

IDEA Collective: August 2025

Back to School

School is Back in Session for Iowa Youth

Schools across Iowa are gearing up to welcome students back this month, with food service teams preparing millions of school breakfasts and lunches. For many children, these meals aren't just convenient—they're essential. School-provided meals play a vital role in ensuring consistent food access. Let's review the National School Lunch Program, its impact, and recent legislation!

About the National School Lunch Program (NSLP)

The NSLP has proven efficacy in reducing food insecurity & improving health in children who participate. Benefits of the NSLP include ([Food Research and Action Center](#)):

- **Reduces Food Insecurity:** Receiving free or reduced-price school lunch reduces food insecurity by at least 3.8%.
- **Improves Dietary Intakes:** Schools participating in the NSLP must meet nutritional requirements consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans—these standards have shown to have a positive impact on children's food selection and consumption.
- **Reduces health risk:** It is estimated that free or reduced-price lunch reduces obesity by 17% and reduces poor health by 29%.
- **Improves learning environment:** Children experiencing hunger may be more likely to have behavior issues, may have poorer grades, and may experience higher rates of tardiness/absenteeism.
- **Reduces disparities across income, race and ethnicity:** Since the Health, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (HHFKA), school food has been associated with health outcomes. As menu standards have continuously been developed, associations continue to be noticed the most in non-Hispanic Black children and those living in lower-income households. Read the 2024 article [here](#).
- **What about kids who refuse to eat fruits/veggies?** For less popular food items, experiential learning is a useful strategy to involve kids in choosing and preparing food items. Overarching public health efforts may also contribute to positive attitudes surrounding fruits and vegetables at home.

NSLP in Iowa

The Iowa School Lunch Program home page may be found [here](#) with eligibility criteria [here](#).

SUN Bucks

Rates of food insecurity among children are higher during the summer months when children have less consistent access to healthful lunches ([FRAC](#)). SUN Bucks (also known as the Summer EBT program) provides \$120 in grocery benefits per eligible school-aged child over the summer. Twelve states, including Iowa, have opted out of this program for Summer 2025. More information can be found [here](#).

Recent Legislation Pertinent to the NSLP

According to the [Iowa Department of Education](#) website, reimbursement costs for the NSLP are shared between states and the federal government. With the recent passing of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, states will be required to cover more administrative costs associated with the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) than they once had to, thereby putting funds set aside for the NSLP at risk. Overall food security in the State of Iowa is at risk starting in Fiscal Year 2028 ([AP News](#)). The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics has published a press release stating their position on protecting food security [here](#) (June 2025).

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