

SUPPER MAKES CENTS FOR SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Serving supper through the CACFP At-Risk Afterschool Meals Program makes good sense—and cents. If your district has schools where at least half of students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals, you could provide students at those schools with a well-balanced meal after school and on weekends and holidays.



Feed Kids What They Need

As a food service professional, you know the kids in your community need a nutritious meal after the school day ends. You also know that some kids won't eat until the next morning. Give kids the nourishment they need to continue growing and learning after school.



Collect a High Reimbursement

Suppers are reimbursed through the Child and Adult Care Food Program at \$4.03¹. Taking cash instead of USDA commodity foods, reimbursement comes up to \$4.33 – nearly four times more than the reimbursement for a snack. Check out the numbers below to see how two school districts make supper work with money to spare.



Support Your Operations

Many districts build supper preparation into existing staff time to ease the budget. The high reimbursement can also support extra hours and even new staff depending on the cost of base pay, overtime hours, and benefits, as well as how you structure your program and set your staffing plan.

FEED KIDS MORE. BRING IN MORE MONEY. SUPPER IS A WIN-WIN.

While every district faces unique budget factors, the following numbers were shared by two geographically diverse school districts to show how the math makes sense for afterschool meals. Use the leftover money to offset other meal program costs like administration or supplies, help with upgrading equipment, or offer new types of foods.

Cold Supper in a Large Suburban District

Reimbursement plus commodity:	\$4.55
	-
Average food cost per meal:	\$2.78
	-
Labor cost per meal*:	\$0.48

Remaining money: \$1.25

Hot Supper in a Small Rural District

Reimbursement plus commodity:	\$4.55
	-
Average food cost per meal:	\$1.62
	-
Labor cost per meal*:	\$0.27

Remaining money: \$2.55

* Assumes 2 hours of labor at \$20.27/hour including benefits needed to prepare meals for a program serving 85 kids. This district provides hot meals to schools with more than 100 participants since the food cost is lower and outweighs the higher total time and labor cost per hour.

* Assumes 7.5 hours of labor at an average of \$22.47/hour including benefits needed to prepare meals for 620 kids across three programs served by the district.

¹ The reimbursement rate for all Afterschool Meals is the "free" reimbursement rate for the Child and Adult Care Food Program. The rate for July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024 is \$4.25 per lunch or supper plus \$0.30 for cash-in-lieu of USDA commodity foods. As sponsors, school districts may use no more than 15 percent of CACFP meal reimbursements for administrative costs.

SCHOOL DISTRICTS SHARE TIPS TO MAKE AFTERSCHOOL MEALS WORK

Promote the Meal

Make sure that all afterschool program leaders know when and where the meal is served so that they can encourage kids to eat. Ideally, work with school administrators and program leaders to determine a time and place that works well for everyone. If the school has a wide variety of afterschool activities or an open-to-all program, consider promoting the meal to all students. Even simple tactics like a PA announcement can make a big impact.

Plan for Efficiency

With smart menu planning, you can streamline your preparation and minimize how much extra equipment and supplies you need. By choosing supper items that need different kitchen appliances and tools than lunch, you can get started with supper before lunch clean-up ends. By using similar ingredients over the course of the week, you can minimize the number of items that you have to keep in stock and cut down on prep time. Limit waste by serving supper leftovers at lunch the following day, or offer leftover lunch favorites as an option for supper.

Serve Cold Meals

Particularly for smaller afterschool programs (less than 100 students), cold meals are more financially viable since less staff time is needed for meal prep and less expertise is generally needed for serving. Try easy, tasty cold meals like sandwiches, wraps, or pasta salads. The USDA's Team Nutrition Library offers a variety of menu tools for school food service providers. Visit healthymeals.nal.usda.gov. The Alliance for a Healthier Generation's Smart Food Planner also offers sample menus and product ideas for afterschool meals. Visit <https://foodplanner.healthiergeneration.org/>.

Consider Branding and Presentation

Some programs have found that presenting the meal as a "supper" can lead to decreased interest, especially if expectations for a large, hot meat-and-potatoes meal aren't met. Instead, they present the meal as a "super snack." In addition, making the packaging more appealing to kids can make the meals more popular, regardless of their content. Schools have found that clear lids and bags showcase the day's items so that kids see what their friends are eating, which provides free advertising. And as always, asking kids makes them more engaged and likely to try a meal.

Let Afterschool Program Staff Conduct Meal Service and Clean Up

Labor may become prohibitively expensive, particularly for smaller programs, if the food service staff is needed to help serve meals. Allow afterschool program staff (teachers, coaches, YMCA staff, etc.) access to a refrigerator so they can distribute the food, clean up, and return leftovers. If programs are hesitant to have their staff assist with meals, help coordinate a visit to another afterschool program that has successfully implemented this model.

Use Flexibility in Labor Allocation

Determine how afterschool meal prep can be built into your existing labor framework. One strategy is to forecast a pool of hours needed for all meal programs and use that to allocate labor across schools. Some districts move staff to another school for the afterschool meal depending on bandwidth and demand at each school and the staff's desire for extra hours.

Want to Learn More?

Visit bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/programs/afterschool-meals. Or, contact bestpractices@strength.org.

