

Lifting Up School Meals

USDA Key Messages

August – October 2023

Key Messages

Nutritious school meals help America's children learn, grow, and stay healthy.

- USDA and the Biden-Harris Administration are all in on setting up children to be healthy and thrive.
- School meals are a proven tool for giving kids the nutrition they need for a bright future.
- School meals are the main source of nutrition for over half of children.
- Research shows that school meals are the most nutritious food source for American children, thanks in large part to the efforts of school nutrition professionals as well as partners, parents, the food industry, and USDA to best support children's health and well-being.

School nutrition professionals and their partners work tirelessly to ensure children have access to healthy school meals. USDA celebrates their hard work and dedication and remains committed to doing all we can give them the support they need to succeed.

- Since 2021, USDA has provided close to \$3.8 billion in additional support for schools, on top of the standard reimbursement schools receive for each meal they serve.
- We continue to find new ways to equip them with the resources to serve the best meals and reach more children.

USDA, schools, and partners are working together on a lot of fun and innovative activities happening in cafeterias and classrooms across the country. For example:

- [USDA's Healthy Meals Incentives](#) is a multi-part initiative supporting schools in their efforts to serve high quality, nutritious meals.
 - USDA awarded \$30 million in subgrants to 264 small and rural districts – our largest ever targeted investment in school meal programs for this community – for projects to improve the nutrition and operations of school meals in some of the nation's highest need schools.
 - In addition, school districts are invited to apply for the Healthy Meals Incentives Recognition Awards, which celebrate districts that have made significant improvements to the nutrition of their school meals.
- The [Patrick Leahy Farm to School Program](#) helps bring more local foods into the child nutrition programs and teaches children about where their food comes from. This year, USDA awarded \$10.7 million to 103 projects in 40 states and Guam.
- Schools are using [USDA's National School Lunch Program Equipment Grants](#) to invest in new food service equipment that improves program operations and makes it easier to serve fresh, tasty foods that appeal to kids. This year, USDA made \$30 million available to 54 states and territories.
- [USDA's Team Nutrition Grants](#) support nutrition education and training for schools. This year, USDA awarded \$9.3 million in these grants to two school districts and eight states.

When all students have access to healthy school meals at no cost, more children are fueled for learning and development.

- Supporting education is critical for our nation's future; yet research clearly shows that children cannot focus on learning if they are hungry.

- The nutrition kids receive during the school day is just as important to their future as the lessons they are taught in the classroom. We can't expect kids to learn and achieve if they aren't properly nourished.
- We need to ensure that nutritious, appealing meals are an integral part of the school day so that every child has the nutrition and energy they need to power their learning.
- The Biden-Harris Administration is committed to advancing a pathway toward healthy school meals for all as part of the White House's National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health.
 - USDA proposed changes to the [Community Eligibility Provision](#) to give more schools the option to provide healthy meals to all students.
 - We also applaud the states that have taken the bold step toward healthy school meals for all and invested in the bright futures of *all* their students, so every child in America has the opportunity to reach their full potential.
- Schools and states offering healthy school meals at no cost to all students report that it reduces stigma, helps families on the cusp of qualifying, reduces administrative burden, promotes equity, and gives parents financial relief as they manage their food budgets and the many other costs it takes to raise and nurture their children.

As you're talking to parents directly about school meals, or working with organizations that work with parents directly, it's also an opportunity to flag for them other programs their families might be eligible for.

- For example, as many of you may know, families have had to renew their Medicaid and CHIP coverage for the first time since the start of the pandemic. Back to School conversations are also an opportunity to make sure families know how to renew their Medicaid coverage.