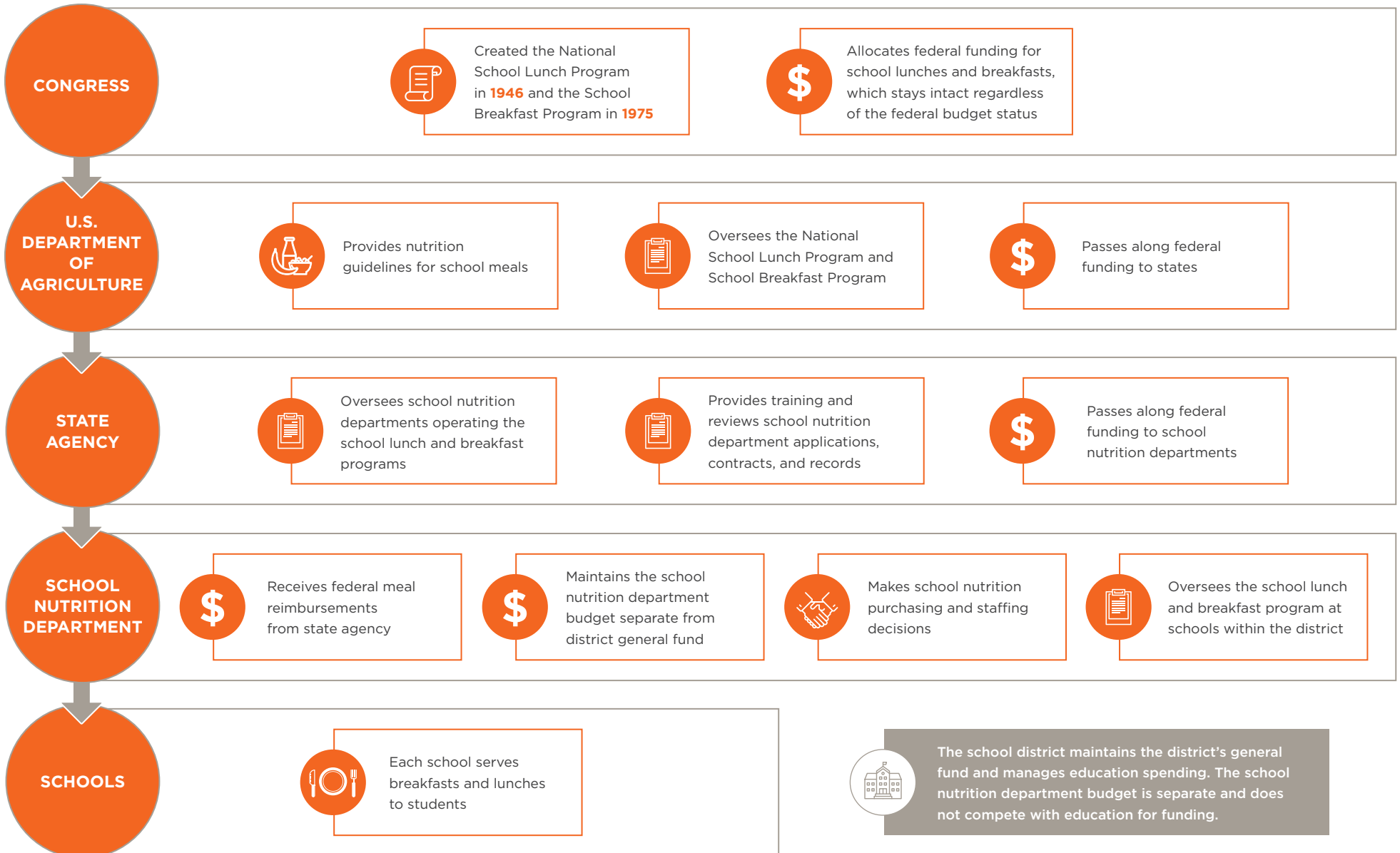


# HOW SCHOOL MEALS REACH KIDS



Over 30 million students participate in the National School Lunch Program and nearly 15 million participate in the School Breakfast Program. The vast majority receive free or reduced-price meals. Have you ever wondered who pays for them? Here's the path that funding takes from Congress to cafeteria.





# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



## WHERE DO SCHOOL MEALS COME FROM?

The school nutrition department (the department) manages meal services for all schools in the district.

School meals are funded by the school nutrition department budget, not by the school district's education budget or general fund. The school nutrition budget funds the salaries of school nutrition staff, school meals, and other items for the department.



## WHO FUNDS THE SCHOOL NUTRITION DEPARTMENT?

The department may receive money from multiple sources, such as:

- Federal reimbursements for student participation in the school lunch and breakfast programs, which are authorized by Congress and come from U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) via the state agency;
- Department of Defense funding; and
- Additional ventures, like catering or a la carte food sales.



## DO STUDENTS PAY ANYTHING?

Yes, if the student does not meet USDA requirements for free school breakfast or lunch. To determine each student's eligibility for free or reduced-price meals, the department may collect applications and compare a family's reported income to federal guidelines. Or, the department may use information about whether a student's family participates in other programs that have strict income requirements, like SNAP or Medicaid.

In schools with a high level of need, the department may choose to offer all meals at no cost to students by utilizing flexibilities like the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP).

## WHO SETS THE FUNDING LEVELS?

Based on laws passed by Congress, the USDA sets specific reimbursement payment rates for each breakfast or lunch according to students' family income. The school nutrition department receives less federal reimbursement money for meals if the student's family has a higher income. The current federal reimbursement rates range from \$0.33 to \$2.35 per breakfast and \$0.35 to \$3.68 per lunch.

## IS THIS DIFFERENT THAN EDUCATION FUNDING?

Yes. School districts receive a mix of state and local funding for education along with some federal education funding. The district's education spending comes out of its general fund, which pays for teacher and principal salaries, books, desks, and anything not related to school meals.

While some states choose to provide some additional funding to support school meals, the vast majority of the funding is federal. School meal funding is provided through the USDA, not the U.S. Department of Education.

Because the district's general fund and budget rely heavily on state and local taxes, education funding can drop if the tax base weakens, but school nutrition departments receive more federal funding for meals if families' incomes drop.

## IS THERE A LIMIT ON FEDERAL FUNDING?

No, there is no cap on how much money states and school nutrition departments can receive, as long as the meals meet USDA requirements and are served to eligible students. The school nutrition department gets more funding for serving more students. Expanding the breakfast and lunch programs brings more federal funding into the school nutrition department to benefit schools and students.