

# School Nutrition Equity in Nebraska 2022



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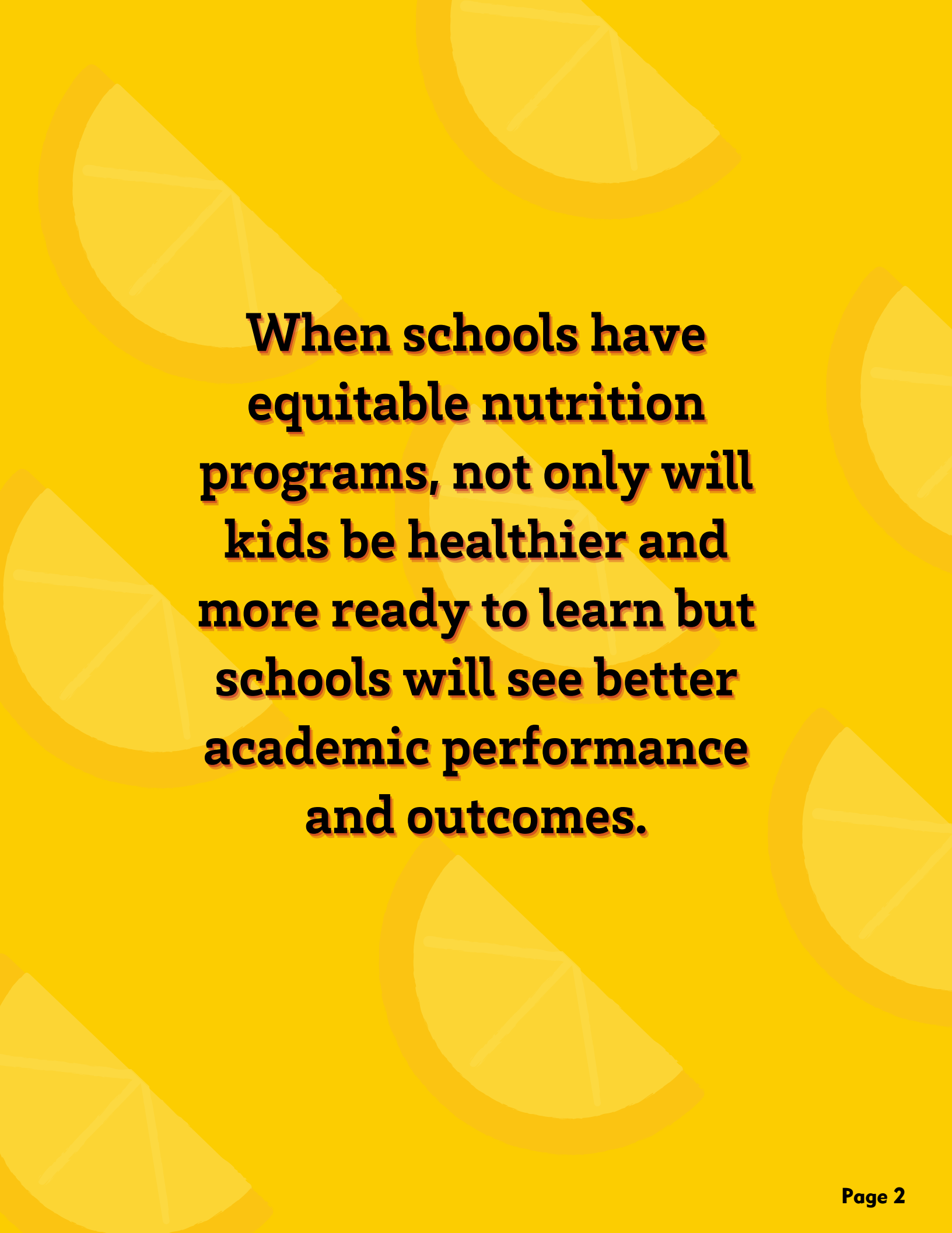
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## Introduction

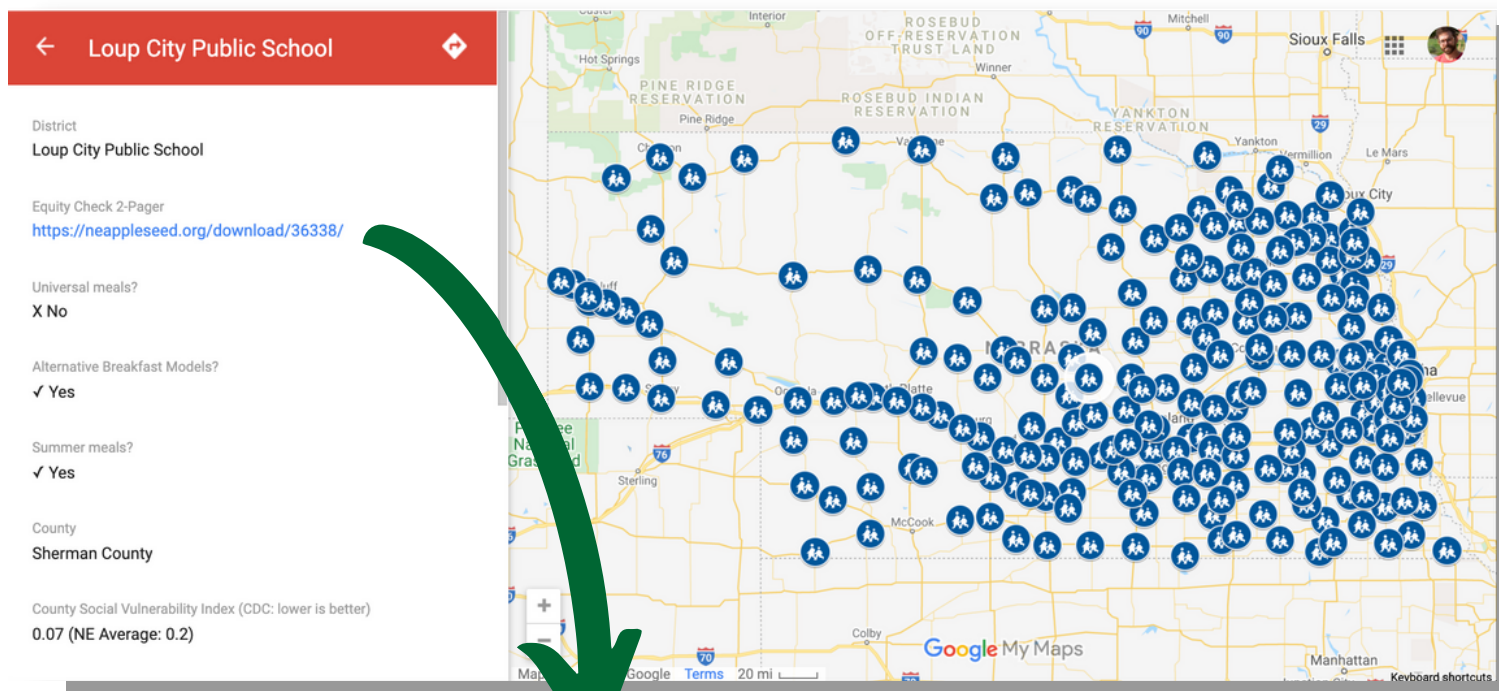
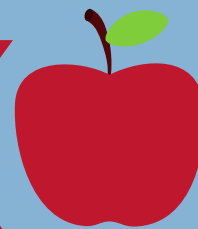
Equity in school nutrition is a vital part of equity in education. As Nebraska Appleseed continues its equity dialogue with school districts and communities across the state, we would like to share our experiences and suggestions supporting increased equity in school nutrition. We hope that these resources, examples, and tools can be a guide for school districts to make their nutrition programs more equitable for all students.

More information and additional resources are available at [neappleseed.org/schoolnutritionequity](https://neappleseed.org/schoolnutritionequity).

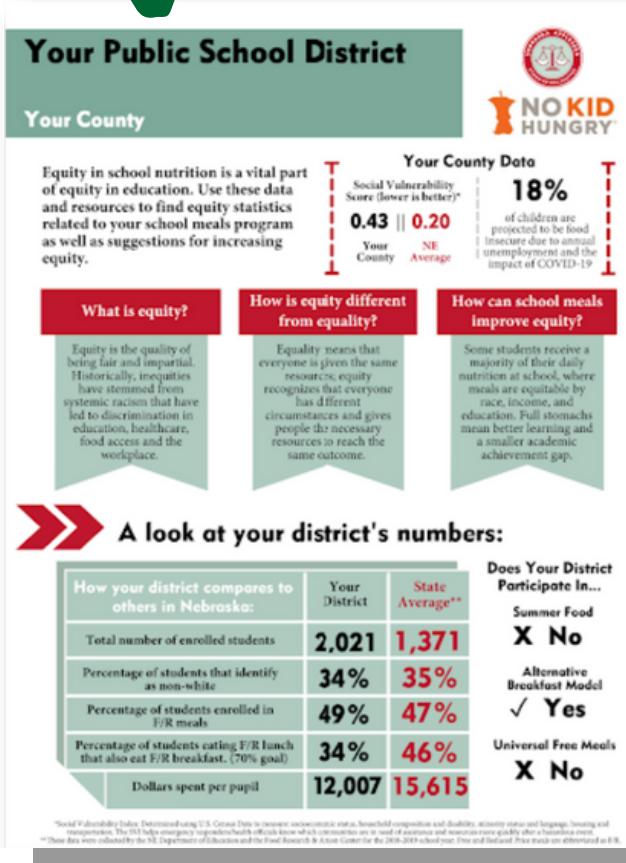
The background of the page is a solid yellow color, decorated with several semi-transparent, stylized lemon slices scattered across the surface. The slices are arranged in a way that they appear to be floating or scattered, with some overlapping. The text is centered on the page and is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font with a subtle drop shadow effect.

**When schools have equitable nutrition programs, not only will kids be healthier and more ready to learn but schools will see better academic performance and outcomes.**

# Mapping School Nutrition Equity



Nebraska Appleseed collaborated with the Nebraska Department of Education and No Kid Hungry to compile district-specific equity and program data for every district in Nebraska. This data is compiled on the interactive map above at [neappleseed.org/schoolnutritionequity](https://neappleseed.org/schoolnutritionequity).



## 2021 District-Specific Equity Fact Sheets

View your district's information and download your district-specific 2021 Equity Fact Sheet, including an equity checklist, using the link in the pop out on the map.





# What is Equity?

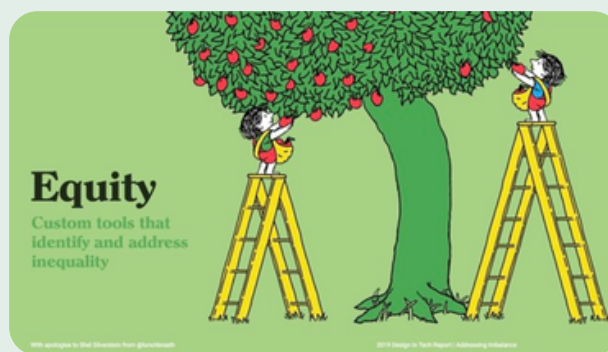
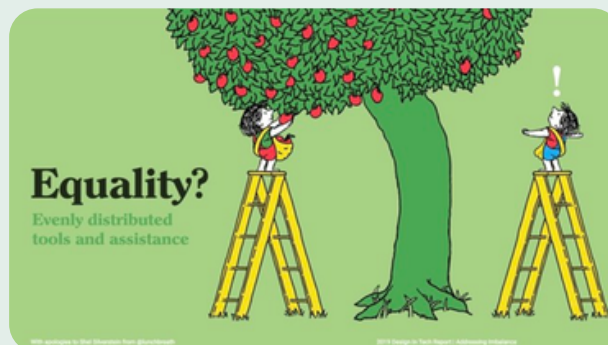


Equity is the quality of being fair or impartial. This sounds a lot like equality, but it's more complicated than that!

To treat people equally means to give everyone the same resources and opportunities.

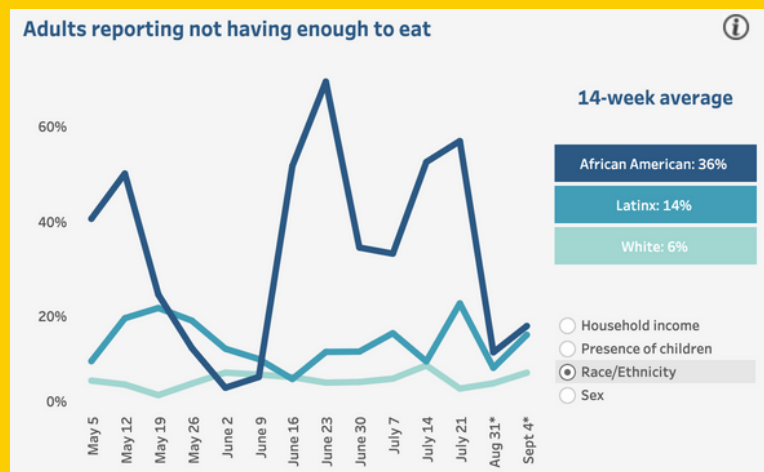
To treat people equitably means to acknowledge that everyone has different circumstances and to provide the necessary resources to help them reach the [same result](#).

Equity is important because certain groups of people have historically been marginalized and are still disadvantaged and discriminated against. [Structural racism](#) is one important contributor to this. By not acknowledging imbalanced social systems, it's impossible to have justice for all people. Equity is a solution that acknowledges and accounts for imbalanced systems.



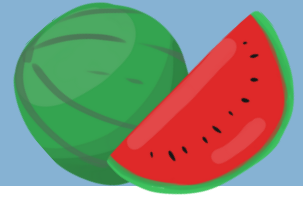
## Food Insecurity in Nebraska

In Nebraska, COVID-19 compounded already big challenges with food insecurity for kids and their families. Prior to the pandemic, [11.7% of all Nebraskans](#) including [15.1% of children](#) were food insecure.



After the onset of the pandemic, that number rose as businesses closed and jobs disappeared. The weekly average of [Nebraskans reporting not having enough to eat](#) showed that Latinx (14%) and African Americans (36%) had over double and six times the rate of white Nebraskans (6%), respectively. These disparities show differing needs in communities with more people of color and highlight potential places to direct resources more equitably.

# How can school meals help?



For many students, school is the place where a majority of their daily calories are consumed. Recent research shows that schools are where American kids eat the healthiest and are one of few places where food consumption overall is [equitable by income, race/ethnicity, and education](#).

The same study shows that compared to grocery stores, restaurants and other sources, the nutritional value of the food served at schools were the best at delivering calories with high quality foods!

Tackling hunger equitably in the community helps meet the basic needs of students, in turn helping them succeed in the classroom. It is in the best interest of all involved to see equity in the way meal programs are implemented throughout the state.

## Potential barriers for school nutrition equity

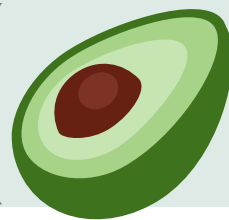
To ensure that kids of all backgrounds are being fed, it's important to acknowledge [potential barriers](#) that could prevent them from eating school meals. Some examples of these barriers can include:

- *Language*
- *Types of food served*
- *Comfortability with staff*
- *Bus schedules*
- *Parent drop off schedules*
- *Location of meal service*
- *Stigma*

School districts can influence many if not all of these barriers to access and equity by changing existing structures and practices to minimize the negative effects the barriers create.



# Minimizing Barriers & Promoting Equity



Schools should think big and small to address barriers to equity. Equitable change can happen with incremental action and major shifts. Don't be scared to try!

Below is a list of eight tangible next steps that districts and schools can take to increase equity in nutrition programs. Consider each within the context of your community and work to make it a reality.

**EQUITY CHECKLIST**

When making sure that ALL kids get the food they need, it's important to acknowledge potential barriers that prevent students from eating school meals. Barriers can be language, comfortability with staff, stigma, the types of food served, or others. Consider implementing action items on this checklist to address barriers and make school meals more equitable for your community as a whole.

- Consistently ask for community feedback**  
Focus groups and community forums where school leaders are interacting with community members build strong relationships and trust. Also consider parent/student surveys or taste tests to get feedback on new or existing menu items.
- Display information in multiple languages**  
Communication is key! Consider making signage, menus, flyers, etc. in English and Spanish (and any other language represented in your district) to give all families equal access to information.
- Serve culturally appropriate foods**  
For a diverse population, consider incorporating meals that honor the culture of all students.
- Offer an alternative breakfast model**  
Serving breakfast in the cafeteria before class may be missing students. Consider:
  - Breakfast in the Classroom** - breakfast items are packed in coolers and delivered to classrooms
  - Grab and Go** - breakfasts are packed in bags for students to grab-on the way to their first class
  - Second Chance** - students who aren't hungry right away can grab breakfast between their first and second classes
- Extend meals beyond school hours**  
Meals at school may be the only ones a student gets. If your school has over 50% ELL students, consider serving After School snacks and supper through the Child and Adult Care Food Program and summer meals through the Summer Food Service Program.
- Serve no-cost meals to all students**  
The Community Eligibility Provision, Provision 2, or simply paying for meals eaten by students use of federal reimbursements are options to serve no cost meals to all students for many high poverty schools.
- Ensure staff are representative of those served**  
Hiring staff that represent those they serve expands understanding and skills, including lived experiences, which enables a school to better connect to their community.
- Explore and practice cultural humility**  
Learning about one's own own biases can help eliminate inequalities in programs.

For more information:  
[neappleseed.org](http://neappleseed.org)  
[mckinlenny.org](http://mckinlenny.org)

A summary of options that can support nutrition equity is available for download at [neappleseed.org/schoolnutritionequity](http://neappleseed.org/schoolnutritionequity). This sheet is also included with each District-specific Equity Fact Sheet.

## 1. Consistently ask for community feedback



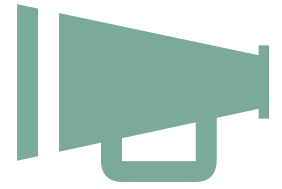
Focus groups and community forums where school leaders are interacting with community members build strong relationships and trust. Also consider parent/student surveys or taste tests to get feedback on new or existing menu items. Teachers could even build this feedback into their students' curriculum.

To the extent possible, work to develop relationships with diverse families in your area. In doing so, staff can learn about their communities and can better support their engagement and participation across programs.





## 2. Display information in multiple languages



*NDE created Spanish-language posters, bookmarks, postcards, and door hangers for Nebraska Summer Food sponsors to request to support their outreach. They continue to spread awareness within Spanish-speaking communities around the state.*

**Communication is key! Consider making signage, menus, flyers, etc. in English and Spanish (and any other language represented in your district) to give all families equal access to information. Changing communications slightly based on language to emphasize cultural norms can also be beneficial. Consider using pictures of people that are representative of your student population, bright colors that appeal to younger kids, or shots of well loved menu items to reach specific communities.**

## 3. Serve culturally appropriate food



*Tradition and history are infused into the Winnebago Tribe's meals including buffalo meat sloppy joes and occasionally, a traditional Native American dessert called Wojapi – a blueberry sauce with walnuts.*

**For a diverse population, consider incorporating meals that honor the culture of all students. Remember that serving meals that appeal to the majority can exclude kids who are less represented. Occasionally explore diverse menu items that can push students toward multicultural options and show others that you care about their culture and heritage.**



# 4. Offer an alternative breakfast model

Serving a traditional breakfast in the cafeteria before class starts may leave some students out. Adopting the alternative breakfast models located to the right generally help to increase the number of students that eat breakfast.

To determine which model would work best for your school, use [USDA's helpful self-assessment](#).

If you're looking for tools to assess the need in your community, calculate costs, or market your breakfast program, check out the [USDA's breakfast resources](#).



## Grab and Go:

Nutrition staff packs breakfasts in bags for students to take on the way to their first class. This allows students to eat at different locations and after the first bell.



## Second Chance:

Students are able to eat breakfast in between their first and second classes. This can either take place in the cafeteria or on the go.



## Breakfast in the Classroom:

Nutrition staff/volunteers pack breakfasts in transportable coolers to deliver to classrooms. Students take 10-15 minutes to eat in the classroom with their peers after school starts.

## Grab and Go at West Lawn Elementary, Grand Island

West Lawn Elementary in Grand Island implemented a grab and go breakfast model in 2018. By switching from traditional to grab and go, school breakfast participation went from 50% to over 85%, student behavior and energy went up, and administrative time went down. Watch [a video](#) about their experience to learn more.



COVID-19 safety measures forced many school districts to adopt alternative breakfast models at the beginning of the pandemic. Maintaining that model as protocols are relaxed will increase access for kids AND make the best use of that experience.

# 5. Extend meals beyond school hours



For some students, hunger is at its greatest when school isn't in session. If your school has 50% or more students who qualify for free and reduced-price lunches, you could be eligible to serve afterschool snacks, supper, and/or summer meals.

## Summer Food Service Program (SFSP):

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) invites kids ages 1-18 to share free meals at schools, nonprofits, libraries, and other locations around the state during the summer months. This program fills in some of the gaps when school is out and regular school breakfasts and lunches aren't available.



## SFSP Equity Best Practices

Nebraska Appleseed has compiled recommendations for SFSP Equity Best Practices for Nebraska SFSP sponsors. These are tangible options that can increase access and incorporate community input into your SFSP program.

## Nebraska Summer Best Practice Toolkit

Find data, best practices, practical next steps and stories from around Nebraska in our Best Practice Toolkit. This was developed from surveys and interviews with SFSP sponsors in Nebraska in 2020.



**Nebraska Summer Food Service Program**  
**EQUITY BEST PRACTICES**

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) offers all kids 18 and under a free meal in a supervised, safe, and welcoming location.  
Find Nebraska Appleseed's 6 SFSP Equity Best Practices, developed from surveys and interviews with SFSP sponsors in Nebraska in 2020 and updated to account for COVID below:

BEST PRACTICE	EQUITY IMPACT
1. Extend service to include more days, more meals, or both	The SFSP allows sponsors to serve 2 meals per day (including weekends) for as long as regular school is out for the summer. Serving as much of and as many meals during that time as possible limits the financial burden on families as well as the days when a student might go hungry.
2. Offer consistent outreach that meets families where they are	Offer clear, culturally-appropriate invitations to your program in community locations (including online) and in languages kids speak at home. Get to know families from diverse backgrounds in your community so you know your audience and where they like to get info.
3. Design menus to attract more kids	Serving meals that appeal to the majority can exclude kids that are less represented. Occasionally explore diverse menu items that can push students toward multicultural options and show others that you care about their culture and heritage.
4. Host activities at sites (and make them healthy!)	The most well-attended SFSP sites around the state offer activities that not only provide nutrition for the body, but also nutrition for the mind. Maybe host team sports or an event at the local pool!
5. Make location and design decisions with participation in mind	Participants want to share their opinions, you just have to ask! Try to remove barriers like transportation for kids and families by considering ways to bring food to where the kids already are whether that be summer school, camps, the local pool, or apartment complexes.
6. Implement precautionary measures for students who have been impacted by COVID-19	Consider ways to increase access through remote meal distribution in the community or social distancing and masking up on site to support a safe and welcoming environment for all.

*"The SFSP has helped my food budget and my daughter's. I have four grandkids that live with me. It's helped us tremendously. My daughter gets food stamps, but those only go so far. Kids being home all summer, all they want to do is eat, eat, eat. The nutritional foods are also good. We've gotten them to eat more things than they would have."*

- 2021 SFSP Participant

\*If you are interested in sponsoring an SFSP site, contact the [Nebraska Department of Education](https://www.education.nebraska.gov/).

## AT-RISK AFTERSCHOOL MEALS GUIDE

\*For more information on these two programs, see [No Kid Hungry's After School Meals resources](#).

### Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP):

The CACFP provides funding to schools or nonprofits that offer educational or enrichment programs, allowing them to serve an afterschool snack and/or supper.

### National School Lunch Program (NSLP):

If already serving lunch through NSLP, schools have the opportunity to use NSLP funding to provide snacks at after school programs at the school.

## 6. Serve meals at no cost to all students!



Some of the biggest barriers to serving school meals are the paperwork for administrators and the stigma associated with free meals for certain students. The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) allows schools in high-poverty areas to serve breakfast and lunch for free to ALL students without the traditional application process. Provision 2 and serving meals at no cost are additional options to achieve no cost meals.

To learn more and check on the most recent data for your schools and district, visit [NDE's CEP webpage](#).

*To be eligible for CEP, the school or district must have an Identified Student Percentage (ISP) of at least 40%. Identified Students (or those who are directly certified) include those who receive benefits from...*

- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP),
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF, called ADC in Nebraska),
- Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), or
- or those who are homeless, migrant, runaway, or in foster care.

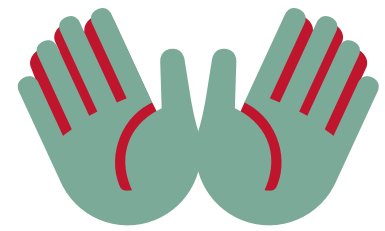
## Community Eligibility Provision at Druid Hill Elementary, Omaha



Druid Hill Elementary in Omaha was an early adopter of CEP in Nebraska, taking up the option in March of 2016. Administrators, parents, and teachers all saw positive impacts immediately. Absences were cut by 2%, kids had less stigma from their peers about eating free/reduced price school meals, more kids ate, parents didn't run up meal debt, and the nutrition staff had less paperwork!



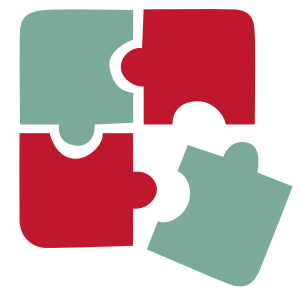
# 7. Ensure staff are representative of those served



Hiring staff that represent those they serve expands understanding and skills, including lived experiences, which enables a school to better connect to their community.



# 8. Explore and practice cultural humility



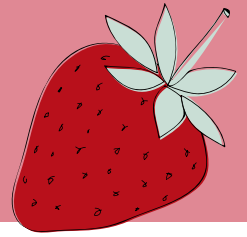
Learning about our own biases can help eliminate inequities in programs. Find resources like this one from the [National Institutes of Health](#) to learn how cultural humility supports personal perspective and community health. Addressing inequities in the community is more difficult if you haven't explored personal biases, hidden or apparent, in yourself.

*Consider taking a personal assessment that may provide insights into your unknown biases. The [Harvard Implicit Bias Test](#) is one tool to help identify bias so that you account for it in your programs.*

*Remember that we all hold biases - it's how we respond to those biases that matter most, especially with our students.*

Category	Items
Good	Attractive, Pleasing, Pleasure, Delight, Fantastic, Friendship, Cherish, Terrific
Bad	Hurtful, Selfish, Hate, Detest, Pain, Tragic, Evil, Sick
African Americans	
European Americans	

# Conclusion



School nutrition equity is not just about expanding programs, although increasing access definitely helps kids most in need. School nutrition equity is about engaging with the community to ensure that ALL voices are heard, included, and taken into account for program design. Doing this hard work on top of an already difficult job is challenging, however, the goal of making strides to support families and students from all walks of life, especially those most disproportionately impacted by inequities, is well worth the effort.

If you'd like support in your efforts toward equity in school nutrition programs, reach out to Nebraska Appleseed at 402-438-8853. We are excited to help in whatever way we can.

## Further Reading and Resources

### *Nebraska Department of Education Equity Webpage*

- *We applaud the NDE for their prioritization of equity and their efforts to break down barriers in all parts of education for students. Access equity resources at their [website](#).*

### *Equity*

- *[“Equity vs. Equality: What’s the Difference?”](#) - George Washington University - Explore the difference between equity and equality.*
- *[“Visualizing Food Insecurity”](#) - Northwestern Institute for Policy Research - Identify how different groups were impacted by the pandemic.*
- *[“The Impact of the Coronavirus on Food Insecurity in 2020 and 2021”](#) - Feeding America - Learn how economic recovery from the pandemic looks like for different groups.*
- *[“Study Finds Americans Eat Food of Mostly Poor Nutritional Quality – Except at School”](#) - Tufts University Now - Read about how school meals are both nutritious and equitable.*
- *[“Cultural Humility: Essential foundation for clinical researchers”](#) - National Institutes of Health - Learn how cultural humility supports personal perspective and community health.*

### *Identifying Barriers*

- *[“Equity in Access: Designing a Meals Program That Reaches Every Child”](#) - No Kid Hungry - Reflect on these questions to make sure your program is reaching diverse groups.*

### *Alternative Breakfast Models*

- *[“Breakfast Method Fact Sheet”](#) - USDA - Distinguish between the different breakfast models to identify which would work best for your school.*
- *[“Discover School Breakfast Resource Materials”](#) - USDA - Utilize the USDA’s breakfast resources to identify needs in your community, calculate costs, and download marketing materials.*

### *Serving Meals Beyond School Hours*

- *[“About After School Meals”](#) - No Kid Hungry - Discover how CACFP and NSLP could be used to serve afterschool meals.*
- *[“Nebraska Summer Food Service Program Best Practices Toolkit”](#) - Nebraska Appleseed - Learn how to serve meals the most efficiently during the summer.*
- *[“Summer Food Service Program”](#) - Nebraska Department of Education - Contact information for the NDE to inquire about establishing an SFSP site.*

### *Universal Free Meals*

- *[“Take a Fresh Look at Community Eligibility for the 2021-2022 School Year”](#) - Food Research and Action Center - Find out how the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) could be used to serve meals to all students for free.*

# Acknowledgements



Generous funding and data analysis support to create this report were provided by No Kid Hungry.

No Kid Hungry is a national campaign run by Share Our Strength, a nonprofit working to solve problems of hunger and poverty in the United States and around the world. After 25 years of successfully investing in local nonprofits and helping find the best approaches to eradicating poverty and hunger, Share Our Strength launched No Kid Hungry in 2010. Learn more at [nokidhungry.org](http://nokidhungry.org).

Participation data and statistics used in this report were provided by the Nebraska Department of Education's Department of Nutrition Services. Learn more at [education.ne.gov](http://education.ne.gov).



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January 2022

Nebraska Appleseed is a nonprofit organization that fights for justice and opportunity for all Nebraskans. We take a systemic approach to complex issues – such as child welfare, immigration policy, affordable health care, and poverty – and we take our work wherever we believe we can do the most good, whether that's at the courthouse, in the statehouse, or in the community.

To find more information, please visit [neappleseed.org/schoolnutritionequity](http://neappleseed.org/schoolnutritionequity).

