



National School Lunch Program Quick Facts

What is the School Lunch Program?

The National School Lunch Program is a federally assisted meal program operating in over 101,000 public and nonprofit private schools and residential child care institutions.

Participating school districts receive cash subsidies and donated foods from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for each meal they serve.

The lunches must meet Federal requirements, including offering free or reduced-price lunches to low-income children. Schools are also reimbursed for snacks served in afterschool educational or enrichment programs.

Nutritional Requirements



School lunches must meet the applicable recommendations of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans such as limiting calories from fat. Lunches must also provide one-third of the Recommended Dietary Allowances for certain key nutrients. While school lunches must meet Federal requirements, decisions about what specific foods to serve and how they are prepared are made locally.

Qualifications

Any child at a participating school may purchase lunches. However, children from families with incomes at or below 130 percent of the poverty level are eligible for free meals. Those with incomes between 130 percent and 185 percent of the poverty level are eligible for reduced-price meals. Local schools set their own prices for full-price meals but must operate a nonprofit lunch program.

Reimbursements

Most of the support USDA provides to schools in the National School Lunch Program comes in the form of a cash reimbursement for each meal served.

In addition to cash reimbursements, schools are entitled by law to receive USDA foods, called "entitlement" foods. Schools can also get "bonus" USDA foods as they are available from surplus agricultural stocks.

USDA provides schools with technical training and assistance to help school food service staffs prepare healthful meals, and with nutrition education to help children understand the link between diet and health.



For more information visit:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Lunch>