



# School Lunch and Breakfast Programs

Prepared by: Emily Hicks, Staff Attorney

Federal school nutrition programs provide funding for states to reimburse schools for the costs of providing meals to students. These include the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the School Breakfast Program (SBP), which are administered at the federal, state, and local levels.<sup>1</sup>

## NSLP AND SBP

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) distributes aid to states to fund school meals for eligible students through both the NSLP and the SBP. In Wisconsin, this aid is provided to the Department of Public Instruction (DPI), which then distributes the funding to school districts, private schools, independent charter schools, tribal schools, the Wisconsin Educational Services Program for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and the Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired.<sup>2</sup>

Federal law requires state partial matching of NSLP funding.<sup>3</sup> The specific amount a state is required to provide may vary from year to year depending on how the state's per capita income compares to the per capita income of the United States. Wisconsin was required to provide \$4.2 million in state funding for school lunches in the 2021-22 school year to receive the federal funding.

Participation in NSLP and SBP is optional. If a school participates in either or both programs, the cost of providing meals to all students is subsidized by federal, and in the case of NSLP, state funding. Free and reduced-price meals are reimbursed at a higher rate than full-price meals.

## ELIGIBILITY

Families are eligible for free or reduced-price meals in two ways: (1) through an application that evaluates household income; and (2) through direct certification of categorical eligibility. Under the first method, students qualify for reduced-price meals if their household income is above 130 percent and below or equal to 185 percent of the federal poverty guidelines. Students qualify for free lunches if their household income is at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty guidelines.

Alternatively, students may be eligible for free meals via direct certification of categorical eligibility. Categorical eligibility means the student is eligible because they meet specified criteria or are already participating in particular programs. Specifically, students are eligible for free meals if they are a migrant, a runaway, homeless, in foster care, enrolled in Head Start, or in a household receiving benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).<sup>4</sup>

Students may receive free lunches based on their individual eligibility, but students may also receive free lunches if they attend a qualifying school. Certain schools qualify for the community eligibility provision (CEP). In these schools, every student is eligible for free lunch, regardless of their family's income. A school may participate in CEP if at least 40 percent of students are certified for free meals because of household participation in SNAP, FDPIR, or TANF, being enrolled in Head Start, or being a migrant, a runaway, homeless, or in foster care. Additionally, to participate in CEP, schools must participate in both NSLP and SBP and must opt-in to CEP.<sup>5</sup>

## NUTRITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

In order for schools to receive reimbursements for meals, lunches and breakfasts must meet federal nutritional requirements. Nutritional standards vary by grade ranges, as shown below, but generally

require a minimum quantity of fruits, vegetables, grains, proteins, and milk per day, as well as maximum amounts of saturated fat, trans fat, and sodium, and minimum and maximum amounts of calories.

### Lunch Nutritional Requirements<sup>6</sup>

|  | Grades K-5  | Grades 6-8  | Grades 9-12 |
|--|---|-------------|-------------|
| <b>Food Components: Amount of Food per Week (minimum per day)</b>                  |   |             |             |
| <b>Fruits (cups)</b>   | 2.5 (0.5)   | 2.5 (0.5)   | 5 (1)       |
| <b>Vegetables (cups)</b>   | 3.75 (0.75)   | 3.75 (0.75) | 5 (1)       |
| <b>Grains (oz. eq.)</b>  | 8-9 (1)   | 8-10 (1)    | 10-12 (2)   |
| <b>Meats/Meat Alternates (oz. eq.)</b>   | 8-10 (1)  | 9-10 (1)    | 10-12 (2)   |
| <b>Fluid Milk (cups)</b>   | 5 (1)   | 5 (1)       | 5 (1)       |
| <b>Other Specifications: Daily Amount Based on the Average for a Five-Day Week</b> |   |             |             |
| <b>Min-Max Calories (kcal)</b>   | 550-650   | 600-700     | 750-850     |
| <b>Saturated Fat (% of total calories)</b>   | <10   | <10         | <10         |
| <b>Sodium Interim Target 1A (mg)</b>   | ≤1,110  | ≤1,225      | ≤1,280      |
| <b>Trans Fat</b>   | Nutrition label or manufacturer specifications must indicate zero grams of trans fat per serving. |             |             |

### Breakfast Nutritional Requirements<sup>7</sup>

|  | Grades K-5  | Grades 6-8 | Grades 9-12 |
|--|---|------------|-------------|
| <b>Food Components: Amount of Food per Week (minimum per day)</b>                  |   |            |             |
| <b>Fruits (cups)</b>   | 5 (1)   | 5 (1)      | 5 (1)       |
| <b>Vegetables (cups)</b>   | 0   | 0          | 0           |
| <b>Grains (oz. eq.)</b>  | 7-10 (1)  | 8-10 (1)   | 9-10 (1)    |
| <b>Meats/Meat Alternates (oz. eq.)</b>   | 0   | 0          | 0           |
| <b>Fluid Milk (cups)</b>   | 5 (1)   | 5 (1)      | 5 (1)       |
| <b>Other Specifications: Daily Amount Based on the Average for a Five-Day Week</b> |   |            |             |
| <b>Min-Max Calories (kcal)</b>   | 350-500   | 400-550    | 450-600     |
| <b>Saturated Fat (% of total calories)</b>   | <10   | <10        | <10         |
| <b>Sodium Target (mg)</b>  | ≤540  | ≤600       | ≤640        |
| <b>Trans Fat</b>   | Nutrition label or manufacturer specifications must indicate zero grams of trans fat per serving. |            |             |

<sup>1</sup> [7 C.F.R. ss. 210.2](#) and [220.2](#).

<sup>2</sup> ss. [115.34](#) and [115.341](#), Stats.

<sup>3</sup> There is no matching requirement for SBP funding.

<sup>4</sup> [42 U.S.C.s. 1758\(b\)\(1\)](#) and [\(12\)\(A\)](#).

<sup>5</sup> [7 C.F.R.s. 245.9\(f\)](#).

<sup>6</sup> [7 C.F.R.s. 210.10](#).

<sup>7</sup> [7 C.F.R.s. 220.8](#).