

# School Meals: Valuable to Kids, Schools & Communities

School meals are a win-win for schools, communities, and especially kids.

They provide:

- ✓ Essential nutrition to help students stay focused during the school day
- ✓ Consistency and comfort for kids
- ✓ A lifeline for many families, easing uncertainty and financial strain

## Supporting School Meals Means Supporting Local Business

School nutrition departments operate as nonprofit businesses. They are generally expected to be self-sustaining, and their budget must remain separate from the school district's education budget and general fund. All school nutrition revenue, whether from federal meal reimbursements, supplemental state reimbursements, or sales revenue, must be re-invested back into the school meals programs. So, when school nutrition departments succeed, money goes back into local employees' pockets, back to local vendors that supply food, and back into making school meals nutritious, delicious, and easily accessible to students. By supporting school meals, you are directly supporting local business and the local economy.

## School Meals Are Essential to Student Health and Academic Success

School meals are critical to students' well-being and readiness to learn. Research shows that children who eat breakfast and lunch at school rely on school meals for half of their daily energy intake.<sup>1</sup> Research has also shown that school meals are healthier than meals brought from home or elsewhere: students consume more fruits, vegetables, and milk when they eat school meals, and they are less likely to consume desserts and snack items.<sup>2</sup> This has an impact on the classroom: students who eat breakfast the morning of a standardized test have significantly higher scores in spelling, reading, and math, compared to those who do not eat breakfast.<sup>3</sup>

### References

1. Weber Cullen, K. & Chen, T. (2017). The contribution of the USDA school breakfast and lunch program meals to student daily dietary intake. *Preventive Medicine Reports*, 5, 82-85.
2. Minaya S. & Rainville A.J. (2016). How Nutritious Are Children's Packed School Lunches? A Comparison of Lunches Brought From Home and School Lunches. *Journal of Child Nutrition Management*, 40(2).
3. Ptomey, L. T., Steger, F. L., Schubert, M. M., Lee, J., Willis, E. A., Sullivan, D. K., Szabo-Reed, A. N., Washburn, R. A., & Donnelly, J. E. (2016). Breakfast intake and composition is associated with superior academic achievement in elementary schoolchildren. *Journal of the American College of Nutrition*, 35(4), 326-333

"The challenging times that our nation and local communities continue to work through have resulted in many more students and families experiencing food insecurities than ever before. For a large number of children in our community, school meals are their only certain food they receive." -- Debra P. Pace, Superintendent, The School District of Osceola County, Florida

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