

Four Key Facts in Support of the Improved School Nutrition Standards

The Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010 required the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to make significant nutrition improvements in federally-funded school meals, as well as to improve the overall quality of the food sold at school. Specifically, USDA was mandated to update nutrition standards for school lunch, breakfast, and “competitive foods” (meals, snacks and beverages served and sold in schools outside of the federal programs).

The new standards are vital to the health and learning of the nearly 31 million children who eat school lunch and 14 million who eat school breakfast each day. Of the students who eat meals at school, more than 20 million at lunch and 12 million at breakfast are from low-income families and receive free or reduced-price meals. These students rely on school meals, and the new standards improve nutrition shortfalls and help address the nation’s obesity problem.



FACT: 99 Percent of All School Districts Have Implemented the School Nutrition Standards

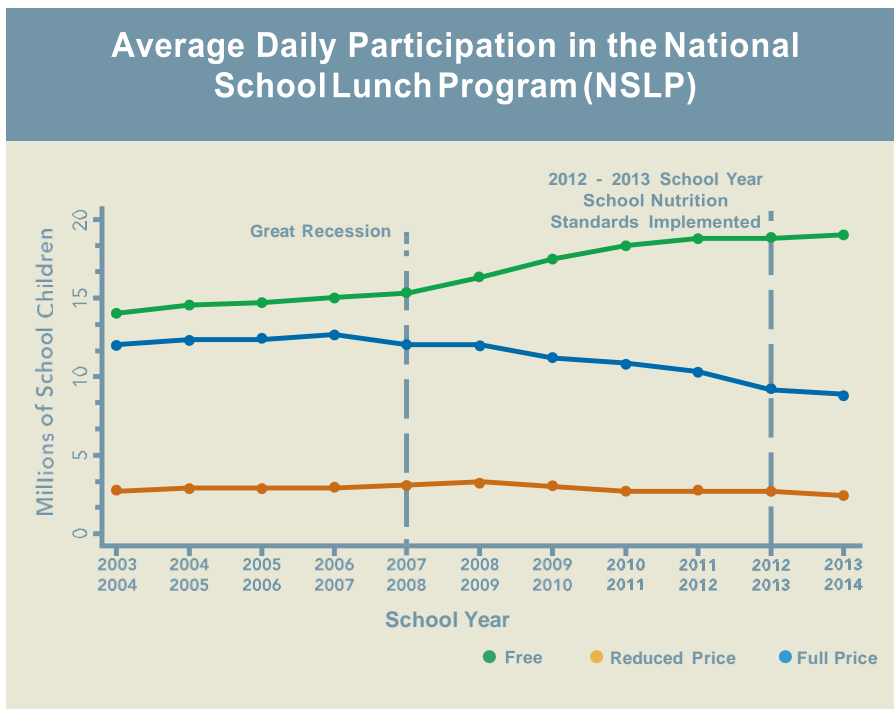
The new school nutrition standards may present some challenges for some schools, but USDA is aggressively working to help districts make the transition as smoothly as possible, including by implementing reimbursements to help schools with any increased costs. School districts that certify that they meet the new standards receive an additional 6 cents per meal reimbursement. As of October 2016, 99 percent of all school districts nationwide had implemented the new standards and had started receiving this reimbursement.

FACT: Parents Support the New School Nutrition Standards

A majority of parents support the new standards, according to a poll released by The Pew Charitable Trusts, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the American Heart Association. Seventy-two percent favor national school meal standards and school snack standards. The support cut across racial and political lines, with 68 percent of whites, 85 percent of Hispanics and 91 percent of African-Americans supporting the standards, and 56 percent of Republicans, 71 percent of independents and 84 percent of Democrats supporting the standards.

FACT: More Low-Income Students Participate in School Meals

Some have claimed that the new nutrition standards are resulting in dramatically reduced school lunch participation. However, a recent report released by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), *National School Lunch Program: Trends and Factors Affecting Participation*, showed that more low-income children are participating in school lunch. This trend began in the 2007-2008 school year, driven by an increase of children eligible for free school meals due to the recession and on-going improvements to the process that certifies eligible children for free school meals. This trend continued as the new nutrition standards were being implemented. Participation among moderate and higher income children began decreasing at the same time, dropping an average of five percent each school year until the 2013-2014 school year. The decreasing participation began five years prior to the implementation of the new nutrition standards, driven by the shifting of many children from paying for school lunches to receiving them for free due to lower family incomes in the recession and to significant increases in school lunch fees for children not eligible for free or reduced-price meals.



The data analysis shows that lower family incomes and improvements to the eligibility process for school meals have led to a continuous increase in participation among low-income children; and increased lunch prices for children not eligible for free or reduced-price meals has contributed to a multi-year decline in participation for those with higher family incomes. FRAC also noted these changes both are part of longer-term trends.

FACT: Children Eat More Fruits and Vegetables

The improved school nutrition standards are getting healthier meals to students, many of whom rely on school food for half their daily caloric intake. For example, according to one study from researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health, the new standards increased fruit selection by 23 percent, and increased vegetable consumption by 16 percent per student. The study also found the new standards did not result in increased average plate waste per student.

Source: Food Research and Action Center, www.FRAC.org