



School Nutrition

The American Heart Association's Position

- Maintain robust school nutrition standards for meals and competitive foods to ensure the health and wellbeing for all children, especially those who experience food insecurity, and the success of the programs.
- Prevent and reverse any rules that weaken the school nutrition standards to ensure the nutrition standards are aligned with the most current Dietary Guidelines for Americans, as required by law, and the updated Dietary Reference Intake for sodium.
- Include a limit for added sugars in the school nutrition standards (meals and competitive foods).
- Strengthen the sodium standards in the school nutrition standards to align with the updated sodium Dietary Reference Intake.
- Strengthen the School Breakfast Program nutrition standards to increase whole grains and fiber, reduce added sugars, and ensure a good source of protein.
- Support expanding the Summer Food Service Program and Summer EBT pilot and update the Summer Food Service Program nutrition standards to align with the current Dietary Guidelines for Americans.
- Use the research on school food operations and utilization during the COVID-19 pandemic to inform policy approaches to strengthen the school meals program for future crises.
- Continue to implement and expand the Community Eligibility Provision, allowing communities to offer free meals to all students.
- Adopt universal meals and allow all students to receive free breakfast and lunch while in school.
- School Breakfast Program should be supported to ensure it is reaching all students who do not receive a healthy breakfast at home.
- Maintain the integrity of the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program by allowing only fresh fruits and vegetables to be offered.
- Expand Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program to reach all eligible schools.
- Put policies in place to deal with unpaid meal debt that do not stigmatize children or prevent them receiving the full school meal.
- Support school nutrition professionals through training, technical assistance, and other approaches to help them reduce food waste without weakening the nutrition standards.
- Urge U.S. Department of Agriculture, in coordination with the U.S. Department of Education, to develop guidance on timing and length of lunch to help schools address this issue.
- Improve the lunch period through appropriate time of day and length of lunch, as well as overall cafeteria environment.
- Continue and increase support to provide nutritious, appealing meals through training and technical assistance.
- Increase investment in infrastructure through equipment grants and salad bars.

Fast Facts:

1. Each day in the United States, nearly 30 million students receive lunch through the National School Lunch Program (NSLP),¹ and more than 14 million students receive breakfast through the School Breakfast Program (SBP).²
2. The NSLP is the nation's second largest food and nutrition assistance program, after the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).
3. The majority of student participants are from under-resourced families—71 percent of NSLP participants and 85 percent of SBP participants receive free or reduced-price meals, which are determined by their household income.³
4. As of 2016, more than 99 percent of schools that participate in the NSLP were meeting the nutrition standards, up from 14 percent in 2009-2010.^{4,5}
5. A longitudinal study found that NSLP participation was associated with a 14 percent reduction in the risk of food insufficiency among households with at least one child receiving a free or reduced-price school lunch.⁶

For more information and resources from the American Heart Association's policy research department and nutrition policy positions please visit: <https://www.heart.org/en/about-us/policy-research>.

¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture; Food and Nutrition Service. National School Lunch Program: Participation and lunches served (data as of February 14, 2020). <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/slsu2020-2.pdf>. Accessed March 17, 2020.

² U.S. Department of Agriculture; Food and Nutrition Service. School Breakfast Program: Participation and meals served (data as of February 14, 2020). <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/sbsu2020-2.pdf>. Accessed March 17, 2020.

³ 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.

⁴ U.S. Department of Agriculture. Percent of School Food Authorities (SFA) certified for the performance-based reimbursement as of June 2016. 2016. Retrieved from: https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/cn/SFAcert_FY16Q4.pdf. Accessed February 2019.

⁵ U.S. Department of Agriculture. School Nutrition Dietary Assessment Study IV. 2012. Available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-nutrition-dietary-assessment-study-iv>. Accessed on February 2019.

⁶ 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.