

# Universal Free School Meals: Examining Factors Influencing Adoption of Community Eligibility Provision

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## WHY FOCUS ON SCHOOL MEALS?

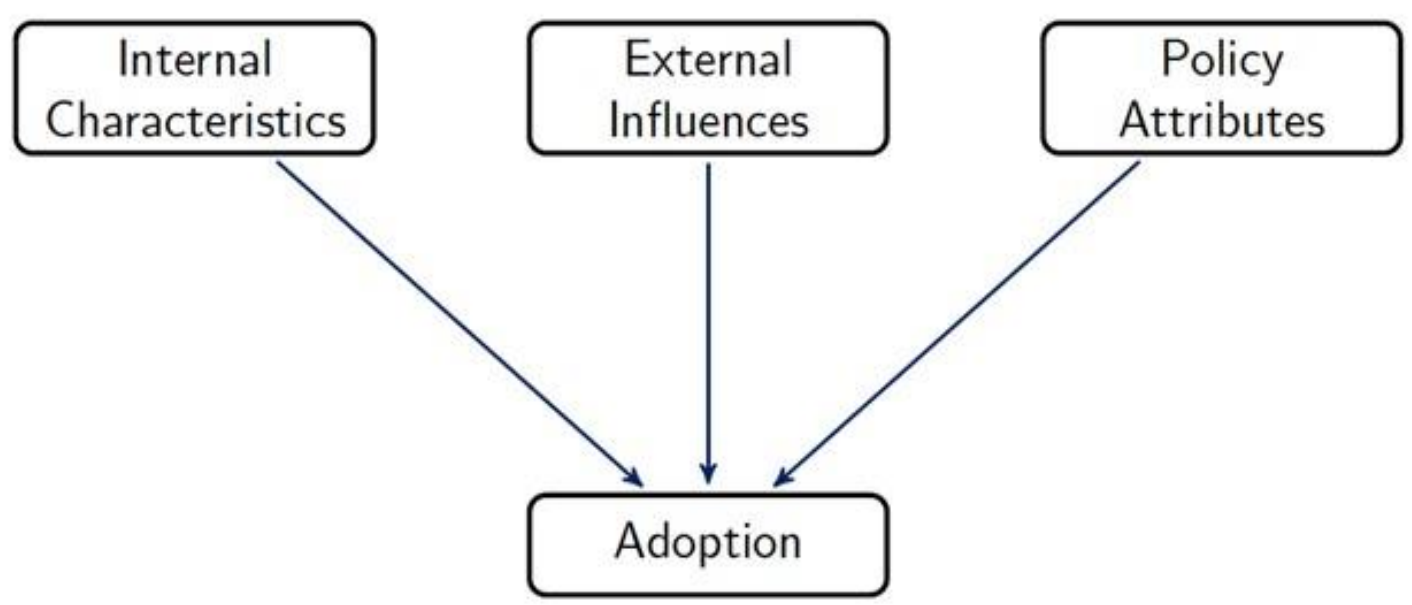
- High food insecurity in households with children in the United States - 13.6% in 2019
- The National School Lunch Program provided free or reduced-price lunches to about 30 million children each school day in school year 2018-19 = Important Nutrition Safety Net.
- **Many eligible low-income children do not participate.**
- Universal free meals at schools – to address the barriers of school meal programs leading to increase in meal participation (Hecht et al., 2020).

## COMMUNITY ELIGIBILITY PROVISION (CEP)

- Enables high-poverty school districts to offer free meals to all students.
- Studies show higher meal participation, lower stigma of school meals, and lower burden for schools after adopting CEP (Pokorney et al., 2019).
- Identified Student Percentage (representing school poverty level) determines eligibility that is determined by direct certification that is largely done by matching Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) eligibility data.
- **ISSUE: In 2018-19 - 46.2% eligible school districts did not adopt CEP (FRAC, 2019).**

## RESEARCH QUESTION: What are the factors associated with adoption of CEP by school districts in the U.S.?

### THEORY: POLICY DIFFUSION

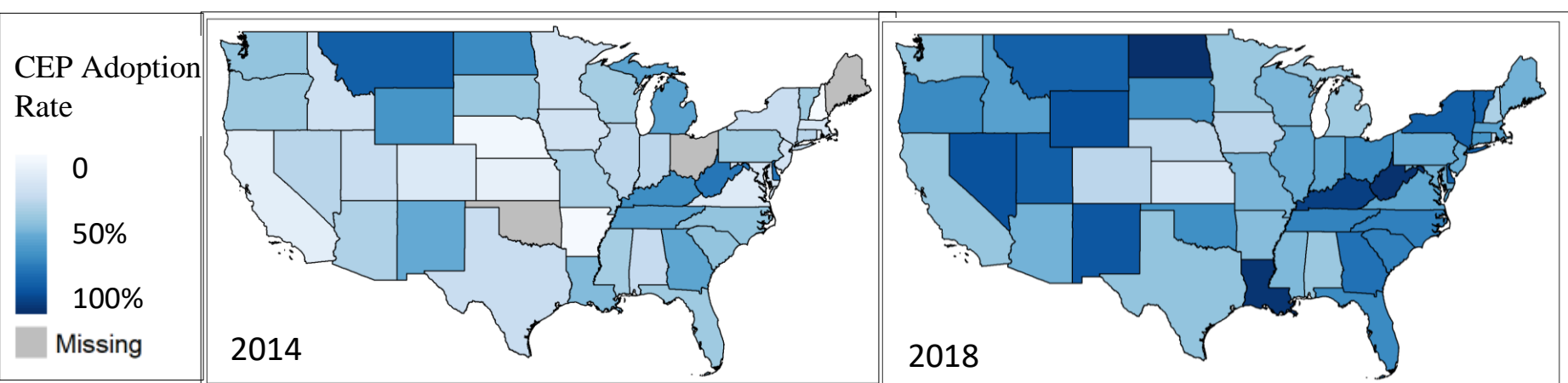


### EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS: COX PROPORTIONAL HAZARDS MODEL

$\lambda(adopt) = \lambda_0(t) \exp(X^T \beta)$  : Models the factors (X) that affect likelihood of adoption of CEP in year t.  
 X = state's direct certification rate, school identified student percentage, school food characteristics

## RESULTS AND MAIN TAKEAWAYS

- Likelihood of adoption increases with Identified Student Percentage (ISP) – federal policy implications – set by federal policies.
- Bills that propose changes to ISP : Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act (due since 2015), Expanding Access to School Meals Act (H.R.3113)
- Higher adoption in states with higher direct certification rate – state policy implications – determined by state agencies.
- Use of SNAP for direct certification can be inefficient and states are testing out the use of Medicaid instead which has shown better outcomes.



Research Cited :  
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 - Pokorney, P. E., Chandran, A., & Long, M. W. (2019). Impact of the community eligibility provision on meal counts and participation in Pennsylvania and Maryland national school lunch programs. Public health nutrition, 22(17), 3281-3287.

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