

# THE SCHOOL BREAKFAST PROGRAM



## 1. What is the School Breakfast Program?

The School Breakfast Program (SBP) is a federally assisted meal program operating in public and non-profit private schools and residential child care institutions. The SBP started in 1966 as a pilot project, and was made a permanent entitlement program by Congress in 1975.

Participation in the SBP has slowly but steadily grown over the years: 1970: 0.5 million children; 1980: 3.6 million children; 1990: 4.0 million children; 2000: 7.5 million children; 2010: 11.67 million children; and 2016: 14.57 million children.

## 2. Who administers the SBP?

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) administers the Program at the Federal level. At the State level, the Program is administered by State agencies, which operate the SBP through agreements with local school food authorities. State agency contact information is available at: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/school-meals-contacts>.

## 3. How does the Program work?

The SBP is generally operated by public or non-profit private schools of high school grade or below. Public or non-profit private residential child care institutions may also participate in the SBP, and charter schools may participate in the SBP as public schools. School districts and independent schools that choose to participate in the Program must serve breakfast meals meeting Federal nutrition requirements, and offer free or reduced

price breakfasts to all eligible children. In exchange, participating institutions receive cash subsidies from the USDA for each reimbursable meal served.

## 4. What are the nutrition requirements for school breakfasts?

All school breakfasts must meet Federal nutrition requirements, though decisions about the specific foods to serve and how the foods are prepared are made by local school food authorities. Information about the SBP meal pattern requirements may be found on the School Meals website: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/nutrition-standards-school-meals>.

## 5. How can children qualify for free or reduced price school breakfast?

Children may be determined “categorically eligible” for free meals through participation in certain Federal Assistance Programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or based on their status as a homeless, migrant, runaway, or foster child. Children enrolled in a federally-funded Head Start Program, or a comparable State-funded pre-kindergarten program, are also categorically eligible for free meals. Children can also qualify for free or reduced price school meals based on household income and family size. 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 and 185 percent of the Federal poverty level are eligible for reduced price meals. Schools may not charge children more than 30 cents for a reduced price breakfast. To see the current Income Eligibility Guidelines, please visit: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/income-eligibility-guidelines>.

### 6. What are the current reimbursement rates for participating schools?

School food authorities are reimbursed for meals based on children’s free, reduced price, or paid eligibility status. For current SBP reimbursement rates, please see: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/rates-reimbursement>. Schools serving a higher percentage of low-income students (at least 40 percent of children receive free or reduced price lunch) are considered “severe need” schools and are eligible for a higher reimbursement rate. Schools in Alaska, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico also receive a higher reimbursement rate, due to the higher cost of food in those areas.

### 7. What breakfast service options are available to schools?

In addition to the traditional, cafeteria-based breakfast model, schools may also consider an alternative breakfast model. For example, “Breakfast in the Classroom” involves serving the breakfast meal to children during a morning class, often while the teacher is taking attendance or giving classroom announcements. Schools operating “Grab & Go Breakfast” serve children a breakfast “to go,” often in a paper or plastic bag, before school or during a morning break. To learn more about these and other breakfast service options, please see the School Breakfast Program webpage: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/sbp/school-breakfast-program-sbp>.

### 8. What additional support do schools receive from FNS?

Through its Team Nutrition initiative, FNS provides training and technical assistance to school nutrition professionals to enable them to prepare and serve nutritious meals that meet the Program meal pattern requirements and appeal to children. The Team Nutrition Resource Library has web-based resources available to help children and school nutrition professionals understand the link between diet and health. State and local agencies may request free printed copies of certain Team Nutrition materials. To learn more, visit: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/team-nutrition>.

### 9. Where can I go to learn more about the SBP?

For more information about the SBP, please contact the State agency responsible for the administration of the Program in your State: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/school-meals-contacts>.

