

School Meals Receipt: 2021

Survey of Income and Program Participation Snapshots

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P70FS-187
November 2023

68.8% of children aged 5–18 years ate school meals.

Roughly 97 percent of children who ate school meals ate school lunch. School meals may be free, reduced price, or full price for families that use them.

55.1% of free or reduced-price school meals recipients were primary school-age children (aged 5–11 years).

High school students (aged 15–18 years) were the smallest group of free or reduced-price school meals recipients (21.7 percent). Middle school students (aged 12–14 years) accounted for the remaining group of school meals recipients.

3 in 5 free or reduced-price school meals recipients ate both school breakfast and lunch.

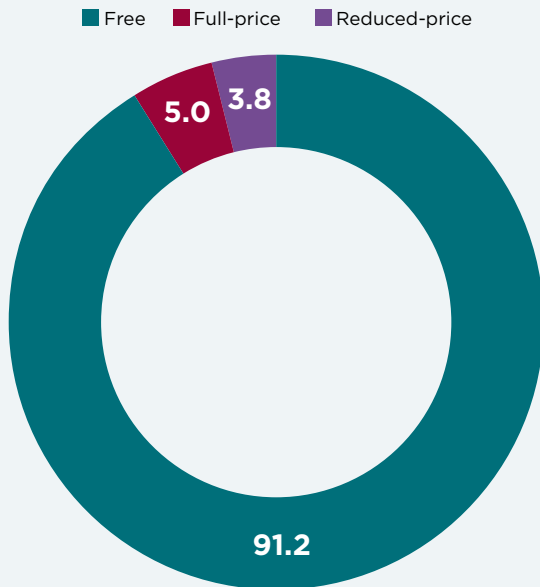
A smaller percentage of free or reduced-price school meals recipients ate only one school meal. About 35 percent ate only lunch and roughly 3 percent ate only breakfast.

What Are School Meals?

The [National School Lunch Program \(NSLP\)](#) and [School Breakfast Program \(SBP\)](#) are programs administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). These provide low-cost or free school meals each day in many school districts across the country. For the 2021–2022 school year, nationwide [waivers](#) allowed states to serve free meals to the majority of children without determining eligibility for free or reduced-price breakfast or lunch.

More information on school meals and other social safety net programs is available in [fact sheets](#), [detailed program participation tables](#), [interactive data visualizations](#), and [reports](#).

School Lunch Type Among Children Who Ate School Lunch: 2021 (In percent)



In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the USDA granted waivers to all states that enabled schools to provide free school lunch to all children without determining eligibility in the 2021–2022 school year. As a result, 91 percent of students who ate school lunch in 2021 were not charged for those meals.

Characteristics of Children Receiving Free/Reduced-Price School Meals: 2021 (In percent)

