



SCHOOL MEAL PROGRAMS

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This *issue brief* outlines federal and state school nutrition programs, including eligibility, funding, and reimbursement.

Background

School Food Service Authorities (SFAs). SFAs are designated organizations that implement school food programs. An SFA may be a school district, charter school, or an organization representing a group of charter schools. There are 192 SFAs in Colorado.

Reimbursement. For most federal programs, SFAs are reimbursed for each meal they provide. The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) Office of School Nutrition receives annual funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), based on CDE’s projections of meals served each quarter. CDE then reimburses claims made by SFAs. Reimbursement amounts are based on three income classifications (free, reduced-cost, and paid), as illustrated in Table 1. Families may apply to their SFA to qualify for free or reduced-cost meals, or may qualify based on reception of other government assistance.

Table 1
School Meal Income Requirements

	Income Eligibility (% of federal poverty level)	Income Eligibility (Family of 4; SY 2016-17)	Eligible Students (PK-12; SY 2015-16)
Free Meals	≤130%	\$31,590	309,995
Reduced-Cost Meals	130% - 185%	\$44,955	66,083
Paid Meals	All others	-	508,097

Source: Colorado Department of Education

Total Funding. During the 2014-15 school year, Colorado SFAs received approximately \$183.5 million in federal reimbursement and \$4.9 million in state reimbursement. The state reimbursement includes \$2.5 million in state matching funds, which the state is required to distribute equally among the SFAs for administration or other costs. The total amount of matching funds is based on a federal formula and lunch meal counts.

Breakfast Programs

School Breakfast Program (SBP). SBP is a federal program that provides reimbursement for each breakfast served. Breakfasts must meet nutrition requirements and participating schools must offer free and reduced-cost breakfasts. Schools with more than 40 percent of students eligible for free or reduced-cost breakfast are considered “severe need” and receive higher reimbursement rates. In the 2015-16 school year, 172 SFAs and 1,410 sites participated in SBP.

Start Smart Program. The state provides free breakfasts to students in pre-k through twelfth grade who would otherwise pay for a reduced-cost breakfast. CDE reimburses \$0.30 per reduced-cost breakfast to SFAs. Table 2 details total breakfast reimbursement rates.

Breakfast After the Bell. Colorado public schools with at least 70 percent of students eligible for free or reduced-cost lunch must offer free breakfast to all students, including those

eligible for paid meals. At participating schools, all students receive breakfast once the school day has started. Schools with fewer than 1,000 students and those that do not participate in SBP or the National School Lunch Program are exempt from the program. In the 2015-16 school year, 403 schools are participating.

Table 2
Per-Meal State and Federal Breakfast Reimbursement Rates (SY 2016-17)

School Type	Program	Free Meal	Reduced-Cost Meal	Paid Meal
Regular	SBP	\$1.71	\$1.41	\$0.29
	Start Smart		\$0.30	
	Total	\$1.71	\$1.71	\$0.29
Severe Need	SBP	\$2.04	\$1.74	\$0.29
	Start Smart		\$0.30	
	Total	\$2.04	\$2.04	\$0.29

Source: Colorado Department of Education

Lunch Programs

National School Lunch Program (NSLP). NSLP is a federal program that provides reimbursement for each lunch served. Lunches must meet nutrition requirements, and participating schools must offer free and reduced-cost lunches. Schools with more than 60 percent of students eligible for free or reduced-cost lunches are considered “severe need” and receive higher reimbursement rates. In the 2015-16 school year, 185 SFAs and 1,687 sites participated.

Lunch Protection Program. The state provides free lunches to students in pre-k through fifth grade who would otherwise pay for a reduced-cost lunch. Currently, CDE reimburses \$0.40 per lunch to SFAs. Table 3 details total lunch reimbursement rates.

Table 3
Per-Meal State and Federal Lunch Reimbursement Rates (SY 2016-17)

School Type	Program	Free Meal	Reduced-Cost Meal	Paid Meal
Regular	NSLP	\$3.22	\$2.82	\$0.36
	Lunch Protection		\$0.40	
	Total	\$3.22	\$3.22	\$0.36
Severe Need	NSLP	\$3.24	\$2.84	\$0.38
	Lunch Protection		\$0.40	
	Total	\$3.24	\$3.24	\$0.38

Source: Colorado Department of Education

Additional Programs

Afterschool Snack Program. Under this federal program, participating schools may be reimbursed for snacks served once the school day ends. Schools that participate in NSLP and operate an eligible afterschool program are reimbursed \$0.07 per paid snack, \$0.43 per reduced-cost snack, and \$0.86 per free snack. In the 2015-16 school year, 41 SFAs and 274 sites participated.

Summer Food Service Program. This federal program provides free meals to students under the age of 18 who are attending approved summer programs. Qualifying programs may be provided by nonprofit, public or private school authorities, camps, universities, or other organizations. In 2016, 579 sites participated in the program.

Special Milk Program (SMP). The SMP provides milk to children who do not receive NSLP or SBP meals. For instance, children attending summer or year-round camps or split-session schools may be served by this program. There is no reduced-cost eligibility for the SMP, as organizations receive \$0.20 per half-pint for paying children and the average cost of a half-pint of milk for each free half-pint of milk served. In the 2015-16 school year, 28 SFAs and 51 sites participated in the SMP.

Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. The program offers grants to schools to provide fresh fruits and vegetables to pre-k through fifth grade students. The USDA provides the funding, which is distributed by CDE. For the 2016-17 school year, 162 schools have received grants, which total about \$4 million.

Provisional programs. Schools that have a high percentage of low-income students may participate in one of two federal provisional programs. Participating schools still receive reimbursement, but have fewer administrative requirements related to applications, meal counts, and eligibility determinations, and must serve free breakfast and lunch to all students for up to four consecutive years. At least 18 SFAs participate in provisional programs.