

Include Healthy School Meals for All Students in the American Families Plan



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Providing healthy school meals to all students at no charge to them will help to ensure that they are ready to learn and help them cultivate healthy eating habits that will last a lifetime. The pandemic has demonstrated that schools and school food service workers have the capacity to provide meals to students in all communities, in the most challenging circumstances. We can build on this and give all students a solid foundation for growth and learning.

School meals for all supports learning and improves health

- ▶ Students who participate in school breakfast programs have improved attendance, behavior, academic performance, and achievement, according to the [Food Research & Action Center](#).
- ▶ Students are eating better at school than ever before [according to a recent study published in JAMA Network Open](#). The study found that the nutritional quality of school food beats the nutritional quality of food they get anywhere else, and increased dramatically after nutrition standards were improved in 2010. This puts students on a path toward developing lifelong healthy eating habits, cultivating generations of healthy eaters and saving our nation health care costs in the long run.

School meals for all ends shame and stigma

- ▶ Many students need a nutritious breakfast and lunch at school, but do not participate or just barely miss out on qualifying for free or reduced-price meals. Healthy school meals for all ensures that students who may be hungry have access to meals, whether they qualify or not.
- ▶ Often, students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals feel a sense of shame, and as they get older and more aware of their circumstances, they stop participating in the program. Providing healthy school meals for all students would eliminate any stigma associated with receiving free and reduced-price school meals, and therefore encourage participation. It also eliminates the stigma and shame caused by some local district policies that single students out for accumulated unpaid meal charges.

School meals for all helps schools save money and reduce paperwork

- ▶ Healthy school meals for all would lift the burden of unpaid meal debt from schools, and relieve them of complicated and burdensome paperwork. This will also allow school food service workers to focus more on preparing healthy meals and serving them to students.
- ▶ School meals actually cost schools *less* per student when *more* students participate in a free meal program. [A study by the Milken Institute of Public Health](#) at George Washington University and other institutions found that schools participating in a universal meal program spent 67 cents and 58 cents less per lunch and breakfast, respectively, while maintaining the same nutritional quality.