

NATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is a federally assisted meal program operating in over 100,000 public and non-profit schools and residential childcare institutions. In 1998, Congress expanded the NSLP to include reimbursement for snacks served to children in afterschool educational and enrichment programs to include children through 18 years of age.

The Food and Nutrition Service administers the program at the Federal level. At the State level, the NSLP is usually administered by state education agencies, which operate the program through agreements with school food authorities. The California Department of Education Child Nutrition Programs oversees the NSLP in California.

School districts and independent schools that choose to take part in the lunch program and breakfast program receive cash subsidies and USDA foods from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for each meal they serve. In return, they must serve meals that meet Federal requirements, and they must offer free or reduced price meal to eligible children.

School meals and snacks must meet meal pattern and nutrition standards based on the latest *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. The current meal patterns increased the availability of fruits, vegetables and whole grains in the school menus. The meal pattern's dietary specifications set specific calorie limits to ensure age-appropriate meals for grades K-5, 6-8 and 9-12.

Any child at participating schools may purchase a meal through the NSLP. Children from families with incomes at or below 130 percent of the poverty level are eligible for free meals. Those with incomes between 130 and 185 percent of the poverty level are eligible for reduced price meals. Parents are encouraged to complete an application for free meals either on paper or on-line. Applications must be submitted on an annual basis.

For more information on the NSLP and all other Child Nutrition programs, contact the California Department of Education.