



## The Success of MN-Free School Meals

Daron Korte, Assistant Commissioner, Office of Student Support Services

# Ten Minnesota Commitments to Equity

1. Prioritize equity.
2. Start from within.
3. Measure what matters.
4. Go local.
5. Follow the money.
6. Start early.
7. Monitor implementation of standards.
8. Value people.
9. Improve conditions for learning.
10. Give students options.



# MN Free School Meals Program

- MN Free School Meals Program (MN-FSM) signed into law on March 17, 2023
- Amended MN statute 124D.111
- Began July 1, 2023

Governor Tim Walz signs MN Free School Meal Program into law. GOV. TIM WALZ / INSTAGRAM



# The Backbone Behind MN-Free School Meals Success

1. Increased State Reimbursement Rates
2. Required participation in the School Breakfast Program
3. Required participation in CEP for schools with ISP  $\geq$  62.5%

# Over 150 Million Meals Served to Kids in the First Year of MN-Free School Meals

- Increase in number of students participating in SBP/NSLP and reimbursable meals being served
- Increase in availability of breakfast
- Increase in number of schools participating in SBP/NSLP



# Increases in Participation at Breakfast and Lunch

**Table 1. Comparison of Total Meals Served Before and After Free School Meals**

Breakfast SY 2022-23	Breakfast SY 2023-24	Percent Increase	Lunch SY 2022-23	Lunch SY 2023-24	Percent Increase
35,011,480	48,860,416	40%	88,612,525	102,240,755	15%

**Table 2. Month-by-Month Comparison of Meals Served Before and After Free School Meals**

Month	Breakfast SY 2022-23	Breakfast SY 2023-24	Percent Increase	Lunch SY 2022-23	Lunch SY 2023-24	Percent Increase
July	57,146	64,591	13%	68,387	81,673	19%
August	116,743	177,864	52%	262,863	366,415	39%
September	3,726,021	4,947,869	33%	9,986,740	11,212,701	12%
October	3,964,711	5,578,309	41%	9,917,946	11,843,942	19%
November	3,817,264	5,347,741	40%	9,683,625	11,239,908	16%
December	2,735,831	4,186,267	53%	7,263,352	8,877,713	22%
January	3,632,295	5,509,345	52%	9,609,466	11,786,379	23%
February	3,484,020	5,644,801	62%	8,885,453	11,636,247	31%
March	4,158,719	4,643,560	12%	10,321,533	9,421,772	-9%
April	3,683,675	5,894,590	60%	9,185,780	12,008,847	31%
May	4,985,508	6,310,559	27%	12,026,346	12,693,374	6%
June	649,547	554,920	-15%	1,401,034	1,071,784	-24%



# Putting Dollars Back in MN Families' Pockets



- Saved MN families \$267.81 million in first year, or \$1,000 in savings per student per year.
- Savings included \$47.77 million for breakfasts and \$220.04 million for lunches not covered for students before MN-Free School Meals.

# MDE Ensured Maximized Federal Funding

## Targeted Outreach to Schools

- \*Targeted schools eligible for Community Eligibility Provision allowing schools to maximize federal funding
- \*Requested extensions from USDA to give schools more time to apply
- \*Monthly claim audits to safeguard state resources





# Student and School Community Successes



Significant increase in students eating school meals



More students trying new foods



Increased exposure to fruits and veggies



More reimbursement going to schools throughout the state



Positive stories and communication about school nutrition

# MN-FSM Frequently Asked Questions

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## Free School Meals for Kids Program

On Friday, March 17, 2023, Governor Walz signed the Free School Meals bill into law. This will take effect with the July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024 school year. This legislation provides the reimbursement for a free breakfast and lunch to students who receive meals through their school's participation in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the School Breakfast Program (SBP). Schools that participate in the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National School Lunch Program (NSLP) must now participate in the state funded Free School Meals Program.

[Minnesota Free School Meals: First Year Preliminary Summary - 10/23/24](#)


[Free School Meals FAQ - 5/9/24](#)  
Regularly Updated Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for the Free School Meals Program.

[Minnesota Free School Meals Messaging - 7/27/23](#)  
This document includes information that schools can use in newsletters, handbooks and social media posts.

<https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/FNS/SNP/free/>

# Say Yes! To School Meals

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Breakfast Encourages Students to Thrive

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Smarter Lunchrooms and Smarter Mealtimes

USDA Memos

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## School Meal Marketing Resources

The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) created the Say Yes! to School Meals resources to provide information on the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program. Five schools participated in creating the videos. This project was funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Fiscal Year 2022 Team Nutrition Training Grant.

### Videos

[What's the Scoop with School Nutrition Programs](#) (5:55)

[The Benefits of School Meals](#) (3:47)

[Expanding School Wellness Opportunities](#) (3:46)

[Delicious School Meal Choices](#) (3:44)

[Connecting with Students through School Meals](#) (4:29)

### Resources for schools and families:

[Social Media Images](#) - 1/4/24  
Available images for download when promoting School Nutrition Programs on social media. View the Social Media Toolkit for details.

[Social Media Toolkit for School Meal Programs](#) - 1/4/24  
The images and text options included in this document may be used by school staff to promote school meal programs on social media. The information is intended for use on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, or X.

[What's for Breakfast?](#) - 11/16/23  
This infographic provides information about the nutritious components of school breakfast, reasons to eat school breakfast and provides tips for parents and caregivers.

[What's the Scoop with School Lunch?](#) - 11/8/23  
This infographic provides information about the nutritious components of school lunch, compares meals from home to school meals, and provides tips for parents and caregivers.

<https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/FNS/Team/smm/>

2/11/2025

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# Farm to School and Early Care

## What is Farm to School and Early Care?

- Farm to School connects Minnesota farmers and kids by serving local food in students' meals and teaching them about local agriculture in educational activities.
- Farm to School is funded through a Agricultural Growth, Research, and Innovation (AGRI) Program grant from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MS 41A.12)
- Farm to School projects are very diverse and can look different depending on the communities doing them. They include at least one of these three core strategies:
  - **Local purchasing:** Local foods are purchased, promoted and served in the cafeteria or at mealtimes, as a snack or in classroom taste-tests.
  - **Education:** Students participate in educational activities related to agriculture, food, health and nutrition.
  - **School gardens:** Students engage in hands-on, experiential learning through gardening.

## **Benefits of Farm to School and Early Care**

- Good for Kids
- Good for Farmers
- Good for Communities



# Thank you

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