

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 School

In December 2010, the bipartisan Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA)¹ 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. 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.² 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.³

From 2017-2020, there were efforts from the USDA to weaken the school meal nutrition standards by allowing for more sodium; allowing fewer whole grains and fruit in breakfast; changing the vegetable subgroups to allow for less variety; changing the milk standards to allow more sugary milk; and permitting more unhealthy foods in the à la carte line. Through litigation and other efforts, the USDA never finalized the proposed changes. Schools that participate in the meal programs must still meet the nutrition standards promulgated in 2012 and 2014.

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.⁶ CEP was phased into a few states at a time before expanding nationwide during school year 2014–2015. As of school year 2018-2019, 53.8% of eligible school districts now participate in CEP.⁷

Current Participation Trends

FACT 1

Each day, nearly 30 million students receive their midday meals through the National School Lunch Program, and more than 14 million students receive their morning meals through the School Breakfast Program. These numbers include all participating children: free, reduced-price and full-priced.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ Each day, nearly 30 million students in the United States receive free, low-cost or full-priced lunch at school.
- ▶ Each day, more than 14 million students in the United States receive 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 provides more than 14 million students across the country with breakfast at school each day.
- ▶ The National School Lunch Program provides nearly 30 million students at schools across the country with lunch each day.

Sources:

U.S. Department of Agriculture; Food and Nutrition Service. National School Lunch Program: Participation and lunches served (data as of July 10, 2020). <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/slsummar-7.pdf>. Accessed July 22, 2020.

U.S. Department of Agriculture; Food and Nutrition Service. School Breakfast Program: Participation and meals served (data as of July 10, 2020). <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/sbsummar-7.pdf>. Accessed July 22, 2020.

FACT 2

The National School Lunch Program is the nation's second largest food and nutrition assistance program. In fiscal year 2018, 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 2018, the National School Lunch Program operated in 100,000 schools and child care programs across the country.
- ▶ In 2018, 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:

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 March 17, 2020.

FACT 3

In fiscal year 2019, 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:

U.S. Department of Agriculture; Food and Nutrition Service. National School Lunch Program (data as of July 10, 2020). <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/slsummar-7.pdf>. Accessed July 22, 2020.

FACT 4

The National School Lunch Program provides low-cost or free lunches to nearly 22 million children daily, and the School Breakfast Program provides low-cost or free breakfasts to more than 12 million children daily.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ Each day, nearly 22 million students rely on the National School Lunch Program for free or low-cost midday meals.
- ▶ The National School Lunch Program provides nearly 22 million students with the free or low-cost midday meals they need to thrive while at school.
- ▶ As part of the National School Lunch Program, nearly 22 million students receive free or low-cost midday meals at school each day.
- ▶ Each day, more than 12 million students rely on the School Breakfast Program for free or low-cost morning meals.
- ▶ The School Breakfast Program provides more than 12 million students with the free or low-cost morning meals they need to thrive while at school.
- ▶ As part of the School Breakfast Program, more than 12 million students receive free or low-cost morning meals at school each day.
- ▶ Breakfast is served for free or at a low cost to more than 12 million students through the School Breakfast Program each day.
- ▶ Lunch is served for free or at a low cost to nearly 22 million students through the National School Lunch Program each day.

Sources:

U.S. Department of Agriculture; Food and Nutrition Service. National School Lunch Program: Participation and lunches served (data as of July 10, 2020). <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/slsummar-7.pdf>. Accessed July 22 2020.

U.S. Department of Agriculture; Food and Nutrition Service. School Breakfast Program: Participation and meals served (data as of July 10, 2020). <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/sbsummar-7.pdf>. Accessed July 22, 2020.

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://nalcd.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.
- ▶ Even after changes to implement healthier nutrition standards, nearly half of schools participating in the National School Lunch Program were small, with fewer than 500 students total.
- ▶ At the majority of schools participating in the National School Lunch Program after healthier nutrition standards were implemented, 40% or more of students were approved for free or reduced-price lunches.
- ▶ Following changes to nutrition standards in the 2014 school year, over two-thirds of schools participating in the National School Lunch Program had 40% or more of their student populations approved for free or reduced-price 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 March 17, 2020.

Schools Meeting Nutrition Standards and Creating Healthier Menus

FACT 7

A recent U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) evaluation found that updated nutrition standards led to improvements in school meals. Compared to data from school year 2009–2010, in 2014–2015, the mean Healthy Eating Index score (a measure of meeting the Dietary Guidelines for Americans) increased from 57.9 to 81.5 for lunches from 49.6 to 71.3 for breakfasts, out of a possible score of 100.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ A U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) evaluation found that school meals became healthier when the Department updated its nutrition standards.
- ▶ Students began eating healthier meals when the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) updated its nutrition standards.
- ▶ When the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) updated its nutrition standards, school lunch scores increased from 57.9 to 81.5 of a possible 100 points on the Healthy Eating Index; breakfast scores increased from 49.6 to 71.3.
- ▶ Following nutrition standards updates, school lunch scores are up nearly 24 points on the Healthy Eating Index.
- ▶ Following updates to nutrition standards, school breakfast scores are up nearly 22 points on the Healthy Eating Index.

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 8

According to a study from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the vast majority of schools (85%) met or were close to meeting the first sodium-reduction target in school year 2014-2015. Additionally, the majority of school meals met daily requirements for fruits (95%) and vegetables (81%).

Fast Facts:

- ▶ A study from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) found that 85% of schools are on track to reduce sodium in school meals.
- ▶ A study from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) found that 95% of schools met daily fruit standards while 81% met daily vegetable standards in 2014-2015.
- ▶ A study from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) found that most schools have reduced the sodium in the meals they serve to students while meeting the Department's daily fruit and vegetable standards.
- ▶ A study from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) found that most school meals met daily fruit and vegetable standards in 2014-2015.
- ▶ Nearly all schools were on target to reach sodium reduction goals in school meals in the 2014-2015 school year.

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

As of 2016, nearly all schools that participate in the National School Lunch Program were meeting the 2012 nutrition standards for school meals.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ Nearly all schools that participate in the National School Lunch program are meeting the 2012 nutrition standards.
- ▶ 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 meal standards set in 2012 for students.

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 10

In a study of eight school districts across the United States, during the three school years (2011–2014) leading to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Smart Snack ('competitive foods') regulation, there was a general trend toward purchasing foods and beverages with fewer calories and less sugar.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ One study found that, even before enactment of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) competitive foods regulation, schools were trending toward healthier options outside of the school meal program, with lower-calorie and lower-sugar food and drink options.
- ▶ Schools were moving toward offering lower-calorie and lower-sugar options for food and drinks outside of the school meal program before enactment of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Smart Snack regulation, according to a study of several U.S. school districts.
- ▶ During the three school years prior to U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) enactment of Smart Snack competitive food regulations, schools selling food and beverages outside of the school meal program were already offering lower-calorie and lower-sugar density options.
- ▶ One study found that, among eight U.S. school districts, food and beverages sold in cafeterias outside the school meal program were trending toward lower caloric and lower sugar density, even before the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) enacted Smart Snack regulations.

Source:

Wang YC, Hsaiao A, Chamberline P, Largay M, Archibald A, Malone A, et al. Nutrition quality of US school snack foods: a first look at the 2011–2014 bid records in 8 school districts. *J Sch Health*. 2017; 87:29-35. doi: 10.1111/josh.12465.

FACT 11

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 schools began using the Healthy Eating Index, breakfasts and lunches have become healthier.
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- ▶ Since schools began using the Healthy Eating Index, breakfasts and lunches have become more than 40% healthier.
- ▶ Breakfasts and lunches have become more than 40% healthier since schools began using the Healthy Eating Index.
- ▶ Since schools began using the Healthy Eating Index, 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, 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 12

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 energy, fat, saturated fat, sugar, vitamin C and iron, 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, fat and 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, fat 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 U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) 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 13

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 rich in whole grain (82%). No differences in adherence to nutrition standards were observed by school poverty level, suggesting that the nutrition standards established 2012 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) were feasible to implement across a wide variety of schools.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ A study found that schools were able to follow the 2012 nutritional standards set by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) regardless of whether they were located in high-income or low-income ZIP codes.
- ▶ Most schools have been able to meet the 2012 U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) healthier school meal standards.
- ▶ Most schools, regardless of the income level of the families of attending students, have been able to meet the 2012 U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) healthier school meal standards.
- ▶ Most schools have been able to meet the 2012 U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) healthier school meal standards—for example, by including serving foods rich in whole grain at lunchtime.
- ▶ Nutrition standards set by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) were implemented successfully in most schools, regardless of school poverty levels, suggesting that healthy meal requirements 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 14

A rapid health impact assessment published by Healthy Eating Research found that the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) 2020 proposed changes to school nutrition standards would negatively affect the quality of children's diets who consume school meals and competitive foods, reduce school meal participation and increase the risk that students fall into food insecurity, and could impact student academic performance and learning, especially among students who rely most on school foods, including Hispanic and Black children and those from underserved communities.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ The school nutrition standards rollback proposed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) would hurt student health.
- ▶ The school nutrition standards rollback proposed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) would hurt student health by reducing the quality of food they're served.
- ▶ Lowering the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) school nutrition standards would negatively impact meal quality, reduce the number of meals purchased and increase food insecurity for students.
- ▶ Lowering the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) school nutrition standards would negatively impact meal quality, reduce the number of meals kids buy and increase food insecurity for students.
- ▶ Lowering the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) school nutrition standards could lead to lower grades and test scores for students, especially for those who rely most on school meals.
- ▶ Lowering the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) school nutrition standards could lead to lower grades and test scores for students, especially among Black and Hispanic children and those from underserved communities.

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 March 23, 2020.

Student Consumption, Plate Waste and Acceptance of Healthier Food

Examples from across the country show that students are selecting more fruits and vegetables and eating healthier meals over time as a result of updated meal standards.

FACT 15

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 (before 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 not only increased their fruit and vegetable intake, with no increase in plate waste.
- ▶ When school lunches became healthier after the improved 2012 U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) 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 16

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 enacted 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 17

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 18

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 19

Studies have consistently shown that food waste was an issue even before passage of the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act. Therefore, weakening the standards will likely have minimal effects on plate waste.

Fast Facts:

- ▶ Studies show that food waste was a problem in school cafeterias before the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) improved its nutrition standards in 2012, so weakening standards will not likely reduce waste.
- ▶ Weakening school meal nutrition standards likely will not lead to less food waste in school cafeterias.

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.

Effect of Revenue and Participation Trends

FACT 20

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 nutritional standards, more students participate, increasing food service revenue for schools.
- ▶ Schools abiding by 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 21

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 in school years 2014–2015, 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 22

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:

- ▶ After nutrition standards were strengthened in school year 2014, school nutrition directors reported rising or stable revenue from meal reimbursements plus snack and beverage sales. 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 23

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 24

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 25

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 26

A national poll conducted by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation in 2015 found that 86% of the public supported the 2012 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 standards and 86% saying the 2012 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.wkkf.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 27

Modeling data show that implementing the 2012 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:

- ▶ Schools that use the 2012 improved nutrition standards could help lower childhood obesity rates.
- ▶ By using the higher 2012 school meal nutrition standards, schools could prevent 1.8 million cases of childhood obesity by 2025.
- ▶ Schools could 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, Sonnevile 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 28

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 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 less sodium when school meal standards improved in 2012.
- ▶ 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 29

A rapid health impact assessment published by Healthy Eating Research found that strong evidence supports the 2012 school nutrition standards and improved dietary consumption 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 school meals 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 30

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:

- ▶ 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 ninety percent 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:

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 31

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

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:

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 Meals and Impact on Food Security

FACT 32

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 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 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 insecurity.
- ▶ Several social services, 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 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 33

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-price 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.