



THE NATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM

1. What is the National School Lunch Program?

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is a federally assisted meal program operating in public and nonprofit private schools and residential child care institutions. It provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost or no-cost lunches to children each school day. The program was established under the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act, signed into law by President Harry Truman in 1946.

About 7.1 million children participated in the NSLP in its first year. Since then, the Program has reached millions of children nationwide: 1970: 22.4 million children; 1980: 26.6 million children; 1990: 21.1 million children; 2000: 27.3 million children; 2010: 31.8 million children; and 2016: 30.4 million children.

2. Who administers the NSLP?

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) administers the Program at the Federal level. At the State level, the NSLP is administered by State agencies, which operate the Program through agreements with school food authorities. State agency contact information is available at: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/school-meals-contacts>.

3. How does the Program work?

The NSLP is generally operated by public or non-profit private schools of high school grade or below. Public or non-profit private residential child care institutions may also participate in the NSLP, and charter schools may

participate in the NSLP as public schools. Participating school districts and independent schools receive cash subsidies and USDA Foods for each reimbursable meal they serve. In exchange, NSLP institutions must serve lunches that meet Federal meal pattern requirements and offer the lunches at a free or reduced price to eligible children. School food authorities can also be reimbursed for snacks served to children who participate in an approved afterschool program including an educational or enrichment activity."

4. What are the nutrition requirements for NSLP lunches?

All NSLP lunches must meet Federal requirements, though decisions about the specific foods to serve and the methods of preparation are made by local school food authorities. Information about the NSLP nutrition standards, along with technical assistance and guidance materials, may be found on the School Meals website: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/nutrition-standards-school-meals>.

5. How can children qualify for free or reduced price school lunch?

Children may be determined "categorically eligible" for free meals through participation in certain Federal Assistance Programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or based on their status as a homeless, migrant, runaway, or foster child.

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