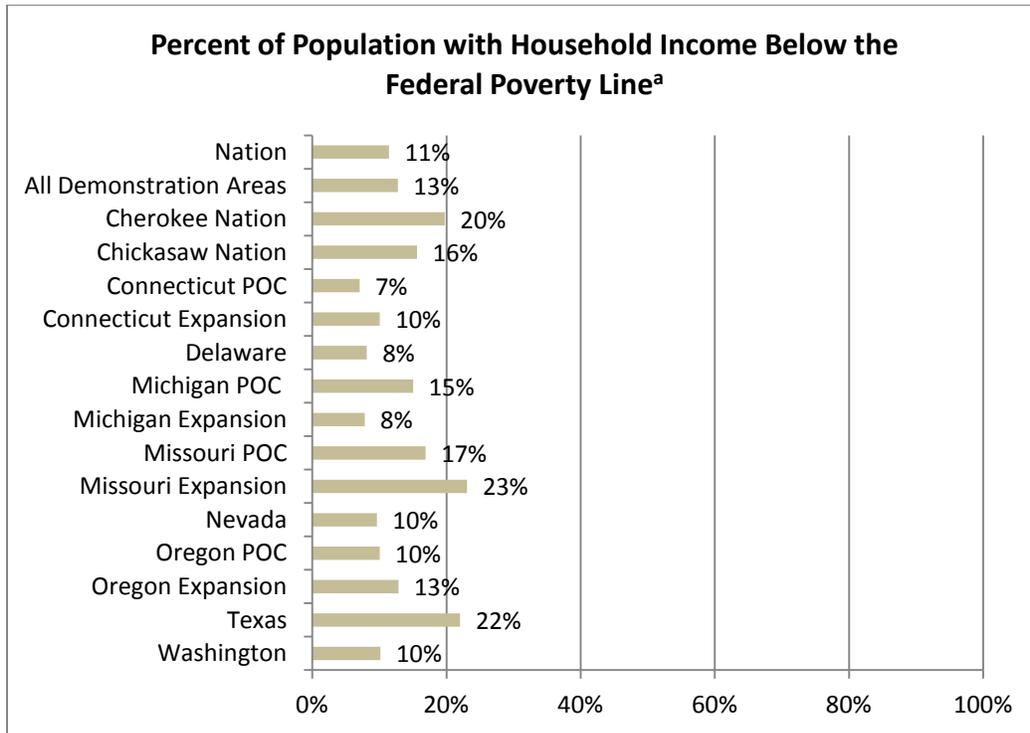
Differences in the percentage of school-aged children from minority populations (50% compared to 46%) and receiving FRP meals (53% compared to 47%) were of similar magnitude. Four demonstration areas (Michigan POC, Missouri POC and Expansion, and Texas) had significantly more ethnic and racial diversity than the national average, ranging from 81% to 95%; these sites are all located in urban settings.

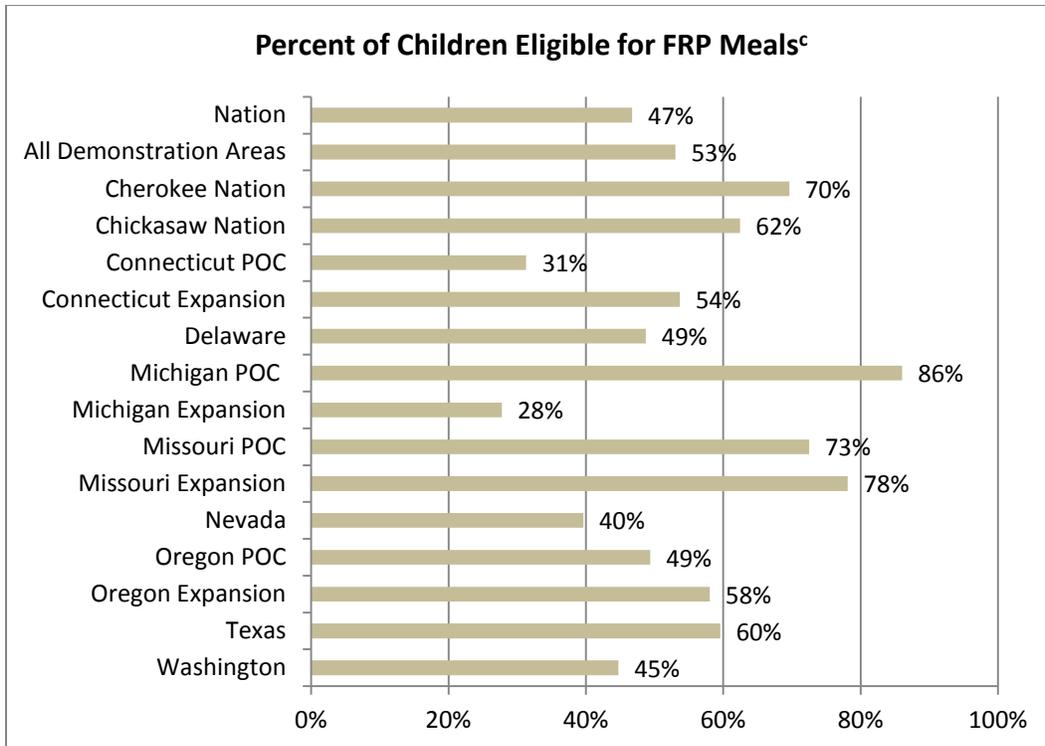
### 2.2.2 Characteristics of SFSP in Demonstration Areas

As mentioned previously, SFSP is a national program that provides food to children during the summer months. Children receiving SEBTC benefits in the demonstration areas could also visit SFSP sites and receive meals. Although SFSPs were generally available across the demonstration sites, grantees reported that for about half of the sites the lack of SFSP availability was one of the primary criteria used to select demonstration areas. This was particularly true for the more rural areas with few SFSP sites and large distances between them. Therefore, SFSP may not have been available to, or convenient for, all children eligible for SEBTC.

SFSP summer feeding sites were offered within all of the demonstration areas in the summer of 2012; however, the coverage varied. SFSP sponsor agencies were typically schools or community-based organizations that provided meals at several sites within the local communities. These sites were located both indoors at schools, churches, libraries, housing complexes, community centers, and outdoors at parks and open green spaces, or from mobile food trucks. The number of SFSP sponsors in the demonstration areas ranged from three in Washington to 22 in Cherokee. The number of SFSP sites ranged from 23 in Chickasaw Nation to more than 100 in Missouri. Both SFSP and grantee staff noted that the distribution of sites

**Exhibit 2.2. Characteristics of Demonstration Areas Compared to the Nation**





Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (NCES, 2009-2010).

<sup>a</sup> Percentage of population with annual household income not exceeding the federal poverty level, as measured in the 2000 Census.

<sup>b</sup> Percentage of enrolled children (pre-K to Grade 12) who are black, Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Hispanic or two or more races.

<sup>c</sup> Percentage of enrolled children eligible for FRP meals.

was not equal across the demonstration area. In general, SFSP sites tended to be clustered in urban areas and more commerce-focused areas than in residential areas.

In summer 2012, most SFSP sites were “open,” serving any child who visited the site during hours of operation. SFSP staff in sites located in rural areas, especially those in the Cherokee Nation, Chickasaw Nation, Michigan, and Texas demonstration areas, reported that usage was low among children unless they attended summer school or a specific summer program that offered SFSP meals, despite the sites’ “open” status. Within each demonstration area, all of SFSP sites offered lunch at various locations, but some also offered breakfast, dinner, or afternoon snacks; with breakfast and snacks being offered most often among SFSP sponsors who were interviewed for the implementation study.

SFSP staff reported an average length of operation of just over eight weeks; some sites in several demonstrations reported staying open throughout the summer school break, including

Cherokee Nation, Michigan POC, Missouri POC, and Oregon.<sup>27</sup> However, some SFSP sites in the Cherokee Nation demonstration area operated only during June, and some sites in Michigan POC reported closing two weeks earlier in 2012 than in 2011, due to funding cuts in summer activities. Conversely, sites in the Michigan Expansion area remained open four weeks longer than previous years, due to increased need in the area.

Stakeholders from all demonstration areas agreed gaps remain in the availability and accessibility of summer food service programs for children; they listed barriers to access consistent with a national evaluation of SFSP and other research findings (Gordon and Briefel, 2003; FNS, 2012b). For example, staff in Missouri estimated that over half of eligible children do not have access to food services during the summer. Nevada reported that the rural areas outside of the cities of Reno and Sparks did not have any feeding sites, and another rural area had only one SFSP site for the entire county. In addition to a lack of available feeding locations, all nine demonstration areas with rural populations cited transportation as the main barrier to participation. Nevada staff estimated that there are stretches of 15 to 20 miles of unpopulated area between SFSP sites. Similarly, about half of the children in Chickasaw Nation live 10 miles or more from their schools, which are SFSP sites. Safety was also a barrier in urban areas; Michigan, Missouri, and Texas staff reported that unsafe urban neighborhoods may deter parents from allowing their children to travel to SFSP sites alone. Finally, funding issues have caused some schools in some demonstration areas to eliminate summer school or other summer programs for children that were traditionally venues for SFSP service; grantee staff in Nevada and Washington reported that school districts in their area have eliminated summer school programs (and their SFSPs) because of budget issues.

In general, SFSP staff interviewed for the implementation study reported viewing SEBTC and SFSP programs as complementary, rather than in competition. Although some SFSP directors were initially concerned that the SEBTC demonstration could reduce SFSP participation, ultimately none found that it dampened participation and in some sites, SFSP participation actually increased. This could be due, in part, to some SEBTC grantees promoting SFSP. For instance, Cherokee Nation, Oregon, and Texas used the demonstration as an opportunity to actively promote SFSP among the eligible population during the notification process, in which all households in both the benefit and non-benefit groups received information about how to access SFSP sites in their area. Texas also had an active SFSP marketing campaign through its partner, the West Texas Food Bank, which promoted child and family nutrition programs, such as the Seamless Summer and Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and other feeding programs available in the summer.<sup>28</sup> However, few of the local SFSP sponsors and site

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<sup>27</sup> The length of the summer ranged from 11 weeks (Chickasaw Nation, Connecticut POC/Expansion, Delaware, Missouri Expansion, Texas, and Washington) to 15 weeks (Michigan Expansion). See Exhibit 2.3, Duration of the Summer Benefit, for more details.

<sup>28</sup> The Seamless Summer program allows SFAs participating in the NSLP or SBP to use a streamlined application process to provide summer meals free of charge to children, 18 years and under, from low-income areas (FNS, 2012b). The Child and Adult Care Food Program provides snacks and meals to children and adults receiving care in

managers who were interviewed for the implementation study were aware that the SEBTC demonstration was being implemented unless they were SFAs directly involved in demonstration. Non-SFA sponsors who were aware of the program had few details and sometimes expressed misperceptions about the nature of, and eligibility criteria for, the SEBTC.

### 2.2.3 Availability of Food Retailers in Demonstration Areas

The impact of SEBTC benefits on children’s food security and nutritional status is influenced by the availability of local retailers that accept SEBTC benefits. State and local partner interviews indicated that several local factors are important when considering how easily families can access these retailers in their area. Grantee respondents reported several factors that limit access, including the lack of public transportation in rural communities (such as Chickasaw Nation and Nevada), language barriers among customers, the distance to retailers in rural areas, and food deserts in highly populated areas.<sup>29</sup>

Sites reported a range of retail options for participants: including large chains, small retailers, convenience stores, farmers' markets, and superstores. Most sites reported a mix of all types of stores, but four sites—Chickasaw Nation, Delaware, Michigan Expansion, and Missouri Expansion—responded that the majority of SEBTC-approved retailers in their area were large chain stores. Only one site, Texas, had WIC-only vendors, which stock WIC-approved food items and serve WIC customers only. Although farmers’ markets were located in all demonstration areas, only some markets in Delaware, Michigan POC, Missouri Expansion, Oregon, and Washington accepted SNAP or WIC EBT cards.

### 2.2.4 Availability of Nutrition Education during the Summer

Nutrition education is neither a component of the SEBTC demonstration nor of the evaluation, but it is useful to consider the general level of opportunities for nutrition education in the local community because it might influence SEBTC benefit take-up and how the benefits are used. In all WIC sites, pre-made WIC food package materials were available to families. Most sites did not provide additional nutrition training to participants. Cherokee Nation and Washington grantees had planned to distribute nutrition education materials, but did not due to the demonstrations’ tight timelines. In Cherokee Nation, Missouri POC/Expansion, and Texas, partners in the demonstrations distributed pre-made materials during parent nights and trainings. These materials included pamphlets on healthy eating, WIC food package recipe examples, and a healthy eating kit created by Sesame Street. In Delaware, the University of Delaware sent a weekly nutrition newsletter to all consenting households.

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*(continued)*

nonresidential day care centers and children participating in afterschool care programs or residing in emergency shelters (FNS, 2012c).

<sup>29</sup> A food desert is an area where healthful, affordable food is difficult to obtain. Food deserts are most prevalent in low-socioeconomic minority communities (Ver Ploeg et al., 2009).

## 2.3 Variations in the SEBTC Model across Grantees

FNS issued two separate RFAs to engage States to implement summer benefits through either the SNAP or WIC EBT systems in 2012 (FNS, 2011a, 2011b). Grantees could choose to administer SEBTC by loading benefits onto existing EBT cards for those who were already receiving SNAP or WIC (the SNAP or the WIC hybrid model); or to issue separate SEBTC cards for selected households (the SNAP or the WIC model). The SNAP sites issued \$60 per month per eligible child in SEBTC benefits on an EBT card using SNAP technology. The WIC sites allowed households to purchase specific packages of WIC-allowable foods that have a maximum cost of \$60 per month per eligible child using WIC EBT technology.

### 2.3.1 Overview of Program Models

Eight sites were awarded grants to offer benefits using SNAP EBT systems—Connecticut POC and Expansion, Delaware, Washington, Missouri POC and Expansion, and Oregon POC and Expansion. Missouri and Oregon chose the SNAP-hybrid approach. Connecticut, Delaware, and Washington administered the SNAP approach, sending a separate, SEBTC-branded card to selected households, regardless of whether they also received SNAP benefits.

The other six sites—Cherokee Nation, Chickasaw Nation, Nevada, Texas, and Michigan POC and Expansion—used WIC EBT systems to administer the SEBTC benefit. None of the sites chose to implement a WIC-hybrid model and instead issued benefits on newly created cards to all selected households. Each household received one food package per eligible school-age child per summer month. Exhibit 2.1 shows the model chosen by the site, as well as the method of gathering consent.

### 2.3.2 Active Versus Passive Consent

Each grantee was required to obtain consent from households to take part in the demonstration and release contact information to the grantee and evaluator. Six grantees (across nine sites)—Chickasaw Nation, Connecticut (both sites), Delaware, Michigan (both sites), Oregon (both sites), and Washington—chose to use an active consent process in which households returned a signed form that indicated they wanted to be considered for the program (i.e., opt in).<sup>30</sup> Households that did not return the form (non-consenting households) were excluded from the study. Four grantees (across five sites)—Cherokee Nation,<sup>31</sup> Missouri (both sites), Nevada, and Texas—chose a passive consent process where households only returned a signed form if they chose not to participate in the demonstration (i.e., opt out).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Connecticut used active consent for all new households and for households that consented in 2011 but did not receive the SEBTC benefit. For those households that received the SEBTC benefit in 2011 and were eligible in 2012, the grantee used a passive consent process.

<sup>31</sup> One site in Cherokee Nation chose to use active consent.

Unless a household returned a form and opted out, or had a mailing returned as undeliverable (and thus were not given the opportunity to opt out) it was automatically included in the study. The consent method had implications for the initial phase of implementation, as discussed in Chapter 3.

### 2.3.3 Duration of Benefits Based on School Calendars

The duration of SEBTC benefits was directly tied to the school calendars in each demonstration area. The goal of SEBTC is to provide nutritional assistance when children do not have access to FRP meals; therefore, the benefit period should begin at the end of the 2011-2012 school year and end at the beginning of the 2012-2013 school year. For grantees with multiple SFAs, FNS indicated that they could issue benefits as early as the date that the first participating SFA let out for summer and stop benefits on the day when the summer break ended for the last participating SFA (FNS, 2011a, 2011b).<sup>33</sup> In five sites—Cherokee Nation, Chickasaw Nation, Michigan POC, Missouri Expansion, and Texas—there was no overlap between SEBTC benefits and FRP meals; however, in the other sites there was some overlap, ranging from one day in Missouri POC to 13 school days in Michigan Expansion.

SEBTC benefits were available for 85 days on average, with a range of 80 days in Connecticut, Texas, and Washington to 102 days in the Michigan Expansion site. Thus, the SEBTC period varied by 22 days among sites, representing approximately \$44 in SEBTC benefits per child. As shown in Exhibit 2.3, the earliest school end date was May 4 in Cherokee Nation and the latest June 21 in Connecticut. The earliest school returned for the new 2012-13 session on August 3 in Chickasaw Nation and the latest on September 10 in the Oregon POC site. The average benefit amount was approximately \$173 per child for the summer, ranging from \$150 in Cherokee Nation to \$210 in the Michigan Expansion site.

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<sup>32</sup> As discussed later in this report, in Texas, in order to get the benefit card, guardians had to be in contact with the grantee and receive training. However, whether or not they actively took this step, they already had consented to have a chance to receive the benefit and have their contact information released to the evaluator, and could not be eliminated from the evaluation subsample without biasing the random assignment design.

<sup>33</sup> For more detailed breakout of school calendars within each site, see the grantee profiles in Appendix 2A.

### Exhibit 2.3. Duration of the Summer Benefit, 2012

Grantee	Last Day of School 2011-2012 SY (Range Across Schools)	First Day of School 2012-2013 SY (Range Across Schools)	First Day of Benefits	Last Day of Benefits	Number of Summer Benefit Days	Total Amount of Summer Benefit per Eligible Child
<b>Cherokee Nation</b>	5/4 – 5/25	8/8 – 8/16	5/5 – 5/26	8/7 – 8/15	81-94	\$150 or \$180 <sup>a</sup>
<b>Chickasaw Nation</b>	5/9 – 5/30	8/3 – 8/23	5/10 – 5/31	8/2 – 8/22	82-84	\$180 or \$195 <sup>b</sup>
<b>Connecticut</b>						
<b>POC</b>	6/8 – 6/21	8/27 – 8/30	6/15	9/3	80	\$158
<b>Expansion</b>	6/14 – 6/21	8/27 – 9/4	6/15	9/3	80	\$158
<b>Delaware</b>	6/7 – 6/12	8/27 – 8/28	6/8	8/29	81	\$162.58
<b>Michigan</b>						
<b>POC</b>	6/8	9/4	6/9	9/3	86	\$180
<b>Expansion</b>	5/24 – 6/12	9/4	5/25	9/3	102	\$205 <sup>c</sup>
<b>Missouri</b>						
<b>POC</b>	5/22 – 5/23	8/13 – 8/15	5/23	8/14	84	\$168
<b>Expansion</b>	5/24	8/14	5/25	8/13	81	\$162
<b>Nevada</b>	6/1 – 6/8	8/20 – 8/27	6/2	8/31	91	\$180
<b>Oregon</b>						
<b>POC</b>	6/7 – 6/14	9/4 – 9/10	6/8	9/6	90	\$176
<b>Expansion</b>	6/7	9/6	6/8	9/6	90	\$176
<b>Texas</b>	6/6	8/27	6/7	8/26	80	\$180
<b>Washington</b>	6/15 – 6/20	9/5	6/16	9/4	80	\$158

Source: Dates gathered during technical assistance efforts with the grantees, 2011 and 2012. Amount of summer benefit based on dates and grantees' prorating for partial months (with FNS approval).

<sup>a</sup> Benefits were issued according to each district's ending and beginning dates. Benefit value for the third benefit month is half (\$30) for SFAs with fewer than 17 benefit days, for a summer benefit total of \$150.

<sup>b</sup> Benefits were issued according to each district's ending and beginning dates. Benefit value for the third month is full (\$60) or 1.25 times (\$75) if the third period exceeded 33 days (up to 44 days).

<sup>c</sup> Benefit value for a partial fourth benefit month of 10 days assumes an approximate \$25 value based on an average of (1) the grantee's estimate of most food amounts at half benefit (\$30), and (2) one-third of the monthly benefit based on the number of days (\$20).

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## Chapter 3

# SEBTC Implementation Experiences and Challenges

As with any new program, the implementation of the SEBTC demonstration involved both successes and challenges. To better understand how the POC and new grantees implemented the SEBTC demonstration, the evaluation team conducted a detailed implementation study. This chapter begins with an overview of the key findings and the study methodology. It then turns to the study results,<sup>34</sup> discussing the consent process, training and support for households, SEBTC participation rates, and EBT system modifications, as well as other important contextual factors that influenced grantee experiences in the second year of the demonstration.

### 3.1 Key Findings

The implementation analysis addresses the first two research objectives: to assess the feasibility of implementing different models of SEBTC, including the WIC, SNAP, and SNAP-hybrid models, and to document the approaches used for SEBTC implementation and the challenges and lessons learned (presented in Chapter 1). A few key findings emerged from the analysis, including the following:

- Many grantees found creating household lists and obtaining consent from parents (in the active consent sites) a major challenge. In many of the sites, difficulties were caused by incomplete or inaccurate data from school systems, limited time for the consent process, and limited communication with parents to encourage them to return consent forms. Despite difficulties, seven of the grantees, operating nine of the 14 sites, were able to obtain consent from at least the minimum number of children and families needed to be part of the demonstration and evaluation. Household consent rates ranged from 93% to 97% in sites using passive consent and 23% to 57% in sites using active consent. The consent rates for three of the POC sites, two of which used passive consent, were the same or higher in 2012 than in the 2011 POC year, and were lower for two of the sites that used active consent.
- Despite the extremely fast-paced time line and various issues grantees encountered, all 10 grantees were able to recruit households, enroll them in the SEBTC program, and administer SEBTC benefits during the summer of 2012. Nine sites provided benefits to

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<sup>34</sup> This report includes findings through midsummer. The evaluation report for the full implementation year will update findings for the full implementation year.

about 5,300 children, while the other five sites (that did not achieve their consent targets) provided benefits to between 2,500 to 4,000 children, depending on the site.

- Between 50% and 85% of households that received the SEBTC benefit in the first year consented to participate in the second year, depending on the site. In the two sites using active consent for this group, the consent rates were 50% and 62%. Return rates in passive consent sites suggest that 15% to 25% of the households either move out of the site or were otherwise no longer eligible for SEBTC in 2012.
- The sites issued benefits to a total of 37,339 households with 64,845 children identified as eligible. Among the households that were issued benefits, 75% (79% of children) used their benefits at least once during the first benefit issuance cycle of the demonstration.

## 3.2 Research Methods

This chapter focuses on the implementation experiences of the 10 grantees across 14 sites. The chapter relies on three data sources to analyze SEBTC implementation, including (1) documentation from site visits and multiple calls to provide grantees with technical assistance in planning and implementing their demonstrations; (2) notes from interviews during site visits conducting in the summer with grantees and their key partners, SFAs, SFSP sponsors, retailers, and EBT processors; and (3) written documents, such as grant applications and materials developed by the grantee to obtain consent and notify the community about the demonstration.

First, the evaluation team gathered information from technical assistance efforts conducted from the start of the demonstration in December 2011 through benefit issuance in May or June 2012. Each grantee was assigned a team to help it successfully implement the evaluation requirements. Team members participated in routine teleconferences with grantees and their partners and exchanged emails as necessary. Also, teams for the five new grantees (Delaware, Missouri, Nevada, Texas, and Washington) conducted site visits to provide technical assistance in late December 2011 or early January 2012. The teams for the five returning grantees provided this technical assistance over the telephone. In addition, members of the evaluation staff attended a three-day conference, planned and hosted by FNS, with representatives from all of the grantees.

Second, the evaluation teams visited each grantee in summer 2012 to collect in-depth information on the planning, implementation, and early operations of the demonstrations. During this visit, the team conducted interviews with the grantee and all its major partners, including the EBT vendors used by each grantee. The team also conducted interviews with 30 SFSP sponsors to learn about the availability of other summer feeding programs and their interaction with the SEBTC. In addition, 24 participating retailer organizations were interviewed to learn about their experiences with SEBTC transactions.

During the visit, team members also interviewed all or a subset of participating SFAs. As described in Chapter 2, the number of participating SFAs ranged from only one SFA to more than 40 (see Exhibit 2.1). Teams interviewed all participating SFAs in sites with five or fewer

SFAs. In sites with more than five SFAs, the team interviewed approximately 20% of the SFAs, choosing a sample to ensure a mix of large and small SFAs, also taking into account variation in individual SFA's consent rates and the percent of children eligible for FRP meals. The teams interviewed staff from a total of 136 SFAs.

Third, to supplement the other data sources, the evaluation team reviewed a range of written documents from the grantees, including grant applications, outreach and marketing materials, consent and notification documents, and materials used to train households on EBT procedures.

The evaluation team members used standardized templates to document interviews with those involved in the demonstration. The information obtained from the interviews and documentation was entered into an Access database, which was used for cross-site study analysis to identify the key themes and findings presented in this chapter.

### 3.3 Consent Processes and Providing SEBTC Benefits to Households

As part of the demonstration, grantees or their partners had to identify children eligible to participate, conduct outreach to their parents and guardians, and obtain guardian consent to be included in the demonstration and evaluation. The evaluation team randomly assigned those consenting households at each site to either the benefit group or the non-benefit group. Using those results, each grantee notified households, issued and distributed SEBTC benefits on new or existing EBT cards, and, provided support to households on their use of the benefit as needed. This section describes those processes along with training provided to local retailers who accepted the benefit in their stores. Appendix 2A includes profiles for each grantee that provides details of the approach in individual sites.

#### 3.3.1 Identifying Eligible Children and Households

One of the primary tasks for the SEBTC demonstration was to identify children in the demonstration area who were certified for FRP meals, and therefore eligible for SEBTC, and to group them into eligible households. The demonstration required household-level data for three purposes: (1) the initial mailing to obtain household consent to be part of the demonstration, (2) random assignment for receipt of the benefit, and (3) the selection of a subsample of households to participate in the evaluation's survey. The sources and quality of the data, as well as the level of sophistication of the staff using the data, directly influenced the time needed to develop child and household lists and the complexity of the effort.

The success of the SEBTC demonstration and its evaluation relied on the ability of grantees and their partners to develop accurate lists of eligible households and ensure that contact information was up-to-date. Even if the demonstration was not being rigorously evaluated, this step is vital. If grantees are successful in these tasks, the full eligible population has a chance to take part in the demonstration, and, if selected, benefits in the correct amounts, accounting for the actual numbers of eligible children, can be issued. In addition, for the evaluation, correct listings of households and contact information are essential for random assignment and to

enable high response rates for the parent survey, which is the principal source for the study's impact analysis.

Grantees and SFAs relied on a range of data sources and processes for these tasks. Many SFAs had separate databases for information related to children on FRP meals—including data on children and households from the NSLP application for those that formally applied for NSLP and data received from the SNAP agency on those children directly certified for NSLP because they were receiving SNAP or TANF—and for information related to student records. Both may contain demographic and contact information for eligible children and their households, but student records tended to be updated more frequently and have more accurate contact information. Due to privacy concerns, however, not all of the sites were able to use the student record data prior to consent (particularly in sites where the SFAs did not manage the consent process), leaving them with NSLP application and direct certification data that may have included out-of-date household or contact information. From the NSLP data, SFAs universally included all children from pre-kindergarten (where available) through 12th grade who were eligible for FRP meals in the target population, including those eligible for FRP meals because of their status regarding foster care, homeless youth, and emancipated youth. Most SFAs included students in their database as of the date they created the files, while others selected only those enrolled as of the beginning of the school year or another earlier date.

All of the grantees or SFAs were able to identify eligible children and mail consent forms; however, not all SFAs were able to use their child level records to identify individual households prior to consent or did not understand this was the required consent procedure, as the grantees provided varying levels of guidance to SFAs across sites. As a result, some of the SFAs in Cherokee Nation, Connecticut, and Oregon sent one consent letter per child; consequently households with multiple eligible children received multiple letters. SFAs that did create household files used a combination of techniques to match children to households. Many of the SFAs had a household identifier in their databases or used application numbers to identify households. Those without identifiers had to manually match children using telephone numbers, addresses, and guardian names.

Some of the grantees and SFAs found developing the household lists to be one of the most difficult and time-consuming parts of the demonstration. Staff in Delaware, Michigan, and Nevada, in particular, described the process of grouping eligible children into distinct households as very challenging. For instance, Nevada described difficulties in matching about 25% of eligible children to households because the parent name was not the same for all children in a household. SFAs also faced the challenge of duplicate records for the same household and children, and because sometimes there was slightly different contact information, it was not always clear if there were one or two unique households.

### 3.3.2 Obtaining Household Consent

Children could not be included in the demonstration if their guardians did not consent to take part—either actively or passively. All of the grantees completed the consent process, and nine of the 14 sites obtained at least the minimum number of children needed to (1) issue benefits

to 5,300 children and (2) achieve a target of households representing approximately 3,400 children (from both the benefit and non-benefit group) to be potentially selected to participate in the evaluation. Exhibit 3.1 provides the number of eligible and consenting children and households per site.

**Exhibit 3.1. Consent Rates by Grantee**

Grantee	Approximate Number of Eligible Households in Demonstration Area	Approximate Number of Eligible Children in Demonstration Area	Percentage of Households Consenting <sup>a</sup>	Percentage of Children in Households Consenting <sup>a</sup>
<b>Passive Consent Grantees</b>				
<b>Cherokee Nation</b>	11,645 <sup>b</sup>	17,456	90	96 <sup>c</sup>
<b>Missouri</b>				
<b>POC</b>	12,893	22,309	96	97
<b>Expansion</b>	15,105	22,000	97	97
<b>Nevada</b>	15,204	23,739	93	93
<b>Texas</b>	24,500	37,020	94	96
<b>Active Consent Grantees</b>				
<b>Chickasaw Nation</b>	13,020	21,878	31	38
<b>Connecticut</b>				
<b>POC</b>	10,121	17,408	33	33
<b>Expansion</b>	11,193	21,715	23	23
<b>Delaware</b>	18,565	25,934	25	33
<b>Michigan</b>				
<b>POC</b>	9,809	16,459	57	58
<b>Expansion</b>	12,731	20,942	42	50
<b>Oregon</b>				
<b>POC</b>	15,102	24,459	24	28
<b>Expansion</b>	12,007 <sup>b</sup>	23,708	28	27
<b>Washington</b>	14,000	29,380	23	22

Source: Data obtained through technical assistance efforts and files submitted by grantees for random assignment, spring 2012.

<sup>a</sup> In passive consent sites, the consent rate reflects those that opted out and undeliverable mail (to the extent it could be known).

<sup>b</sup> This is an estimate of the number of eligible households. The grantee was not able to obtain accurate estimates of the number of eligible households for all of their SFAs; therefore the evaluation team calculated the number of eligible households based on the ratio of children to households from the consenting population.

<sup>c</sup> Cherokee Nation included one active consent site that achieved a 25% consent rate. The consent rate calculation includes data from the passive consent sites only. When including the one active consent site, the consent rate is 90%.

The issues encountered during the consent process differed between grantees that used active and passive consent. Grantees that used passive consent were more likely to achieve high numbers of “consenting” households, ranging from 93% to 97%. This was due to few families choosing to actively opt out of the demonstration (1-2%) and having low rates of undeliverable mail (1-6%), which removes the families from the demonstration because they were not afforded the opportunity to opt out.<sup>35</sup> However, because of the nature of the opt-out process,

<sup>35</sup> The opt-out number includes both those that returned signed letters and those letters that were returned as undeliverable.

it is not clear whether households that did not opt out had actually chosen to take part in the demonstration or simply had ignored or never received the consent mailing. The consent rates for passive POC sites in 2012 were similar to the rates in 2011, although in Missouri's POC site the undeliverable mail rate dropped by 4% in 2012.

By contrast, the active consent process ensured that families received a consent letter and actively desired a chance to receive the SEBTC benefit. However, many households that would have chosen the benefit in active consent sites may not have opened the consent materials, understood the information, or taken the time to return forms even though they would have used the benefit if issued to them. As a result, consent rates for active consent sites were much lower than the passive sites (from 23% of eligible households in Washington and Connecticut Expansion to 57% in Michigan POC), and lower than many grantees anticipated. Some SFAs and grantees were inexperienced with the process of obtaining consent from families to take part in a demonstration. In addition, grantees, partners, and SFAs reported different levels of effort given to the consent process. A more intense level of outreach applied consistently may have yielded higher rates in the active consent sites. In addition, the combination of targeted outreach and familiarity with the program in Michigan may account for the increase in the household consent rate in the POC site from 41% in 2011 to 57% in 2012.

Five of the sites—all active consent—were not able to obtain enough consenting households to use all of the benefits available for the demonstration and to fill the evaluation sample. Connecticut POC/Expansion, Oregon POC/Expansion, and Washington obtained consent rates from 22% to 33% of children, which was considerably lower than the 40% to 50% needed and, for the POC sites, lower than their consent rates in 2011. These sites reported institutional obstacles, such as limited staffing and contractual issues, that delayed their implementation, and most did not have contingency plans for or enough time to do additional outreach when consent rates were low.

In the POC sites, all households that received the benefit in 2011 and continued to be eligible for SEBTC would receive the benefit again in 2012, if they consented. With the exception of Connecticut, the sites used the same consent process for this group (active or passive) in both years. In Connecticut, SFAs used a passive consent process for households that received the SEBTC benefit in the POC year but active consent for all of the other POC households. The percent of households that were issued SEBTC benefits in 2011 and consented in both years ranged from 50% to 85%, depending on the site. The sites using active consent had lower rates of returning households, as shown in Exhibit 3.2.<sup>36</sup>

Some of the households that received the SEBTC benefit in the POC year were ineligible in 2012, either because they moved out of the jurisdictions of participating SFAs, no longer had

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<sup>36</sup> Numbers of participating households and children vary somewhat between the data collected from the grantees and that calculated by the evaluation team. Percentages reported above use grantee estimates. The evaluation team is analyzing this data and plans to present the reconciled estimates in final draft of the report; percentages may therefore shift slightly.

school age children, or no longer were eligible for FRP meals. The rates of returning households in Connecticut and Missouri, which used the passive consent process, provide some insight into the percentage of ineligible households and children, given that so few households opt out.<sup>37</sup> The consent rates for Connecticut and Missouri suggest that between 15% and 25% of households moved away or became ineligible between Year 1 and 2 of the demonstration.

It is unclear why some eligible households that received benefits did not actively consent to take part in the demonstration again in Year 2, considering 90% or more of households in the POC year (in four of the five sites) used the SEBTC benefit at least once (Collins et al., 2012). Grantees hypothesized that some guardians may not have understood the consent materials, thinking they were automatically eligible and did not realize that they had to provide consent for the second year. Other guardians may have misplaced the consent forms or not read them at all.

**Exhibit 3.2. Percent of Households and Children who Received SEBTC Benefits in 2011 and Consented to Participate in 2012**

POC Site	Percent of POC Households Issued the SEBTC Benefit that Consented to Participate in 2012	Percent of Children in POC Households Issued the Benefit and Consented to Participate in 2012
Connecticut	84.7%	83.5%
Michigan	62.3%	60.2%
Missouri	74.2%	69.9%
Oregon	49.6%	44.8%
Texas	62.8%	68.9%

Source: Data obtained from grantee, including files submitted by grantee for random assignment, 2012.

Note: Percentages include all households and children receiving benefits in 2011, those ineligible in 2012 have not been excluded.

After the grantees compiled their site-level files(s) of consenting households, they submitted them to the evaluation team for random assignment. The evaluation team worked with each site to clean the file—removing duplicate children and households, and identifying gaps in demographic, school, and contact information. Households from the final file were randomly assigned to the benefit group or non-benefit group and a file for each was returned to the grantee. Benefits were assigned to approximately 5,300 children in nine of the 14 sites. Because of low consent rates, fewer than 5,300 children were assigned to receive SEBTC assigned in the other five sites ranging from 2,516 in Connecticut Expansion to 4,091 in Connecticut POC.<sup>38</sup> Additional information about random assignment procedures is located in Appendix 5A.

<sup>37</sup> Although Texas also used the passive consent process, the rate does not provide insights into this issue as nearly 25% of households issued SEBTC cards in 2011 could not be located and did not redeem benefits (Collins et al., 2012).

<sup>38</sup> In the other three sites, benefits were assigned to 3,378 in Oregon POC, 3,259 in Oregon Expansion, and 3,297 in Washington.

### 3.3.3 Notifying Households of the SEBTC Benefit

After random assignment was complete, all grantees notified households that they were selected to receive SEBTC benefits and provide information on next steps. With the exception of Texas, all grantees notified households by mail. The Texas grantee did not have enough time between receiving the assignment file and the start of training to notify households by mail, so its local partner called families and conducted home visits to notify families, update information, and inform them about the training (described below). Eight grantees also sent notification letters to all households in the non-benefit group. Nevada sent letters only to those households that would be contacted by the evaluation team for the survey, and Washington did not send letters to any of the non-benefit households, although it reported receiving more than 100 calls from parents who were confused and wanted to know if they received the benefit. In general, grantees sent additional materials with the notification letters about SFSP programs and other food options in the area, as well as general nutrition education information.

### 3.3.4 Issuing Benefits

After the consent and notification processes were complete, grantees enrolled households into their systems so they could issue benefits. At the end of the school year, all the sites had completed the required steps for all or most of the households assigned to receive the benefit. Getting to that stage, however, was not without challenges.

The grantees used two different approaches for developing a system to administer and issue SEBTC benefits—using the existing SNAP or WIC systems or developing a new SEBTC-only database and system. The decision to use the existing system or develop a new one generally depended on the ease of adding coding to the new system, the availability of staff to conduct the work, and the efficiency of the approach. In addition, for the SNAP-hybrid States, using the existing system was necessary to load benefits on the current SNAP recipients' cards. Ultimately, four States (Connecticut, Missouri, Oregon, and Washington) used their existing SNAP systems to issue SEBTC benefits. For these grantees, households randomly assigned to the benefit group had to be matched to State eligibility systems before benefits could be issued. This process involved using a household or person identifier if available, or more commonly, the parent and/or children's name, date of birth, and address. This could be time consuming and records that could not be found had to be manually entered, which often resulted in data entry errors. However, once matched, benefits could be set up relatively easily and contact information was likely to be up-to-date. Missouri attempted to automate this process in 2012 after challenges in 2011; however, the automation did not go as planned, so significant manual entry was still required. The five WIC States and one SNAP State (Delaware) created separate but parallel systems for administering and issuing SEBTC benefits. This allowed sites to automatically load families into the database, without matching, which was a much faster process. However, the only contact information they had available was from the consent forms or school records, which may have been out of date.

Once SEBTC households were entered into the State’s system, the grantee could issue SEBTC benefits to households. Grantees in nine States created automated issuances systems, in which all SEBTC cases in their system were transferred to the EBT processor for benefit administration and benefits were issued each month automatically. In Connecticut, however, the grantee had to manually enter SEBTC benefit amounts into the EBT administrative terminal to administer the benefits monthly. Again, this manual process required significant staff time and was subject to data entry errors.

In most States, selected households received their benefits by mail without further follow-up; however, a few States asked parents for additional information or to attend training. In Texas, the grantee’s partner called or visited parents to verify household composition and contact information; they verified information for about two thirds of the households receiving benefits. Connecticut, which in the POC year required selected households to send in a form with their social security numbers before they could receive benefits, streamlined the process in 2012 and eliminated the second data collection requirement. Four grantees offered training to households after they were selected for the program and two of these, Cherokee Nation and Texas, distributed EBT cards at the training:

- Texas required the 90-minute in-person training offered at 21 training sessions. Staff also offered one-on-one training sessions at local offices or through home visits, if necessary. About 75% of households participated in the trainings.
- Cherokee Nation offered 38, 60-minute sessions at 15 locations, with about 50% attendance. Households that could not attend the training could receive their card by mail or by visiting the WIC office.
- Chickasaw Nation and Michigan offered optional trainings to households selected for benefits, but attendance was low. Chickasaw Nation offered 45-minute trainings in each of the 41 SFAs, where about 25% of households attended. Michigan offered five, 30- to 60-minute in-person sessions, as well as online training videos for households to access at any time. Only two to four families attended each session and the use of the web videos was very low.

Although most States succeeded in issuing benefits to all households on time, four States (Cherokee Nation, Connecticut, Oregon, and Washington) encountered challenges. Cherokee Nation, Oregon, and Washington were not able to deliver benefits to a few hundred households due to issues such as system errors in setting up the cases in the database, poor data quality causing mail to not be sent to correct addresses, and delays in mailing EBT cards. In Connecticut, however, about one third of households did not receive benefits on time due to delays in receiving consent form information from the SFAs and missing data that prevented them from matching households in the State system. Most of the problems in each State were resolved by the end of the first benefit period.

### 3.3.5 Benefit Participation (Take-up) Rates and Use

EBT system data were used to determine benefit participation rates, also known as take-up rates, in the first benefit issuance cycle (described in Chapter 4). The first benefit issuance cycle

varied by site, ranging from 8 days in Missouri Expansion to 31 days in Cherokee Nation, Chickasaw Nation, and Michigan Expansion (Exhibit 4.1).

A total of 64,845 children were eligible to receive benefits (or assigned to receive benefits) in 37,339 households. Of those, 36,793 households including 66,019 children were issued benefits, or 99.5% of households and 102% of children received benefits, as shown in Exhibit 3.3. Numbers of households and children assigned benefits varied slightly among the sites. In most sites, approximately 5,300 children were randomly assigned to receive benefits; although as discussed previously, fewer children were assigned in Connecticut, Oregon, and Washington. The number of households assigned benefits ranged from 2,602 in Chickasaw Nation to 3,731 in Missouri Expansion (among those issuing to all potentially eligible children), due mainly to differences in household size. Overall, there were 1.7 children per household issued benefits, ranging from 1.4 in Missouri Expansion to 2.1 in Washington. The exact numbers of households and children also varied due to two factors encountered after random assignment. First, some households could not be located or declined the benefit, so benefits were not issued to them. This explains why Delaware and both Missouri sites issued benefits to fewer than 5,300 children. Second, when households were notified, some identified additional eligible children in their households, while others indicated that eligible children to whom benefits were to be issued were part of a different household. In addition, because Oregon, Connecticut, and Washington did not assign benefits to 5,300, FNS allowed them to continue to add children that they could confirm consented and lived in the demonstration area but were not included in the random assignment process.

Among all households issued benefits, 75% used (i.e., redeemed) them at least once during the first benefit cycle. This is considered the benefit participation or take-up rate. The household participation rate ranged from 48% in Missouri Expansion to 90% in Chickasaw Nation and Oregon POC. The passive sites generally had below average household participation rates, ranging from 48% to 76%. The active sites, as found in the POC year, had above average participation rates, ranging from 72% to 90%. The model (SNAP versus WIC) did not appear to have an effect on participation as it did in the POC year. However, the proportion of households already receiving SNAP may have been a factor as the three SNAP-hybrid sites had high participation rates.

For the 2011 POC sites, there was variation in the participation rates for the first benefit issuance cycle between 2011 and 2012. The participation rates for households in Michigan and Texas were virtually the same between 2011 and 2012, while they increased by 4% in Connecticut and decreased by 7% in Oregon and 32% in Missouri. The issuance periods between the two years may have affected these results—the periods were the same in Michigan and Texas, two days longer in Connecticut in 2012, 20 days shorter in Missouri, and 7 days shorter in Oregon.

### Exhibit 3.3. Households and Children Assigned, Issued, and Redeeming Benefits in the First Benefit Cycle, Summer 2012

Site	First Month	Number Assigned Benefits		Number Issued Benefits		Percent Issued Benefits	Households Participating (Redeeming Benefits)		Children Participating (in Households Redeeming Benefits)	
		Households	Children	Households	Children	Households	Number	Percent of Households Issued	Number	Percent of Children Issued
Cherokee Nation	Jun	3,621	5,409	3,635	5,801	100.4%	2,357	64.8%	4,060	70.0%
Chickasaw Nation	Jun	2,602	5,302	2,592	5,354	99.6%	2,319	89.5%	4,868	90.9%
Connecticut										
POC	Jun	2,357	4,091	2,299	4,294	97.5%	1,822	79.3%	3,514	81.8%
Expansion	Jun	1,296	2,516	1,250	2,585	96.5%	1,064	85.1%	2,266	87.7%
Delaware	Jun	2,906	5,302	2,864	5,293	98.6%	2,517	87.9%	4,710	89.0%
Michigan										
POC	Jun	3,044	5,303	3,042	5,364	99.9%	2,579	84.8%	4,669	87.0%
Expansion	Jun	2,734	5,347	2,782	5,355	101.8%	2,456	88.3%	4,849	90.6%
Missouri										
POC	May	3,015	5,327	3,026	5,296	100.4%	1,642	54.3%	3,043	57.5%
Expansion	May	3,731	5,304	3,355	5,290	89.9%	1,619	48.3%	2,771	52.4%
Nevada	Jun	3,376	5,301	3,293	5,345	97.5%	2,496	75.8%	4,215	78.9%
Oregon										
POC	Jun	1,752	3,378	1,822	3,416	104.0%	1,635	89.7%	3,117	91.2%
Expansion	Jun	1,652	3,259	1,788	3,491	108.2%	1,566	87.6%	3,122	89.4%
Texas	Jun	3,679	5,709	3,433	5,750	93.3%	2,452	71.4%	4,234	73.6%
Washington	Jun	1,574	3,297	1,612	3,385	102.4%	1,158	71.8%	2,553	75.4%
All Sites		37,339	64,845	36,793	66,019	98.5%	27,682	75.2%	51,991	78.8%

Sources: Information from grantees and EBT transaction data for SEBTC, summer 2012.

Note: See text for explanation of difference between number assigned and number issued benefits.

#### 3.3.6 Providing Participant Supports After Benefit Administration

After households received their cards and were issued benefits, grantees provided support to families and dealt with a range of issues as households attempted to use their cards. Five States used the existing SNAP or WIC customer support telephone numbers to answer questions from families in the benefit group and five instituted new SEBTC-specific telephone numbers. In the POC year, Michigan used the existing WIC hotline number. However, due to the increase in the number of participants and the slight differences from the WIC program, a new SEBTC hotline number was established in 2012. The grantee believes the new number has allowed staff to provide more efficient and focused services for the SEBTC program. All States also provided a support number to address EBT card issues (discussed later in this chapter under the EBT System Modifications section). Half of the grantees also provided additional supports to families. Nevada, Michigan, and Missouri created SEBTC-specific websites to provide program information to families, and Texas created a SEBTC Facebook page, where the grantee posted program updates and healthy recipes. Washington distributed the Washington Hunger Helpline number, which assists people with finding SFSP sites, regardless of whether they've received the SEBTC benefit. Nevada also used a pre-existing WIC Google Earth application that SEBTC

staff could use to direct clients to the closest WIC retailer. Finally, Texas provided in-person customer support through the local partner that provided training, as they did in 2011.

Every State received calls from parents with questions, although, only four (Cherokee Nation, Connecticut, Michigan, and Missouri) tracked the number they received from parents about the program: each site received between 400 and 785 calls by late June. Nevada tracked their calls for June only, during which they received 650 calls. Other States estimated they received “hundreds of calls.” The passive consent sites tended to receive more calls after benefits were issued, generally due to parents not being familiar with the program or needing to update their contact information. Although there was a high volume of calls in some sites, many of these calls were not from unique callers. For instance, Connecticut estimated that 40% to 50% of their 600 calls in June were from follow-up calls with the same parents. Inquiries most commonly received across States related to EBT card pinning and activation, updating family composition, allowable food items for purchase, and timing of card receipt.

Nine out of 10 States reported challenges related to PINs, whether they were automatically generated and sent to households (Texas and Cherokee Nation) or guardians pinned their cards after entering identifying information such as a date of birth, zip code and/or digits of a social security number (Chickasaw Nation, Connecticut, Delaware, Michigan, Missouri, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington). In seven States, these problems were minor and quickly resolved, but in Washington and Texas, 200 to 300 participants had difficulty with pinning. In Texas the technical difficulties were addressed during the training (when the cards were distributed). In Washington, the confusion resulted from unclear instructions on using the youngest child’s date of birth. In Nevada, the grantee said 90% of pinning calls were due to participants not reading the instructional material. Common problems across States included parents’ having difficulty remembering PIN numbers, understanding the verification of identity, or entering the PIN number. Missouri, which sent cards with benefits already activated, was the only State with no reported problems or phone calls related to activation or pinning.

All 10 grantees also received requests to add children to households because they were not initially included or later moved into the household. This was a relatively minor issue across sites, with as many as 80 children added in Texas. In some cases, the children who had not been included in the original benefit issuance attended private, year-round or charter schools; in other cases, there was an error in the SFA’s list of eligible children or in the process of grouping children into households. FNS authorized grantees to issue benefits to additional children who were not initially included and provided guidance that grantees could accept the parent’s claim of household composition. Most States attempted to verify that the children were included on the consent forms (in the active sites) or lived in the demonstration area through discussion with the parent, school records, or social service case files. Washington and Delaware were the only States to require the child be on the consent form in order to be added to the case. Texas and Cherokee Nation did not verify the child’s address before adding them, but due to concerns about potential fraud, Texas set a July 4 cut-off date for changes to household composition.

### 3.3.7 Efforts to Encourage Use of Benefits

Some of the grantees made efforts to encourage the use of SEBTC benefits. Eight grantees (Chickasaw Nation, Delaware, Michigan, Missouri, Nevada, Oregon, Texas, and Washington) sent reminders to households either by mail, email, text message, or telephone to use their benefits before the expiration date. Some grantees using the SEBTC-WIC model, where benefits expire at the end of each month, sent reminders in the first few weeks after benefits were issued so that participants would use them before they expired. Nevada did not send monthly reminders, but did send a notice in early August about the final termination of the summer program at the end of the month. SNAP sites sent reminders the month before the end of the summer to remind participants that benefits expire at the end of the summer. Cherokee Nation and Connecticut did not send any reminders, but Cherokee Nation reported reminding parents of the expiration if they called with questions.

Five States (Chickasaw Nation, Delaware, Missouri, Texas, and Washington) made additional efforts beyond sending reminders to encourage benefit use. Delaware, Missouri, and Washington contacted households that had not accessed their benefits to determine the reasons and encourage them to use the benefit; resending cards when necessary. Texas posted reminders each month on their SEBTC Facebook page, and Chickasaw Nation issued a PSA recording in June for Chickasaw Nation Radio.

### 3.3.8 Training Retailers

SNAP and WIC Retailers also play a role in the demonstration and could be affected by the influx of SEBTC benefits in the area. All 10 grantees informed retailers about the demonstration to prepare them for potential questions from customers or cashiers. The grantees distributed letters to retailer locations and four States printed press releases in retailer association newsletters that described SEBTC and addressed retailers' potential questions.

Four WIC grantees (Cherokee Nation, Chickasaw Nation, Michigan, and Texas) and one SNAP grantee (Delaware) also offered in-person training for retailers during the months before the benefit period began. Delaware invited retailers to nine community outreach sessions held over two weeks in May, but no retailers attended. Cherokee Nation held the earliest training, in February 2012, while the other three WIC grantees held trainings between April and May. The WIC trainings provided information about the similarity of SEBTC cards to WIC EBT cards despite the different logos, retailers' guidelines for processing a WIC or SEBTC card first, how the program could potentially increase grocers' WIC vendor business, and which food items were included in the SEBTC food package. Texas hosted three, 90-minute training sessions, with 38 of the 74 retailers in the demonstration area attending (compared to 72 of 78 retailers in the POC year). Michigan held two, two-and-a-half-hour trainings at the Expansion site. Chickasaw Nation conducted one-on-one trainings on-site at each of the 31 participating retailers. Although Missouri did not conduct retailer trainings, the State project director met with the largest farmers' market and the State Grocers' Association to discuss the program.

Retailers in all States were able to use the existing SNAP and WIC help-line phone numbers if they had questions about SEBTC. Michigan and Oregon supplied retailers with SEBTC help lines,

as they also did during the POC year, although they reported very few, if any, calls to these numbers in both years. Michigan also included a retailer section on their SEBTC website containing retailer-specific information, as the State did in the POC year.

## 3.4 EBT System Modifications and Strategies to Maintain Program Integrity

The majority of households that were assigned to the benefit group received an EBT card and used at least a portion of their benefits during the summer months. To distribute these benefits, EBT processors for the POC sites used either the modifications previously made in the POC year or made new system modifications to accommodate the needs of the grantee, while new sites worked with their processors to modify their systems for the first time in 2012. This section discusses the EBT system modifications needed to facilitate benefit issuance and redemption during the demonstration year. It also describes the issuance and redemption patterns across the demonstration sites.

### 3.4.1 EBT System Modifications and Support Activities for EBT Cards

Conventional online EBT is similar to a debit card transaction in that it uses a magnetic stripe card and requires a PIN to authenticate the transaction. The transaction is sent at the time of the purchase through commercial credit/debit networks for authorization by the EBT system's central (or "host") computer. SNAP EBT, as implemented by all States and territories, follows this model. As with credit/debit cards, SNAP cards are portable, meaning that a card issued in one State can be used in any State. SNAP benefits may be used only to purchase food items at SNAP retailer locations authorized by FNS.<sup>39</sup>

WIC EBT is a different type of transaction. The WIC program issues a tailored set of foods to each recipient from a list of those authorized by each State's WIC program. WIC EBT systems must therefore ensure that only specific WIC "allowable foods" prescribed for an individual are purchased with the benefit card. A State with WIC EBT may use online transaction technology, similar to the way that SNAP EBT systems operate. An offline transaction can also be done through the use of a smart card, which has an embedded chip that stores information about the specific foods and quantities available to the card holder.<sup>40</sup>

Half of the States use JPMorgan as their EBT processor, two use FIS, two self-process offline transactions but use SoliSystems for card issuance and writing benefits to the card's chip, and one uses Xerox (see Appendix 3A for more detail about processors). All States and their respective EBT processors and contractors completed any necessary system modifications in

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<sup>39</sup> See <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/retailers/store-eligibility.htm> for more information on SNAP retailer eligibility.

<sup>40</sup> Because the WIC EBT purchase transaction occurs between the smart card and the card acceptance terminal, there is no real-time communication with the EBT host system during the transaction. As a result, the transaction is referred to as an offline transaction.

time to issue SEBTC cards and benefits at the end of the 2011-2012 school year.<sup>41</sup> These modifications may have included (1) account setup, (2) card issuance and re-issuance, (3) benefit processing, (4) cardholder support, and (5) benefit settlement and reconciliation.<sup>42</sup> Diagrams illustrating the processes and data flow for EBT issuance, procurement, and settlement for SNAP and WIC are provided in Appendices 3B and 3C.

### Account Setup

Two types of modifications were necessary to enable account setup processes for SEBTC. First, systems in all States required a new SEBTC program designation so that SEBTC funds or WIC food items purchased with SEBTC funds could be tracked within the systems from issuance through redemption and settlement. Second, the States using WIC technologies also required the development of new software modules to create accounts and issue SEBTC benefits to the EBT systems without meeting all the issuance rules of the WIC program. States using SNAP technologies did not modify their systems beyond the program designation. All of these States were able to use a direct file transfer from their State SNAP eligibility systems to set up SEBTC accounts; Missouri used a manual process in the POC year, but added this feature in 2012. Of the four States with Expansion sites, two created separate account types for their POC and Expansion sites for reporting purposes.

### Card Issuance and Re-issuance

Eight of the grantees issued cards by mail; two—Cherokee Nation and Texas—distributed them in-person after participants attended training (Cherokee Nation mailed cards not picked up at training). Replacement cards for the online systems were handled according to the States' existing procedures. The online system replaces cards overnight, and, therefore, cards are replaced faster than in the offline system. Cherokee Nation and Texas used an offline system in which lost and stolen cards were reported directly to the WIC program staff for re-issuance of replacement cards because the local WIC clinics that normally re-issue cards were not involved with SEBTC. Re-issued cards were mailed in Cherokee Nation and distributed by the local partner in Texas.

### Account Processing

Each EBT processor had to establish a new sub-account within its system to separate SEBTC benefits and funds from SNAP and WIC and, in SNAP-hybrid sites, establish rules for which benefits were to be used first by families that received both SEBTC and SNAP. For Missouri and Oregon, the EBT processors used a first-in, first-out process based on when the benefits were issued for drawing down funds when recipients receiving both SEBTC and SNAP use their cards. If a household was receiving both SNAP and SEBTC, any existing SNAP balance prior to the SEBTC benefit issuance would have to be drawn down before the household could access their

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<sup>41</sup> Because the types of allowable purchases mimic SNAP and WIC Program food types, no changes were required to retailer electronic cash register systems, point-of-sale hardware or software, or third party processor systems, or to the Cherokee Nation, Chickasaw Nation, Michigan and Texas WIC Universal Product Code (UPC) databases.

<sup>42</sup> Benefit expiration and expunging is an additional process that had not occurred at the time of this report.

SEBTC benefit. During the summer months, Missouri and Oregon SNAP issued SEBTC benefits before SNAP benefits to allow SEBTC to have first priority for use.

### Cardholder Support

EBT processors required few changes in cardholder support for PIN selection and questions concerning cards and accounts. Eight of the States' processors used the existing integrated voice response (IVR) for customer calls by providing staff with new SEBTC scripts to answer cardholder questions. Some of the processors also added SEBTC-specific messages to their prompts or directed cardholders to SEBTC PIN functions. Two States—Cherokee Nation and Michigan—requested that its processors establish a separate toll-free number for SEBTC IVR services. The script used for SEBTC was basically the same one used for WIC EBT. Across the States, processors reported little if any change from normal call center volumes after SEBTC benefits were issued.

### Benefit Reconciliation and Settlement

The settlement and reconciliation processes are the final steps in benefit administration. For SNAP, EBT systems post a SNAP issuance file each day to a special account, known as a letter of credit (LOC). Each day, the EBT system posts a LOC file to this account to draw the funds necessary to settle payments to retailers accepting SNAP transactions. At the same time, EBT systems create and post a redemption data file to the Store Tracking and Redemption Subsystem II (STARS), which FNS uses to monitor retailer redemption activity. The amount paid to the EBT processor's account for settlement to retailers must reconcile against the amount paid to retailers in STARS.

The U.S. Treasury Department and FNS required that SEBTC funds be tracked, settled, and reconciled separately from SNAP because monies are coming from two different funding sources. In order for SNAP EBT systems to automate the settlement process, a separate SEBTC LOC must be posted daily to the special account and a separate file for SEBTC redemptions must be sent to STARS. The processes for reconciliation and settlement were automated for all five grantees in 2012; in the POC year, Missouri and Oregon used a manual process, but, as was required in the FNS RFA for the 2012 demonstration year, they automated the process in 2012.

The settlement and reconciliation processes are slightly different for the WIC EBT systems. Once separate LOCs were established by the grantee States for the demonstration, no modifications to the WIC EBT systems were needed for SEBTC settlement.

## 3.5 Other Factors Influencing Implementation

A range of other factors affected grantees' implementation of the SEBTC demonstration, including the State and local leadership of and the support for the demonstration, the budget and staff time required, the very condensed time line for the demonstration, the ability of grantees to partner with SFAs, and the degree to which sites used the lessons from the POC year.

### 3.5.1 State and Local Partnerships and Leadership

One of the key challenges in issuing the SEBTC benefit was that it necessitated collaboration between two programs that generally operate separately—FRP meals and either SNAP or WIC. This collaboration required the reconciliation of different federal and State program rules and approaches, such as definitions of households, information required from guardians to participate in programs, and other data requirements. It also meant that staff in several agencies had to work together, often for the first time. In many cases, there were unanticipated data issues, related to the types of information required by the demonstration from the SNAP or WIC and FRP programs, and different cultures between the two organizations. Grantees and their partners worked hard to overcome those inconsistencies and to create a process where different programs worked together to achieve a common goal.

Grantees took a variety of approaches to dividing responsibilities across participating organizations. While many were comfortable with the division of labor, some key staff voiced differing opinions on the success and appropriateness of those approaches. Staff from eight of the grantees suggested that they would have liked at least one of their partners to have been more involved in the demonstration—generally looking for more efforts on the part of SFAs. Despite some perceived shortcomings, most participating agencies recognized both the strengths and weaknesses of each partner, and developed strategies to successfully implement the demonstration accordingly. All grantees indicated that the staff members at various agencies generally worked well together and were able to strengthen current or develop new relationships among partner agencies. Frequent communication from very early stages of implementation aided this process.

Grantees also pointed out that having a strong leader in place to negotiate between multiple agencies was a key to success. States that reported having the least issues overall had dedicated staff that were able to push the project forward even as challenges arose. In addition, some of the sites discussed strong support from the community and public officials. For instance, Missouri had significant support from the governor’s office, which was very involved in the project, and Delaware conducted a press conference introducing the demonstration that included remarks by one of the State’s U.S. Senators and the State Secretaries of the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) and Education (DOE).

### 3.5.2 Level of Effort Needed and State Budget Issues

Although none of the grantees reported needing more funds than were available under the grant, Chickasaw Nation and Oregon reported using considerable in-kind and volunteer staff time to complete the project. In addition, Cherokee Nation staff suggested that if they had known how much work was required, they would have budgeted more for staff time. Most States recommended that a dedicated staff member serve as the point person for all partners and to keep the project on track.

Five of the grantees mentioned that State budget constraints affected the demonstration. In most cases, mandatory furlough days interfered with completing work on the demonstration. However, in Missouri and Oregon, Statewide hiring freezes created difficulties in hiring staff

needed for SEBTC even though grant funds would have made it possible to do so. In both States, staff had to seek special permission to hire these staff causing delays. Connecticut also had difficulty hiring a dedicated project manager, but this was related to extended delays in the hiring process.

In addition, two States—Chickasaw Nation and Washington—required Internal Review Board (IRB) approval for the demonstration. This involved review and approval of all agreements and documents developed for the demonstration. IRB can often extend time lines and add additional work for grantee staff. In Washington, the wait for IRB approval delayed the start of the consent process for several months.

### 3.5.3 The Pace of Implementation

As was the case in the POC year, the pace of implementation in 2012 was extremely fast and challenging for most grantees. Grants were awarded in December 2011 and the official kickoff meeting was in mid-January 2012. Most sites did not start actively planning for the demonstration until after the meeting and summer benefits were to begin before the middle of June 2012. With about four to five months to complete preparations, the grantees and their partners displayed tremendous perseverance in their efforts to meet established schedules. When facing issues or questions requiring resolution, they demonstrated an ability to adapt to change, and generally communicated quickly and effectively to move the demonstration to the next stage.

Yet, most grantees expressed some frustration about the time line, especially when unanticipated challenges emerged. Staff in these States and local areas felt that with more time, they could have anticipated more of the issues, developed more effective ways of conducting implementation, and tapped other resources. Even with the POC experience, two of the grantees found the tight time frame difficult to manage and ultimately did not have enough time to obtain the needed consent rates, and, in fact achieved lower consent rates than in the POC year.

### 3.5.4 Partnering with SFAs

Many grantees noted that partnering with the SFAs was more difficult than anticipated, particularly those with sites that included large numbers of SFAs (as high as 29 to 41). Most SFAs do not have experience obtaining consent from parents and working with data in the ways required by the demonstration, often not fully understanding the importance of data quality. One SNAP director working with multiple SFAs, pointed out that partnering with SFAs was not ideal for this type of project because SFAs are focused on feeding children and not on developing programs and monitoring data. In addition, many of the grantees had no prior experience working with SFAs, so not only did they have to implement the demonstration; they also had to foster new relationships quickly. This could sometimes be a struggle for both SFA staff, who felt their program was misunderstood, and the grantee, who was frustrated by the quality of the data and effort put forth.

The extent and quality of communication with participating SFAs also varied across grantees, creating some inconsistencies in how SFAs approached the development of lists of eligible children and households as well as the consent process. In States with only a single participating SFA, the SFA was generally an active partner from the start of the demonstration, and expectations for its involvement were clear. In States with more than one participating SFA, some of the SFAs appeared to be less clear about grantee expectations and the processes to be followed for key tasks. At the same time, grantees had less information than needed about how SFAs were approaching the consent process. This type of lack of communication in Cherokee Nation and Connecticut caused several SFAs to drop out of the demonstration after realizing how much work would be required; Cherokee Nation lost almost half of their proposed SFAs.

The grantees that minimized the role of SFAs reported fewer issues. Some of the sites, such as Delaware and Missouri, used partner organizations to work with SFAs to identify eligible children and collect consent data. The partners, which had previous working relationships with the SFAs, were able to better facilitate communication and had an understanding of the capacity of each SFA. They could also better navigate the issues with data than organizations that were not familiar with SFA systems.

### 3.5.5 Learning from the POC Year

All the POC sites discussed incorporating the lessons they learned from the first year and changing the process in the second year. For instance, Oregon realized that with twice the children in the second year, their model for documenting consent forms would not work and they involved the SFAs in the second year. Three of the POC sites started working on the demonstration right after award, instead of waiting until the grantee meeting a month later. In addition, two of the new 2012 grantees—Chickasaw Nation and Nevada—applied for but did not receive a POC grant. They both discussed learning from the POC sites and being able to anticipate some of the challenges that might occur. They conducted upfront planning before the grant started and made changes to their second application to make them stronger candidates for receiving the funds.

Although the lessons from the POC year helped many sites in 2012, using the models from the POC did not always work as anticipated. For instance, Michigan had difficulty replicating their successful model from 2011 at the Expansion site. They found applying the same model from a site with a single SFA to one with multiple SFAs was not the best approach. There was a different culture across SFAs that did not fit the model. For example, they rarely sent correspondence home with children, and there were data access issues with multiple SFAs that did not exist with just one. In addition, staff in Texas noted that they did not appreciate the difficulty of increasing the scale of the project in the second year and the additional data quality issues that occurred, as well as the difficulty in contacting many more households that received the benefit.



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## Chapter 4

# Use of EBT Benefits

This chapter presents patterns of SEBTC benefit use (or redemption) at the household level, using the SEBTC transaction data for the first benefit issuance cycle of 2012. For these findings, the evaluation team used EBT systems data, which track the SEBTC benefits of participating households. For each grantee, the systems provide data on when and where benefits were used, the amount spent for each transaction, the proportion of benefits used in the first cycle, and for those households that exhausted the benefit, when this occurred.

The EBT benefit-use data provide a number of insights into the operation of the SEBTC demonstrations. At the most basic level, examining the average rates of participation and redemption tests a key link in the theory underlying SEBTC: that providing benefits to eligible households will result in purchases of eligible foods, a necessary but not sufficient condition for benefits to have an impact on food insecurity. Analysis of the distribution of redemption rates and amounts shows that benefit use varies among households. Categorizing households by their level of benefit use may help shed light on why impacts vary among participants or across the sites. For example, the analysis of redemptions among households within the POC sites in 2011 pointed to a bimodal distribution, with most households redeeming either none of their benefits or more than 75%. This type of distribution has a different implication for potential impacts than a more even distribution. In addition, benefit-use data can provide indicators of the success of SEBTC implementation, both overall and across sites, and also may suggest specific implementation problems. In particular, the benefit-use analysis can provide evidence of whether differences in implementation had consequences for eligible households—for example, whether issuing SEBTC cards by mail resulted in higher or lower participation rates than issuing cards in person. However, differences in benefit use across sites may be due to factors other than implementation, such as differences in the characteristics of eligible households or external events<sup>43</sup> outside the grantees' control, and connections between benefit use and implementation actions by the grantees must be made with caution.

The findings in this report focus on the first cycle of benefits for the summer of 2012. Differences among the 2012 sites, including the length of the issuance cycle and the amount of benefits per child are discussed. The chapter also compares results from the POC sites in 2011, using data for the first issuance cycle. Analysis of data for the entire summer of 2012 and comparisons with the summer of 2011 will be presented in the evaluation report for the full implementation year.

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<sup>43</sup> For example, problems caused by retailers interfered with participants' ability to redeem benefits for bread and grain products and for fruits and vegetables in the Michigan Expansion site.

The chapter begins with an overview of key findings, followed by a brief description of the research methods. The balance of the chapter describes patterns of household benefit use in the first cycle of SEBTC benefits, including overall patterns among all households in the 14 sites, differences in benefit use between SNAP and non-SNAP households in sites using the SNAP model, and patterns of benefit use for specific food categories in sites using the WIC model.

## 4.1. Key Findings

The following are key findings for the first benefit issuance cycle in 2012:

- During the first issuance cycle, \$3.2 million in benefits were issued, and \$2.1 million (66%) were redeemed in the 14 SEBTC sites. The mean benefit issued ranged across the sites from \$25.23 per household in the Missouri Expansion site to \$124.36 in Chickasaw Nation. The mean dollar amount redeemed per household varied across sites from \$11.74 (43%) in the Missouri Expansion site to \$94.57 (84%) in Delaware. The variation in dollars issued and redeemed per household reflected differences across sites in the number of eligible children and length of benefit period.
- There was wide variation in redemption rates (percentage of benefits redeemed) across sites. Six of the sites had average redemption rates above 70%, four sites had rates between 50% and 66%, and four had rates below 50%.
- In all but two of the sites (Michigan Expansion and Nevada), the great majority of households were at one end of the distribution of redemption rates or the other: either with a 0% rate (no redemptions) or with a rate from 75% to 100%.
- Households in SNAP sites redeemed more of their benefits than those in WIC sites overall, but there was substantial variation within these groups, with SNAP sites ranging from 43% to 84% of benefits redeemed and WIC sites from 49% to 74%.
- Within the SNAP sites, households receiving SNAP redeemed benefits at higher rates overall than non-SNAP households; on average SNAP households redeemed 74% of their benefits while non-SNAP households redeemed an average of 63%.
- In the POC sites, the redemption rates in the first issuance cycle were not consistent between 2011 and 2012, but no clear pattern is apparent from the limited data available for this report. The Connecticut and Michigan sites had increases in the average household redemption rate, but the Missouri, Oregon, and Texas sites had declines. Differences in the length of the first issuance cycle in Missouri and Oregon (particularly the very short cycle of 10 days in Missouri versus 30 days in 2011) may have been a factor underlying the differences in redemption rates, but differences in implementation or eligible populations may also have been factors.
- In each of the WIC sites, redemption rates were similar across most categories of foods. The exceptions were in the Michigan Expansion site, where there were problems with redemptions of whole grain foods and fruits and vegetables. Cheese, eggs, and juice had the highest percentage of benefits redeemed; fish, grain products, and fruits and vegetables had the lowest redemption rates.

## 4.2. Research Methods

The analysis in this chapter is based on SEBTC transaction data collected from the 14 sites. The Memorandum of Understanding for the evaluation with each site specified the data to be provided in benefit issuances, redemptions, and other transactions (such as returns and reversals). Data from the SNAP and WIC systems both provided the date, time, and dollar value of each transaction. In addition, the WIC data provided separate transactions for each category of foods issued and redeemed, allowing for the analysis of redemptions at the aggregate and food category levels for the SEBTC WIC model sites. The dollar value of WIC benefits issued was determined by multiplying the quantity issued by the average unit price in each food category, and then summing across the food categories. In addition, for SNAP sites, except Washington,<sup>44</sup> data identified whether a particular household received SNAP benefits during the first month of the SEBTC benefit period. These data permitted analysis of benefit-use patterns for SNAP and non-SNAP households, including computation of totals, averages, and distributions of key measures.

The analysis aggregated the transactions for each household to produce net amounts for benefits issued and redeemed for the first issuance cycle. The analysis uses data for all households receiving benefits in the first issuance cycle, including those receiving SEBTC for the first time in 2012, and returning households receiving SEBTC in 2011 in the POC sites. EBT transaction data for the entire summer will be analyzed and reported in the evaluation report for the full implementation year.

## 4.3. Overall Patterns of SEBTC Benefit Use in the First Issuance Cycle

The results in this chapter are based on EBT transaction data collected for the first benefit issuance cycle, that is, the period starting with the date of the first benefit issuance and ending on the last day before the second benefit issuance. Exhibit 4.1 provides the length of the benefit issuance cycle and the value of the benefit per child for the first cycle in the SEBTC demonstration sites. Across all 14 sites, the benefit issuance period was a full month for five sites and a partial month in the other nine sites, ranging from 8 days in the Missouri Expansion site to 23 days in both Oregon sites. Each of the sites had a standard period across all of its participating SFAs for the first issuance cycle, except for the Chickasaw and Cherokee Nations, which varied their benefit dates across SFAs depending on when school ended for the summer and began in the following fall. Thus, the exact dates covered in this analysis vary among SFAs in these two sites, but for each household in these sites, the length of the first benefit issuance cycle (as analyzed in this report) was the same.

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<sup>44</sup> Washington declined to provide SNAP data because of privacy considerations.

### Exhibit 4.1. First Cycle of SEBTC Benefits, by Site in 2012

Site	SEBTC Model	Benefit Issuance Cycle Start and End Dates	Value Per Eligible Child for First Issuance Cycle
<b>Cherokee Nation</b>	WIC	Earliest cycle: 05/04/12 – 06/03/12 Latest cycle: 05/25/12 – 06/24/12 (31 days for all SFAs) <sup>a</sup>	\$60
<b>Chickasaw Nation</b>	WIC	Earliest cycle: 05/10/12 – 06/09/12 Latest cycle: 05/31/12 – 06/29/12 (31 days for all SFAs) <sup>a</sup>	\$60
<b>Connecticut</b>			
<b>POC</b>	SNAP	06/15/12 – 06/30/12 (16 days)	\$32
<b>Expansion</b>	SNAP	06/15/12 – 06/30/12 (16 days)	\$32
<b>Delaware</b>	SNAP	06/08/12 – 07/07/12 (30 days)	\$60
<b>Michigan</b>			
<b>POC</b>	WIC	06/08/12 - 07/07/12 (30 days)	\$60
<b>Expansion</b>	WIC	05/25/12 – 06/24/12 (31 days)	\$60
<b>Missouri</b>			
<b>POC</b>	SNAP-Hybrid	05/22/12 – 05/31/12 (10 days)	\$20
<b>Expansion</b>	SNAP-Hybrid	05/24/12 – 05/31/12 (8 days)	\$16
<b>Nevada</b>	WIC	06/01/12 - 06/30/12 (30 days)	\$60
<b>Oregon</b>			
<b>POC</b>	SNAP-Hybrid	06/08/12 – 06/30/12 (23 days)	\$44
<b>Expansion</b>	SNAP-Hybrid	06/08/12- 06/30/12 (23 days)	\$44
<b>Texas</b>	WIC	6/7/2012-07/06/12 (30 days)	\$60
<b>Washington</b>	SNAP	06/16/12 – 06/30/12 (15 days)	\$30

Source: SEBTC project documents and SEBTC transaction data, 2012.

<sup>a</sup>The benefit issuance period varied by SFA. The range of dates is provided.

In the first issuance cycle, most demonstration households in most sites fell into one of two categories: either they did not participate (0% redemption rate) or they redeemed more than 75% of their benefits. There was a substantial variation in the rate of non-participation between and within SNAP and WIC sites. In general, households in WIC sites were less likely to redeem any SEBTC benefits than those in SNAP sites. Exhibit 4.2 shows the proportion of demonstration households with no redemptions (non-participating households) and the distribution of households by redemption rate (i.e., the percentage of benefits redeemed). As discussed in Chapter 3, a total of 27,682 households participated in SEBTC (i.e., redeemed any benefits) in the 14 sites, representing 75% of households issued benefits. The participation rate ranged from 48% in Missouri Expansion to 90% in Chickasaw Nation and Oregon POC (see Exhibit 3.3). The average non-participation rate across all sites was about 23%, but was much higher in Cherokee Nation (35%) and the two Missouri sites (46% and 52%).

The pattern of redemption varied between SNAP and WIC sites as well. Households in the SNAP sites most often redeemed more than 75% to almost 100% of benefits (41% to 83% of households), while in WIC sites most households redeemed 0 to 75% of benefits (33% to 93% of households). The percentage of households redeeming all of their benefits was lower for WIC sites than for SNAP sites as well. This may, in part, be attributed to the more restrictive nature

of the WIC benefit (i.e., households can only choose WIC-approved foods in the prescribed package, so they may only buy what they know they will use).<sup>45</sup> As discussed in more detail later in this chapter, redemption rates for some foods were substantially lower than for others, indicating that many participants could not or chose not to purchase all their benefits in some categories.

**Exhibit 4.2. Percentage of Demonstration Households by Percentage of Benefits Redeemed in the First Benefit Issuance Cycle**

Site	Month	Percentage of Benefits Redeemed					
		None	>0 and ≤25%	>25 and ≤50%	>50 and ≤75%	>75 and ≤100%	≥100%
Cherokee Nation <sup>a</sup>	Jun	35.2%	3.0%	9.1%	13.2%	33.7%	5.8%
Chickasaw Nation	Jun	10.5%	2.1%	5.7%	14.3%	57.6%	9.8%
<b>Connecticut</b>							
POC	Jun	20.8%	1.1%	2.0%	3.9%	36.6%	35.7%
Expansion	Jun	14.9%	0.6%	1.4%	3.4%	43.4%	36.2%
Delaware	Jun	12.1%	0.6%	1.4%	3.0%	49.0%	33.9%
<b>Michigan</b>							
POC	Jun	15.2%	2.5%	8.7%	19.8%	45.9%	7.9%
Expansion	Jun	11.7%	5.0%	15.9%	60.0%	7.4%	0.0%
<b>Missouri</b>							
POC	May	45.7%	1.8%	2.2%	3.6%	16.6%	30.1%
Expansion	May	51.7%	2.0%	2.4%	2.9%	16.9%	24.1%
Nevada	Jun	24.2%	3.5%	10.8%	36.1%	25.2%	0.3%
<b>Oregon</b>							
POC	Jun	10.3%	1.6%	2.7%	4.9%	36.8%	43.7%
Expansion	Jun	12.4%	1.6%	2.2%	5.0%	34.8%	44.0%
Texas	Jun	28.6%	0.8%	1.8%	5.4%	40.7%	22.7%
Washington	Jun	28.2%	1.1%	2.1%	5.5%	31.5%	31.7%

Source: SEBTC transaction data for the first issuance cycle (see Exhibit 4.1), 2012.

<sup>a</sup> Cherokee Nation was not able to provide detailed data on transactions by food category for approximately 4% of households during the first two-and-a-half months of summer 2012. Therefore, the data do not permit identification of the household making the purchase or the transaction date. Because these are excluded from the values in this table, redemption amounts for the Cherokee Nation may be understated by a small but unknown percentage.

While the focus of this section is on benefit redemption, the amount of benefits issued is important context. The total amounts of benefits issued in the first issuance cycle ranged from \$82,720 in the Connecticut Expansion site to \$393,838 in Nevada. The large range in benefits was due to variation in the length of the benefit period and the total number of children assigned benefits (as discussed in Chapter 3). Exhibit 4.3 presents the average SEBTC benefits

<sup>45</sup> Another factor might be the computation of the redemption rate. For WIC sites, the benefits issued are valued at the average prices of the foods (based on the redemption data). If a participant consistently pays less than the average cost, it is possible to obtain all of the prescribed foods while redeeming less than 100% of the value of the benefit issued. On the other hand, a participant who pays more than average prices may have total redemptions that exceed the value assigned to the benefits issued, resulting in a redemption rate over 100%. Given these offsetting effects, it is unlikely that the computation of the redemption rate is a major factor in holding down the proportion of households redeeming all of their benefits.

issued to and redeemed by benefit group households. The average benefit issued across all sites was \$84.39,<sup>46</sup> ranging from \$25.23 per household in the Missouri Expansion site (with just 8 days of benefits in the first cycle) to \$124.36 per household in Chickasaw Nation (with 31 days of benefits).

### Exhibit 4.3. Distribution of Demonstration Households by Redemption Amount

Site <sup>a</sup>	Month (Days)	Mean Issuance	Mean Redemptions	25th Percentile of \$ Redeemed	Median \$ Redeemed	75th Percentile of \$ Redeemed	Maximum \$ Redeemed
Cherokee Nation <sup>b</sup>	Jun (31)	\$95.49	\$48.55	\$0.00	\$45.89	\$60.91	\$414.60
Chickasaw Nation	Jun (31)	\$124.36	\$94.37	\$48.77	\$90.82	\$123.29	\$474.32
Connecticut							
POC	Jun (16)	\$59.77	\$45.47	\$25.89	\$32.00	\$64.00	\$252.02
Expansion	Jun (16)	\$66.18	\$55.20	\$31.38	\$62.00	\$64.00	\$224.00
Delaware	Jun (30)	\$110.89	\$94.57	\$59.11	\$63.235	\$120.00	\$479.95
Michigan							
POC	Jun(30)	\$108.55	\$73.47	\$35.03	\$55.60	\$108.84	\$442.48
Expansion	Jun (31)	\$114.10	\$61.33	\$30.45	\$48.21	\$83.96	\$455.11
Missouri							
POC	May (10)	\$35.00	\$18.32	\$0.00	\$14.42	\$36.33	\$160.00
Expansion	May (8)	\$25.23	\$11.74	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$16.00	\$112.00
Nevada	Jun (30)	\$119.60	\$61.58	\$11.03	\$52.28	\$95.15	\$687.88
Oregon							
POC	Jun (23)	\$82.49	\$69.66	\$43.34	\$63.35	\$88.00	\$396.00
Expansion	Jun (23)	\$85.91	\$71.53	\$43.13	\$69.73	\$88.00	\$308.00
Texas	Jun (30)	\$90.90	\$61.74	\$0.00	\$52.92	\$103.56	\$335.37
Washington	Jun (15)	\$63.00	\$43.74	\$0.00	\$30.00	\$60.00	\$298.41

Source: SEBTC transaction data for the first issuance cycle (see Exhibit 4.1), 2012.

<sup>b</sup>For approximately 4% of all detailed transactions by food category in the Cherokee Nation data for the first two-and-a-half months of summer 2012, current data do not permit identification of the household making the purchase or the transaction date. Because these are excluded from the values in this table, redemption amounts for Cherokee Nation may be understated by an unknown, but small, percentage.

The average redemption amount per household among the SNAP sites ranged from \$11.74 in the Missouri Expansion site to \$94.57 in Delaware, and among the WIC sites from \$48.55 in Cherokee Nation to \$94.37 in Chickasaw Nation. In general, the average redeemed amounts were higher among the WIC sites (which all had a full month of benefits) than among the SNAP sites (of which only Delaware had a full month of benefits).

The amount of benefits redeemed varied substantially among households within each site, as shown in Exhibit 4.3. One useful way to look at the distribution of redemption amounts is to compare the percentiles to the benefit amounts issued per child. The benefit per child serves as a benchmark; as more households redeem the benefit for at least one child, the potential impact of the program increases. The 25th percentile amounts were close to the benefit for one

<sup>46</sup> This is the average of the mean issuances for the sites, giving each site equal weight. The average for all households issued benefits was \$85.79.

child for the period in all of the SNAP sites except for Missouri and Washington. The median redemption (50th percentile) was approximately equal to the first period benefit for one child in the Connecticut POC, Delaware, and Washington sites; the median household spent substantially more than the first benefit for one child in the Connecticut Expansion site and the two Oregon sites. The Missouri sites had the lowest values for all of the percentiles of dollars redeemed per household, reflecting both low benefits and low participation. Among the WIC sites, Cherokee Nation had the lowest values for all of the percentiles of dollars redeemed per household, and Chickasaw Nation had the highest for all values except the maximum, which was highest in Nevada.

#### 4.4 Differences in Redemptions Between SNAP and Non-SNAP Households

The data show that demonstration households already receiving SNAP prior to SEBTC were more likely to redeem benefits and tended to redeem a higher proportion of them. Exhibit 4.4 shows that fewer SNAP households than non-SNAP households had no redemptions and more had redemptions over 75%.<sup>47</sup> SNAP households redeemed 100% of benefits more often than non-SNAP households in the two Missouri sites and the Oregon POC site. In the two Connecticut sites, Delaware, and the Oregon Expansion site, however, the non-SNAP households redeemed 100% of their benefits slightly more often than the SNAP households. Further analysis will be needed using the full summer issuance to determine if there is a clear difference in redemptions between SNAP and non-SNAP households. These results will be presented in the evaluation report for the full implementation year.

#### 4.5 Comparison of Redemption in POC Sites in 2011 and 2012

Exhibit 4.5 compares the key redemption statistics for 2011 and 2012 in the five POC sites. Two factors—past experience and new populations—could affect these comparisons. On the one hand, redemption rates might be expected to improve from 2011 to 2012 in the POC sites, both because of the experience in participant communications gained by the sites, and because the households that received and used benefits in 2011 would be expected to have higher rates of consent and participation than those that were selected but did not use their benefits. On the other hand, the Connecticut and Oregon POC sites were expanded in 2012. Challenges of expansion might reduce participation and redemption in these sites; differences between the eligible households in the “old” and “new” parts of these sites might push benefit use in either direction.

In making these comparisons, it is important to note that the first benefit period in 2011 was shorter (by 2 days) in Connecticut, but longer in Oregon (by 7 days) and Missouri (by 20 days) than in 2012. Thus, the average amounts redeemed in these sites are less comparable than the

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<sup>47</sup> SNAP households were identified using statewide SNAP EBT transaction data. Exhibit 4.4 includes only the SNAP sites. However, Washington is not included because staff declined to provide SNAP transaction data.

percentage of households redeeming benefits (the participation rate) and the percentage of benefits redeemed (the redemption rate). However, even the comparison of participation and redemption rates could be affected by the length of the benefit period, particularly in the Missouri POC site. Thus, the following results should be interpreted with particular care, and no conclusions should be drawn until the complete analysis of benefit use for the summer is completed.

**Exhibit 4.4. Percentage of Demonstration Households by Percentage of Benefits Redeemed in the First Issuance Cycle (Percentage of Households) by SNAP Status**

Site <sup>a</sup>	Percentage of Benefits Redeemed					
	0	>0 and <=25%	>25 and <=50%	>50 and <=75%	>75 and <100%	≥100%
<b>Connecticut</b>						
POC - SNAP	14.7%	1.4%	2.2%	4.1%	43.1%	34.7%
POC - Non-SNAP	27.5%	0.7%	1.7%	3.7%	29.5%	36.9%
Expansion – SNAP	11.6%	0.6%	1.1%	3.6%	47.5%	35.7%
Expansion- Non-SNAP	19.5%	0.8%	1.9%	3.3%	37.5%	37.1%
<b>Delaware – SNAP</b>	9.3%	0.9%	1.1%	2.4%	54.1%	32.2%
<b>Delaware – Non-SNAP</b>	15.7%	0.2%	1.7%	3.7%	42.4%	36.2%
<b>Missouri</b>						
POC – SNAP	37.8%	2.6%	2.8%	4.1%	20.0%	32.7%
POC - Non-SNAP	59.8%	0.5%	1.0%	2.8%	10.4%	25.5%
Expansion – SNAP	46.9%	2.7%	2.8%	3.3%	19.8%	24.6%
Expansion - Non-SNAP	65.9%	0.1%	1.1%	1.8%	8.5%	22.7%
<b>Oregon</b>						
POC - SNAP	7.4%	1.8%	3.3%	4.8%	38.3%	44.5%
POC - Non-SNAP	20.8%	0.8%	0.8%	5.6%	31.2%	40.9%
Expansion– SNAP	10.2%	1.7%	2.2%	5.4%	36.9%	43.7%
Expansion - Non-SNAP	22.2%	1.2%	2.1%	3.3%	25.9%	45.3%

Source: SNAP transaction data for the first issuance cycle (see Exhibit 4.1), 2012.

<sup>a</sup>Due to privacy concerns, Washington did not provide data on SNAP usage.

**Exhibit 4.5 Comparison of 2011 and 2012 Redemption in POC Sites Based on First Issuance Cycle**

	Number of Days in First Issuance Cycle		Average \$ Redeemed Per Household		Percent of Households Redeeming		Percent Redeemed Per Household	
	2011	2012	2011	2012	2011	2012	2011	2012
	<b>Connecticut POC</b>	14	16	\$34.94	\$45.47	75.1%	79.3%	69.5%
<b>Michigan POC</b>	30	30	\$59.96	\$73.47	84.7%	84.8%	64.5%	65.1%
<b>Missouri POC</b>	30	10	\$88.26	\$18.32	85.8%	54.3%	84.2%	48.9%
<b>Oregon POC</b>	30 <sup>a</sup>	23	\$89.93	\$69.66	96.9%	89.7%	96.1%	83.0%
<b>Texas</b>	30	30	\$59.16	\$61.74	73.2%	71.4%	67.7%	65.6%

Source: SEBTC Congressional Status Report (Briefel et al., 2011); SEBTC transaction data for the first issuance cycle (see Exhibit 4.1), 2012.

<sup>a</sup>Oregon POC site benefits for 2011 were prorated for the 23 days in June after the end of school, but benefits were available on June 1, so there were 30 days of activity.

No clear pattern is apparent from the limited data available for this report. The most dramatic differences between 2011 and 2012 are in Missouri, where the participation and redemption rates fell by more than 30%. This change likely reflects the short benefit period (10 days) in 2012 as compared to 30 days in 2011. Also, the benefit period was at the end of the month, so families may not have realized the benefits were issued before the month ended.<sup>48</sup> There was a smaller but still noticeable decline in participation and redemption rates in Oregon and Texas, but Oregon's rates remained the highest of the POC sites. On the other hand, there was a slight increase in participation and redemption rates in Connecticut and Michigan.

Additional analysis using data for all POC sites from all issuance cycles will be conducted for the evaluation report for the full implementation year to compare the summer benefit in 2011 to 2012. This analysis will provide a much stronger basis for assessing whether participation and redemption rates changed from the POC year to the full implementation year.

#### 4.6 Patterns of Benefit Redemption Overall and by Food Category in WIC Sites

Exhibit 4.6 presents the redemption and participation rates for each WIC food category during the first issuance cycle in the six WIC model sites (see Appendix 4A for site-specific food packages). All six sites issued their first cycle of benefits for a full month, so the comparisons are not affected by differences in cycle length. Redemption and participation rates were generally quite similar for most foods within sites, with some notable exceptions discussed below. In most categories, the Chickasaw Nation and Michigan Expansion sites had the highest redemption and participation rates. Depending on the category, participation and redemption rates for most foods were lowest in the Cherokee Nation and Nevada sites. The Michigan POC and Texas sites generally fell in the middle of the range of participation and redemption rates for specific food categories.

The redemption rate—the percent of food redeemed by all households—across all food categories ranged from 51% in Cherokee Nation to 75.9% in Chickasaw Nation. In terms of participation (any household redeemed at least one food item), the rate ranged from 64.8% in Cherokee Nation to 89.5% in Chickasaw Nation.

Across the six sites, the top three foods, in terms of percentages redeemed, were cheese, eggs, and juice. The lowest redemption rates were for fish, grain products, and fruits and vegetables. In terms of participation rates, the top food categories were milk, eggs, and cereal, while the lowest categories were again fish, bread and other grain products, and fruits and vegetables. In the Michigan Expansion site, one of the major retailers had delays in updating vendor software to process a particular WIC subcategory of fruits and vegetables, and this problem may have led

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<sup>48</sup> In the SNAP model, benefits do not expire until the end of the summer, so households could have redeemed their May benefits in June. Information collected from the grantee during the process study visit indicated that less than 10% of households had not redeemed benefits by the end of July 2012.

to confusion and thus to wider non-redemption in the fruit and vegetable category. The Michigan Expansion site also reported there was a lack of widespread availability of whole wheat bread in the demonstration area, and that this likely contributed to the low rate of redemption (49% of benefits) in the bread and other grain products food category, as compared with most other food categories in this site. The Nevada site had a wider range of redemption rates across foods than the other four WIC model sites.

**Exhibit 4.6. Benefit Redemption in the First Issuance Cycle, by Food Category (SEBTC-WIC Model Sites)**

Food Type	Unit	Cherokee Nation	Chickasaw Nation	Michigan POC	Michigan Expansion	Nevada	Texas	Average
<b>Percentage of Benefits Redeemed</b>								
Milk – skim, 1/2%, 1%, 2%	Gal	53.4%	77.8%	72.6%	78.0%	59.5%	68.1%	68.2%
Cheese	Lbs	58.9%	83.7%	72.4%	81.6%	61.9%	71.3%	71.6%
Eggs	dzn	57.9%	85.3%	78.9%	82.6%	55.1%	72.0%	72.0%
Juice 64 oz bottle/equivalent	Cont	57.9%	83.2%	78.4%	84.5%	58.0%	70.8%	72.1%
Cereal	oz	52.2%	75.5%	68.5%	75.8%	55.7%	69.8%	66.2%
Dry/canned beans and peanut butter	unit	47.8%	69.3%	58.4%	76.2%	42.2%	65.7%	59.9%
Tuna/salmon	oz	47.8%	71.3%	62.1%	77.0%	33.5%	62.0%	59.0%
Bread/tortillas/rice/oatmeal	lbs	45.6%	66.3%	42.1%	48.9%	41.1%	65.1%	51.5%
Fruits/vegetables	\$	50.8%	78.0%	75.7%	0.5%	55.5%	68.1%	54.8%
<b>Total</b>		<b>50.8%</b>	<b>75.9%</b>	<b>67.7%</b>	<b>53.8%</b>	<b>51.5%</b>	<b>67.9%</b>	<b>61.3%</b>
<b>Percent with any Redemptions</b>								
Milk – skim, 1/2%, 1%, 2%	Gal	63.4%	87.9%	81.7%	86.9%	73.6%	70.6%	77.4%
Cheese	Lbs	61.6%	85.3%	75.3%	83.2%	70.8%	69.4%	74.3%
Eggs	dzn	61.0%	86.2%	78.3%	82.7%	71.5%	70.0%	75.0%
Juice 64 oz bottle/equivalent	Cont	60.0%	83.2%	76.9%	82.6%	66.1%	68.7%	72.9%
Cereal	oz	62.0%	85.2%	76.4%	82.9%	71.0%	69.2%	74.5%
Dry/canned beans and peanut butter	unit	60.0%	82.4%	68.2%	80.1%	66.2%	66.8%	70.6%
Tuna/salmon	oz	56.5%	78.5%	61.0%	75.4%	56.1%	65.5%	65.5%
Bread/tortillas/rice/oatmeal	lbs	57.5%	80.3%	62.2%	67.9%	58.4%	67.6%	65.6%
Fruits/vegetables	\$	62.8%	87.7%	82.5%	0.6%	73.1%	70.2%	62.8%
<b>Total</b>		<b>64.8%</b>	<b>89.5%</b>	<b>84.8%</b>	<b>88.3%</b>	<b>78.3%</b>	<b>75.1%</b>	<b>80.1%</b>

Source: SEBTC transaction data for the first issuance cycle (see Exhibit 4.1), 2012.

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## Chapter 5

# Characteristics of Households at Baseline

This chapter describes the characteristics of households in the SEBTC demonstration using data from the spring household survey from spring 2012, a core component of the impact study for the SEBTC evaluation. The evaluation research design called for two surveys during the full implementation year (2011-2012), when the SEBTC was implemented in 14 sites.

Approximately 27,000 households were surveyed during the school year and will be surveyed again in the summer. The spring survey had to be conducted before the end of the 2011-2012 school year to, among other reasons, obtain an estimate of household food security during this time period. More specifically, the major reasons for the 2012 spring interviews include the following:

- To provide descriptive information about the households that consented to participate in the SEBTC demonstration.
- To obtain a preliminary prevalence rate of very low food security among children (VLFS-C) in the school year. (When the summer interviews are completed, these data will be used to determine the extent to which the SEBTC demonstrations closed the gap between the school-year and the summer prevalence of VLFS among children.)
- To determine the equivalence of the treatment and control groups with respect to the random assignment process.

This chapter provides an overview of the household survey, research methods—including random assignment and balance between the treatment and control groups, data collection, response rates, return rates, the development and use of analysis weights, and sample size—and summary information about the characteristics of households in the spring.

### 5.1 Key Findings

Key findings describing the characteristics of households in the study population are based on responses to the completed spring interviews from households in 13 of the 14 sites<sup>49</sup> in the full implementation year:

- **Household Composition.** There was an average of 4.4 people in the household—including adults and children of all ages, some of whom are not school-age, with a mean of 2.4 children. About half the adult respondents were single (52%, including those never married,

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<sup>49</sup> Survey data from Cherokee Nation are removed from the pooled analysis of baseline descriptive characteristics due to a low response rate (39.9%); however descriptive data for Cherokee Nation are included in the chapter as appropriate and are also shown in Appendix 5E. The summer weighted response rate for the Cherokee Nation site was 61.6%, so the site will be included in the main impact analysis for the evaluation report for the full implementation year.

separated or divorced, or widowed); the other half (48%) were married or living with a partner. In terms of educational attainment, the population was nearly evenly divided among those who had not completed high school (28%), had completed high school but not gone to college (32%), and had some college education (33%).

- **Racial/Ethnic Composition.** The largest group of respondents identified themselves as non-Hispanic white (41%), with the next largest group being Hispanic (32%). There was substantial variation in racial/ethnic composition across sites: in Texas, 95% of respondents were Hispanic; in Missouri, 71% of respondents were non-Hispanic black; and in the Chickasaw Nation, a sizeable proportion of respondents were American Indian (15%).<sup>50</sup>
- **Household Income.** Nearly three-quarters of the population (72%) had monthly incomes below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) for their household size. Most households (71%) had at least one employed adult in the household.
- **Participation in Nutrition Assistance Programs.** In addition to children's participation in an FRP meals program, more than two-thirds of households (72%) reported participating in at least one federal or emergency nutrition assistance program in the 30 days prior to the interview, with, on average, 61% using SNAP; 21% using WIC; and 19% receiving food from a food pantry, food bank, soup kitchen, or emergency kitchen. Only 5% of respondents reported that their child did not participate in school meal programs, after-school meal or snack programs, or a backpack program; almost all reported their child received FRP lunch (93%) and somewhat fewer reported school breakfast (84%).<sup>51</sup>
- **Food Security.** More than half of households (59%) reported food insecurity in the past 30 days among adults, children, or both, with the majority of the insecure households experiencing food insecurity among children. Among all households in the study population, 9.0% experienced VLFS-C, which ranged from 3.8% in the Michigan Expansion site to 12.9% in Nevada. The estimated prevalence of VLFS-C during the full implementation year is higher than the 7.3% estimated during the POC year. Among the five POC sites only, the estimated prevalence of VLFS-C (9.0%) also is higher in 2012 than in 2011.
- **Food Expenditures.** Counting food expenditures from all food outlets, including fast food restaurants and other eateries, and excluding purchases made with SNAP or WIC, the median weekly out-of-pocket food expenditures for a household was \$60, ranging from \$47 to \$82 across sites. Across all sites, the median weekly out-of-pocket food expenditure was approximately \$15 per person.

## 5.2 Research Methods

This section describes the research methods used for the study. The random assignment process is discussed first, followed by the survey instrument, household survey methods, survey response rates, and survey weights.

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<sup>50</sup> In addition, 25% of households in the Cherokee Nation demonstration area also identified themselves as American Indian.

<sup>51</sup> Children in households where at least one child is eligible for FRP may be home schooled or attending a school where FRP meals are not served. They may also be certified for FRP meals but do not participate in the program.

### 5.2.1 Random Assignment

As described in Chapter 3, the process of consent and random assignment required several steps. First, participating SFAs constructed lists of households with children certified for FRP meals. After working with SFAs and others to obtain consent from families (by either passive or active processes, depending on the site), each grantee sent a list of consenting households to the evaluation team.<sup>52</sup> The team then randomly assigned the families to be in the benefit group or non-benefit group, with the objective of assigning 5,300 children to receive the benefit in each site (and the balance of children to the non-benefit group). Next, the team randomly selected an evaluation subsample of households from the benefit and non-benefit group to participate in the household survey (the treatment and control groups).<sup>53</sup>

The essence of random assignment is that units (i.e., households, in this case) are assigned randomly—i.e., by the equivalent of a coin toss—from a common pool to either the benefit group or the non-benefit group. Because households are assigned randomly, the two groups will not differ with regard to background characteristics, measured or unmeasured, except by chance, with chance differences diminishing when a large number of units is randomized. As a result, any subsequent differences in outcomes between the two groups of households that are statistically significant (that is, not due to chance variations) can be interpreted confidently as impacts of the intervention.

Although in theory, the randomization process will yield benefit and non-benefit groups that are equivalent in terms of background characteristics, differences may occur by chance or if random assignment was not properly handled. To assess whether chance differences between the groups occurred, the evaluation team tested for differences between the benefit and non-benefit groups (and for the subsample selected for the evaluation) on characteristics available for all units from administrative data, including number of eligible children in the household, children’s age, grade, gender, and school lunch status. The baseline balance testing identifies any chance imbalance between the groups, so differences can be statistically adjusted in analysis. Using this information, the two samples showed no evidence of baseline imbalance (see Appendix 5A), leading to the conclusion that random assignment successfully created statistically equivalent populations both receiving and not receiving the SEBTC benefit.<sup>54</sup>

### 5.2.2 Survey Instrument

The 25-minute spring 2012 survey was administered by telephone, in English and Spanish. The survey included questions on household characteristics, household and children’s participation in nutrition-assistance programs, household food security, and monthly food expenditures.

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<sup>52</sup> For more details on each site’s consent approach, see Appendix 2A.

<sup>53</sup> For more details on the random assignment approach, see Appendix 5A.

<sup>54</sup> The evaluation team will consider whether the two groups remained equivalent based on the summer 2012 outcome survey data when the impact of the SEBTC benefit for the full implementation year is measured in a later report.

### 5.2.3 Household Survey Data Collection

The evaluation team conducted the survey using computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI). Prior to the CATI calls, advance letters were mailed to 42,309 households—21,477 benefit households and 20,832 non-benefit households—selected for the evaluation subsample. These letters provided information about the study and stated that the interviews were voluntary and would not affect the receipt of any benefits, and that the findings would be confidential. A telephone number for additional questions was also provided.

To reach the households for which contact information was inaccurate or incomplete, the team used centralized locating processes (e.g., web searches of telephone and address databases) and field locating. In addition, some of the households not successfully interviewed by telephone were assigned to field interviewing and, if located, were connected to the call center to conduct the interview. Respondents received a \$10 incentive for completing the spring survey.

### 5.2.4 Response Rates

Exhibit 5.1 shows the weighted response rates in the spring, pooling all 14 sites (including Cherokee Nation), 13 sites that are included in the pooled analysis, as described further below, and by site. These weights account for the two-phase sampling scheme. (See Section 5.2.6 and Appendix 5B for details about the sampling plan and computation of the weighted response rate.) Overall, the survey achieved a 72.9% weighted response rate.<sup>55</sup> The overall spring response rate varied substantially by site, with the highest response rates in the Michigan Expansion and Washington sites (90.2% and 90.3%, respectively) and the lowest in Cherokee Nation (39.9%). The two major reasons for the large variation in response rates among sites were the quality of contact information and the length of the field period (ranging from 5-27 days for Cherokee Nation, depending on when the school year ended in each SFA, to 58 days for Delaware). (Appendix 5B provides more site-level details about the length of the data collection period by site.)

The quality of the contact information—provided by school districts—clearly contributed to differing response rates. Overall, the passive consent sites achieved a 58.3% response rate; compared to active consent sites where the rate was 82.3%. As we discussed in Chapter 3, active consent sites had much higher quality contact information, which was used to contact households to obtain consent. In addition, through the consent process, guardians had an opportunity to update or correct contact information. Therefore, at the time of the consent process, contact information was accurate for households in active consent sites. In contrast, with passive consent sites, it appears that many of the street addresses were invalid, even when the consent form was not returned as undeliverable. Further, there was no opportunity to update or correct contract information.

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<sup>55</sup> Across all 14 sites, the weighted spring response rate among households in the treatment group was 74.9%, compared to 70.9% in the control group. The weighted spring response rate for the 13 sites in the pooled analysis was 75.1% (see Appendix 5B).

A short spring data collection period was another challenge to obtaining high response rates. In response to concerns that a short data-collection period could jeopardize response rates to the degree that the study's baseline estimates would be questioned, prior to the completion of the spring data collection, FNS and the evaluation team determined that any site with a weighted response rate below 50% would be excluded from the pooled baseline analysis. On these grounds, Cherokee Nation was excluded from the pooled descriptive baseline analysis in this report.<sup>56</sup> Based on the results of the assessment of non-response bias described in Appendix 5C, the sites with a response rate between 50% and 60% (Missouri POC, Missouri Expansion, and Nevada) were included in the analysis as were sites with response rates above 60% (also by pre-specified agreement by FNS and the evaluation team). After excluding Cherokee Nation, the weighted response rate for the sample used for the pooled analysis was 75.1% (Exhibit 5.1).

**Exhibit 5.1. Weighted Response Rates, by Site and All Sites, Spring 2012**

Site	Consent	Weighted Response Rates			
		Data Collection (Number of Days)	All Cases	Treatment	Control
<b>Cherokee Nation</b>	Passive <sup>a</sup>	5 - 26	39.9%	40.8%	39.1%
<b>Chickasaw Nation</b>	Active	20 - 41	84.4%	89.9%	76.4%
<b>Connecticut</b>					
<b>POC</b>	Active	17	73.9%	75.3%	72.5%
<b>Expansion</b>	Active	25	76.6%	81.0%	72.2%
<b>Delaware</b>	Active	48 - 53	84.3%	85.9%	82.7%
<b>Michigan</b>					
<b>POC</b>	Active	47	83.7%	85.9%	81.5%
<b>Expansion</b>	Active	28	90.2%	90.6%	89.7%
<b>Missouri</b>					
<b>POC</b>	Passive	44 - 45	54.2%	54.8%	53.6%
<b>Expansion</b>	Passive	43	58.1%	59.3%	57.0%
<b>Nevada</b>	Passive	22	59.6%	61.7%	57.5%
<b>Oregon</b>					
<b>POC</b>	Active	34	85.2%	86.8%	83.5%
<b>Expansion</b>	Active	21	81.2%	80.3%	82.1%
<b>Texas</b>	Passive	56	75.6%	78.8%	72.5%
<b>Washington</b>	Active	40 - 45	90.3%	90.3%	90.2%
<b>All 14 Sites</b>			<b>72.9%</b>	<b>74.9%</b>	<b>70.9%</b>
<b>13 Sites (excluding Cherokee Nation)</b>			<b>75.1%</b>	<b>77.2%</b>	<b>73.0%</b>
<b>Active Consent Sites</b>	<b>5 sites</b>		<b>82.3%</b>	<b>84.4%</b>	<b>80.1%</b>
<b>Passive Consent Sites</b>	<b>9 sites</b>		<b>58.3%</b>	<b>59.9%</b>	<b>56.7%</b>

Source: Spring Household Sample, 2012.

<sup>a</sup>One SFA in Cherokee Nation chose to use active consent.

<sup>56</sup> Although survey data from Cherokee Nation are removed from the pooled analysis of baseline descriptive characteristics, the site will be included in the summer 2012 impact analysis since the response rate was over 60%.

### 5.2.5 Return Rates for Households Receiving SEBTC in the POC Year

To study the effects of two summers (referred to as “two-year”) of exposure to SEBTC, households that participated in the POC year were included in the full implementation year, if there was still an eligible child in the household and the household consented to participate for a second year. As described in Chapter 3, households in the benefit group in the POC year (2011) with an eligible child were automatically offered benefits in the full implementation year (2012); those in the non-benefit group in the POC year with an eligible child were offered the opportunity to be re-randomized; i.e., they had a chance of being assigned either to the benefit group or to the non-benefit group in the full implementation year. Households in both groups had to re-consent to participate in the full implementation year. However, those in the benefit group in the POC year had a stronger incentive to consent—to continue receiving their SEBTC benefit—than POC non-benefit group members, potentially destroying the comparability of the two groups in the full implementation year.

Before seeing results regarding the comparability of households in the two groups, the evaluation team decided to include the POC year benefit group (i.e., the two-year benefit group) in the analysis only if its consent rate did not differ significantly from the consent rate for the POC year non-benefit group. A significant difference would imply that the returning (i.e., re-consenting) POC year benefit group households may not be equivalent to the re-randomized returning non-benefit households, making the inclusion of the former in the full implementation year analysis inappropriate because those households would have no direct counterparts in the implementation year non-benefit group. Return rates that do not differ significantly between the POC year benefit and non-benefit groups make it reasonable to interpret the two sets of returning households as statistically equivalent. Consequently, returning POC-year benefit households have counterparts in the demonstration year analysis sample—the random half of the returning POC year non-benefit households re-randomized to non-benefit status. Under this circumstance, it is appropriate to include the returning POC-year benefit group in the full implementation year analysis.

In Oregon and Michigan, there was a statistically significant difference in the 2012 return rates for the benefit and non-benefit groups from the POC year.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, in both sites, the two-year benefit group was excluded from the main analysis sample. In Missouri and Texas, the 2012 return rates for the households assigned to the benefit group in the POC year and for households assigned to the non-benefit group in the POC year were not significantly different. Therefore, in Missouri and Texas, the two-year benefit group was retained in the main analysis sample, and benefit group members were weighted to reflect the overabundance of these same cases from the POC year (this set plus POC-year non-benefit group members re-randomized into the benefit group) compared to non-benefit cases from the POC year. In Connecticut, the comparison of return rates is not meaningful because the grantee used a

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<sup>57</sup> In Michigan, 62.3% of the households identified by either the grantee or the evaluation team as receiving benefits in 2011 households consented in 2012, compared to 55.9% of the 2011 non-benefit households. In Oregon, 49.6% of 2011 benefit households consented in 2012, compared to 36.7% of non-benefit households.

passive consent process for the benefit group and an active consent process for the control group. Because of the difference in the consent process for the two groups, the POC year benefit group households could not be equivalent to the re-randomized Connecticut non-benefit households and so were without non-benefit counterparts in the demonstration year sample. They were therefore excluded from the sample prior to selecting the evaluation subsample. In sum, POC benefit households in two of the five sites (Missouri and Texas) will remain in the sample for impact analysis. Survey information for returning POC beneficiaries in all of the POC sites, with the exception of Connecticut, will be used for exploratory analysis about the impacts of receiving SEBTC for two summers in the evaluation report for the full implementation year.

### 5.2.6 Spring Weights

Sampling and non-response weights are applied in the analysis of the household survey data. The sample represents all consenting households (i.e., consenting households were used for random assignment to the benefit group and for the evaluation subsample).<sup>58</sup> The weights adjust for the two-phase sampling: initial sampling into the evaluation subsample and further subsampling into the group of households eligible for field location efforts. Weights also adjust for differences between the respondent sample and the full evaluation subsample on characteristics measured by variables in the sampling frame, which includes all consenting households in a site. The goal is to have the weighted respondent data reflect the mix of households in the demonstration. This objective is perfectly achieved by the sample selection weights but possibly not by the non-response weight adjustments, if respondents and non-respondents differ on characteristics related to survey answers but not included in the weight adjustments. (Because survey data were not available for non-respondents, they could not be included in weight adjustments.) Finally, the pooled analyses give each site the same weight in order to balance the demonstration evidence evenly across the different locations where the SEBTC benefit was tested in the full implementation year.<sup>59</sup> (Additional information on weighting can be found in Appendix 5D.)

### 5.2.7 Analysis Sample Size

Of the 42,309 households that were randomly selected, 27,589 completed the survey.<sup>60</sup> Of the households that completed the survey, 1,623 were excluded from the analysis sample. As described earlier, exclusions include households from Michigan (370) and Oregon (437) who received benefits for a second year were excluded, as were the 734 households in the Cherokee

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<sup>58</sup> In the passive consent sites, this is essentially the same as all eligible households.

<sup>59</sup> As noted earlier, the pooled analysis excludes the Cherokee Nation site entirely, giving it zero weight.

<sup>60</sup> There were 69 of these households that partially completed the survey, i.e., they completed the survey at least through the section on food security.

Nation site because of its low response rate. The remaining 82 households were excluded for various reasons.<sup>61</sup> The resulting analysis sample size for the spring survey is 25,966.

## 5.3 Household Characteristics

This section reports the baseline characteristics of households in the full implementation year, as measured by responses to the spring 2012 survey. These data are neither nationally representative nor necessarily representative of the population receiving FRP meals in each included State or local demonstration area. Findings for additional characteristics for both the total study population and for each site are provided in Appendix 5E.<sup>62</sup>

### 5.3.1. Household Size and Composition

Across the 13 sites included in the pooled analysis,<sup>63</sup> the mean number of people in the household—including adults and children of all ages (some of whom are too young to be eligible for the program)—was 4.4 (Exhibit 5.2). The mean number of people in the household ranged from 4.1 to 4.7. (See Appendix 5E for detailed site specific results for the characteristics reported in this chapter. For each characteristic, there is a statistically significant difference between sites.) Almost half of the households reported having more than one adult (47.6%), and almost half (48.7%) had one adult female. The remaining households (3.6%) had one adult male. Household adult composition varied across sites, with Missouri expansion sites reporting almost three-quarters (71.5%) of its households with one female adult, compared to less than 40% of households in Chickasaw Nation, Nevada, and the Oregon sites.

The mean number of children in households was 2.4. Again, this included children of all ages—those attending school and certified for FRP school meals, younger children who had not yet started school, and any other children living in the household.<sup>64</sup> The mean number of children

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<sup>61</sup>Exclusions included the following 52 households for which final sampling weights could not be calculated because sample data on household characteristics were missing (n=16) or households were not in the field long enough to be included in adjustments for non-response<sup>61</sup> (n=36); 22 households from a school district in which incorrect notification letters were sent; 7 households assigned to the control group that were later identified as members of a household assigned to the treatment group; and 1 household that opted out of the study after completing the spring survey.

<sup>62</sup> Appendix 5E provides site-level information for all 14 sites, including Cherokee Nation. However, Cherokee Nation was omitted from pooled analyses and tests of variation among in household characteristics, for reasons described previously. In Appendix 5E, for each household characteristic, the p-value is reported from an F-test assessing whether there was statistically significant variation in the household characteristic among the 13 sites in the pooled analysis sample, excluding Cherokee Nation.

<sup>63</sup> The pooled analysis omits Cherokee Nation for reasons described previously. Henceforth, the phrase “across all the sites,” will not include Cherokee Nation respondents. However, Appendix 5E does provide Cherokee Nation’s site level information.

<sup>64</sup> Children were defined as 18 years or younger or still in school (if older than age 18) and living with an adult in a household. Households also included group homes if children living in the home were certified for FRP school meals.

varied across sites and ranged from 2.2 in the Connecticut POC site to 2.6 in Nevada and the Oregon Expansion site.

### Exhibit 5.2. SEBTC Household Characteristics

Characteristics	Percent	SE
<b>Household Size<sup>a</sup></b>		
Mean number of people in household	4.4	0.01
<b>Household Composition<sup>a</sup></b>		
Household with one adult, female	48.7%	0.44
Household with one adult, male	3.6%	0.14
Household with more than one adult	47.6%	0.44
<b>Number of Children<sup>a</sup></b>		
1 child	23.6%	0.33
2 children	35.0%	0.41
3 or more children	41.5%	0.41
Mean Number of Children in Household	2.4	0.01
<b>Last Month Household Income<sup>a</sup></b>		
Median	\$1,399	20.74
Mean	\$1,608	10.22
No income (last month)	2.9%	0.12
<b>Last Month Household Income<sup>a</sup></b>		
Below poverty line <sup>b</sup>	71.5%	0.39
101–130% of poverty <sup>b</sup>	13.7%	0.30
131–185% of poverty <sup>b</sup>	10.8%	0.24
Above 185% of poverty <sup>b</sup>	4.0%	0.20
At Least One Employed Adult	71.4%	0.37
Any Person with a Physical or Mental Disability	31.1%	0.44

Source: SEBTC Spring Survey, 2012 (n=25,966).

Note: Findings are based on final spring weights and exclude the Cherokee Nation site.

<sup>a</sup>The respondent reported the household's characteristics and circumstances in the last 30 days (and last month for income). Means and medians include households with zero income.

<sup>b</sup>Poverty level was calculated based on reported household income last month before taxes, household size, and the HHS poverty guidelines (<http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/12poverty.shtml>). A small percentage of households provided annual income, which was used to calculate monthly income for the poverty distribution.

### 5.3.2. Household Income

Eligibility rules specifically limit participation in the SEBTC program to those eligible for FRP meals, i.e., at or below 185% of the federal poverty line (FPL), which, for a family of four is \$3,554 per month.<sup>65</sup> It would therefore be expected that the survey sample would be relatively disadvantaged. As expected, mean monthly household income is low; in the month prior to the survey it was \$1,608, with 2.9% reporting no income (Exhibit 5.3). Nearly three-fourths of the survey population (71.5%) had monthly incomes below the FPL (for their household size),

<sup>65</sup> The FPL is adjusted for household size. An FPL is calculated for the contiguous United States, Alaska, and Hawaii. The 2012 FPL for a family of four is \$23,050 per year (i.e., \$1,921 per month) in the 48 contiguous States. By comparison, 18.1% of families with children reported being under the poverty level nationally in 2011 (Census Bureau, 2012, <https://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/data/incpovhlth/2011/index.html>).

ranging from 61.3% of households in Washington to 82.8% of households in the Michigan POC site (See Appendix 5E).<sup>66</sup> The proportion of households with children below the poverty line in this study population is substantially greater than the 13% reported for the demonstration areas in general (See Exhibit 2.2) or the 56% reported nationally among children certified for FRP school meals in the 2005-06 school year (Ponza et al., 2007).

### 5.3.3 Other Household Characteristics

Most respondents had at least one employed adult in the household (71.4%). Texas and Chickasaw Nation reported the highest percentage of employed adults (78.2% and 77.5%, respectively), while the Missouri Expansion site reported the lowest (60.9%). About 31% of households reported that a household member had a physical or mental disability, and this varied across sites: 17.3% of households in Texas and 47.3% of households in the Michigan Expansion site (see Appendix 5E).

### 5.3.4. Characteristics of the Survey Respondent

Most of the spring survey respondents were female (89.5%) and nearly three-quarters were between the ages of 30 and 49 (71.9%) (Exhibit 5.3). There was some variation in the age of household respondents across sites: one-quarter of respondents in the Michigan POC site (25.0%) were between the ages of 18 and 29, while Delaware, Oregon, and Washington had 13.0%–14.0% of respondents in that age category. Chickasaw Nation, Delaware, and Texas had the highest percentage of respondents who were 50 years or older (13% or more); the Michigan POC site, the Oregon Expansion site, and Washington reported the smallest percentage in the older age categories (8.6%–8.8%). (See Appendix 5E for site-level details.)

In terms of race/ethnicity, the largest group identified themselves as non-Hispanic white (41.3%), with the next largest group being Hispanic (32.4%) (Exhibit 5.3). Delaware and the Michigan POC site were the most racially and ethnically diverse, with approximately one-third of respondents reporting being Hispanic, one-third identifying as non-Hispanic black, and more than one-quarter identifying as non-Hispanic white. Texas was the least racially diverse, with 95.3% of respondents reporting being Hispanic. Respondents in Missouri sites were predominantly non-Hispanic black (62.0%–79.2%). A sizeable percentage of respondents in Chickasaw Nation identified themselves as American Indian (15.3%).<sup>67</sup>

In terms of education attainment, the population was divided nearly evenly between those who had not completed high school (28.0%), those who had completed high school but had not gone on to college (31.9%), and those with some college (32.9%) (Exhibit 5.3). The Oregon Expansion site and the Michigan POC site had the highest percentage of respondents who had not completed high school (more than 38%).

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<sup>66</sup> The 4.0% of households that indicated incomes above 185% of FPL may be eligible for FRP meals because their incomes had gone up since eligibility was determined, they have experienced monthly variation in income, and/or they may count income differently than is done for FRP certification.

<sup>67</sup> In the Cherokee Nation site, 25.4% of respondents identified themselves as American Indian.

### Exhibit 5.3 Characteristics of SEBTC Respondents and Children Eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Meals

Characteristics	Percent	SE
<b>Gender</b>		
Female (Respondent)	89.5	0.26
Male (Respondent)	10.5	0.26
<b>Age of Respondent<sup>a</sup></b>		
18–29 years	17.0	0.35
30–39 years	44.5	0.43
40–49 years	27.4	0.42
50–59 years	8.7	0.24
60 years or older	2.3	0.11
<b>Race/Ethnicity of Respondent<sup>b</sup></b>		
Hispanic	32.4	0.39
Non-Hispanic black	18.9	0.29
Non-Hispanic white	41.3	0.46
American Indian or Alaska Native, non-Hispanic	2.3	0.12
Other, non-Hispanic	5.2	0.21
<b>Education Level of Respondent<sup>c</sup></b>		
Less than high school	28.0	0.39
Completed high school (or GED)	31.9	0.41
Some college (including two-year degree)	32.9	0.43
Four-year degree or higher	7.3	0.23
<b>Marital Status of Respondent</b>		
Married	38.5	0.44
Living with partner	9.1	0.23
Separated or divorced	25.1	0.36
Widowed	2.5	0.26
Never married	24.8	0.36
<b>Age of Children<sup>a</sup></b>		
3–4 years	3.9	0.21
5–8 years	30.3	0.48
9–12 years	30.6	0.49
13–15 years	20.1	0.41
16–17 years	10.8	0.31
>17 years	4.4	0.22

Source: SEBTC Spring Survey, 2012 (n=25,966).

Note: Findings are based on final spring weights and exclude the Cherokee Nation site.

<sup>a</sup>Age of respondents and children were calculated from date of birth and the date the survey was administered.

<sup>b</sup>Responses to the separate race and ethnicity questions were combined to create a race/ethnicity variable, according to OMB reporting rules (see [http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/fedreg\\_race-ethnicity](http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/fedreg_race-ethnicity)).

<sup>c</sup>Education level categories were condensed from the survey response categories to create those displayed.

About half the respondents were single (52.4%, including never married, separated or divorced, or widowed); the other half of the respondents were married or living with a partner (47.6%) (Exhibit 5.3). There was substantial variation across the sites: Chickasaw Nation, Nevada, and Oregon POC and Expansion sites had the highest proportion of respondents married or living with a partner (58.2%– 60.3%), and Missouri had the lowest (23.6% in the Expansion site and 35.1% in the POC site). (See Appendix 5E for site-level details.)

### 5.3.5 Characteristics of Children Certified for FRP Meals

Children in the sample certified for FRP meals were approximately equally distributed throughout school-age years; a small percentage were pre-school age. These younger children were enrolled in a school-based pre-school and received subsidized meals from NSLP or SBP or another source of support, and therefore were eligible for the SEBTC demonstration (Exhibit 5.3).

### 5.3.6 Participation in Nutrition Assistance Programs

This section describes participation in nutrition assistance programs—first household participation and then children’s participation. At baseline, nearly three-quarters of households (71.5%) reported participating in at least one federal or emergency nutrition assistance program in the 30 days prior to the interview (Exhibit 5.4). Respondents most commonly reported using SNAP (61.2%), followed by WIC (21.2%). Participation rates varied across sites, with the highest proportion of respondents reporting participation in SNAP in Oregon POC and Expansion sites and the Missouri expansion site (approximately 73%) and the highest percentage reporting participation in WIC in the Michigan POC and Oregon Expansion sites (30.1%). The Oregon POC and Expansion sites had the highest percentage of respondents who reported receiving food from a food pantry, food bank, soup kitchen, or emergency kitchen (approximately 28%) (see Appendix 5E).

For children, the highest program participation rates are in SBP and NSLP. This is not surprising given that eligibility for SEBTC was limited to children certified for FRP meals (Exhibit 5.4). Only 4.9% of respondents reported that their child did not participate in school meal programs,<sup>68</sup> after-school or snack programs, or a backpack program; almost all reported their child received FRP lunch (92.8%) and somewhat fewer reported receiving school breakfast (83.8%).<sup>69</sup> Of those reporting receiving meals from either program, 87.8% (SE, 0.33) said they received both SBP and NSLP (data not reported in Table 5.3). In addition, 8.8% reported receiving free supper at an afterschool program; 11.7% reported participation in an after school meal or snack program; 7.9% reported participation in a backpack food program. Nutrition-program use varied across sites. Households in both Missouri sites and the Michigan POC site reported the highest program participation in after school programs providing free supper (14.9%–17.0%) and in after school meal or snack programs (15.5%–18.5%). Participation in backpack food programs was highest in the Missouri POC site (23.8%).

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<sup>68</sup> Participation in the SFSP and other summer nutrition programs will be reported based on the summer interviews.

<sup>69</sup> Households with children certified for FRP school meals were eligible for the SEBTC, but it is possible that some children living in the household were not receiving or participating in FRP school meals for a number of reasons (for example, the child was home-schooled or dropped out of school). One child per household was selected to be the focal child for the child-level baseline survey questions.

## Exhibit 5.4. Reported Participation in Household and Child Nutrition Programs

Characteristics	Percent	SE
<b>Household Benefits<sup>a</sup></b>		
Reported receiving SNAP <sup>b</sup>	61.2	0.42
Reported receiving WIC <sup>c</sup>	21.2	0.33
Reported receiving food from food pantry/food bank/soup kitchen/emergency kitchen	18.6	0.33
No reported food assistance benefits	28.5	0.39
<b>Children's Benefits<sup>a</sup></b>		
Reported receiving free or reduced-price lunch	92.8	0.29
Reported receiving free or reduced-price breakfast	83.8	0.39
Reported receiving free supper at after school program	8.8	0.27
Reported receiving after school meal or snack program	11.7	0.30
Reported receiving backpack food program	7.9	0.39
No reported food assistance benefits	4.9	0.26

Source: SEBTC Spring Survey, 2012 (n=25,966).

Note: Findings above are based on final spring weights and exclude the Cherokee Nation site. Proportions for household benefits are based on household weights and proportions for children's benefits are based on child-level weights.

<sup>a</sup>The respondent reported if anyone in the household or if the focal child received food assistance from any of the programs in the last 30 days.

<sup>b</sup>Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

<sup>c</sup>Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children

### 5.3.7. Food Security

Food security, defined in Chapter 1, is assessed for both the adults and the children living in the household as well as the full household. Reducing the most severe level of food insecurity among children, VLFS-C, is the key objective of the SEBTC demonstration, and establishing whether that result was achieved is the main goal of the SEBTC impact study.

At SEBTC baseline, more than half the households in the sample (59.4%)<sup>70</sup> reported food insecurity among adults, children, or both. The majority of food insecure households experienced food insecurity among children, and 9.0% of all SEBTC households experienced VLFS-C, which ranged from 3.8% in the Michigan Expansion site to 12.9% in Nevada (Appendix 5E). Low food security among children ranged from 30.6% of households in Texas to 47.7% of households in the Oregon Expansion site (Appendix 5E).

Exhibit 5.5 shows the food security status of the households in the sample. The prevalence of household food insecurity among the SEBTC evaluation sample is considerably higher than

<sup>70</sup> This study uses a method of coding food security status called the adult/child cross-tabulation approach, which differs slightly from that in USDA reports using the CPS data. The adult/child cross-tabulation approach, which has been under development at USDA as a means of eliminating a misclassification that affects a small number of cases, has been recommended by USDA for the current study. The new approach does not affect the number of households classified as VLFS-C, but does slightly alter the total number of households classified as food insecure. In the present analysis, applying the scoring method normally used in the CPS would classify 63.2% of SEBTC households as food insecure, compared to the 59.4% reported in Exhibit 5.5, which is based on the adult/child cross-tabulation approach.

recently reported national estimates for households with children and incomes below 185% poverty (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2012). The baseline estimates for the 13 sites participating in the full demonstration year are also higher this year than baseline estimates for the five sites in the POC year (Briefel et al., 2011). However, in two of the sites (Connecticut and Oregon) the exact demonstration area covered by the sites changed. Exhibit 5.6 gives the prevalence estimates for consistently defined sites. Overall, there is an increase in VLFS-C.<sup>71</sup>

### Exhibit 5.5. Food Security in SEBTC Households

Characteristics	Percent	SE	95% CI
Food Secure Households <sup>a</sup>	40.6	0.44	39.7 - 41.5
Food Insecure Households (Adults or Children or Both Insecure) <sup>a</sup>	59.4	0.44	58.5 - 60.3
Food insecurity among adults only	14.4	0.31	13.8 - 15.0
Food insecurity among children	45.0	0.44	44.1 - 45.9
Low food security among children	36.1	0.43	35.2 - 37.0
Very low food security among children	9.0	0.22	8.6 - 9.4

Source: SEBTC Spring Survey, 2012 (n=25,966).

Note: Findings above are based on final spring weights and exclude the Cherokee Nation site.

<sup>a</sup>Food security was assessed using the USDA 18-item food security instrument and a cross-tabulation of adult and child food security status.

### Exhibit 5.6. Very Low Food Security Among Children in SEBTC Households in POC Sites, in 2011 and 2012

Grantee	POC 2011 Percent	POC 2012 Percent	Change
Connecticut	4.7	8.3	3.7
Michigan	8.7	8.2	-0.5
Missouri	7.4	9.4	2.0
Oregon	7.5	9.6	2.1
Texas	8.4	9.5	1.1
Overall	7.3	9.0	1.7

Source: SEBTC, 2011 Spring Survey (n=5,830) and 2012 Spring Survey (n=9,239).

Note: Findings above are based on final spring weights for 2011 and final spring weights for POC sites in 2012. Food security was assessed using the USDA 18-item food security instrument and a cross-tabulation of adult and child food security status.

Exhibit 5.7 compares the baseline SEBTC prevalence estimates to those from the 2009 CPS, also based on the 30-day measure. There are two main findings. First, in both studies the prevalence of food insecurity and VLFS is much higher for adults than for children, indicating that adults reduce or cut their food intake to minimize the effects of food shortages on the children in the family. Second, the proportion of households experiencing food insecurity or very low food security among children was nearly three times as high in the SEBTC sites compared to national estimates for families reporting SNAP benefits or families with incomes below 130% FPL. These

<sup>71</sup> Computation of the standard error is complicated because some households are in the sample in both years, while other households are in the sample only in the first year or only in the second year. The appropriate standard error was computed considering the correlation in observations for households in the sample in both years.

differences may reflect the fact that CPS is a nationally representative sample of U.S. households; the SEBTC demonstration is operating in chosen communities that grantees determined to need such a program.

**Exhibit 5.7. Prevalence Rates of Food Insecurity and Very Low Food Security in the SEBTC Spring Survey and in a Low-income Population in the 2009 CPS**

Survey and Sample	Adults		Children	
	Food Insecure	VLFS	Food Insecure	VLFS
SEBTC Spring Survey, 2012 <sup>a</sup>	53.8	25.4	45.0	9.0
SEBTC Spring Survey, 2011 <sup>b</sup>	53.4	23.7	42.9	7.3
CPS-FSS households with school-age children and annual incomes less than 130% of the FPL; 30-day measures of food security	25.9	10.3	16.6	2.6
CPS-FSS households with school-age children who received SNAP at some time during the year; 30-day measures of food security	28.3	10.9	17.6	2.5

Source: SEBTC Spring Survey, 2012 (n=25,966), SEBTC Spring Survey, 2011 (n=5,830), and Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement data for 2009 (Nord 2009, 2011).

<sup>a</sup>Based on data from 10 grantees and 13 sites.

<sup>b</sup>Based on data from five grantees and five sites.

**5.3.8. Weekly Food Expenditures**

Respondents were asked to report the amount of money they spent out-of-pocket on food in the last 30 days—excluding purchases made with government benefits like SNAP or WIC—at various food outlets. Food outlets included supermarkets and grocery stores (e.g., Walmart, Target, and Kmart), other types of stores (e.g., convenience stores, food clubs, bakeries, mini markets, farmers’ markets, vegetable stands, and meat markets), and restaurants (fast food and other types) (Exhibit 5.8). Weekly out-of-pocket expenditures were higher for food purchased from supermarkets, grocery stores, and other types of stores than for restaurants. The median expenditure for foods purchased at food outlets other than restaurants (presumably for “at-home” food consumption) was \$46.70. Median weekly food expenditures at restaurants (\$6.90) averaged about 15% of the expenditures at grocery stores. (See Exhibit 5.8).

Counting out-of-pocket food expenditures from all food outlets, including fast food restaurants and other eateries, the median weekly out-of-pocket food expenditure for a household was \$60. Median weekly out-of-pocket household food expenditures range from \$82 in Chickasaw Nation to \$47 in the Missouri Expansion site (see Appendix 5E). Across all site, the median weekly food expenditure was approximately \$15 per person. Nationwide, households with incomes at or below 185% FPL had a median weekly food expenditure of \$37 per person based on data from the 2011 CPS (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2012).

### Exhibit 5.8. Weekly Out-of-Pocket Food Expenditures, by Food Outlet, Total Expenditures, and Per-Person Expenditures

Characteristics	\$ per Week <sup>a</sup>	SE
<b>Supermarkets/Grocery Stores<sup>b</sup></b>		
Mean	62.60	0.47
Median	46.70	0.85
<b>Restaurants<sup>b</sup></b>		
Mean	11.50	0.14
Median	6.90	0.25
<b>Total Out-of-Pocket Food Expenditures<sup>c</sup></b>		
Mean	74.10	0.54
Median	60.00	0.85
<b>Total Per-Person Food Expenditures<sup>c,d</sup></b>		
Mean	18.30	0.13
Median	15.30	0.15

Source: SEBTC Spring Survey, 2012 (n=25,966).

Note: Findings are based on final spring weights and exclude the Cherokee Nation site.

<sup>a</sup>Expenditures were calculated for food purchases only. The respondent reported weekly purchases in the last 30 days at various types of stores and restaurants and then non-food expenditure was calculated to obtain weekly expenditures on food items only.

<sup>b</sup>Values reflect all respondents who reported for the subcategory.

<sup>c</sup>Total food expenditures exclude respondents who were missing data for either of the two subcategories shown.

<sup>d</sup>Per-person expenditures are the total out-of-pocket food expenditures divided by the number of people who live together in the household and share food.

In addition to out-of-pocket expenditures, the SNAP benefit provides an important source of money for food. The median SNAP benefit amount was \$46.40 per week (Exhibit 5.9). The median SNAP benefit amount varied across sites—with a high of \$69.80 per week in the Missouri Expansion site to \$0 per week in Chickasaw Nation and Nevada. Notably, variation in out-of-pocket food expenditures corresponded to variation in the SNAP benefit amount; households in sites with high SNAP benefit amounts tended to have lower out-of-pocket expenditures, and households in sites with low SNAP benefit amounts tend to have higher-out-of-pocket expenditures. The median total weekly food expenditure—including both out-of-pocket expenditures and SNAP benefit amount—was \$120.00 per household, or \$30.30 per person. Median total weekly food expenditure for households ranged from \$111.90 in Texas to \$130.60 in the Oregon Expansion site.

### Exhibit 5.9. Weekly SNAP Benefit Amount, Out-of-Pocket Food Expenditures, and Total Food Expenditures

Characteristics	\$ per Week	SE
<b>Weekly SNAP Benefit Amount<sup>a</sup></b>		
Mean	54.70	0.54
Median	46.40	0.87
<b>Weekly Out-of-Pocket Food Expenditures</b>		
Mean	74.10	0.54
Median	60.00	0.85
<b>Total Weekly Food Expenditures<sup>b</sup></b>		
Mean	129.20	0.55
Median	120.00	0.65
<b>Total Per-Person Weekly Food Expenditures<sup>b,c</sup></b>		
Mean	32.00	0.14
Median	30.30	0.18

Source: SEBTC Spring Survey, 2012 (n=25,966).

Note: Findings are based on final spring weights and exclude the Cherokee Nation site.

<sup>a</sup>There were 39% of respondents who reported not receiving SNAP; for these respondents, a SNAP benefit amount of \$0 was included in calculations of the mean and median weekly SNAP benefit amount.

<sup>b</sup>Total weekly food expenditures are the sum of out-of-pocket food expenditures and the SNAP benefit amount.

<sup>c</sup>Per-person expenditures are the total weekly food expenditures divided by the number of people who live together in the household and share food.

## 5.4 Summary

Not surprisingly, households participating in the SEBTC demonstration were economically disadvantaged and reported relatively high use of nutrition assistance programs. Nearly three-quarters of households were below the FPL and, in addition to FRP meals, most participated in one or more nutrition assistance programs, including SNAP and WIC. In addition, 19% of households reported food pantry or emergency kitchen use in the month prior to their interview. In addition to high participation in FRP school meals, 12% of children were reported to have received benefits from an after school or child care program, and 8% from a backpack program. Furthermore, households reported a relatively high rate of food insecurity at baseline. Six of 10 households (59.4%) in the SEBTC evaluation subsample experienced food insecurity and most of those households had food insecure children. Overall, 38 to 60% of households had food insecure children and 4 to 13% experienced VLFS-C.

Counting out-of-pocket food expenditures from food outlets, fast food restaurants and other eateries, the median weekly food expenditure was \$60, averaging a weekly food expenditure of \$15 per person. Including the SNAP benefit amount, the median total weekly food expenditure was \$120 per week with a median total weekly expenditure of \$30 per person. In 2011, the national value for low-income households at or below 185% of FPL was \$37 per person (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2012). Future reports will assess the changes in food security between the school year and the summer, and also compare the summer food consumption of children based on their receipt of the SNAP or WIC summer benefit.

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## Chapter 6

# Summary of Project Accomplishments

FNS planned the SEBTC demonstration for two phases: a POC phase in 2011 and a full implementation phase in 2012. The POC phase tested the following two facets of the SEBTC approach vital to the long-term success of the policy and its evaluation:

- Whether SEBTC could be implemented successfully by the State and local grantees entrusted with its actuation
- Whether the initial evaluation, targeting 5,000 households, could be done with fidelity, enabling a robust evaluation targeting 27,000 households in the full implementation year

The POC test achieved both of these goals and provided lessons for the full implementation in 2012. Some of the returning grantees tried new approaches in 2012 based on their first year of experience, and four of five POC sites had expansion sites. A total of nine new SEBTC sites were brought on board in 2012.

The evaluation team used the POC experience to develop additional materials and guidance to help grantees with obtaining consent and creating household lists for random assignment. The POC year also informed the evaluation team's revisions to the instruments and data collection strategies for the second year of the evaluation. Decisions were made to help improve the quality of contact information, particularly in active consent sites, shorten the length of the spring survey, and maximize in-house and field locating to increase survey response rates for the impact study. The implementation study interview protocols were also streamlined to focus on the most important themes that emerged in the POC year. This chapter summarizes the results of the SEBTC demonstrations through midsummer 2012, identifies emerging issues to be more fully addressed in the impact analysis, and describes upcoming evaluation plans.

## 6.1. Summary of Results for SEBTC Demonstrations to Date

### 6.1.1. Implementation of SEBTC

As often happens in early years of a program, grantees encountered unanticipated difficulties, including identifying eligible households, obtaining consent, delivering SEBTC benefits to selected households, improving participation rates of households selected to receive SEBTC, working in short time frames with limited resources, and collaborating with new partners. The grantees devised strategies to move past these issues. The results from both the POC and the full implementation year indicate that SEBTC is feasible, although a grantee's choice of active or passive consent, the number of SFAs involved, and available resources are associated with the level of success in identifying eligible children and issuing benefits before the end of the school year.

In the first year of the demonstration, the grantees and their partners implemented a new initiative, requiring efforts to set up and operate a variety of administrative processes for the first time. Grantees needed to identify the households eligible for the demonstration and inform them of the SEBTC benefit. From there, they had to gain households' consent to take part in a random assignment evaluation. These first steps were not simple; for instance, grantees needed to communicate effectively to households the parameters of a new benefit and its EBT technology and, given random assignment, also communicate the fact that there was no guarantee that households would receive the SEBTC benefit even if they consented. Next, grantees had to modify SNAP and WIC EBT procedures and systems to equip them to issue SEBTC benefits. Because SEBTC is issued according to NSLP program rules and practices, those modifications had to resolve differences between NSLP and either SNAP or WIC policies and practices. Just as importantly, because SEBTC derives its funds from sources independent from SNAP or WIC, fully separate and transparent lines of accounting had to be maintained even if States included SEBTC and SNAP benefits on the same benefit cards. Grantees and their partners then had to take the practical steps needed to issue new EBT cards or load benefits onto existing cards for households representing the target number of children in each site (2,500 in 2011 and up to 5,300 in 2012). Because this was the first or second time that SEBTC benefits were issued, the process often involved much manual effort that perhaps would be automated if the program were adopted on a permanent basis.

Grantees had to achieve these results in an extremely short time frame. Grant awards were announced in December and benefits had to be issued five to six months later, depending on the length of the school years of participating SFAs. In both study years, grantees were confronted with an extremely fast time line and many also faced State budget crises and staff/resource constraints. Some of these difficulties might not be issues if SEBTC were more broadly implemented on an ongoing basis, i.e., grantees would have early experiences to build on for later years.

Returning grantees tried to implement new approaches in an effort to increase efficiencies and reduce burden, but these efforts met with mixed success.<sup>72</sup> Examples of changes made by POC grantees in 2012 include: Oregon asked SFAs to take on more of the consent process; Connecticut did not require the mailing of a second consent letter (as it did in 2011); and Missouri tried to automate matching consenting households to their SNAP management information system.

#### Identifying Eligible Children and Obtaining Consent

One of the greatest challenges faced by grantees was the creation of accurate lists of eligible households, and—from that—accurate lists of households consenting to take part in the demonstration. The quality of the data available in school systems and, in some cases, grantees'

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<sup>72</sup> The process study includes conference calls with grantees to be conducted in October 2012. At that time, grantees will be asked to reflect on their experiences in 2012 and offer suggestions for how the implementation process could be improved in the future.

own data-entry practices, created challenges in working toward these goals. The quality of data, the degree of variation in how data are kept by SFAs, and coordination with SFAs challenged many grantees, especially those with many SFAs. The time needed in the active consent sites to increase consent rates and in passive sites to resolve data quality issues caused delays in the consent and random assignment process, shortening the time available to get SEBTC benefits to families selected for the demonstration.

In 2012, household consent rates ranged from 93% to 97% in sites using passive consent and from 23% to 57% in sites employing active consent. Some of the returning sites struggled with the same consent issues in the second year they encountered in 2011. The consent rates for one of the three active consent POC sites were the same or higher in 2012, and lower for the other two sites, suggesting that participating in the POC year was not a guarantee to reaching target numbers in the second year of the demonstration. Further, there is evidence from the POC sites that not all those who received benefits in 2011, consented to receive them again in 2012—only 50% to 85% of households receiving benefits in 2011 consented in 2012. This may be due to lack of understanding that they needed to give their consent again.

#### Benefits Issued and Redemption Rates

Despite glitches, all the sites in both years got EBT cards to a substantial number of eligible households before the end of the school year, and many sites issued benefits to all selected households. In the POC year, five State grantees collectively administered SEBTC to nearly 7,000 households, with some 12,500 children, the target number initially specified by FNS when it awarded the 2011 grants. In 2012, more than 37,000 households with nearly 65,000 children were assigned SEBTC benefits. However, only nine of the 14 sites were able to obtain consent from enough households to enable them to provide benefits to all of the 5,300 children who could potentially receive SEBTC benefits during the summer. The five sites that did not achieve their consent targets provided benefits to between 2,500 to 4,300 children.

Analysis of EBT data indicates distinct patterns of usage. Data suggest that eligible families with a desire to take advantage of a SEBTC-type benefit (as represented by those using the EBT card at least once) likely will use most or all of the benefit offered to them in an ongoing program. In the first issuance cycle of 2011, the majority of households (83%) used the SEBTC benefits at least once and 73% of households used 75% or more of the benefits issued to them. In the first cycle of benefits for 2012, the average household participation rate across all sites was 75%. Although the rates appear lower in 2012 than in 2011, the first issuance cycles in 2012 were generally shorter than those in 2011 and the proportion of WIC model sites increased, so conclusions must wait for upcoming analysis on the full summer benefit redemption rates.

Despite relatively high overall redemption rates, rates varied substantially depending on the type of model used. Sites using the SNAP-hybrid model had the highest participation rates among households, followed by sites using the SNAP model. The WIC model sites had the lowest rates. In the first issuance cycle of 2011, there was more than a 12 percentage point difference in participation rates between the SNAP-hybrid and WIC model sites. The first issuance cycle for 2012 also shows generally higher rates for SNAP model sites (43% to 84%)

than for WIC model sites (49% to 74%) but substantial variation overall.<sup>73</sup> These findings are reasonable because SNAP tends to be less complicated for families to use and allows more food options. In addition, in the SNAP-hybrid sites, the SEBTC benefits are exhausted before the monthly SNAP allotment, so current SNAP households are using SEBTC as they normally access their SNAP benefits.

### Demonstration Costs

Cost data for the 2012 demonstration year was not available for this report. In 2011, the five POC grantees experienced a wide range of start-up and administrative costs. Start-up costs included modifying computer systems and databases to interface with each other and developing consent and outreach materials including logos and card designs. Administrative costs accounted for 54% of total costs on average in 2011, a much higher percentage than for ongoing federal nutrition assistance programs such as SNAP and WIC. Administrative costs for ongoing programs do not include start-up costs and may be unrelated to the number of beneficiaries so that per-person start-up costs can also be misleading. Cost data for the POC sites in the full implementation year may make it possible to assess the magnitude of startup costs, as well as better gauge the costs of scaling up the program to serve at least twice as many households per site. Data from the new sites will help provide a better sense of the range of startup costs, which are higher than costs for an ongoing program.

#### 6.1.2 Impact of SEBTC

The impact analysis relies on a random assignment design, considered the gold standard for estimating the impacts of programs and policies—i.e., for determining in this case how much difference the SEBTC benefit makes to child and household outcomes compared to a control group that represents what those outcomes would have been absent SEBTC. All evidence indicates that random assignment was implemented with fidelity in both years of the demonstration. In the 2011 POC year, impact analysis provided evidence that SEBTC achieved its main objective, reducing VLFS-C. The evaluation also produced suggestive evidence of other favorable effects on broader food security measures and on two of six indicators of the nutritional status of children (based on POC findings).

For the 2011 POC analysis, the evaluation team interviewed more than 5,000 households before the 2010-2011 school year ended and again in the summer of 2011.<sup>74</sup> The impact analysis in the POC year provides evidence that SEBTC reduced VLFS-C from 7.0% to 5.6% during the summer of 2011 for the five POC sites combined. Further, analysis of related measures of food security among children as well as measures of adult and household food

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<sup>73</sup> The variable number of days in the first issuance cycle is one factor that makes valid comparisons between 2011 and 2012 for POC sites difficult. More meaningful comparisons can be made using redemption rates for the full summer benefit.

<sup>74</sup> Two major factors influenced the evaluation's spring survey efforts: the length of the data collection period and the quality of household contact information. The weighted response rate for the 2011 spring survey was 68% and for the 2012 spring survey, with five times the sample size, 73%.

security, reinforce the evidence that SEBTC helped some households avoid food insecurity for their children and other members. All food security results are based on robust analysis of the main outcome, VLFS-C, using the sample of all households in the POC sites. Further analysis showed that food insecurity improved in four of the five POC sites for one or more of the six measures of food insecurity examined. However, to put the POC impact into perspective, it is useful to consider national prevalence rates. In all five sites in 2011, VLFS-C among the treatment group was more than twice as large as corresponding national estimates (5.6% compared to 2.1%). Therefore, while SEBTC demonstrated a significant impact, VLFS-C among the treatment group was more than twice as large as corresponding national estimates.

The impact study for 2012 includes 14 sites and an evaluation subsample of approximately 27,000 households, allowing more robust examination of variation in VLFS-C and food insecurity across sites and demographic groups. If results from the full implementation year are, on average, consistent with these POC year results and do not vary much across sites and demographic groups, then it may be plausible to extrapolate the results to similar communities or areas of high need. In addition to providing estimates of the impact of SEBTC, the study provides a current look at the food security levels of selected high-need communities in the U.S. For the five sites during the 2011 POC year, the study population had a VLFS-C rate of 7.3% during the spring, before the school year ended. The 2012 year spring estimate was 9.0% for the full implementation year based on more than 26,000 interviews across 13 sites.<sup>75</sup> The lack of food security data at the national, State, or local levels based on the standard USDA 30-day measure data makes it difficult to compare SEBTC data to other studies of low-income households with children. The study population in 2012, much as in the POC year, is economically disadvantaged. About three-fourths of the households surveyed reported income below the poverty line across 13 sites.<sup>76</sup> More than two-thirds were already receiving SNAP or WIC in addition to FRP school meals. Some were also using food pantries, emergency food, and/or backpack programs to supplement their food availability. The level of economic hardship and resource constraints found in the full implementation sites is high and may contribute to the baseline rates of VLFS-C.<sup>77</sup>

Monthly estimates of VLFS-C are generally lower than annual estimates because many low-income families that experience food insecurity have periodic or short-term problems rather than problems in most or every month of the year (Economic Research Service, 2012b). The level and consistency of observed monthly VLFS-C estimates in the SEBTC study participants

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<sup>75</sup> Survey data for the 14th site, Cherokee Nation, indicate similar levels of constrained resources among households that were interviewed. The summer response rate for Cherokee Nation will permit the inclusion of data from this site in the 2012 impact analysis.

<sup>76</sup> Pooled results exclude Cherokee Nation due to a low response rate for the 2012 spring survey.

<sup>77</sup> Expectations for 30-day prevalence estimates were based on national annual statistics for low-income populations because data are limited or not available for local areas. By definition and the number of instances needed to document a problem, the 30-day estimates are lower than 12-month estimates. Further, reports of three or more days (out of 30 days) could occur on weekends rather than weekdays when children receive FRP meals, or at the end of the month when SNAP benefits run out or low.

suggest that circumstances related to food insecurity may be more chronic, or occur in several or more months of the year. Other factors contributing to high rates of food insecurity in local areas include unemployment, low wage rates, rising fuel costs, high housing and transportation costs, and higher food costs related to the 2012 drought (Bartfeld et al., 2010; Nord, 2009; Webber et al., 2010).

For the 2011 POC sites, the estimates of changes in VLFS-C and other measures of household food security for the control group between spring and summer 2011 provide important context as to how limited availability of federally sponsored children's nutrition programs could affect VLFS-C, as well as the broader measure of food insecurity among children, (i.e., both VLFS-C and LFS-C). The study found that the level of VLFS-C in the control group remained steady between spring and summer, even though most children in this group did not receive either SFSP or FRP meals in summer school. (Food insecurity among children improved slightly between spring and summer, from 43% in the spring to 39% in the summer.) This finding is surprising, given the logical assumption that children would experience more food insecurity in the summer, when school-based nutrition programs are limited. However, the research base on seasonal differences in food security among school-age children is scant. Further, research indicates that, in general, adults do whatever they can to protect the food security of their children (Nord, 2009; Institute of Medicine, 2011), so parents, lacking access to school-based nutrition programs, may make different tradeoffs during the summer than during the school year to ensure their children do not go hungry. In addition, there is little information about how the food security instrument works when used as a repeated measure for the same households; repeated administration in a short time frame may affect responses. In 2012, with a larger sample size, it may be possible to develop a better understanding of spring and summer differences in food security among households with children.

## 6.2. Upcoming Evaluation Activities

The second wave of household data collected in summer 2012 from more than 27,000 households will serve as the basis for the impact analysis for the full implementation year. The evaluation study will also collect EBT data, cost data, and additional process data through fall 2012 to reflect the full implementation period. These data sources will be used for the evaluation report for the full implementation year planned for spring 2013. The upcoming analysis of the EBT data will use transaction data for the full benefit period in 2012 from six sites using the WIC model and nine sites using the SNAP or SNAP-hybrid model. This analysis will provide an opportunity to learn more about patterns of redemption and how they relate to implementation practices and other site and population characteristics in a much larger sample than was possible in the POC year.

The findings of the POC year are encouraging regarding the feasibility of the SEBTC approach and its potential effect on reducing VLFS-C in the summer months. Expansions to larger samples and more grantee sites in the full implementation year (2012) allow the research team to address the research questions more thoroughly and further equip FNS to make data-informed decisions about additional implementation plans for summer food benefits for children. In

particular, the larger samples in the full implementation year provide an opportunity to see if the first-year findings are supported in a broader application of the SEBTC approach. In addition, the data will allow for more conclusive analysis of impacts on subpopulations of participating households and for testing ancillary hypotheses concerning the origins of any overall impact findings that emerge.

Finally, a comprehensive report synthesizing findings from the first two years of the SEBTC evaluation is planned for summer 2013. Journal articles and presentations to policy and other target audiences are also planned.

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