

Increase Funding for School Lunch



Quick Facts on School Lunch:

- Students eating free or low-cost meals that meet current nutrition standards are more likely to be at a healthy weight.¹
- The Rochester City School District (RCSD) serves **22,000 lunches**; and **16,000 breakfasts** to students daily.²
- Currently schools receive a maximum of \$3.21 per school meal from the federal government.³
- After labor and equipment costs, school districts have on average only \$1.19 (per meal) to spend on food.
- Through the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act districts can receive an additional 6 cent per meal incentive if they follow the new guidelines.⁵

Why school lunch?

Studies show that students who eat free or low-cost meals in states where the nutritional contents of lunches exceeded USDA nutritional standards are more likely to be at a healthy weight than students getting these meals in states that only marginally meet the new standards.⁶

How much do school meals cost?

School meals are subsidized by both federal and state governments. The federal government sets annual reimbursements that they will provide for each meal. In 2014-2015 school districts received \$2.75 per reduced price meal, to \$3.15 per free meal.⁷ The federal government has also recognized the need to provide incentives to school districts to meet new nutritional requirements implemented through the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act (HHFKA). Districts now can receive a **6 cent per meal incentive** if they follow the new guidelines.

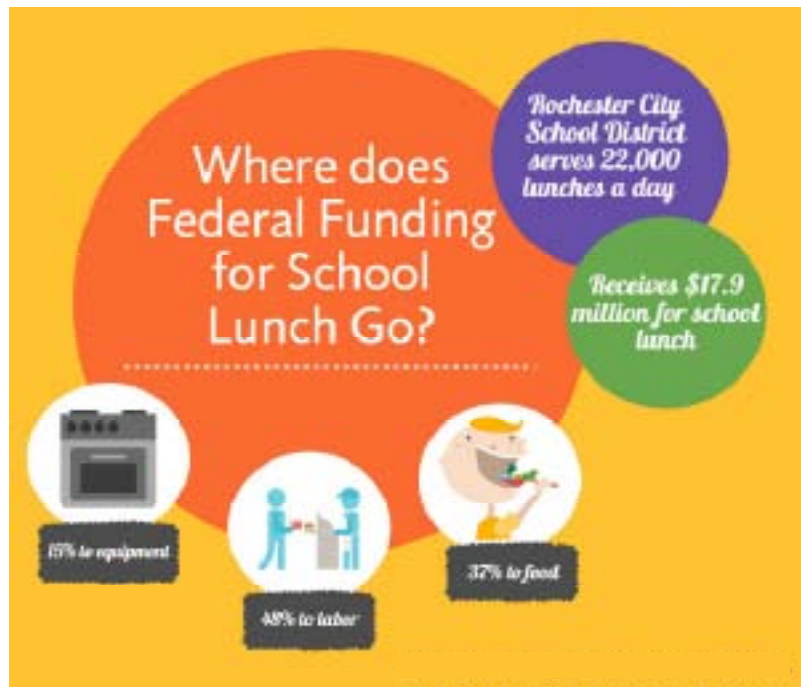
Is there enough funding?

Despite these federal reimbursement incentives to implement new nutrition standards, districts continue to struggle with their implementation, and ultimately believe overall revenue will be affected. In a survey of School Nutrition Association (SNA) directors and major directors, 46% of respondents indicated they experienced a decrease in total revenue due to rising food costs; and 64% of respondents stated new HHFKA requirements will increase their average meal cost for lunch in 2014-2015.⁸ The SNA states the cost of implementation is much higher than the federal incentive allotment, and projects it will cost an **additional 14 cents** per meal to meet new standards.⁹

In addition to the challenges of implementing the nutrition standards, studies show that not all federal reimbursement funding goes towards school food. Only 37% of federal reimbursement dollars are directly used for school food. 48% of federal funding goes directly to labor costs, and 15% gets spent on other items (e.g. equipment, supplies, and other indirect costs).¹⁰

What is happening in New York State?

State support for the National School Lunch Program has remained static for the last **40 years**.¹¹ The New York Chapter of the SNA estimates that the state government contributes less than 6 cents per school meal.¹² If New York state had provided a cost of living adjustment on an annual basis for school meal programs, schools would be receiving an additional \$0.26 per school meal. Additional state funding would offset labor costs and allow for more money to go towards healthy food that not only meets the HHFKA nutrition guidelines but also is tasty enough that kids will eat it.



What is happening in Rochester?

Currently Rochester receives \$575,000 from New York State; and \$17.9 million from the federal government for school meals.¹³ After labor and indirect costs, the district has on average \$1.19 per meal to make healthy and delicious food for children. Additional state funding for the National School Lunch program could allow the RCSD to continue their kitchen modernization process. This would allow the district to continue to increase their capacity for preparing school meals on-site. Also, additional funds could allow for an opportunity for the district to use a higher percentage of each dollar towards improving food quality, variety and appeal to children.



Parents in the Rochester City School District (RCSD) have concerns about school lunch. In Healthi Kids' Lunch is Gross campaign parents and children advocated for changes to school lunch that would make the meals tastier and healthier for children.



In 2013-2014 working with Healthi Kids staff, parents conducted lunch observations to see what children were eating, what they were throwing away and asked them what they would like to see better. Parents observed that students were **throwing out 25 to 75 percent** of their school lunch. Parents and students throughout elementary schools in the RCSD want better tasting healthy food options. Only half of students indicated that they actually liked their lunch. Kids wanted more variety and choice in their meals, more fruits and vegetables and wanted the food to be cooked at school so that they would look more like "home-made" food.

Healthi Kids Recommends:

- Supporting the New York State School Nutrition Association's ask to state to increase funding for the National School Lunch Program by 20 cents per meal;
- Any additional funding the Rochester City School District receives to be allocated towards:
 - Kitchen and equipment modernization to increase capacity to prepare on-site food;
 - Expanding the variety of fruits, vegetables and healthy meals for kids;
 - Investing in food tasting programs to allow kids to choose what items appear on the menu;
 - Further training for food service staff on food preparation, presentation and customer service.

Endnotes

1. Taber, DR, Chiriqui, J., Chaloupka, FJ. (2013). Association between state laws governing school meal nutrition content and student weight status: implications for new USDA school meal standards. *JAMA Pediatrics*. 167(6): 513-9.
2. Rochester City School District (2014, May). Superintendent's proposed 2014-2015 budget for the board of education. Rochester City School District Online.
3. Food and Nutrition Service (2014). School meals: rates of reimbursement. United States Department of agriculture: Food and nutrition service online. July. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/rates-reimbursement>.
4. Food and Nutrition Service (2008). School lunch and breakfast cost study II. U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service Online. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/MealCostStudy.pdf>
5. Food and Nutrition Service (2014).
6. Taber, Chiriqui, Chaloupka (2013).
7. Food and Nutrition Service (2014).
8. School Nutrition Association (2014). School nutrition trends survey 2014. School Nutrition Association Online. August 2014.
9. New York School Nutrition Association (2013, October). Letter to Commissioner John B. King at the New York state department of education. New York School Nutrition association.
10. Food and Nutrition Service (2008).
11. New York School Nutrition Association (2013, October).
12. Ibid.
13. Rochester City School District (2014, May).

About Healthi Kids

By advocating for a handful of public-policy and practice changes, the Healthi Kids Coalition is blazing a path for healthier, more active children in Rochester and Monroe County, New York. Our change agenda calls for better school food, safer play areas, food standards at childcare centers, at least 60 minutes of in-school physical activity, and policies that support breastfeeding.

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