



National School Lunch Program

WHY THE SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM IS IMPORTANT

- The National School Lunch Program makes it possible for all school children in the United States to receive a nutritious lunch each and every school day.
- Research shows that when a child's nutritional needs are met, the child is more attentive in class, and has better attendance and fewer disciplinary problems. The National School Lunch Program meets the nutritional needs of children by providing a nutritionally balanced meal that contains one third or more of the nutrients they need each day.
- The National School Lunch Program offers parents a convenient way to provide a nutritious lunch for their children at the lowest possible price.

ELIGIBILITY

- Any child at a participating school may purchase a meal through the National School Lunch Program.
- Household income determines if a child is eligible to receive free or reduced price meals, or must pay most of the cost. To receive free lunch, household income must be at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty level; for reduced price lunch, income must be between 130 percent and 185 percent of the poverty level.
- For the 2009-2010 school year, 130 percent of the poverty level was \$23,803 per year for a family of three; 185 percent for a family of three is \$33,874 per year.

PARTICIPATION

- The National School Lunch Program is open to all children enrolled in a participating school. Approximately 95 percent of public schools participate.
- During the 2009-10 school year 31.6 million children in more than 99,685 schools and residential child care institutions participated in the National School Lunch Program.
- On a typical school day, nearly 20 million of these 31.6 million total children, or 63 percent, were receiving free or reduced price lunches.

CHILD NUTRITION FACT SHEET

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NUTRITIONAL BENEFITS

- Reimbursable meals must meet federal nutrition standards. National School Lunch Program lunches provide one third or more of the recommended levels for key nutrients.
- Reimbursable meals must provide no more than 30 percent of calories from fat and less than 10 percent of calories from saturated fat.
- USDA research indicates that children who participate in the National School Lunch Program have superior nutritional intakes compared to those who bring lunch from home or otherwise do not participate.

EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS

- Studies show that proper nutrition improves a child's behavior, school performance, and overall cognitive development.
- Properly nourished children more actively participate in the education experience, which benefits them, their fellow students, and the entire school community.
- A healthy eating environment teaches children good nutrition and the elements of a proper diet, which can have positive effects on children's eating habits and physical well-being throughout life.

REIMBURSEMENT AND FUNDING

- The United States Department of Agriculture, through its Food and Nutrition Service, administers the National School Lunch Program at the federal level. At the state level the program typically is administered by state education agencies, which operate the program through agreements with school food authorities.
- The National School Lunch Program provides per meal cash reimbursements to public and non-profit private schools and residential childcare institutions that provide free and reduced price lunches to eligible children.
- For the 2011-12 school year, schools are reimbursed by the federal government \$2.77 per free lunch served, \$2.37 per reduced priced lunch, and \$.26 per "paid" lunch. Free students must not be charged any amount, and reduced price students must not be charged more than 40 cents for lunch.
- Schools in which 60 percent or more of the lunches served during the second preceding school year were free or reduced price receive an additional \$.02 reimbursement for each lunch served.
- In addition to cash reimbursements, schools also are entitled by law to receive USDA commodity foods, valued at 22.25 cents for each lunch served for the 2011-12 school year. Schools may also receive "bonus" commodities when they are available.
- The federal expenditures for fiscal year 2010 for the National School Lunch Program were \$9.75 billion. (This figure does not include commodity payments or payments to the U.S. territories.)