



Family Support Snapshot #1

SCHOOL BREAKFASTS & LUNCHES

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What?

What are these programs?

The National School Breakfast Program and the National School Lunch Program provide nutritious food to students who might otherwise miss these meals or eat meals with inadequate nutrition. Research has demonstrated that the programs improve students' school achievement by

“Low-income children depend on the School Lunch Program for one-third to one-half of their nutritional intake each day.”



keeping hunger from interfering with performance. The programs contribute directly to the national and local farm economy because schools utilize commodities in meal preparation. Lastly, the programs support families while strengthening Minnesota, bringing about \$109 million in federal money to our state each year and directing state money to schools in need.

The federal government pays the majority of these programs' costs, giving schools \$2.40 for each free lunch served, \$2.00

for each reduced-price lunch, and up to \$1.31 for free breakfasts. (Schools with more than 60% of their students enrolled in free and reduced-price lunches receive slightly higher amounts.) The state contributes about 11 cents for lunches and 30 cents for breakfasts. However, each child who is enrolled in free or reduced-price lunch also leverages state “compensatory aid” funding, bringing additional dollars and resources directly into Minnesota’s classrooms and benefiting all of our students.

Family Size	Annual Income Limit for Free Lunch, 2006–07	Annual Income Limit for Reduced-Price Lunch, 2006–07
Family of 3	\$21,580	\$30,710
Family of 4	\$26,000	\$37,000

Who?

Who participates in these programs?

Children from families with an annual gross household income below 185% of the federal poverty guideline (FPG) can receive a reduced-price lunch (usually 40 cents), and those below 130% FPG can receive a free lunch. Special populations also qualify for free lunches regardless of income, including students who are homeless, in foster care, or whose families already receive Food Support (food stamps).

“Minnesota ranks 42nd among all states in offering school breakfast programs at schools that offer free and reduced-price lunches.”

In Minnesota, schools that have 33% or more of their students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunches are mandated by the state to also offer a school breakfast program. Only about 70% of schools that participate in the School Lunch Program also offer breakfast, despite research affirming its importance to students' well-being and learning. Forty-one other states have a higher percentage of schools offering breakfast than Minnesota.

On an average day during 2004-05, about 212,500 Minnesota students ate school lunches and paid less than full price. About 81,000 of these students were also served free breakfasts (38% of qualifying families).

Why?

Why is this program important to children, families and communities in Minnesota?

1. Physical Benefits for our Students and their Families

School meal programs improve students' nutritional intake by providing nutrient-dense foods. Studies have found that, compared to non-participants, students eating school lunches consume more protein, calcium, zinc and fiber, and less sugar.



Children who experience food insecurity may develop anxiety, aggression, and depression. Poor nutrition during childhood may permanently impair physical growth, brain development, and cognitive functioning. School meal programs can counteract these challenges, especially for the lowest income families.

This school year, the USDA mandated more rigorous nutrition requirements for school meals, resulting in meals that are lower in fat and sodium, but that still provide key nutrients important for growth and development.

2. Economic Benefits for our Farmers, Families and Communities

Qualifying families free up money in their budget.

A family with two elementary students in the Rochester school district, for example, would save \$4.10 a day by not paying full price for school meals, or the cost of otherwise buying food. This family could save almost \$700 over the course of the year to reallocate in their tight budget.

School nutrition programs boost the agricultural sector.

A 2003 USDA report found that school nutrition programs:

- Increased farm production (cash receipts) by \$870 million
- Added \$267 million to farm value (labor earnings and the returns to farm ownership)
- Generated \$1.9 billion in food consumption
- Added 7,738 farm jobs



Minnesota benefits from federal dollars.

Federal contributions to the school lunch and breakfast programs in Minnesota schools during 2004-05 brought in about \$109 million of federal money. Of those students in Minnesota who eat free or reduced-price school lunches, only about 38% also participate in breakfast programs (largely because of limited availability). If schools could boost that rate to 55%, Minnesota would claim more than \$7 million in additional federal money.

3. Educational Benefits for our Students and Schools

Students who participate in school meal programs exhibit:

- Greater alertness and attentiveness to classroom activities and tasks
- Fewer visits to the nurse
- Fewer behavioral problems
- Decreased rates of absence and tardiness
- Higher math, reading, and standardized test scores than hungry children

These benefits improve the learning environment for all students. In addition, schools receive nearly \$1,200 on average in compensatory aid from the state for each student enrolled in free and reduced-price lunch.

Amount of federal nutrition spending that flowed into Minnesota to help our children during the 2004–05 school year:

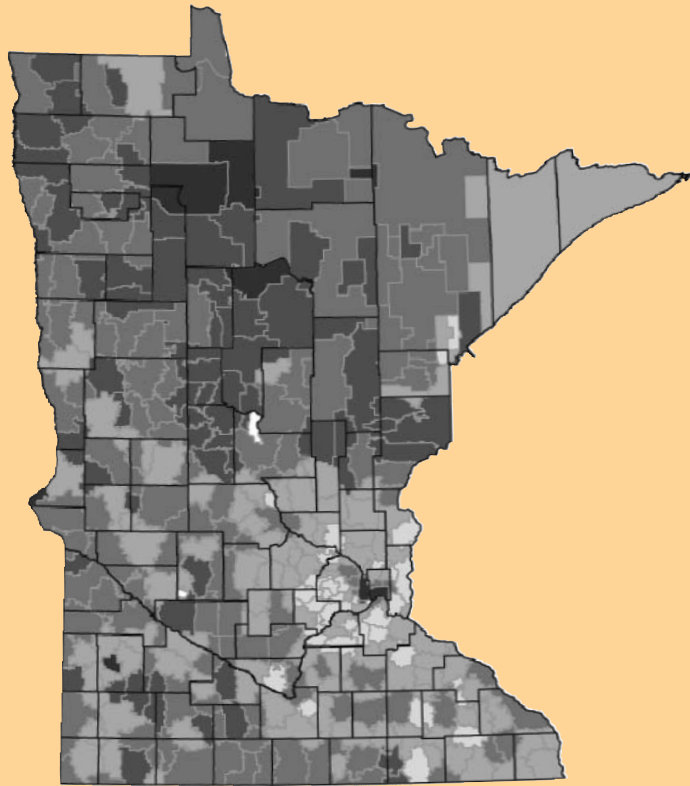
\$89 million (free & reduced lunches)
+ \$20 million (free breakfasts)

\$109 Million of Federal Money

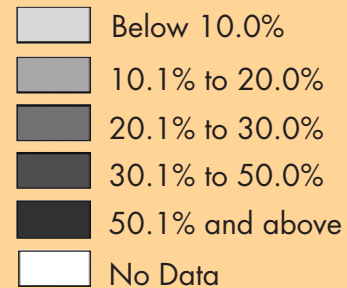


Free School Lunch Enrollment

As a Percentage of Total District Enrollment, 2005–2006



Percent of Students



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How many?

How many students are enrolled in free and reduced-price lunches?

- More than 3 out of every 10 public school students in Minnesota ate free or reduced-price lunches during the 2005-06 school year.
- Nationally, **about 15%** of children believed to qualify for free or reduced-price lunches **are not enrolled.**



Beyond receiving funds for meals, schools that enroll students in free and reduced-price lunches also receive state compensatory aid money, acknowledging that these children may have additional educational challenges.

If an average Minnesota school enrolled only 11 more eligible students in free lunches, they would receive enough compensatory aid money to hire a full-time teacher's assistant.



How?

How can I help families in my community benefit from these programs?

- Visit www.coveringallfamilies.org to learn if a child you know might qualify for free or reduced-price lunches, to download the one-page application, and to learn how simple

“Breakfast can prevent symptoms such as headache, restlessness and sleepiness from competing with educational outcomes.”

it is to enroll. Families can sign up at any time during the school year, and once enrolled in the lunch program may receive free breakfasts (if offered at their school).

- Encourage your school board members to implement breakfast programs at the schools that lack them. Much of the school day is over before hungry students have access to free and reduced-price lunches.
- Hunger Solutions Minnesota advocates for universal school breakfast, which offers a free breakfast to any student, regardless of family income. This would give all students the best start to their school day and make certain that breakfast isn't short-changed when families have a rushed morning at home. Universal breakfast has been shown to improve the educational climate of classrooms, boosting student achievement. Schools in the Minneapolis, Duluth and St. Paul districts currently offer universal free breakfast. Learn more at www.hungersolutions.org.

Learn More

For more information and a complete list of references for this document, please visit www.cdf-mn.org. Then click on Family Support Snapshots under Research & Reports.

Volunteer with the Children's Defense Fund Minnesota to help eligible families learn about this and other supportive programs. Contact Ryan at 651-855-1175 or johnson@cdf-mn.org, or Elaine at 651-855-1176 or cunningham@cdf-mn.org.



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Family Support Snapshots

An occasional series from the Children's Defense Fund Minnesota that examines the importance of public programs to the health of families and communities.

