

# FOOD IN AMERICA'S SCHOOLS

How it works

and why it matters

## What is the National School Lunch Program?

The National School Lunch Program, or NSLP, is a federally-assisted meal program operating in public and nonprofit private schools that provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free lunches to children each school day.

## What is the history of the NSLP?

The National School Lunch Act, which led to the NSLP, was signed into law in 1946 by President Truman in response to the military's discovery that at least 40% of rejected World War II recruits were turned away on the basis of poor nutrition. The Act also supported U.S. agriculture by finding a use for surplus crops.

## What is the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act?

The Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010 is a federal law that authorizes all childhood nutrition programs including the National School Lunch Program. The Act instituted new USDA guidelines for the NSLP that required more fresh fruits and vegetables, more whole grains, calorie maximums by age group, sodium reductions, and healthier snacks in schools. This legislation must be reauthorized every five years, but Congress has delayed the vote. While the National School Lunch Program is permanently authorized, specific provisions established in the HHFKA could be rolled back, unless we tell our lawmakers to keep school meals healthy.

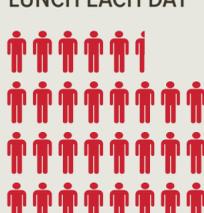
## What programs are part of the Child Nutrition Programs under the USDA?

- **National School Lunch Program (NSLP):** NSLP is a federally assisted meal program that provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free lunches to children each school day. Schools can also offer snacks as part of after-care educational programs or enrichment activities through NSLP.
- **School Breakfast Program (SBP):** Similar to NSLP, SBP provides reimbursement to states to operate nonprofit breakfast programs in schools and residential childcare institutions.
- **Summer Food Service Program (SFSP):** Through SFSP children are provided healthy meals during times when school is closed for the summer.
- **Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP):** CACFP provides reimbursements for nutritious meals (including supper) and snacks to eligible children and adults enrolled at participating child care centers, day care homes, adult day care centers and schools.
- **Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP):** FFVP provides free fresh fruits and vegetables to children at eligible elementary schools during the day.
- **The Special Milk Program (SMP):** SMP provides milk to children in schools and childcare institutions who do not participate in other federal meal service programs.

## School Lunch Participation as of December 2019

29.5 Million

CHILDREN ATE SCHOOL LUNCH EACH DAY



21.6 Million

CHILDREN QUALIFIED FOR FREE OR REDUCED-PRICED LUNCH



4.8 Billion

SCHOOL LUNCHES WERE SERVED DURING THE 2018 - 2019 SCHOOL YEAR



Source: [www.fns.usda.gov/pd/child-nutrition-tables](http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/child-nutrition-tables)

## Federal Reimbursement Rates for the 2019-2020 School Year

For schools that served **less than 60%** free/reduced-price lunches:

Free  
\$3.48\*

Paid  
\$0.39\*

For schools that served **more than 60%** free/reduced-price lunches:

\$3.50\*

\$0.41\*

\*Rates reflect an extra \$.07 per meal that districts receive upon USDA certification of their menu cycles.

Source: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2019-11-01/pdf/2019-23946.pdf>

## How Schools Spend the Money

According to a study released by the USDA in April 2019, the average reported cost to produce a school lunch was \$3.81. Food and labor make up the biggest portion of expenses, with each at 45% of reported costs (about \$1.71 each per meal, \$3.42 total).

Food	\$1.71
Labor	\$1.71
Other	\$0.39

**Total Average Cost: \$3.81**

Source: [https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/SNMCS\\_Summary-Findings.pdf](https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/SNMCS_Summary-Findings.pdf)

## What are some of the USDA Guidelines for school lunch?

**Fruits and Vegetables:** Students are required to take at least one half-cup serving of fruits or vegetables with every school lunch. There are weekly requirements for all vegetable subgroups (i.e., dark green, red/orange, legumes, starchy, and other).

**Grains:** At least half of the grains offered with school meals must be whole grain-rich (at least 51% whole grain).

**Milk:** Schools can serve only fat-free or low fat (1 percent) milk that is either flavored or unflavored.

## The Five Components of a Complete School Lunch



Milk



Vegetable



Whole Grains



Fruit



Meat or Meat Alternate

NOTE: In order for a meal to be fully reimbursable by the federal government, a student must take 3 of the 5 components (including at least 1 fruit or vegetable).

## Benefits of Scratch Cooking in Schools



- Whole and appealing nutrient-rich foods
- Instills healthy eating habits
- Healthy bodies, healthy minds
- Increased meal participation
- Increased local procurement
- Learning opportunities
- Reduced packaging/waste
- Valued workforce

## EXTRA CREDIT: Farm to School

### HOW DOES FARM TO SCHOOL WORK?

1. **Procurement:** Local foods including fruits, vegetables, meats, grains, eggs, and more are purchased, promoted, and served in school cafeterias
2. **Education:** Students participate in activities related to agriculture, food, health, and nutrition
3. **School gardens:** Students engage in hands-on learning through gardening

### FARM TO SCHOOL BY THE NUMBERS

- ★ 42,587 schools serving over 23 million students are buying local produce and teaching students where their food comes from
- ★ \$789 million has been invested in local communities
- ★ 7,101 school gardens have been planted across the country

Learn more at [www.farmtoschool.org](http://www.farmtoschool.org)

Source: 2015 Farm to School Census: <https://farmtoschoolcensus.fns.usda.gov/>