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# THE SCHOOL BREAKFAST PROGRAM

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## *1. What is the School Breakfast Program?*

The School Breakfast Program is a federally assisted meal program operating in public and nonprofit private schools and residential child care institutions. It began as a pilot project in 1966, and was made permanent in 1975. The School Breakfast Program is administered at the Federal level by the Food and Nutrition Service. At the State level, the program is usually administered by State education agencies, which operate the program through agreements with local school food authorities in more than 89,000 schools and institutions.

## *2. How does the School Breakfast Program work?*

The School Breakfast Program operates in the same manner as the National School Lunch Program. Generally, public or nonprofit private schools of high school grade or under and public or nonprofit private residential child care institutions may participate in the School Breakfast Program. School districts and independent schools that choose to take part in the breakfast program receive cash subsidies from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for each meal they serve. In return, they must serve breakfasts that meet Federal requirements, and they must offer free or reduced price breakfasts to eligible children.

## *3. What are the meal requirements for school breakfasts?*

School breakfasts must meet the meal pattern and nutrition standards based on the latest *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. Most changes to the SBP's meal pattern begin in SY 2013-14 with more whole grains offered zero grams of trans fat per portion and appropriate calories for grades K-5, 6-8, and 9-12. More fruit will be offered to students beginning SY 2014-15 and the first target for reduction of sodium.

All school breakfasts must meet Federal meal requirements, though decisions about which specific foods to serve and how they are prepared are made by local school food authorities.

## *4. How do children qualify for free and reduced price breakfasts?*

Any child at a participating school may purchase a meal through the School Breakfast Program. Children from families with incomes at or below 130 percent of the Federal 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, for which students can be charged no more than 30 cents. (For the period July 1, 2013, through June 30, 2014, 130 percent of the poverty level is \$30,615 for a family of four; 185 percent is \$43,568)

Children from families over 185 percent of poverty pay full price, though their meals are still subsidized to some extent. Schools set their own prices for breakfasts served to students who pay the full meal price (paid), though they must operate their meal services as non-profit programs.

### *5. How much reimbursement do schools get?*

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

Schools may qualify for higher "severe need" reimbursements if 40% or more of their lunches are served free or at a reduced price in the second preceding year. Severe need payments are up to 30 cents higher than the normal reimbursements for free and reduced-price breakfasts. About 77 percent of the breakfasts served in the School Breakfast Program receive severe need payments. Higher reimbursement rates are in effect for Alaska and Hawaii.

For the latest reimbursement rates visit FNS website at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/rates-reimbursement>

### *6. What other support do schools get from USDA?*

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

### *7. How many children have been served over the years?*

In Fiscal Year 2012 over 12.9 million children participated every day. Of those, over 10.1 million received their meals free or at a reduced-price.

Participation has slowly but steadily grown over the years: 1970: 0.5 million children; 1975: 1.8 million children; 1980: 3.6 million children; 1985: 3.4 million children; 1990: 4.0 million children; 1995: 6.3 million children; 2000: 7.5 million children.

### *8. How much does the program cost?*

For Fiscal Year 2012, the School Breakfast Program cost \$3.3 billion, up from \$1.9 billion in Fiscal Year 2005. The cost in previous years was in 1970, \$ 10.8 million; in 1980, \$287.8 million; in 1990, \$ 599.1 million; and in 2000, \$1.39 billion.

### *For more information:*

For information on the operation of the School Breakfast Program and all the Child Nutrition Programs, contact the State agency in your state that is responsible for the administration of the programs. A listing of all our State agencies may be found on our web site at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/office-type/child-nutrition-programs>, select your State from the drop down box and select “apply.”

You may also contact us through the Communication Division at 703-305-2281, or by mail at 3101 Park Center Drive, Suite 926, Alexandria, Virginia 22302.

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