

Advocacy, Outreach and Legislation:
Increasing Access to the Child Nutrition Programs
and School Meals for All

Hunger Free New Jersey, Lisa Pitz

A PROGRAM OF THE
CENTER FOR FOOD ACTION

Hunger Free New Jersey



Works to ensure that all in NJ have healthy food, every day by improving access to federal nutrition programs, such as SNAP, summer and afterschool meals and school meals.

Importance of Child Nutrition Programs

- **Reduces Food Insecurity**
- **Improves dietary Intake**

-Low-income students who eat both school breakfast and lunch have significantly better overall diet quality than low-income students who do not eat school meals.

- **Positively impacts health and obesity rates**

-Receiving free or reduced-price school lunches reduces poor health by at least 29 percent based on estimates using national data.

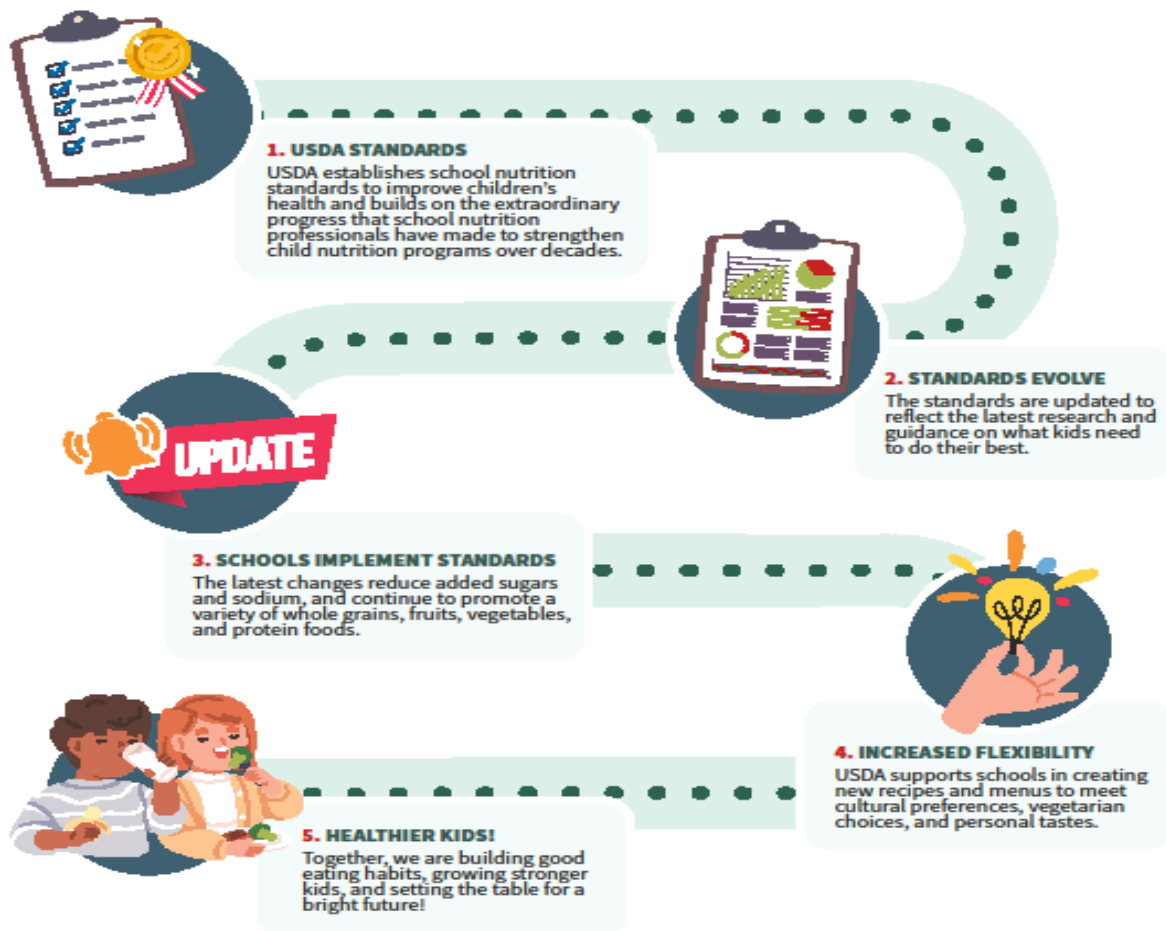
- **Leads to Better learning environments**

-Children and adolescents experiencing hunger have lower math scores and poorer grades



TOP THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT SCHOOL MEALS

School nutrition professionals continue to make school meals the healthiest meals children eat in a day! Nutritious school meals are an investment in our children's futures, and we all share the common goal of helping them reach their full potential.



Expanding Access to Child Nutrition Programs through legislation

- School Breakfast— any school with 70% or more students eligible for free/reduced must operate a breakfast after the bell program.
- Summer meals – any school district with 50% of more students eligible for free/reduced price school meals must operate an open summer meal site.



Progress Made...

- NJ went from 46th (2010) to 19th (2018) in the nation in school breakfast participation
- In 2023, NJ ranked #5 in the nation in Summer Meal participation; reaching 29.5 children with summer meals for every 100 participating in school lunch (*national benchmark is 40:100*)



But more work to do...

Decline in school meal participation since pandemic era waivers ended:

- From 2022-2023 to 2023-2024, there was a 13.9% decrease in breakfast participation
- From 2022-2023 to 2023-2024, there was a 22.8% decrease in lunch participation



Legislation to Expand Access to Free School Meals



- Elimination of Reduced Price (2019)
- Expanded income eligibility for free school meals up to 200% of federal poverty level (NJEIE) (2022)
- Expanded to 224% of federal poverty level (NJEIE) (2024)

Using Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) to Expand Access to Free School Meals

- Community eligibility allows high-need schools to offer breakfast and lunch to all students at no charge.
- Medicaid Direct Certification is implemented this school year, making more children directly certified for free school meals!!



Did you know?
Community eligibility
allows more children to
experience the
education and health
benefits linked to
eating school meals.

Increasing return on school meal applications

- NJ has combined the school meal application, Summer EBT application, and household income survey into one form!
- OFSA and HFNJ launched School Meal Application outreach campaign across the state
- HFNJ's "School Meals and Summer EBT Application" outreach toolkit

An infographic featuring various colorful illustrations of vegetables and fruits, including broccoli, a purple eggplant, a green pea pod, a red tomato, a carrot, and a yellow corn cob. The text is overlaid on this background.

Have you filled out a school meals and S-EBT application?

Free school meals save parents time, money, & stress!

Food for thought:

- Free school meals can save parents \$120 per month in grocery costs per child.
- Research shows that receiving free school meals reduces food insecurity and obesity rates.

Learn how to apply by visiting your school website or obtain a paper copy at your school!

 **SCHOOL MEALS FOR ALL**
NEW JERSEY

Summer EBT

Launched this summer in NJ:

- Low-income families received \$120 per eligible child
- Nearly 600K EBT cards issued to eligible students across 722 participating school food authorities!

**ARE YOU LEAVING \$120 IN BENEFITS
ON THE TABLE THIS SUMMER?**

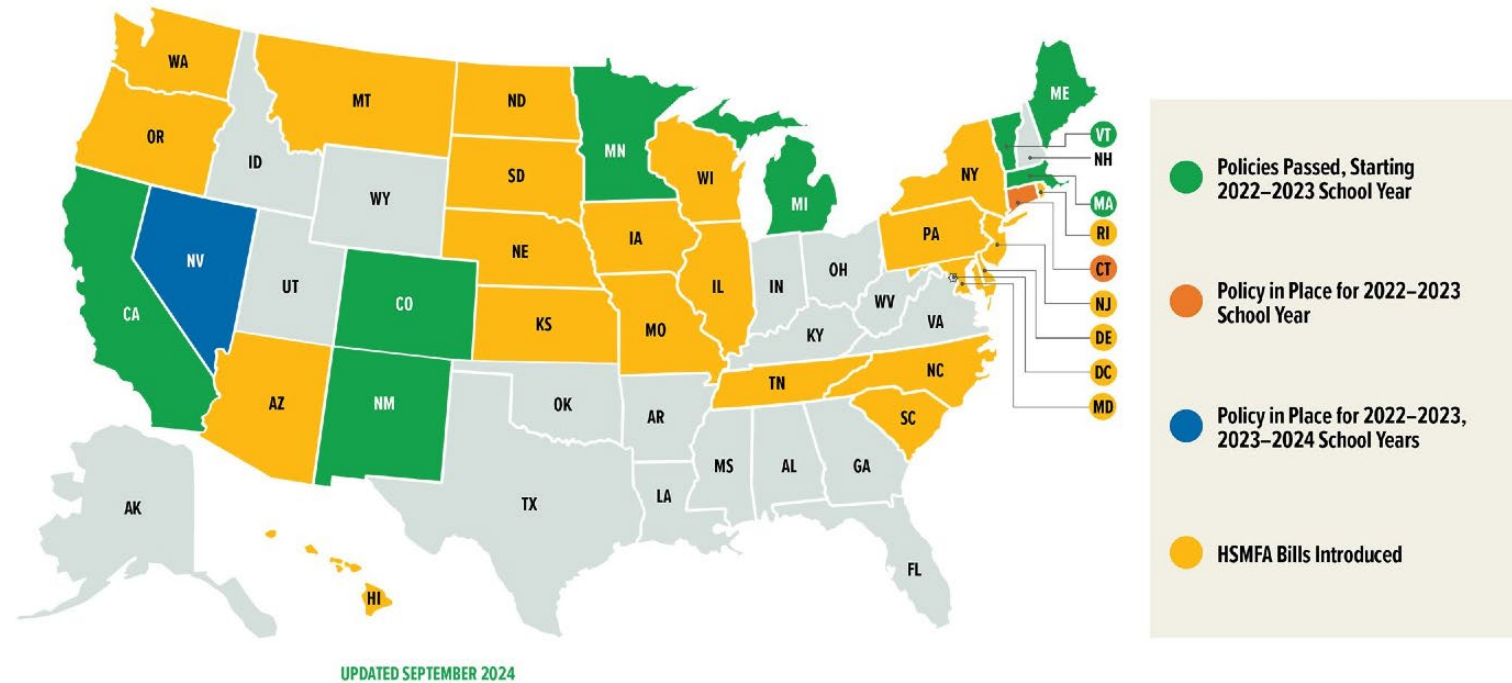
**A new \$120 grocery
benefit is available to
eligible lower income
families.**

**LEARN MORE ABOUT SUMMER EBT AT
NJ.GOV/SUMMER EBT**



Momentum is building for Healthy School Meals for All

- 8 states are implementing policies that offer school meals to all students at no charge, regardless of household income.





- School Meals for All New Jersey is a diverse and growing coalition of anti-hunger, education, health, agriculture, and equity-focused organizations; students; parents; school administrators; and other concerned New Jerseyans advocating for School Meals for All NJ Kids.
- The coalition is led by a steering committee, formed in 2023. Hunger Free New Jersey leads the coalition alongside the NJ School Nutrition Association, FoodCorps, the Food Research and Action Center, and the American Heart Association of New Jersey.

Support School Meals for All New Jersey



- Stay connected! Use the QR Code shown here to sign on to be a part of the School Meals for All NJ coalition and get involved.
- Follow us on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter/X at @SM4ANJ

