

Press Release



The School Breakfast Program and National School Lunch Program: A Primer

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The Food and Nutrition Service of the United States Department of Agriculture administers both the School Breakfast Program (SBP) and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) to help ensure all children, particularly low-income children, receive breakfast and lunch while at school or childcare. In a new primer, AAF's Director of Human Welfare Policy Tara O'Neill Hayes outlines each program's eligibility requirements, costs, and participation rates over time.

Her central points:

- The federal government helps states provide meals to roughly 30 million children through the NSLP and the SBP, with nearly 88 percent of school meals served in 2020 provided to low-income students for free or at a reduced price;
- Children in families with income at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL) qualify for free breakfast and lunch, while those in households with incomes below 185 percent FPL pay 40 cents or less for either meal;
- Participation in the NSLP has declined slightly over the past decade, serving roughly 30 million students per day, while participation in the SBP has risen, serving nearly 15 million students daily in 2019. The number of students receiving free meals has risen in both programs since 2010; and
- Total federal costs for school food programs were approaching \$20 billion in 2019, and totaled nearly \$25 billion in 2020, with the additional assistance provided as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

[Read the primer.](#)