

MN Free School Meals Program

Messages that schools can use to share information about the program

On March 17, 2023, Governor Walz signed the MN Free School Meals bill into law. The MN Free School Meals Program is a permanent program that provides state reimbursement to schools that participate in the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program so that students can have one breakfast and one lunch at no cost at school. The Free School Meals Program began on July 1, 2023.

This document includes information that schools can use in newsletters, handbooks, and social media posts.

Messages for Newsletters, Handbooks, etc.

What is the Minnesota Free School Meals Program?

The Minnesota Free School Meals Program provides state reimbursement to schools that participate in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program so that students can have one breakfast and one lunch at no cost at school.

Can the meals be picked up or brought home like we did during the pandemic?

No. Congregate meal service is required in the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program. Meals may not be taken off campus, sent home, delivered, or picked up by parents or others.

Do I still need to complete the Application for Educational Benefits?

It is important for families to complete the Application for Educational Benefits. Applications for Educational Benefits determine how much funding your child's school receives for educational programs and supports. Additionally, eligible families can qualify for other benefits, such as:

- WIC Benefits
- Metro Transits' Transit Assistance Program
- FCC Affordable Connectivity Program/Reduced price internet programs
- Some summer camps, athletics programs and/or child cares offer scholarships or discounts.

What is included in the MN Free School Meals Program?

In schools with Offer versus Serve (high schools and many elementary schools):

- At breakfast, the student must choose at least 3 items to be counted as a reimbursable meal. The student must choose a ½ cup serving of fruit or vegetable as part of their breakfast.
- At lunch, the student must choose at least 3 components to be counted as a reimbursable meal. The student must choose a ½ cup serving of fruit or vegetable as part of their lunch.

In schools that choose not to do Offer versus Serve (some elementary schools and many schools that purchase meals from a vendor):

- At breakfast and lunch, the student must take all of the items included in the meal. This includes the entrée, fruits, vegetables, and milk.

What is NOT included in the MN Free School Meals Program?

Single item purchases and non-reimbursable meals are not free. Some examples include:

- carton of milk
- snack items
- second entrée
- A second breakfast or a second lunch
- Meals that do not meet the minimum requirements
- Meals served to teachers, staff, and other adults

Messages for Social Media

- Minnesota school districts, charter schools, and nonpublic schools approved for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program may participate in the Free School Meals Program.
- Fill the Form! The Application for Education Benefits helps determine how much education funding your school will receive. Complete an application for your student for school year 2023-24.
- Students and families may qualify for other program fee reductions based on their eligibility for free or reduced-price meals. Parents should complete an Application for Education Benefits.
- Students must choose at least 3 items at breakfast and at least 3 components at lunch. The student must choose at least ½ cup of a fruit or vegetable at breakfast and lunch.
- Only meals that meet the requirements are reimbursed, students that want additional or single items will be charged for those items.

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