



Federal Nutrition Programs: School Meal Programs

Erin Kennedy Hysom | Sr. Child Nutrition Policy Analyst | ehysom@frac.org

July 21, 2026

Who We Are

The Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) improves the nutrition, health, and well-being of people struggling against poverty-related hunger in the United States through advocacy, partnerships, and by advancing bold and equitable policy solutions. For more information about FRAC, or to [sign up](#) for FRAC's e-newsletter, go to www.frac.org.



What We Do

- Conduct research to document the extent of hunger and identify effective solutions
- Advocate for federal, state and local public policies that protect and strengthen the federal nutrition programs
- Provide coordination, training, technical assistance, and support on hunger-related issues

Federal Child Nutrition Programs

School-Aged Child Nutrition Programs

**National
School Lunch
Program
(NSLP)**

**School
Breakfast
Program
(SBP)**

**Summer
Nutrition
Programs**

**Afterschool
Nutrition
Programs**

Summer EBT

National School Lunch Program (NSLP)

- The **National School Lunch Program (NSLP)** provides free, reduced-price, or paid lunches in participating schools
- Any student attending a school that operates the National School Lunch Program can participate in the meal service. What the federal government covers, and what a student pays, depends on household income.
- All meals served must meet **nutrition standards**



Just over **21.1 million children** received a **free or reduced-price lunch** on a typical day in the 2023–2024 school year.

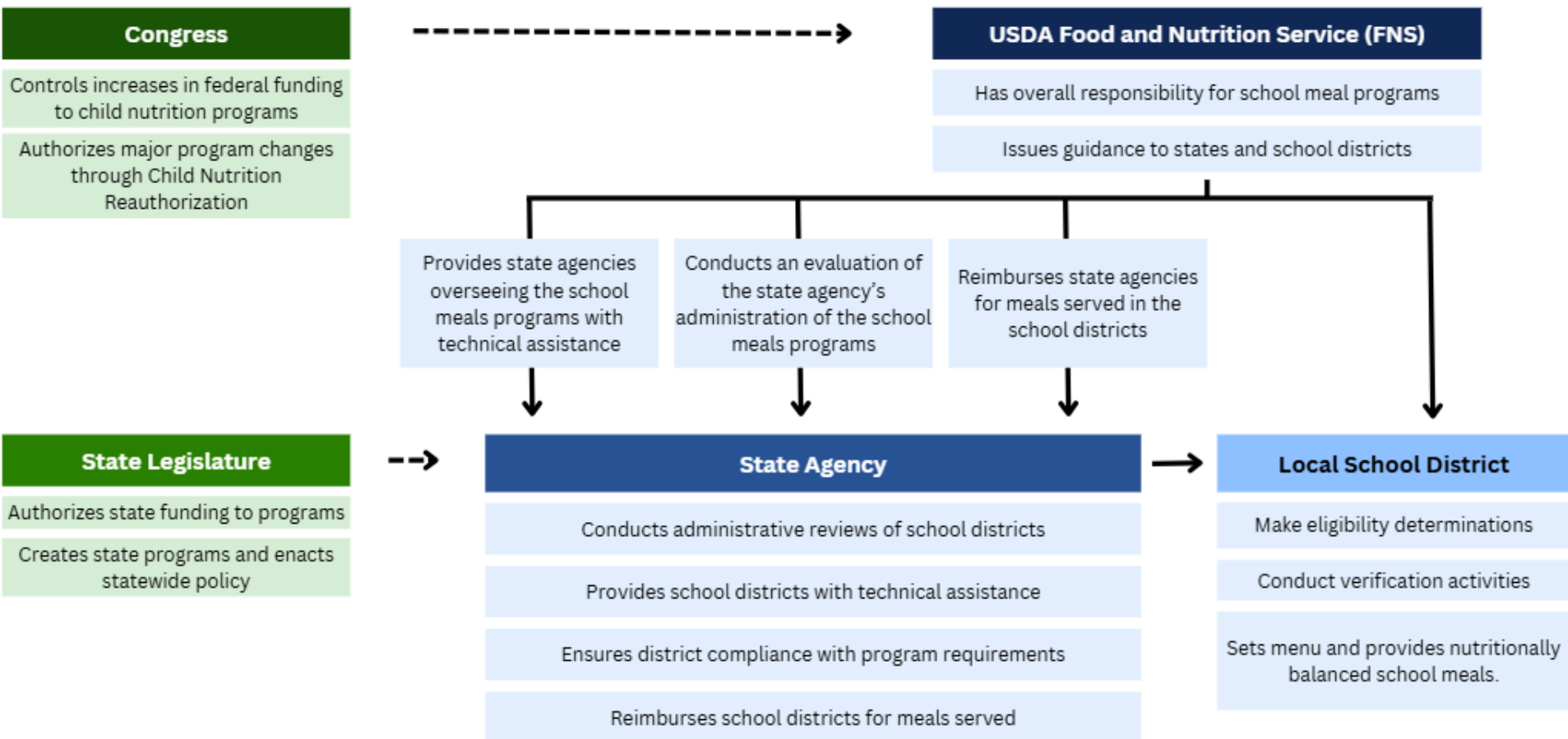
School Breakfast Program

- **The School Breakfast Program (SBP)** provides free, reduced-price, or paid breakfasts in participating schools
- Any student attending a school that operates the School Breakfast Program can participate in the meal service. What the federal government covers, and what a student pays, depends on household income.
- All breakfasts served must meet **nutrition standards**



Just over **12.2 million children** received a free or reduced-price breakfast on a typical day in the 2023–2024 school year.

Only **58.1 children** received a FRP school breakfast for every **100 children** who received a FRP school lunch.



School Meals Support Students, Families, and Schools



Reduce

Food Insecurity & Support
Household Finances

Improve

Student Health & Wellbeing

Support

Academic Achievement

Photo Credit: Fulton County Public Schools

Benefits of School Breakfast



Photo Credit: Anne Arundel County Public Schools

Health:

- Improves Dietary Intake
- Decreases Risk of Food Insecurity
- Protects Against Negative Health Outcomes

Learning:

- Supports Student Behavior
- Improves Attendance
- Strengthens Academic Achievement

School Meals are Nutritious



Photo Credit: Richmond County School System

- Healthiest source of food for children across the U.S.
- Participants have better diet quality than peers who don't participate
- Nutrition regulations are based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans
 - Added sugars limits phasing in
 - Anticipate new regulations being released this fall

School Meals Support Households



Save Time - If you spend 10 minutes a day packing lunch, that adds up to 30 hours (1,800 minutes) each school year



Save Money – Students who receive a free school breakfast and lunch each school day save households over \$1,000 per year

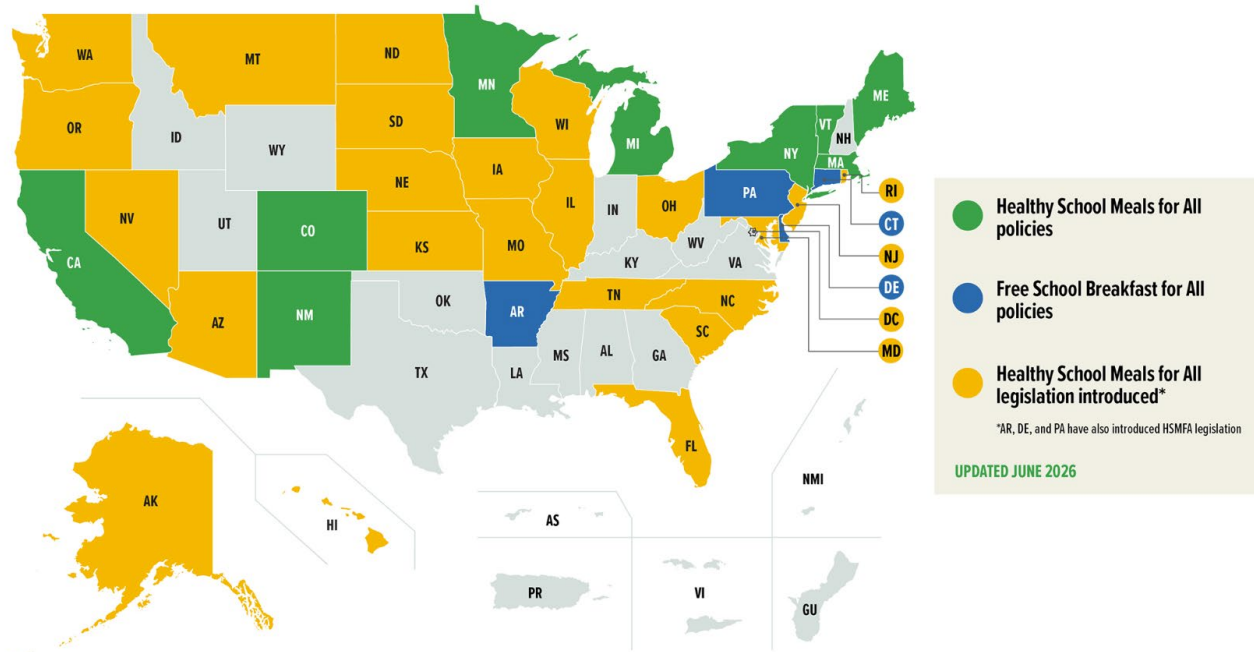


Introduce Children to New Food – Children who consume school meals are often exposed to a variety of colorful fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and entrees representing a variety of different cultures and traditions

Healthy School Meals for All

How Some Schools Are Able to Offer All Children School Meals At No Charge

Healthy School Meals for All



Community Eligibility

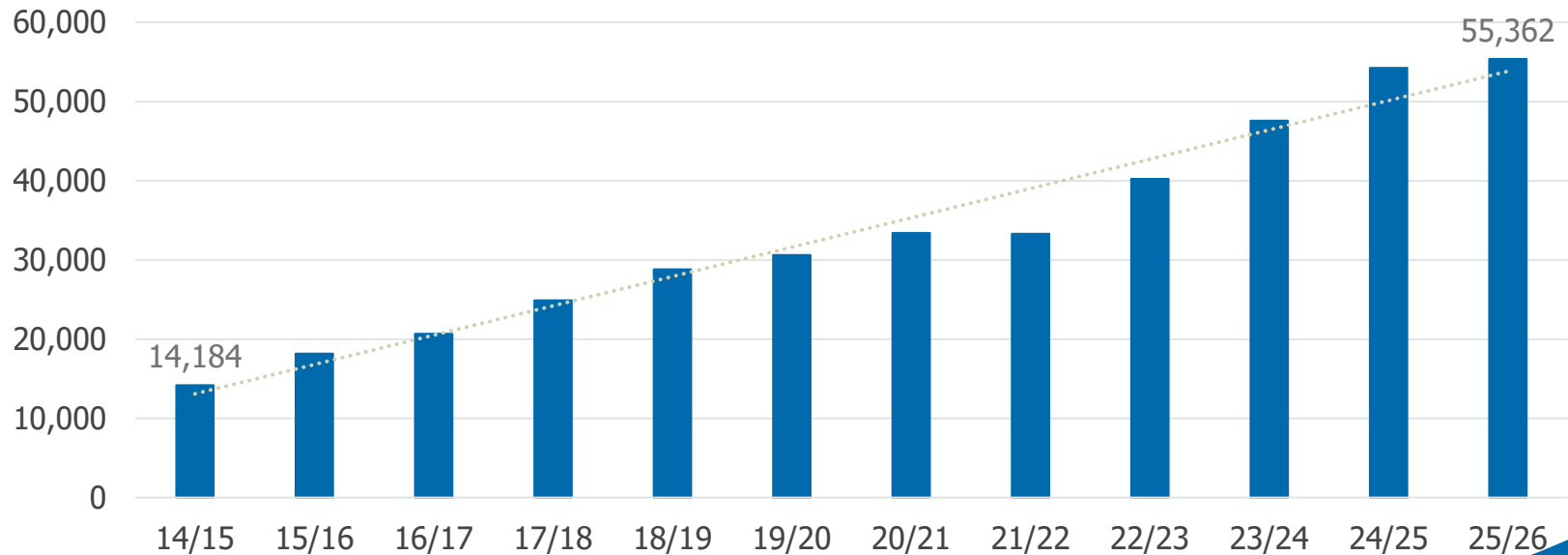
Allows high-need schools to offer school meals to all children at no charge



Photo Credit: School District of Philadelphia

Community Eligibility Provision

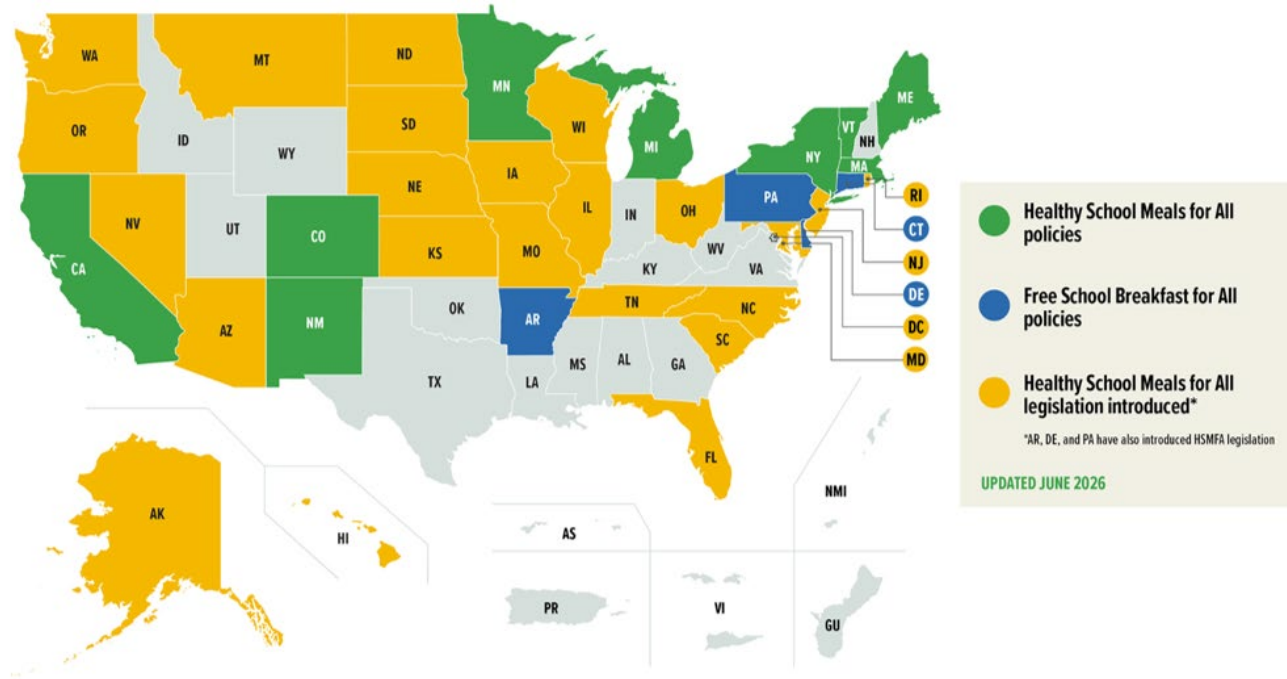
Participating Schools



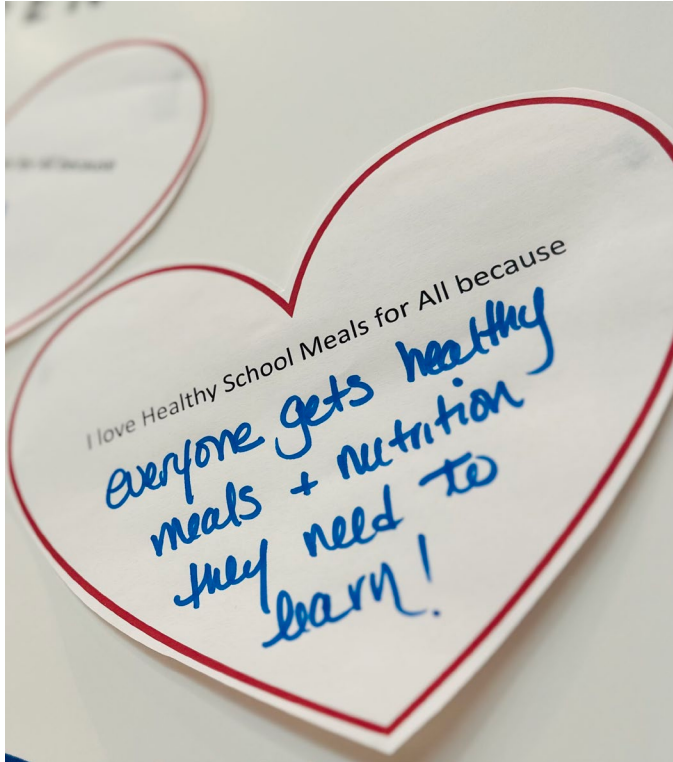
Source: FRAC's [Community Eligibility Report](#), 2026

How Children Qualify for Free or Reduced-Price Meals

State Policy



Community Eligibility: A School District Decision

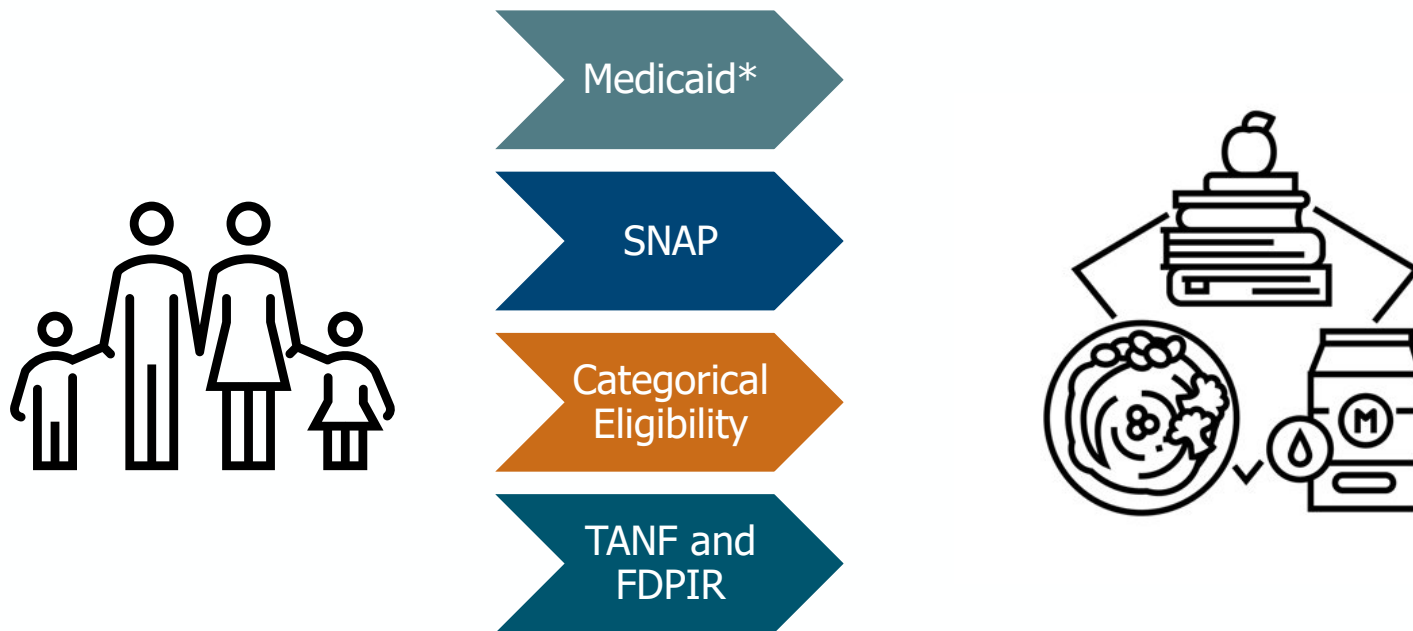


Schools, groups of schools, or entire school districts are eligible to participate in CEP if their **Identified Student Percentage (ISP) is $\geq 25\%$ as of April 1st**

CEP Database

State: Alabama					
District: All					
Eligibility: All					
Show: ☐ Schools Participating ☐ Schools Not Participating ☒ Both					
Eligibility for Community Eligibility Provision					
1133 CEP adopting schools of 1290 eligible and near-eligible schools					
About the Database					
State	School District (Local Educational Agency or LEA)	School	Identified Student Percentage (ISP)	Participation in CEP	Student Enrollment (Where Available)
Alabama	ALABAMA AEROSPACE AND AVIATION SCHOOLS, INC	ALABAMA AEROSPACE AND AVIATION HIGH SCHOOL	47%	Yes	85
Alabama	ALABASTER CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION	CREEK VIEW ELEMENTARY	46%	No	950
Alabama	ALABASTER CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION	MEADOW VIEW ELEMENTARY	48%	No	951
Alabama	ALABASTER CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION	THOMPSON HIGH SCHOOL	41%	No	2123
Alabama	ALABASTER CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION	THOMPSON INTERMEDIATE	45%	No	916
Alabama	ALABASTER CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION	THOMPSON MIDDLE SCHOOL	45%	No	1448
Alabama	ALBERTVILLE CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION	ALBERTVILLE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	73%	Yes	920
Alabama	ALBERTVILLE CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION	ALBERTVILLE HIGH SCHOOL	73%	Yes	1694
Alabama	ALBERTVILLE CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION	ALBERTVILLE INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL	73%	Yes	841
Alabama	ALBERTVILLE CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION	ALBERTVILLE KINDERGARTEN AND PRE-K	73%	Yes	620
Alabama	ALBERTVILLE CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION	ALBERTVILLE MIDDLE SCHOOL	73%	Yes	897
Alabama	ALBERTVILLE CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION	ALBERTVILLE PRIMARY SCHOOL	73%	Yes	884
Alabama	ALEXANDER CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION	ALEXANDER CITY MIDDLE SCH	73%	Yes	428
Alabama	ALEXANDER CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION	BENJAMIN RUSSELL HIGH SCH	73%	Yes	816
Alabama	ALEXANDER CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION	JIM PEARSON ELEM SCHOOL	73%	Yes	718
Alabama	ALEXANDER CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION	NATHANIEL H STEPHENS ELEM	73%	Yes	418
Alabama	ALEXANDER CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION	WILLIAM L RADNEY ELEM SCH	73%	Yes	406
Alabama	ANDALUSIA CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION	ANDALUSIA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	64%	Yes	1086
Alabama	ANDALUSIA CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION	ANDALUSIA HIGH SCHOOL	64%	Yes	494
Alabama	ANDALUSIA CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION	ANDALUSIA JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL	64%	Yes	243
Alabama	ANNISTON CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION	ANNISTON HIGH SCHOOL	88%	Yes	445
Alabama	ANNISTON CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION	ANNISTON MIDDLE SCHOOL	88%	Yes	377
Alabama	ANNISTON CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION	COBB PRE-K ACADEMY	88%	Yes	279

Identified Students



*Currently 44 states use Medicaid and income data to certify children for free and reduced-price school meals.

Categorically Eligible Children



Photo Credit: La Rue County Schools

Automatic eligibility can also cover children who are identified as:

- homeless or “unaccompanied youth,”
- runaway,
- migrant,
- participating in Head Start, or
- in foster care.

School Meals Applications

Free Meals

Household Size	Annual	Monthly	Twice per Month	Every Two Weeks	Weekly
1	\$20,345	\$1,696	\$848	\$783	\$392
2	\$27,495	\$2,292	\$1,146	\$1,058	\$529
3	\$34,645	\$2,888	\$1,444	\$1,333	\$667
4	\$41,795	\$3,483	\$1,742	\$1,608	\$804
5	\$48,945	\$4,079	\$2,040	\$1,883	\$942
6	\$56,095	\$4,675	\$2,338	\$2,158	\$1,079
7	\$63,245	\$5,271	\$2,636	\$2,433	\$1,217
8	\$70,395	\$5,867	\$2,934	\$2,708	\$1,354
For each additional family member add...	\$7,150	\$596	\$298	\$275	\$138

School Meals Application

Names and Grades of
Each Child

Names of All
Household Members
(Economic Unit)

Amount and Source of
Income for Each
Household Member

Signature of an Adult
Household Member

Last Four Digits of the
Adult's Social Security
Number (or indicate
that the adult does
not have one)

Household Income

- Report all GROSS income (before taxes)
- Earnings from Work
- Income from Public Assistance/Child Support/Alimony
- Income from Pensions/Retirement/Social Security/SSI/VA Benefits/Other
- Child Income

Sources of Income

Sources of Income

Earnings from Work	Public Assistance/Alimony/ Child Support	Pensions/Retirement/ All other sources of income
• Salary, wages, cash bonuses, tips, commissions • Net income from self-employment (farm or business) If you are in the U.S. Military: • Basic pay and cash bonuses (do NOT include combat pay, FSSA, or privatized housing allowances) • Allowances for off-base housing, food, and clothing	• Unemployment benefits • Workers' compensation • Supplemental Security Income (SSI) • Cash assistance from State or local government • Alimony payments • Child support payments • Veterans benefits • Strike benefits	• Social Security/Disability (including railroad retirement and black lung benefits) • Private Pensions or disability benefits • Income from trusts or estates • Annuities • Investment income • Earned interest • Rental income • Regular cash payments from outside household

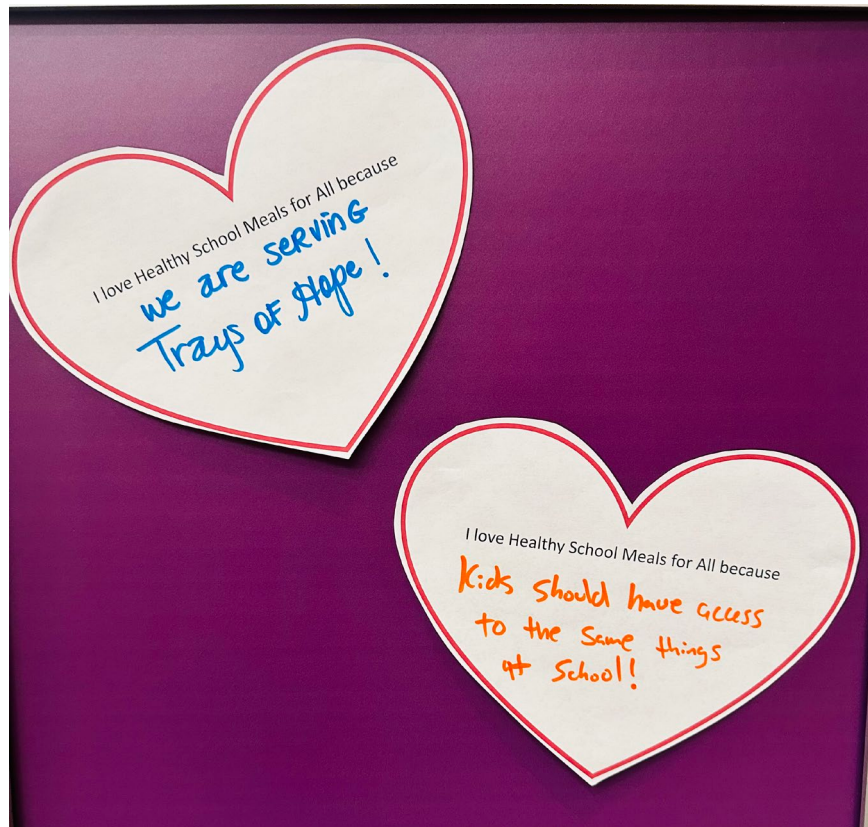
Examples of Income for Children

• A child has a regular full or part-time job where they earn a salary or wages
• A child is blind or disabled and receives Social Security benefits • A parent is disabled, retired, or deceased, and their child receives Social Security benefits
• A friend or extended family member regularly gives a child spending money
• A child receives regular income from a private pension fund, annuity, or trust

Resources & Contacts

FRAC Resources

frac.org



School District's Food & Nutrition Services

Might be called:

- Child Nutrition Services
- Division of Food & Nutrition
- School Nutrition
- School Meals



Photo Credit: Anne Arundel County
Public Schools



Questions?

Connect With Us!

Food Research & Action Center

1200 18th Street, NW, Suite 400 | Washington, DC 20036

202.986.2200 | www.frac.org



[@fractweets](https://twitter.com/fractweets)



facebook.com/foodresearchandactioncenter



[@fracgram](https://www.instagram.com/fracgram)



linkedin.com/company/food-research-and-action-center