

MEMO

FROM: Jennifer Okes, District Operations Special Advisor

RE: Suspension of Census Block Data Collection

DATE: May 7, 2026

Background

The Census Block Data Collection was created by [HB22-1202](#) to explore a potential new way of measuring at-risk students for the school finance formula. Both [SB23-287](#) and [SB24-188](#) extended implementation of the new data collection. The Census Block Data was submitted by districts in the 2024-25 and 2025-26 school years. [HB25-1320](#) gave the State Board of Education the authority to adopt rules to suspend and restart the Census Block Data Collection. In August 2025, the State Board adopted updated [rules](#):

15.01 The Department of Education shall suspend the collection of data pursuant to section 22-54-104.6(1.5), C.R.S., if the Department determines that the data indicates that the student population identified through the census block data collection is substantially similar to the at-risk student population identified through Rule 6.01 and 6.02.

15.01(1) The Department shall consider census block data collection rates and administrative burden when making the determination whether to suspend the data collection.

15.02 The Department of Education shall re-start the census block data collection after suspension of this data collection if the Department determines the at-risk student population identified through Rule 6.01 and 6.02 no longer provides a reasonable measure for identifying students who are at-risk of below-average academic performance because of socioeconomic disadvantages or poverty.

Analysis

Student Populations Identified Through Census Block and Free and Reduced-Price Lunch

Because the purpose of the measure is to reliably identify students who are at-risk, limitations in data completeness and accuracy are relevant to assessing whether the resulting population is meaningfully comparable.

The Census Block Data was submitted by districts in the 2024-25 and 2025-26 school years had significant limitations in data completeness. In the most recent submission, districts obtained data for approximately 94% of students. However, about one-third of districts could not obtain census block data for over 25% of their students. The lack of census block data was a significant issue for districts with less than 3500 students. These small districts only obtained census block data for 28% of their students. These results are similar with those in the prior year and the results of the pilot project.

As outlined in the pilot project [report released in March 2024](#), data abnormalities were identified in the census block data as compared to the at-risk student population. Some districts saw sharp increases in at-risk student identified through the census block data; others saw surprising decreases. The driving force of these differences was not apparent; however, these results do highlight troubling unresolved issues with the census block data. It is possible that the data anomalies in the census block data were driven, in part, by the variability in the underlying data collected from rural areas and skewed data in some areas of the state such as those with concentrations of college students.



While there are significant concerns with the completeness and accuracy of the census block data, district Free- and Reduced-Price Lunch (FRL) counts continue to be a useful and meaningful indicator for calculating at-risk students in Colorado.

The following table shows FRL rates over time. A small drop occurred during the pandemic. Subsequently, FRL rates increased with the addition of Medicaid eligible students and have remained stable.



Research from the U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences National Center for Education Statistics has shown a negative correlation between eligibility for NSLP and academic success (Parker & Griffiths, 2016). As a result of this relationship between FRL eligibility and academic achievement, district FRL counts have been a useful and meaningful indicator for calculating At-Risk numbers in Colorado. Further, the stability of FRL counts demonstrates the continued usefulness of this data. As such, the Department determines the at-risk student population continues to provide a reasonable measure for identifying students who are at-risk of below-average academic performance because of socioeconomic disadvantages or poverty.

Census Block Data Collection Rates and Administrative Burden

The Census Block Data Collection is extremely burdensome and challenging for districts, especially rural and small rural districts.

Conclusion

The question is not only whether the Census Block and At-Risk data collections produce similar results, but whether the available data is sufficiently complete and reliable to make that determination with confidence. As outlined above, the Census Block Data Collection is not sufficiently complete to perform a reasonable comparison with the At-Risk data. To the extent the results can be evaluated, the results appear substantially similar-with some discrepancies attributable to a lack of reliability in the census block data collection. On the other hand, the Free and Reduced-Priced Lunch counts are a reliable and stable source to identify At-Risk students.

Given the data reliability issues and the significant data burden on districts, the Department has made the determination to suspend the Census Block Data collection beginning with the 2026-2027 school year.

