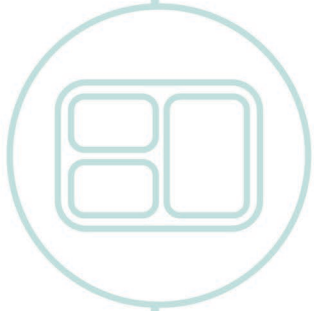


**USDA SCHOOL MEALS:  
TOGETHER, WE CAN GIVE  
KIDS A HEALTHIER FUTURE**



# Why do school meals matter?

Good nutrition is **critical to success** in the classroom and beyond. But unfortunately, many children are not getting the nutrients they need. Most kids get too much sugar, sodium, and saturated fat — and not enough fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. As a result, **diet-related diseases like diabetes and obesity are on the rise.**

For children to grow and reach their full potential, it is critical that they have access to nutritious foods and develop lifelong healthy dietary habits. **USDA school meal programs reach around 30 million children each school day from all communities and backgrounds across the country.** Ensuring these meals are highly nutritious is one of America's best opportunities to improve child health.



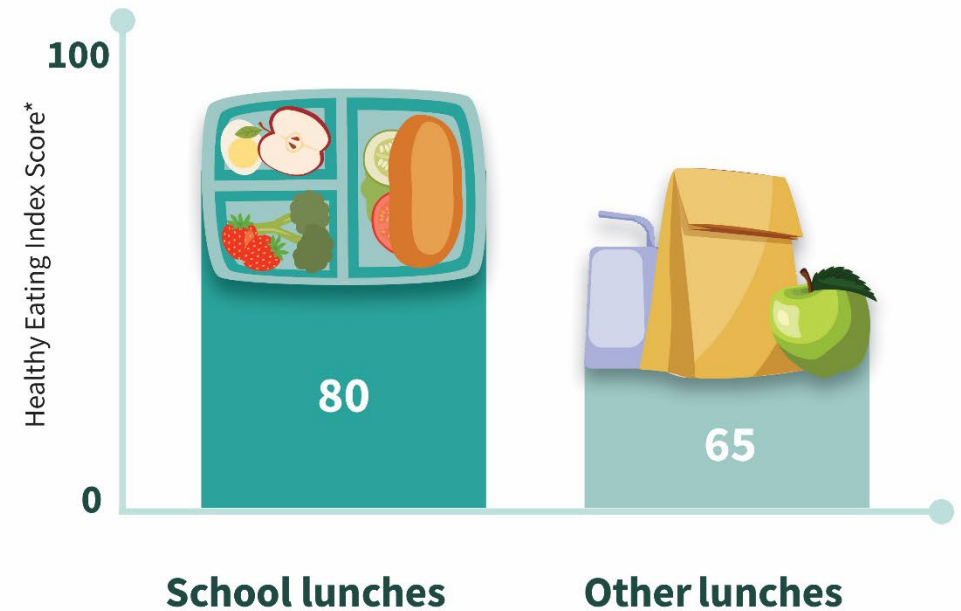


## Where are we now?

### Research shows that kids get their healthiest meals of the day from school.

Thanks to the hard work and dedication of our many school meal partners, school nutrition has come a long way.

For example, the Healthy Eating Index score is a measure of how closely a meal meets the recommendations of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. The average score of school lunches was found to be significantly higher than the average score of lunches from home or other places.



Lunches consumed by school lunch participants and nonparticipants in school year 2014-2015.

*\*100 is a perfect Healthy Eating Index score*

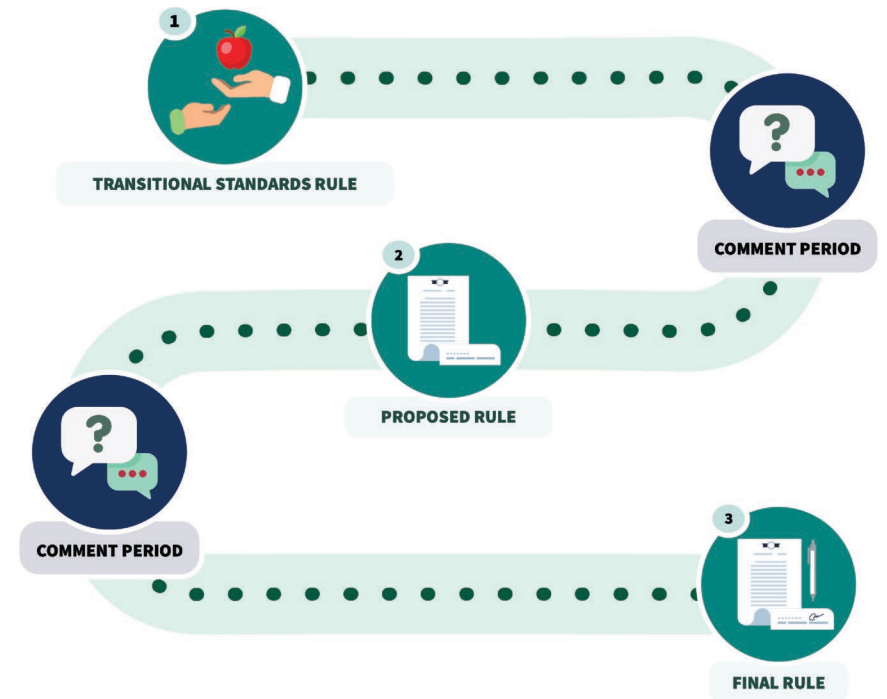


# Where are we going?

Schools and state agencies showed heroic leadership during COVID to continue serving kids meals when they were desperately needed. And they continue to overcome enduring challenges even now, such as supply chain disruptions and high food costs.

While so much work has already gone into making school meals the healthiest meals in a day for most kids, the rates of children experiencing diet-related diseases are trending in the wrong direction.

USDA listened to our stakeholders who said they need ample time to plan for changes to the school nutrition standards. We're getting to work *now* so we can work *with* our partners toward a gradual implementation while still making progress in the pressing goal of improving child health.





# What can I do to help?

We all play an important role in supporting nutritious school meals and healthy futures for our children!

## Administrators

School leaders can help **boost school meal participation** through efforts like investing in kitchen upgrades, extending the lunch period, and exploring the **Community Eligibility Provision**, which allows qualifying schools to provide all students free meals without collecting applications. They can **champion the program** by eating with students in the lunchroom and encouraging parents to do the same.

They can also support school nutrition professionals by providing resources, training, and professional support.





# What can I do to help?

## Educators

Teachers can model healthy eating habits for their students and encourage them to **explore new foods**. They can also find fun ways to **teach kids about nutrition and agriculture**. Additionally, teachers can serve as a link between parents and caregivers and their school nutrition team. **FNS Team Nutrition** provides grants and free menu planning and nutrition education resources for school nutrition professionals to engage students in exploring new foods.

## Health Advocates

Public health and nutrition advocates serve as a critical link between nutrition scientists and school nutrition professionals, providing technical assistance, offering **nutrition education**, conducting research to inform future efforts, and **sharing best practices** on healthy school meals.







# What can I do to help?

## Parents and Caregivers

Parents and caregivers can eat a school meal with their child and serve their child's favorite healthy foods from school at home. They can also support school meal programs by **encouraging their kids to participate**, volunteering in the cafeteria, and showing appreciation for their school nutrition professionals' commitment to healthy school meals that students enjoy.

## School Food Industry

School food producers and distributors can work closely with school nutrition partners to **develop nutritious and appealing products** for school meals and help **educate the public** about the importance of healthy eating. They can also provide resources and training on how to best serve their products, and how to expand the availability of healthy products beyond K-12 school markets.





# What can I do to help?

## School Nutrition Professionals

School nutrition professionals are the **key to success for the school meal programs**, with direct impact on kids every school day. They can continue to prepare, promote, and provide nutritious and appealing meals served with love and kindness!

## USDA

USDA provides substantial **support for school meals** through kitchen equipment grants, nutrition education efforts, farm to school initiatives, supply chain assistance funds, the Healthy Meals Incentives initiative, and more. We continue to prioritize the school meal programs, seeking feedback from our partners to **meaningfully invest** in school meals and give our children the very best.







# Stay in touch!

Follow us on Twitter [@USDANutrition](#) or subscribe to our [newsletter](#) to stay updated.

