

What You Need to Know About School Nutrition

The Core Programs

School Breakfast

Increasing participation in the National School Breakfast Program (NSBP)¹

- 10.6 million children served daily
- 1.8 billion breakfasts served annually

School Lunch

Increasing participation in National School Lunch Program (NSLP)¹

- 31 million children served daily. 95% of schools participate in NSLP
- 5.2 billion lunches served annually

The Facts About School Meals

School meals have come a long way!

Today, kids are offered healthy, tasty and appealing choices:

- Fresh fruits and vegetables
- Whole grains
- Reduced TransFats
- Salad Bars
- Pizza with whole wheat crust, low-fat cheese, low-sodium sauce
- Whole grain pasta
- Baked items rather than fried
- Healthful cooking/preparation techniques

School meals are balanced and healthy

NSLP lunches must meet federal nutrition guidelines. These meals must:

- limit fat and saturated fat
- provide one-third of the Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) of protein, calcium, iron, and vitamins A and C
- contain age-appropriate portion sizes
- provide the right balance of protein, dairy, grains, fruits and vegetables.

School meals help kids maintain a healthy weight

- Students who eat school meals provided through the NSLP and the SBP are more likely to be at a healthy weight.²
- NSLP participants are more likely than non-participants to consume vegetables, milk and milk products, and meat and other protein-rich foods, both at lunch and over 24 hours; they also consume less soda and/or fruit drinks.¹
- Students are less likely to gain weight during the school year when in school then during the summer when school is out.

School meals are a great deal

On average it costs less to buy a school lunch than to bring a packed lunch from home.

- The estimated national average cost of a school lunch from home was \$3.43, while the national average price of a school lunch was \$2.08.³



¹ Source: USDA

² Source: Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine, August 2003

³ Source: Alice Jo Rainville, PhD, RD, CHE, SNS of Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, MI

School meals help students to do better in school

- Research has shown that students who eat school meals perform their best academically.
- Students who eat school breakfast have greater gains in standardized test scores and show improvements in math, reading and vocabulary scores.⁴
- Healthy eating correlates with less trips to the school nurse and less absenteeism.
- Providing nutritious school breakfast on testing days leads to improved test scores.

School meals offer a critical service to our communities

The NSLP and NSBP help ensure that no child will go hungry during the school day.

- Children from families with incomes at or below 185 percent of the poverty level are eligible for free or reduced price meals.
- For some children, a free school meal is the only meal they will have all day.

School meals are safe

- School nutrition professionals have rigorous training in food safety and have implemented a HACCP Plan.
- School kitchens are subject to two health inspections annually conducted by the local health department.
- According to the Food and Drug Administration, school kitchens are among the safest of commercial and institutional foodservice establishments.

The Role of Parents

Parents and school nutrition professionals share the same goals

- Well-balanced nutritious meals for kids
- Creating healthy eating habits for life

Parents are role models and influence what kids eat

- Encourage healthy eating and lifestyles at home for you and your kids (actions speak louder than words...)

Support Healthy School Meals

Contact your members of Congress and call for adequate funding for school meals

- The federal government reimburses schools for the free and reduced price meals they serve, but that reimbursement is too low.
- The average cost to prepare and serve a school lunch is \$2.92, but the reimbursement for a free meal is only \$2.68.
- With a higher reimbursement rate, schools could provide students with an even greater variety of fruits, vegetables and whole grains in school meals.



How to Get Involved

- Review the cafeteria menu with your kids to help them plan for a balanced meal
- Join your kids for school lunch or school breakfast
- Communicate any concerns or special diets your kids may have
- Tell us what you think

For More Information

- Visit www.schoolnutrition.org or contact the School Nutrition Association at (301) 686-3100 or (800) 877-8822

⁴ Source: *Classroom Breakfast Scores High in Maryland, Maryland Meals for Achievement. October 2001*