SCHOOL MEALS ARE ESSENTIAL TO STUDENT HEALTH

Providing School Meals for All ensures every student has access to the nutrition they need.

A hungry student cannot learn, but school meals provide more than just momentary fuel for a young learner. School meals can account for nearly half of a child’s daily calories, particularly for lower-income students who may or may not have reliable healthy meals at home. Furthermore, federal nutrition standards paired with the hard work of school nutrition staff across the Commonwealth ensure that school meals are nutritious.

School Meals for All would increase access to this valuable source of healthy meals by removing administrative barriers like paperwork, and financial barriers created by the current outdated tiered eligibility system. Feeding America estimates, as of 2019, 26% of food insecure children were above that threshold.

School Meals for All decreases food insecurity

Participation in school meals has been associated with lower rates of food insecurity both by providing breakfast and/or lunch to children who may reside in a food insecure household, but also by increasing the purchasing power of the household.

- School Meals for All through the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) was simulated to lead to a 3.73% decrease in food insecurity by school-aged children. As this also benefits their households, CEP was also estimated to decrease food insecurity by 3.17% for households by increasing household purchasing power.
- In a comparison of CEP vs non-CEP schools in Maryland, students attending a district that did not opt to participate in CEP were twice as likely to be in a food insecure household.

School meals improve short and long-term health outcomes

- A study of 2013–2015 surveys suggests that eating school lunch is associated with healthier dietary intake, and that consuming school meals can potentially result in higher nutritional benefits.
- Children who consume school meals more than 4 times a week eat more dairy, vegetables, and fruits than those who eat school meals 0–3 times a week.
- Eating school meals helps children and teens make better dietary choices. One study found that participation in school meals correlated with a reduction in eating unhealthy snacks outside of school.
- Receiving free or reduced-price school lunches reduces poor health by at least 29 percent based on estimates using national data, and reduces obesity by 17 percent.

THE MASSACHUSETTS LEGISLATURE CAN MAKE A SIGNIFICANT INVESTMENT IN THE EDUCATION AND HEALTH OF STUDENTS BY PASSING SCHOOL MEALS FOR ALL (H.714/S.314).

FEEDKIDSMA.ORG
School meals are nutritious and recent improvements are making them even better

Research has found time and time, again, that school meals are healthy. The improved standards initiated by the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 have helped ensure that meals purchased and consumed at school rank among the healthiest sources of food.

- Food consumed at school had the highest quality as measured by the American Heart Association diet score and the Healthy Eating Index. Healthier than food purchased from grocery stores, consumed at a worksite, purchased from a restaurant or other sources.8
- Research shows that school meals are at least as healthy as meals packed from home, and for many, school meals may in fact be healthier than the ones brought from home.5, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14
- USDA found in its School Nutrition and Meal Cost study that the Healthy Eating Index scores of school lunches went up 41% from 57.9% in the 2009–2010 school year to 81.5% in the 2014–2015 school year in the midst of implementation of improved meal standards.16

School Meals for All increases the health benefits of school meals

When schools adopt universal school meals under programs such as CEP they experience an increase in participation and decrease in administrative costs. This increase in revenue has allowed many communities to invest in training, staff, equipment, or higher quality ingredients.

- Springfield Public Schools saw a 43.5% increase in school food program revenue between 2014 and 2017, a period in which they adopted School Meals for All through CEP. This has allowed them to make several improvements to quality including sourcing whole ingredients and processing it at their new Culinary & Nutrition Center.17

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1 Cullen, Karen Weber and Chen, Tzu-An. The contribution of the USDA school breakfast and lunch program meals to student daily dietary intake. Preventive Medicine Reports. 2017, 5, 82-85