

School Breakfast Program

The School Breakfast program is a Federal program that provides States with cash assistance for nonprofit breakfast programs in schools and residential child care institutions. The program began as a pilot project in 1966, and was made permanent in 1975.

Benefits

Over 6 million children in more than 65,000 schools start their day with the School Breakfast program. In 1996, an average of 6.6 million children participated in the program every day. Of those, 5.7 million received their meals free or at a reduced price. The schools submit a claim for meals served to their State agency. USDA reimburses the State, which in turn reimburses the local school food authority. For school year 1996-97, the Federal Government reimburse schools at the following rates: \$1.0175 per meal for free breakfasts; 71.75 cents for reduced-price breakfasts; and 19.75 cents for paid breakfasts.

Schools may qualify for higher “severe need” reimbursements if a specified percentage of their meals are served free or at a reduced price. The severe need payments are 20 cents higher than the normal reimbursements for free and reduced-price breakfasts. More than 60% of the breakfasts served in the School

Breakfast program receive the severe need subsidy. Reimbursement payments for all meals are higher in Alaska and Hawaii.

Schools may charge no more than 30 cents for a reduced-price breakfast. USDA places no limit on the amount a school may charge for breakfasts served to students who pay the full meal price.

Eligibility

Any child at a participating school may purchase a meal through the breakfast program. A child whose family meets income criteria may receive a free or reduced-price breakfast. The Federal Government then reimburses the schools for each meal served that meets program requirements.

Children from families with incomes at or below 130% of the poverty level (currently \$20,280 for a family of four) are eligible for free meals. Those between 130% and 185% of the poverty level (currently \$28,860 for a family of four) are eligible for reduced-price meals. Children from families over 185% of the poverty level pay a full price, though their meals are subsidized to some extent.

Public schools or nonprofit private schools of high school grade or under, and residential child care institutions are eligible to participate in the program. Participating schools and institutions must serve breakfasts that meet Federal nutritional standards, and must provide free and reduced-price breakfasts to eligible children.

Financing and Administration

The School Breakfast Program is administered by the State education agencies and local school food authorities at the local level. At the Federal level, it is administered by USDA's Food and Consumer Service. For FY 1997, Congress appropriated \$1.198 billion for the School Breakfast program.