

# What You Need to Know About School Nutrition

## The Core Programs

### **School Breakfast**

Increasing participation in the National School Breakfast Program (NSBP)<sup>1</sup>

- 10.6 million children served daily
- 1.8 billion breakfasts served annually

### **School Lunch**

Increasing participation in National School Lunch Program (NSLP)<sup>1</sup>

- 31 million children served daily. 95% of schools participate in NSLP
- 5.2 billion lunches served annually

## The Facts About School Meals

### **School meals have come a long way!**

Today, kids are offered healthy, tasty and appealing choices:

- Fresh fruits and vegetables
- Whole grains
- Reduced TransFats
- Salad Bars
- Pizza with whole wheat crust, low-fat cheese, low-sodium sauce
- Whole grain pasta
- Baked items rather than fried
- Healthful cooking/preparation techniques

### **School meals are balanced and healthy**

NSLP lunches must meet federal nutrition guidelines. These meals must:

- limit fat and saturated fat
- provide one-third of the Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) of protein, calcium, iron, and vitamins A and C
- contain age-appropriate portion sizes
- provide the right balance of protein, dairy, grains, fruits and vegetables.

### **School meals help kids maintain a healthy weight**

- Students who eat school meals provided through the NSLP and the SBP are more likely to be at a healthy weight.<sup>2</sup>
- NSLP participants are more likely than non-participants to consume vegetables, milk and milk products, and meat and other protein-rich foods, both at lunch and over 24 hours; they also consume less soda and/or fruit drinks.<sup>1</sup>
- Students are less likely to gain weight during the school year when in school then during the summer when school is out.

### **School meals are a great deal**

On average it costs less to buy a school lunch than to bring a packed lunch from home.

- The estimated national average cost of a school lunch from home was \$3.43, while the national average price of a school lunch was \$2.08.<sup>3</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Source: USDA

<sup>2</sup> Source: Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine, August 2003

<sup>3</sup> Source: Alice Jo Rainville, PhD, RD, CHE, SNS of Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, MI

### ***School meals help students to do better in school***

- Research has shown that students who eat school meals perform their best academically.
- Students who eat school breakfast have greater gains in standardized test scores and show improvements in math, reading and vocabulary scores.<sup>4</sup>
- Healthy eating correlates with less trips to the school nurse and less absenteeism.
- Providing nutritious school breakfast on testing days leads to improved test scores.

### ***School meals offer a critical service to our communities***

The NSLP and NSBP help ensure that no child will go hungry during the school day.

- Children from families with incomes at or below 185 percent of the poverty level are eligible for free or reduced price meals.
- For some children, a free school meal is the only meal they will have all day.

### ***School meals are safe***

- School nutrition professionals have rigorous training in food safety and have implemented a HACCP Plan.
- School kitchens are subject to two health inspections annually conducted by the local health department.
- According to the Food and Drug Administration, school kitchens are among the safest of commercial and institutional foodservice establishments.

## **The Role of Parents**

### ***Parents and school nutrition professionals share the same goals***

- Well-balanced nutritious meals for kids
- Creating healthy eating habits for life

### ***Parents are role models and influence what kids eat***

- Encourage healthy eating and lifestyles at home for you and your kids (actions speak louder than words...)

## **Support Healthy School Meals**

Contact your members of Congress and call for adequate funding for school meals

- The federal government reimburses schools for the free and reduced price meals they serve, but that reimbursement is too low.
- The average cost to prepare and serve a school lunch is \$2.92, but the reimbursement for a free meal is only \$2.68.
- With a higher reimbursement rate, schools could provide students with an even greater variety of fruits, vegetables and whole grains in school meals.



## **How to Get Involved**

- Review the cafeteria menu with your kids to help them plan for a balanced meal
- Join your kids for school lunch or school breakfast
- Communicate any concerns or special diets your kids may have
- Tell us what you think

## **For More Information**

- Visit [www.schoolnutrition.org](http://www.schoolnutrition.org) or contact the School Nutrition Association at (301) 686-3100 or (800) 877-8822

<sup>4</sup> Source: *Classroom Breakfast Scores High in Maryland, Maryland Meals for Achievement. October 2001*