



SCHOOL MEALS PROGRAMS

200 W. Baltimore Street • Baltimore, MD 21201 • Nancy S. Grasmick, State Superintendent of Schools

Revised May 2001

What are the School Meals programs?

The School Breakfast and National School Lunch Programs (NSLP) offer nutritious meals for students in public and private nonprofit schools across the country. After-school snacks are also available through NSLP. In Fiscal 2000, schools in Maryland served more than 80 million meals and nearly 740,000 snacks to students.

How did the programs get started?

Congress created the National School Lunch Program in 1946 after discovering that many young war recruits were in poor physical condition. Congress saw the program as a national readiness measure because poor nutrition had endangered our war effort. Congress authorized the School Breakfast Program when it passed the Child Nutrition Act of 1966. On the federal level, the programs are administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and in Maryland, they are administered by the Maryland State Department of Education.

Does my child's school serve breakfast?

Most public schools in Maryland offer breakfast for students daily. Call your school and ask if breakfast is served. If it is not, let the principal know you would like school breakfast to be an option for your child.

Is the food nutritious?

Definitely. All schools participating in the school lunch and school breakfast programs are required by federal law to comply with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Dietary Guidelines for Americans and Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDA). Over a week's time, school lunches must provide 33.3% of a student's RDA for protein, calcium, iron, vitamin A and vitamin C. School breakfast must provide 25%. Also, the week's meals are to include no more than 30% of calories from fat. Sodium and fiber are also monitored.

Is good taste important?

Absolutely. As food and nutrition service personnel take steps to cut fat, sodium and sugar, they're also working to prepare food kids will eat. They're attending hands-on workshops with chefs to learn creative ways to prepare and flavor foods. They're holding taste tests so children and parents can have a say in what's served in the school dining room. They're expanding the number of options available to children each day.

It's much easier to get a kid to try a greasy, high-fat burger than one made with turkey and lowfat cheese. But School Meals professionals are making inroads. Students are eating turkey burgers and enjoying kiwi. They're getting comfortable with lowfat dip for carrot sticks. They're exploring salad bars and making healthful choices. School Meals professionals are enthusiastic about continuing to make menu changes and encouraging students to try new foods.

Why all this emphasis on nutrition?

Because it makes sense. Research has shown that children who eat well do better in the classroom and perform better on standardized tests.

Researchers from Harvard University and Massachusetts General Hospital are evaluating a pilot program that provides breakfast for students in their classroom each morning. Breakfast is free to all students, regardless of family income. The researchers have found that the program has a positive impact on academics and behavior. A National Health Education Consortium study confirmed “a specific link between nutrition and learning in children.” And the American Dietetic Association found that children who eat well perform better in school because of “increased problem-solving ability and better memory, verbal fluency and creativity.”

How much do School Meals cost?

Each school system sets its own prices for School Breakfast and School Lunch. Call your child’s school for prices.

Can I prepay for my child’s meals?

Nearly every school has a system in place to accept advance payment for School Meals. Some schools offer a discount for prepaid meals. If you would like details, call your child’s school.

What if I can’t afford School Meals?

One of the objectives of the program is to make School Meals available at an affordable price. The federal government and the State of Maryland subsidize meals for students whose family income falls within certain guidelines. Some students receive reduced-price meals, while others receive their meals free.

At the beginning of each school year, your child’s school will send home an Application for Free and Reduced-Price Meals. You may also call your child’s school to request an application. Once you have the form, all you need to do is fill it out and return it. The school will let you know whether or not your child qualifies. If you receive food stamps or Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA), you may receive a letter telling you that you have been directly certified. If you receive such a letter, you do not need to fill out an application because your child is already approved for free meals.

For more information, call the Nutrition and Transportation Services Branch at 410-767-0199.



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