





## Healthy School Meals for All

Healthy School Meals for All would provide school meals to all students at no charge, ensuring all children have the nutrition they need to grow and thrive.

<b>Academic Benefits</b>	<b>Community/Economic Benefits</b>
<p><b>In schools with universal school meals, students had:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Standardized test scores in math and English Language Arts<sup>1,2</sup></li> <li>○ Attention and learning retention<sup>1,2</sup></li> <li>○ Overall attendance, reduced tardiness and decrease in suspensions<sup>1,3</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Increase in overall educational attainment in adulthood<sup>4</sup></li> </ul> 	<p><b>Participation in school meals benefits local communities and economies by:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting Farm to School programs, supporting local farmers and ranchers<sup>7</sup></li> <li>• Building community partnerships<sup>8</sup></li> <li>• Investing in local economies – for every \$1 invested in school meals, local economies have a \$2 return in impact<sup>9</sup></li> </ul> 
<b>Health Benefits</b>	<b>Equity Benefits</b>
<p><b>Schools are the healthiest place to eat for kids.<sup>5</sup> Participation in school nutrition benefits child health by:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Rates of mental illness including anxiety and depression<sup>6</sup></li> <li>○ Overall behavioral health and reducing classroom disruptive behaviors<sup>6</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Reducing rates of overweight and obesity<sup>2</sup></li> </ul> 	<p><b>School meals provide a key support for low-income and students of color. Equitable access to school meals decreases disparities by:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reducing:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Rates of food insecurity<sup>3,6</sup></li> <li>○ Stigmas related to free or reduced-price meals<sup>10</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Increasing availability of nutritious foods to minority students<sup>11</sup></li> <li>• Investing in outcomes linked with reductions in health and educational disparities<sup>3,11,12</sup></li> </ul> 

## Resources

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2. Schwartz, A.E. & Rothbart, M.W. (2019) Let Them Eat Lunch: The Impact of Universal Free Meals on Student Performance. *The Maxwell School Center for Policy Research: Working Paper Series, 203*. [https://www.maxwell.syr.edu/docs/default-source/research/cpr/working-papers/wp-203-let-them-eat-lunch.pdf?sfvrsn=efae783d\\_8](https://www.maxwell.syr.edu/docs/default-source/research/cpr/working-papers/wp-203-let-them-eat-lunch.pdf?sfvrsn=efae783d_8).
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8. Joshi, A., Rouse, A., & Connel, C. (2017). Everything's Better Together: Farm to School Partnerships. *Farm to School Network*. [https://schoolnutrition.org/uploadedFiles/2\\_Meetings\\_and\\_Events/Presentation\\_PDFs/ANC\\_2017/Everything's-Better-Together-Farm-to-School-Partnerships.pdf](https://schoolnutrition.org/uploadedFiles/2_Meetings_and_Events/Presentation_PDFs/ANC_2017/Everything's-Better-Together-Farm-to-School-Partnerships.pdf).
9. True Cost of Food: School Meals Case Study. (2021) *The Rockefeller Foundation*. <https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/news/new-report-every-dollar-invested-in-u-s-school-meal-programs-provides-2-in-health-and-economic-equity-benefits/#:~:text=Press%20Releases%2F-New%20Report%3A%20Every%20Dollar%20Invested%20in%20U.S.%20School%20Meal%20Programs,Health%20and%20Economic%20Equity%20Benefits&text=Today%2C%2030%20million%20children%20in,rely%20on%20daily%20school%20meals.>
10. Brown, A. & Bilski, J. (2017). Fighting the stigma of free lunch: Why universal free school lunch is good for students, schools, and families. *Ford Foundation*. <https://www.fordfoundation.org/news-and-stories/stories/posts/fighting-the-stigma-of-free-lunch-why-universal-free-school-lunch-is-good-for-students-schools-and-families/>
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