

School Nutrition Fast Facts

To provide you with the best science and to reduce review time, please use the following science-approved facts for your campaigns and materials. After each fact, you will find science-based fast facts that can be copied and pasted word for word without additional science review. Please note that if you change any of the wording, you will need to run your documents through the science review process before release.

Nutrition Standards in Schools

In December 2010, the bipartisan Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA) was signed into law. HHFKA empowered the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to update national nutrition standards for school meals and establish nutrition standards for all other foods sold in schools throughout the school day according to the latest science on children's nutrition. At the time, those nutrition standards represented the first major changes to meal requirements in more than 15 years and require more fruits, vegetables and whole grains and limit the amount of calories, saturated fats and sodium in school foods. In addition to breakfast and lunch, the USDA set nutrition standards for competitive foods and beverages—items sold via vending machines, snack bars, stores or fundraisers during school hours or in cafeteria à la carte lines.

As part of the HHFKA, Congress also created a universal meal option, the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), through which schools in high-poverty areas may provide free meals to all students instead of making eligible students apply individually. CEP was phased into a few states at a time before expanding nationwide during school year 2014–2015. As of school year 2020–2021, 56% of eligible school districts now participate in CEP.

In addition to CEP, school cans take advantage of USDA's other healthy school meals for all options, such as Provision 2, which operates slightly differently from CEP.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Congress gave the USDA authority to allow schools to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students, regardless of their qualifying income. Healthy school meals for all, along with the creation of Pandemic-EBT, helped families affected by school closures to access healthy food. The USDA waiver for schools to operate healthy school meals for all will expire on June 30, 2022. As a result, Voices for Healthy Kids supports a policy approach where states can work with local school districts to determine which method (CEP or other healthy school meals for all option) is best for them.

¹ Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, Pub. L. No. 111-296, 124 Stat. 3183, §§ 101-105, 201-210.

² U.S. Department of Agriculture; Food and Nutrition Service. Nutrition Standards in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs; Final Rule. 2012. 7 CFR Parts 210 and 220.

³ <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2012-01-26/pdf/2012-1010.pdf>. Accessed March 17, 2020.

⁴ U.S. Department of Agriculture; Food and Nutrition Service. National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program: Nutrition Standards for All Foods Sold in School as Required by the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010. Final Rule. 2016. 7 CFR Parts 210 and 220. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2016-07-29/pdf/2016-17227.pdf>. Accessed March 17, 2020.

⁵ U.S. Department of Agriculture; Food and Nutrition Service. Community Eligibility Provision. April 2019. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/community-eligibility-provision>. Accessed October 2021.

⁵ Food Research & Action Center. Community Eligibility: The Key to Hunger-Free Schools, School Year 2020–2021. June 2021. <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/CEP-Report-2021.pdf>. Accessed September 2021.

⁶ U.S. Department of Agriculture; Food and Nutrition Service. USDA issues pandemic flexibilities for schools and day care facilities through June 2022 to support safe reopening and healthy, nutritious meals. Press release. April 2021. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/news-item/usda-007521>. Accessed October 2021.

Current Participation Trends

FACT 1

In 2019 (pre-pandemic), each day nearly 30 million students received their midday meals through the National School Lunch Program, and more than 14 million students received their morning meals through the School Breakfast Program. These numbers include all participating children: free, reduced-price and full-priced.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ Each day in 2019, nearly 30 million students in the United States received free, low-cost or full-priced lunch at school.
- ▶ Each day in 2019, more than 14 million students in the United States received free, low-cost or full-priced breakfast at school.
- ▶ Each day, tens of millions of students receive free, low-cost or full-priced meals at school as part of the National School Breakfast Program and the National School Lunch Program.
- ▶ Free, reduced-price and full-priced school meals are offered each day to tens of millions of students at schools across the country through U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) programs.
- ▶ The National School Breakfast Program provided more than 14 million students across the country with breakfast at school each day in 2019.
- ▶ The National School Lunch Program provided nearly 30 million students at schools across the country with lunch each day in 2019.

Sources:

U.S. Department of Agriculture; Food and Nutrition Service. National School Lunch Program: Participation and lunches served (data as of September 9, 2021). <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/slsummar-9.pdf>. Accessed September 2021.

U.S. Department of Agriculture; Food and Nutrition Service. School Breakfast Program: Participation and meals served (data as of September 9, 2021). <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/sbsummar-9.pdf>. Accessed September 2021.

FACT 2

The National School Lunch Program is the nation's second largest food and nutrition assistance program. In fiscal year 2019 (pre-pandemic), it operated in nearly 100,000 public and nonprofit, private pre-K-through-12 schools and residential child care institutions.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ The National School Lunch Program is the nation's second largest food and nutrition assistance program.
- ▶ The National School Lunch program operates in 100,000 schools and child care programs across the country.
- ▶ The National School Lunch program, which is the nation's second largest food and nutrition assistance program, operates in 100,000 schools and child care programs across the country.
- ▶ In 2019, the National School Lunch Program operated in 100,000 schools and child care programs across the country.
- ▶ In 2019, the National School Lunch Program, the nation's second largest food and nutrition assistance program, operated in 100,000 schools and child care programs across the country.
- ▶ The nation's second largest food and nutrition assistance program, the National School Lunch Program, operates in 100,000 public and private schools and child care programs in the United States.

Source:

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture. Economic Research Service. National School Lunch Program. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/child-nutrition-programs/national-school-lunch-program/>. Accessed October 2021.

FACT 3

In fiscal year 2019 (pre-pandemic), school cafeterias served nearly five billion lunches, with nearly three-quarters (74.1%) of the lunches served for free or at a reduced price.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ In 2019, school cafeterias served nearly 5 billion lunches to students.
- ▶ In 2019, nearly 75% of the 5 billion lunches served at schools were for students enrolled in the free or reduced-price meal program.
- ▶ In 2019, cafeterias served more than 3.6 billion lunches to children enrolled in the free or reduced-price meal program.
- ▶ Of the 5 billion lunches served in school cafeterias, more than 3.6 billion were served to children enrolled in the free or reduced-price meal program.
- ▶ In 2019, the majority of school lunches served were free or at a reduced price.

Source:

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture; Food and Nutrition Service. National School Lunch Program (data as of September 9, 2021). <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/slsummar-9.pdf>. Accessed September 2021.

FACT 4

In 2019 (pre-pandemic), the National School Lunch Program provided low-cost or free lunches to nearly 22 million children daily, and the School Breakfast Program provided low-cost or free breakfasts to more than 12 million children daily.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ Each day in 2019, nearly 22 million students relied on the National School Lunch Program for free or low-cost midday meals.
- ▶ The National School Lunch Program provided nearly 22 million students with the free or low-cost midday meals they needed to thrive while at school in 2019.
- ▶ As part of the National School Lunch Program, nearly 22 million students received free or low-cost midday meals at school each day in 2019.
- ▶ Each day in 2019, more than 12 million students relied on the School Breakfast Program for free or low-cost morning meals.
- ▶ The School Breakfast Program provided more than 12 million students with the free or low-cost morning meals they needed to thrive while at school in 2019.
- ▶ As part of the School Breakfast Program, more than 12 million students received free or low-cost morning meals at school each day in 2019.
- ▶ Breakfast was served for free or at a low cost to more than 12 million students through the School Breakfast Program each day in 2019.
- ▶ Lunch was served for free or at a low cost to nearly 22 million students through the National School Lunch Program each day in 2019.

Sources:

U.S. Department of Agriculture; Food and Nutrition Service. National School Lunch Program: Participation and lunches served (data as of September 9, 2021). <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/slsummar-9.pdf>. Accessed September 2021.

U.S. Department of Agriculture; Food and Nutrition Service. School Breakfast Program: Participation and meals served (data as of September 9, 2021). <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/sbsummar-9.pdf>. Accessed September 2021.

FACT 5

Research from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) found that children from food-insecure and marginally-secure households were more likely to eat school meals and receive more of their food and nutrient intake from school meals than did other children.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ Students from families with low income are more likely to rely on school meals for their nutritional needs.
- ▶ Students from families with low income receive more of their food and nutrition intake from school meals.
- ▶ School meals provide students from families with low income the food they need to learn and grow.
- ▶ Students from food-insecure and marginally secure households get more of their food and nutrients from school meals than other students.

Source:

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture; Economic Research Service. Children's Food Security and Intakes from School Meals. Final Report. May 2010. <https://naldc.nal.usda.gov/download/42320/PDF>. Accessed March 17, 2020.

FACT 6

According to the first U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) study conducted after healthier nutrition standards took effect, among schools participating in the National School Lunch Program during 2014–2015, about half (48%) were small (fewer than 500 students) and most were located in suburban and rural settings (44% and 35%, respectively). At over two-thirds of these schools (67%), 40% or more of students were approved to receive free or reduced-price lunches.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ In school year 2014-2015, nearly half of schools participating in the National School Lunch program had fewer than 500 students.
- ▶ In school year 2014-2015, most schools participating in the National School Lunch Program were located in rural or suburban settings.
- ▶ Over a third of schools participating in the National School Lunch Program in the 2014-15 school year were located in rural settings.
- ▶ Nearly half of schools participating in the National School Lunch Program in the 2014-15 school year were small, with fewer than 500 students total.
- ▶ At the majority of schools in suburban and rural areas participating in the National School Lunch Program in the 2014-2015 school year after healthier nutrition standards were implemented, 40% or more of students were approved for free or reduced-price lunches.
- ▶ More than two-thirds of suburban and rural schools participating in the National School Lunch Program in the 2014-2015 school year had 40% or more of their student populations approved for free or reduced-price lunches.

Source:

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture; Food and Nutrition Service. U.S. Department of Agriculture; Food and Nutrition Services. School Nutrition and Meal Cost Study. April 2019. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-nutrition-and-meal-cost-study>. Accessed March 17, 2020.

Schools Meeting Nutrition Standards and Creating Healthier Menus

FACT 7

As of 2016, nearly all schools (pre-pandemic) that participate in the National School Lunch Program were meeting the 2012 nutrition standards for school meals, including Target 2 for sodium.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ Nearly all schools that participate in the National School Lunch program were meeting the 2012 updated nutrition standards prior to the pandemic, including Target 2 for sodium.
- ▶ Nearly all schools that participate in the National School Lunch programs are providing healthier, more nutritious meals to students.
- ▶ Nearly all schools that participate in the National School Lunch programs are providing the healthier, more nutritious updated meal standards set in 2012.

Source:

U.S. Department of Agriculture; Food and Nutrition Service. School Meal Certification Data. https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/cn/SFACert_FY16Q4.pdf. Accessed March 19, 2020.

FACT 8

Since implementation of updated nutrition standards in 2012, school lunches have become 41% healthier and breakfasts have become 44% healthier, as measured by mean Healthy Eating Index scores (a measure of meeting the Dietary Guidelines for Americans).

Fast Facts:

- ▶ Since the updated 2012 standards, school breakfasts and lunches have become healthier.
- ▶ School breakfasts and lunches have become healthier since the 2012 updated nutrition standards were implemented .
- ▶ Since schools implemented the 2012 updated nutrition standards, breakfasts and lunches have become more than 40% healthier.
- ▶ Breakfasts and lunches have become more than 40% healthier since schools began implementing the 2012 updated nutrition standards.
- ▶ Since schools began implementing the 2012 updated nutrition standards, lunches have become more than 40% healthier and breakfasts have become 44% healthier.
- ▶ The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Healthy Eating Index measures how closely foods align with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. By that measure, the 2012 updated nutrition standards for school meals have made lunches 41% healthier and breakfasts 44% healthier.

Source:

U.S. Department of Agriculture; Food and Nutrition Service. U.S. Department of Agriculture; Food and Nutrition Services. School Nutrition and Meal Cost Study. April 2019. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-nutrition-and-meal-cost-study>. Accessed March 17, 2020.

FACT 9

One study of schools in rural Virginia found that packed lunches brought from home were of less nutritional quality than school lunches. In particular, packed lunches had significantly higher amounts of calories, saturated fat, and sugar, and less protein, sodium, fiber, vitamin A, and calcium, compared to school lunches.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ One study found that rural Virginia students who brought their lunches from home often ate foods higher in calories, saturated fat, and lower in protein, fiber and some vitamins, than students who ate lunches provided by schools.
- ▶ One study found that rural Virginia students who ate lunches provided by schools ate foods lower in calories and saturated fat, and higher in protein, fiber and some vitamins than students who brought their lunches from home.
- ▶ A study of rural Virginia schools found that school meals that met the updated 2012 nutrition standards were often healthier than meals brought from home.
- ▶ Packed lunches may contain less nutritional quality than school lunches, including less protein and fiber and more sugar and saturated fat, according to a study of one rural school.
- ▶ One study in rural Virginia found that students eating school lunches may receive more nutritious foods than students eating packed lunches from home.

Source:

Farris AR, Misyak S, Duffey KJ, Davis GC, Hosig K, Atzaba-Poria N, et al. Nutritional comparison of packed and school lunches in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten children following the implementation of the 2012-2013 National School Lunch Program standards. *J Nutr Educ Behav.* 2014; 46:621-6. doi: 10.1016/j.jneb.2014.07.007.

FACT 10

A study of approximately 400 U.S. elementary and middle schools from 2013-2015 found that most schools reported meeting the school meal standards (74%) and most grains offered at lunch were whole grain-rich (82%). There were no observable differences in adherence to nutrition standards by school poverty level, suggesting that the 2012 updated nutrition standards were feasible to implement across a wide variety of schools.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ A study found that schools were able to implement the updated 2012 nutrition standards regardless of whether they were located in high-income or low-income ZIP codes.
- ▶ Most schools have been able to meet the updated 2012 healthier school meal standards.
- ▶ Most schools, regardless of the income level of the families of attending students, have been able to meet the updated 2012 healthier school meal standards.
- ▶ Most schools have been able to meet the updated 2012 healthier school meal standards—for example, by including serving foods whole grain-rich at lunchtime.
- ▶ The updated 2012 nutrition standards were implemented successfully in most schools, regardless of school poverty levels, suggesting that healthy meals are feasible across a wide variety of schools.

Source:

Au LE, Ritchie LD, Gurzo K, Nhan LA, Woodward-Lopez G, Kao J, et al. Post-Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act adherence to select school nutrition standards by region and poverty level: the Healthy Communities Study. *J Nutr Educ Behav.* 2020; 52:249-258. doi: 10.1016/j.jneb.2019.10.016. Epub 2019 Nov 26.

FACT 11

Strong state nutrition standards for snack and à la carte foods and beverages, which go beyond national competitive food standards, are associated with fewer unhealthy foods and beverages in schools and a healthier weight among children.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ Kids consume healthier foods and drinks on campus and have a healthier weight when the state sets strong competitive foods nutrition standards for schools.
- ▶ When states set strong competitive foods nutrition standards for schools, students consume healthier foods and drinks at school and have a healthier weight.
- ▶ Kids consume fewer unhealthy foods and drinks on campus and have a healthier weight when the state sets strong competitive foods nutrition standards for schools.
- ▶ When states set high nutrition standards for schools, students consume fewer unhealthy foods and drinks at school and have a healthier weight.

Source:

Schwartz MB, Leider J, Cohen JFW, Turner L, Chiqui JF. Association between nutrition policies and student body mass index. *Nutrients*. 2021; 13:13. doi: 10.3390/nu13010013.

FACT 12

Because the most recent updated standards were based on the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGAs), which did not have an added sugars standards, school meals standards currently do not limit levels of added sugars. The 2015 DGAs recommended an added sugars limit of no more than 10% of total calories that was reaffirmed by the 2020 DGAs. One study found that during SY 2014-2015, most school breakfasts (92%) had excessive amounts of added sugars, while almost three quarters of lunches (69%) exceeded the current DGAs' added sugars recommendations. The leading source of added sugars in school meals was flavored milk.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ Most of the breakfasts and lunches served at school contain too much added sugars, and flavored milk is the leading culprit.
- ▶ The flavored milk some schools served at breakfast and lunch is leading kids to consume too much added sugars.
- ▶ More than 90% of breakfasts and nearly 70% of lunches served at school contain too much added sugars. The leading source of added sugars in school meals is flavored milk.
- ▶ More than 90% of breakfasts served at school contain too much added sugars. The leading source of added sugars in school meals is flavored milk.
- ▶ Nearly 70% of lunches served at school contain too much added sugars. The leading source of added sugars in school meals is flavored milk.

Source:

Fox MK, Gearan EC, Schwartz C. Added sugars in school meals and the diets of school-age children. *Nutrients*. 2021; 13: 471. doi: 10.3390/nu13020471.

Student Consumption, Plate Waste and Acceptance of Healthier Foods

Prior to the pandemic, examples from across the country show that students are selecting more fruits and vegetables and eating healthier meals over time as a result of 2012 updated meal standards.

FACT 13

Children at 12 Connecticut middle schools consumed more of their entrees by an average of nearly 13% and more of their vegetables by an average 18% in 2014, compared to 2012 (the same year the healthier meal standards took effect). Each additional fruit option offered was associated with a 9.3% increase in fruit servings selected by students. Food waste declined as a result.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ One study found that when students began receiving healthier lunches, they increased their fruit and vegetable intake with no increase in plate waste.
- ▶ When school lunches became healthier after the updated 2012 nutrition standards, one study found that students not only were served more fruits and vegetables, but they also began eating more fruits and vegetables.
- ▶ Despite the misconception that kids dislike fruits and vegetables, students threw away less food when they were served more fruits and vegetables at lunch, according to one study.

Source:

Schwartz MB, Henderson KE, Read M, Danna N, Ickovics JR. New school meal regulations increase fruit consumption and do not increase total plate waste. *Child Obes.* 2015; 11:242-7. doi: 10.1089/chi.2015.0019.

FACT 14

Among students in grades 1 through 8 in four schools in an urban, under-resourced school district in Massachusetts that had implemented 2012 healthier lunch standards, more children took a serving of fruit (23%) and ate larger shares of their entrée (15.6%) and vegetable (16.2%) servings in 2012, compared with the previous year.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ When elementary and middle schools began serving healthier lunches, students voluntarily took more fruit and ate more of their entrées and vegetables.
- ▶ Elementary and middle school students ate more of their entrees and vegetable servings after healthier lunch standards were implemented in one urban Massachusetts school district.
- ▶ One study found that plate waste decreased after implementing healthier lunch standards, with students in grades 1 through 8 eating 15% more of their entrees and 16% more of their vegetables.

Source:

Cohen JF, Richardson S, Parker E, Catalano PJ, Rimm EB. Impact of the new U.S. Department of Agriculture school meal standards on food selection, consumption, and waste. *Am J Prev Med.* 2014; 46:388-94. doi: 10.1016/j.amepre.2013.11.013

FACT 15

One study of two K-through-8 schools in an urban district that removed flavored milk from cafeterias found that student selection of plain milk increased two years after the change, resulting in higher per-capita milk consumption.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ One study found that, despite removing flavored milk from cafeterias, students still chose plain milk to have with their meals and even began drinking more of it.
- ▶ Students drank more plain milk when the cafeteria removed flavored milk as an option.
- ▶ One study found that flavored milk can be removed from schools and consumption of plain milk can increase over time.
- ▶ Removing flavored milk as a cafeteria option resulted in more students selecting plain milk and higher overall milk consumption, according to a two-year study.

Source:

Schwartz MB, Henderson KE, Read M, Cornelius T. Student acceptance of plain milk increases significantly 2 years after flavored milk is removed from school cafeterias: an observational study. *J Acad Nutr Diet.* 2018; 118(5):857-864. doi: 10.1016/j.jand.2017.05.021.

FACT 16

A nationally representative study from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) found that, with healthier meals available, students participating in the National School Lunch Program consumed significantly more whole grains, vegetables and dairy, and fewer refined grains and empty calories, compared with nonparticipants.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ After improving school meal nutrition standards, students who eat school lunches tend to consume more whole grains, vegetables and dairy and fewer refined grains and empty calories.
- ▶ Students who eat school lunches tend to consume more whole grains, vegetables and dairy than those who bring their lunches from home.
- ▶ Students who eat school lunches tend to consume fewer refined grains and empty calories than those who bring their lunches from home.
- ▶ Students who eat school lunches tend to take in more whole grains, vegetables and dairy and fewer refined sugars and empty calories than those who bring their lunches from home.

Source:

U.S. Department of Agriculture; Food and Nutrition Service. U.S. Department of Agriculture; Food and Nutrition Services. School Nutrition and Meal Cost Study. April 2019. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-nutrition-and-meal-cost-study>. Accessed April 13, 2020.

FACT 17

Studies have consistently shown that food waste was an issue even before passage of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, but timing and length of meal periods support students in consuming more of their food. Evidence suggests that students consume significant more when food is offered during traditional lunch hours; however, over a third of schools in the United States serve lunch before 11:00am. Additionally, students need enough time to eat — research suggests that when lunch periods are at least 30 minutes long, there is significantly less food waste. At the elementary school level, recess before lunch may potentially improve school meal consumption.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ Providing students with enough time to eat their meals can reduce food waste.
- ▶ More than one-third of schools in the U.S. serve lunch before 11 a.m. Pushing the lunch break to a later time can reduce food waste.
- ▶ Serving school lunch at traditional hours and providing students with enough time to eat can reduce food waste.
- ▶ When a school lunch period is at least 30 minutes long there is less food waste because students have enough time to eat.
- ▶ When school lunch is after recess, elementary school students could eat more of their lunch, which would reduce food waste.
- ▶ Providing students with enough time to eat their meals, serving food at a traditional lunch time and having lunch after recess can reduce food waste.

Source:

Cohen J, Schwartz MB. Documented success and future potential of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act. *J Acad Nutr Diet.* 2020. 120:359-362. doi: 10.1016/j.jand.2019.10.021.

Effects on Revenue and Participation Trends

FACT 18

A rapid health impact assessment published by Healthy Eating Research found strong evidence that nutrition standards affect student's participation in school meal programs and school food service revenue. Stronger nutrition standards increase the likelihood of a student's participation in school meal programs, thus increasing food service revenue.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ When school cafeterias serve meals with higher nutrition standards, more students participate, increasing foodservice revenue for schools.
- ▶ Schools that implement stronger nutrition standards are more likely to have higher student participation in school meal programs.

Source:

Lott M, Miller L, Arm K, Story M. Rapid Health Impact Assessment on USDA Proposed Changes to School Nutrition Standards. March 2020. <https://healthyeatingresearch.org/research/rapid-health-impact-assessment-on-usda-proposed-changes-to-school-nutrition-standards/>. Accessed April 6, 2020.

FACT 19

A study from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) found no association between the nutritional quality of school meals (as measured by Healthy Eating Index scores) and the reported cost of producing them after updated nutrition standards took effect, indicating that healthier meals did not cost more to produce than other meals.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ A U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) study found that healthier meals were no more expensive to produce than unhealthy meals.
- ▶ A U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) study found that healthier meals did not cost more to produce than unhealthy meals.
- ▶ A U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) study found it did not cost schools more money to serve healthier meals.
- ▶ Improving school meal nutrition quality did not increase the costs of producing the meals for schools, according to one U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) study.

Source:

U.S. Department of Agriculture; Food and Nutrition Service. U.S. Department of Agriculture; Food and Nutrition Services. School Nutrition and Meal Cost Study. April 2019. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-nutrition-and-meal-cost-study>. Accessed April 6, 2020.

FACT 20

A nationally representative survey of 489 U.S. school nutrition directors conducted by the Pew Charitable Trusts and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation found that 84% of program directors reported rising or stable combined revenue (meal reimbursements plus snack and beverage sales) in 2014–2015.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ School nutrition directors reported rising or stable revenue from meal reimbursements plus snack and beverage sales after the 2012 updated meal standards were implemented. School nutrition directors did not report revenue drops following healthier nutrition standard changes.

Source:

The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. School Meal Programs Innovate to Improve Student Nutrition. Published December 2016. https://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/assets/2016/12/school_meal_programs_innovate_to_improve_student_nutrition.pdf. Accessed April 6, 2020.

FACT 21

A national study from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) found that National School Lunch Program participation rates were higher in schools that served the healthiest lunches (as measured by Healthy Eating Index scores), compared with schools that served the least healthy lunches (60% versus 50%, respectively).

Fast Facts:

- ▶ A U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) study found that students were more likely to buy lunches at schools that served the healthiest meals, compared to schools that served the least healthy meals.
- ▶ Students are more likely to buy lunch at schools that serve healthy meals.
- ▶ Students are less likely to buy lunch at schools that don't serve healthy meals.
- ▶ Schools offering healthier lunches have higher participation in school lunch programs than schools offering less healthy lunches.

Source:

U.S. Department of Agriculture; Food and Nutrition Service. U.S. Department of Agriculture; Food and Nutrition Services. School Nutrition and Meal Cost Study. April 2019. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-nutrition-and-meal-cost-study>. Accessed April 6, 2020.

Public Support for Strong School Nutrition Standards

FACT 22

A 2014 national poll conducted by the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the American Heart Association found that parents of school-age children overwhelmingly support national nutrition standards for all foods and beverages sold to students during school. Seventy-two percent of parents favor national nutrition standards for school meals, 72% support standards for school snacks, 75% think salt should be limited in meals and 91% support requiring schools to include a serving of fruits and vegetables with every meal.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ In a national poll, parents said they believe schools should offer their children foods and drinks high in nutritional content.
- ▶ In a national poll, conducted in part by the American Heart Association, parents said they believe schools should offer their children foods and drinks high in nutritional content.
- ▶ A national poll found that 72% of parents support high nutrition standards for school meals and snacks.
- ▶ A national poll found that 75% of parents feel schools should limit the amount of sodium in the meals they provide to students.
- ▶ A national poll found that 91% of parents support standards requiring schools to include fruits and vegetables with every meal they serve to students.

Source:

The Pew Charitable Trusts. Parents Support Healthier School Food Policies by 3-to-1 Margin. September 2014. <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/about/news-room/press-releases-and-statements/2014/09/08/parents-support-healthier-school-food-policies-by-3to1-margin>. Accessed April 7, 2020.

FACT 23

In a nationally representative survey of elementary school administrators and food service staff conducted in 2012–2013, just after the 2012 updated nutrition standards took effect, 70% of respondents reported that students liked the new lunches.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ When elementary schools began serving healthier meals, 70% of school administrators and food service staff reported in a national survey that their students still liked the meals.
- ▶ Most students enjoy eating school meals, even when they're healthier.
- ▶ Elementary school nutrition staff reported that students liked the new lunches following nutrition standard updates.
- ▶ Young students enjoy eating healthier school meals, according to elementary school administrators and food service staff.

Source:

Turner L, Chaloupka FJ. Perceived reactions of elementary school students to changes in school lunches after implementation of the United States Department of Agriculture's new meals standards: minimal backlash, but rural and socioeconomic disparities exist. *Child Obes.* 2014; 10:349-56. 10.1089/chi.2014.0038. Epub 2014 Jul 21.

FACT 24

A national poll conducted by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation in 2015 found that 86% of the public supported the 2012 updated school nutrition standards and 86% said the nutrition requirements should stay the same or be strengthened.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ The public overwhelmingly supports serving kids healthier foods.
- ▶ The public overwhelmingly supports serving kids healthier foods, with 86% saying they support the stronger 2012 updated nutrition standards and 86% saying the 2012 updated nutrition standards should stay the same or be strengthened.
- ▶ Eighty-six percent of people support serving kids more nutritious meals.
- ▶ Eighty-six percent of people say school meals should continue to follow, or even strengthen, the healthier nutrition standards.

Source:

W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Poll: Nine out of 10 Americans Want to Keep School Meals Healthy. August 2015. <https://www.wkcf.org/news-and-media/article/2015/08/poll-nine-out-of-10-americans-want-to-keep-school-meals-healthy>. Accessed April 7, 2020.

Effects on Children's Health and Learning

FACT 25

Modeling data show that implementing the 2012 updated nutrition standards for school meals would prevent more than 1.8 million cases of childhood obesity by 2025. Implementing nutrition standards for all other food and beverages sold in schools would prevent more than 340,000 cases of childhood obesity by 2025. In particular, applying standards to foods sold outside of meal programs (Smart Snacks) would lead to health care cost savings of nearly \$800 million over 10 years.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ The 2012 updated school meal nutrition standards could help lower childhood obesity rates.
- ▶ By using the 2012 updated school meal nutrition standards, schools could prevent 1.8 million cases of childhood obesity by 2025.
- ▶ Schools can help prevent an additional 340,000 cases of childhood obesity by improving the nutritional quality of food and drinks sold on campus.
- ▶ Applying nutrition standards to competitive foods could save nearly \$800 million in health care costs over 10 years.

Source:

Gortmaker SL, Wang YC, Long MW, Giles CM, Ward ZJ, Barrett JL, Kenney EL, Sonneville KR, Afzal AS, Resch SC, Cradock AL. Three interventions that reduce childhood obesity are projected to save more than they cost to implement. *Health Aff.* 2015;34:1932-9. doi: 10.1377/hlthaff.2015.0631.

FACT 26

A 2018 systematic review found that implementing competitive food and beverage standards reduced children's sugary drink intake by 0.18 servings per day and unhealthy snacks consumption by 0.17 servings per day, while implementing the 2012 updated school meal standards increased fruit intake by 0.75 servings per day and reduced sodium consumption by 170 milligrams per day. Over time, these changes could have a significant impact on children's dietary behaviors.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ Children reduced their sugary drink and unhealthy snack consumption when schools set higher nutrition standards for the products students could buy on campus.
- ▶ Students ate more fruit and consumed less sodium under the 2012 updated nutrition standards.
- ▶ Improving nutrition standards for Smart Snacks as well as school meals resulted in students consuming more fruit, less sodium and fewer sugary drinks.

Source:

Micha R, Karageorgou D, Bakogianni I, Trichia E, Whitsel LP, Story M, Peñalvo JL, Mozaffarian D. Effectiveness of school food environment policies on children's dietary behaviors: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *PLoS One.* 2018; 13:e0194555. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0194555.



FACT 27

A rapid health impact assessment published by Healthy Eating Research found that strong evidence supports the 2012 updated school nutrition standards and improved diet quality is associated with improved academic performance and cognitive function.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ Kids who have more nutritious diets tend to perform better in school.
- ▶ Kids who have more nutritious diets tend to pay better attention in school.
- ▶ Kids who have more nutritious diets tend to perform better and pay more attention in school.
- ▶ Healthy Eating Research found that, by improving the school meal nutrition standards in 2012, students also improved their grades and performance in school.
- ▶ Eating healthy meals at school can help students perform better academically.

Source:

Lott M, Miller L, Arm K, Story M. Rapid Health Impact Assessment on USDA Proposed Changes to School Nutrition Standards. March 2020. <https://healthyeatingresearch.org/research/rapid-health-impact-assessment-on-usda-proposed-changes-to-school-nutrition-standards/>. Accessed April 6, 2020.

FACT 28

Science strongly supports the link between lower sodium intake and healthier lives—even in children and teens. More than 90% of school-age children consume too much sodium, a risk factor for high blood pressure and many other health problems.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ Kids who eat more nutritious lunches tend to have healthier diets overall.
- ▶ Most children eat too few vegetables and too many potatoes.

Source:

Appel LJ, Lichtenstein AH, Callahan EA, Sinaiko A, Van Horn L, Whitsel L. Reducing sodium intake in children: a public health investment. *J Clin Hypertens*. 2015. 17:657-62. doi: 10.1111/jch.12615.

FACT 29

Healthier lunches help improve dietary quality among children. Most children don't eat enough vegetables and too many potatoes.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ Studies show that people, including children and teens, who consume less sodium tend to live healthier lives.
- ▶ Despite studies showing that people who consume less sodium live healthier lives, more than 90% of children and teens consume too much sodium.
- ▶ More than 90% of children and teens consume too much sodium.
- ▶ Only 10% of children and teens stay within the confines of recommended sodium intake; the rest—more than 90%—consume excess sodium each day.
- ▶ Despite studies showing that people who consume less sodium live healthier lives, more than 90% of children and teens consume too much sodium, which can lead to chronic illnesses like high blood pressure.
- ▶ Diets high in sodium can lead to adverse health effects like high blood pressure.
- ▶ Nearly all school-age children consume too much sodium, putting them at risk for high blood pressure.

Source:

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture. 2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. 8th Edition. December 2015. Available at <http://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015/guidelines/>.

Access to School Meals and Impact on Food Security

FACT 30

A report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) found that the National School Lunch Program, the Summer Food Service Program and the Child and Adult Care Food Program were associated with significantly lower rates of food and nutrition insecurity for households with children, indicating that they provide a nutritional safety net for many food-insecure children.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ The National School Lunch Program provides a critical safety net for children facing food and nutrition insecurity.
- ▶ The Summer Food Program provides a critical safety net for children facing food insecurity.
- ▶ The Child and Adult Care Food Program provides a critical safety net for children facing food and nutrition insecurity.
- ▶ Several federal programs, like the National School Lunch Program, the Summer Food Service Program and the Child and Adult Care Food Program, provide critical safety nets for children facing food and nutrition insecurity.

Source:

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. Children's Food Security and USDA Child Nutrition Programs. June 2017. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/84003/eib-174.pdf?v=0>. Accessed April 8, 2020.

FACT 31

A longitudinal study found that National School Lunch Program participation was associated with a 14% reduction in the risk of food insufficiency among households with at least one child receiving a free or reduced-price school lunch.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ Children who receive free or reduced-price school lunch are more likely to get the food they need to grow up healthy and reach their full potential.
- ▶ Free and reduced-prices meals through the National School Lunch Program helps food-insecure children get the nutrition they need to grow up healthy and reach their full potential.
- ▶ Food insufficiency dropped by 14% among students who participated in the National School Lunch Program's free or reduced-priced lunch meals.

Source:

Huang J, Barnidge E. Low-income children's participation in the National School Lunch Program and household food insufficiency. *Soc Sci Med*. 2016; 150:8-14. doi: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2015.12.020.

FACT 32

A 2021 study found that students in food-insecure and marginally-secure households received more of their daily calorie intakes from school meals compared to students from food-secure households (22%, 20%, and 13%, respectively). This suggests that that healthy school meals are reaching students with greater need.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ School meals are critical for students experiencing food and nutrition insecurity at home as they provide the healthy calories kids need to learn and grow.
- ▶ School meals provide the healthy food kids experiencing food and nutrition insecurity need to learn and grow.
- ▶ About 20% of kids experiencing food and nutrition insecurity get more of their daily calorie intakes from school meals than kids from food-secure homes, suggested healthy school meals are reaching those with greater need.

Source:

Forrestal S, Potamites E, Guthrie J, Paxton N. Associations among food security, school meal participation, and students' diet quality in the first school nutrition and meal cost study. *Nutrients*. 2021; 13: 307. doi: 10.3390/nu13020307.

Healthy School Meals for All

Healthy school meals for all (through the Community Eligibility Provision or other universal school meals options, such as Provision 2) allow all enrolled children in a school that operates the National School Lunch Program or School Breakfast Program to receive free breakfast and free lunch, regardless of their family's income. Healthy school meals for all also negate the need for families to apply or schools to verify eligibility for the programs, freeing up time for school food service workers to focus on feeding children nutritious meals.

FACT 33

A recent review of nearly 50 studies found that programs providing healthy school meals for all:

- Positively impact students' academic performance;
- Improve students' attendance;
- Help school food service budgets financially;
- Reduce food and nutrition insecurity among vulnerable students; and
- Increase diet quality among students.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ Programs that provide healthy school meals for all help students learn better.
- ▶ Programs that provide healthy school meals for all have improved student attendance.
- ▶ Programs that provide healthy school meals for all help reduce students' experiences with food and nutrition insecurity.
- ▶ Programs that provide healthy school meals for all help students increase their nutritional intake.
- ▶ Programs that provide healthy school meals for all help school food service budgets.

Source:

Cohen JF, Hect AA, McLoughlin GM, Turner L, Schwartz MB. Universal school meals and associations with student participation, attendance, academic performance, diet quality, food security, and body mass index: a systematic review. *Nutrients*. 2021; 13:911. doi: 10.3390/nu13030911.

FACT 34

Schools that participate in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) often see increased participation in school meals and a reduced paperwork burden, allowing school nutrition professionals to focus less on program administration and more directly on offering and preparing healthy, appealing meals.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ More students participate in healthy school meals for all programs when the schools they attend participate in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP).
- ▶ The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) not only allows for more students eat a healthy school meal, it also reduces the paperwork and bureaucracy for school food service workers. This provides school nutrition professionals more time to do what they do best – to prepare healthy, appealing meals for students.
- ▶ School nutrition professionals have more time to prepare healthy, appealing meals for students when their schools participate in Community Eligibility Provision (CEP).

Sources:

U.S. Department of Agriculture; Food and Nutrition Service. Community Eligibility Provision Evaluation. February 2014. Available at: <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/CEPEvaluation.pdf>.

Hecht AA, Neff RA, Kelley TL, Pollack Porter KM. Universal free school meals through the Community Eligibility Provision: Maryland food service provider perspectives. *JAFSCD*. 2021; 10: 529-550. doi: 10.5304/jafscd.2021.102.033.

FACT 35

The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) reduces stigma that school meals are only for children from under-resourced families, resulting in more children receiving healthy meals, further reducing food and nutrition insecurity.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ When all students can participate in healthy school meals for all, it reduces the stigma associated with free or reduced-price school meal programs.
- ▶ Healthy school meals for all help more children receive the healthy meals their growing bodies need, while also reducing food and nutrition insecurity.

Source:

Cohen JF, Hecht AA, McLoughlin GM, Turner L, Schwartz MB. Universal school meals and associations with student participation, attendance, academic performance, diet quality, food security, and body mass index: a systematic review. *Nutrients*. 2021; 13:911. doi: 10.3390/nu13030911.

FACT 36

When schools do not need to collect fees for paid and reduced-price meals, students can move more quickly through the cafeteria line, potentially giving children, especially the youngest and most vulnerable children, more time to eat.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ Students have more time to eat their food when schools provide healthy school meals for all, rather than standing in line waiting to have their money collected from them.
- ▶ When schools provide healthy school meals for all, students are able to more quickly move through the cafeteria lines, giving them more time to eat their food.

Source:

Food Research & Action Center. Community Eligibility: The Key to Hunger-Free Schools; School Year 2018-2019. May 2019. Available at: <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/community-eligibility-key-to-hunger-free-schools-sy-2018-2019.pdf>.

FACT 37

A study of New York City's campaign for healthy school meals for all estimated that the city received \$61.8 million more in federal and state lunch reimbursement for the 2017–2018 school year than the previous year by opting into the Community Eligibility Provision and grew student participation in the meal program among elementary, middle and high school students.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ When New York City opted into healthy school meals for all, it not only increased student participation in school meals, the school food service program in the city also received nearly \$62 million more in federal and state meal reimbursement for a single school year.
- ▶ When New York City opted into healthy school meals for all, more elementary, middle and high school students participated in school meals.
- ▶ When New York City opted into healthy school meals for all, the school food service program in the city received nearly \$62 million more in federal and state meal reimbursement for a single school year.

Source:

Watts A, Araiza AL, Fernández CR, Rosenthal L, Vargas-Rodriguez I, Duroseau N, et al. The campaign for universal free lunch in New York City: lessons learned. *Pediatrics*. 2021; Sep 15;e2020049734. doi: 10.1542/peds.2020-049734.

FACT 38

There is growing evidence that healthy school meals for all produces important benefits for children's health and academic performance. Investments can yield long-term benefits because outcomes such as food and nutrition security and school attendance during childhood are predictive of health and productivity into adulthood.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ Healthy school meals for all benefit students' health and academics.
- ▶ Healthy school meals for all benefit students' health and academics because the program addresses food and nutrition insecurity and as a result, attendance can increase.
- ▶ Food and nutrition security and school attendance during childhood impact health and productivity into adulthood.
- ▶ Healthy school meals for all address students' hunger and nutritional needs, and encourage the students to come to school everyday.

Source:

Hecht AA, Pollack Porter KM, Turner L. Impact of the Community Eligibility Provision of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act on student nutrition, behavior, and academic outcomes: 2011–2019. *Am J Public Health*. 2020; 110:14-5-1410. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2020.305743.