

School Meals: What Students Eat Matters

Ever wonder why schools are required to follow a specific menu plan for the breakfast and lunches they serve each day to students?

10 Reasons Nutrition Matters

- 1. Nutrients are Important**
Children need nutrient-rich food for physical and cognitive development throughout their life.
- 2. Establishing Health Eating Habits**
By offering healthy meals at schools, this helps instill healthy eating habits to set the foundation for a lifetime of well-balanced nutrition.
- 3. Enhanced Energy Levels**
Nutrient-dense foods help sustain energy throughout the day for school as well as physical activity after school.
- 4. Reduced Level of Behavioral Issues**
Research suggests that a nutritious diet may contribute to a reduction in behavioral issues by helping control irritability and mood swings.
- 5. Community Health Promotion**
Healthy students are more likely to become healthy adults, reducing the burden on healthcare systems in the long run.
- 6. Improved Concentration and Learning**
Balanced meals contribute to better concentration, cognitive function, and academic performance.
- 7. Prevention of Health Illnesses**
A healthy diet can help prevent such issues as obesity, type 2 diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases.
- 8. Improved Attendance**
Healthy students are more likely to attend school regularly and actively engage in their education.
- 9. Social Economic Equality**
Healthy meals at schools evens the playing field for students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds who may not have access to nutritious foods at home.
- 10. Compliance with Dietary Guidelines**
School meal menus follow the guidelines as determined by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

What federal rules and regulations guide our breakfast and lunch program?

The National School Lunch and Breakfast programs are regulated by 7CFR 210 and 7CFR 220 which set standards for school meals including limits on the amounts of saturated fat, trans fat, sodium and calories as well as requiring minimum component offerings as part of school meals. Meals must meet these requirements to be eligible for federal reimbursement.

For breakfast, schools must offer three components (grains, fruit, and fluid milk) and students must take 3 items including a serving of fruit from these components.

For lunch, schools must offer five components (grains, protein, fruit, vegetable, and fluid milk) and students must take 3 of these components including a serving of fruit or vegetable.

The Basics of NSLP and SBP Funding

Federal Reimbursements

School food authorities are reimbursed for meals based on children’s free, reduced-price, or paid eligibility status. Schools serving a higher percentage of low-income students (at least 40 percent of children receive free or reduced-price lunch) are considered “severe need” schools and are eligible for a higher reimbursement rate. Reimbursement rates are updated annually by the USDA and posted to their [website](#) when released.

Funds from Nonprogram Foods

(adult meals, a la carte items, catering)

Nonprogram foods are anything sold outside of a reimbursable meal served to students. This encompasses all foods sold in schools as well as adult meals, foods sold outside of school hours, or any foods used for catering or vending activities. For the majority of SFAs, a la carte foods offered during meal service account for the largest share of nonprogram foods.

School food authorities shall ensure that the revenue generated from the sale of nonprogram foods complies with the requirements in [this paragraph](#). Nonprogram foods are those foods and beverages:

- Sold in a participating school other than reimbursable meals and meal supplements; and
- Purchased using funds from the nonprofit school food service account.

The proportion of total revenue from the sale of nonprogram foods to total revenue of the school food service account shall be equal to or greater than the proportion of total food costs associated with obtaining nonprogram foods to the total costs associated with obtaining program and nonprogram foods from the account.

All revenue from the sale of nonprogram foods shall accrue to the nonprofit school food service account of a participating school food authority.

School food authorities must ensure, to the extent practicable, that the Federal reimbursements, children’s payments, and other non-designated nonprofit food service revenues do not subsidize program meals served to adults.

Breakfasts and lunches served to teachers, administrators, custodians, and other adults must be priced so that the adult payment in combination with any per-lunch revenues from other sources designated specifically for the support of adult meals (such as state or local fringe benefit or payroll funds, or funding from voluntary agencies) is sufficient to cover the overall cost of the lunch. In non-pricing programs, the adult charge should be at least the amount of reimbursement received for a free lunch under Section 4 and 11 of the National School Lunch Act.