

**Michigan Department of Education
Michigan School Meals Program
Frequently Asked Questions**



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The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) will refer to the Healthy School Meals for All/Universal Meal funding as the **Michigan School Meals Program** for branding and communication purposes. Questions and responses will continue to be added to this document. Check back often for updates.

General Questions

1. How is the Michigan School Meals Program different than the National School Lunch Program (NSLP)?

Michigan School Meals is a state-funded program that provides reimbursement for meals served to students who do not qualify for free or reduced-price meals, so all students receive the meals at no cost. Schools participating in the Michigan School Meals Program must participate in the NSLP and the School Breakfast Program (SBP) and follow the regulations of those programs.

2. When does this program start?

The Michigan School Meals Program begins immediately when the budget is signed.

3. Can my school participate?

Public school districts, public school academies, and intermediate school districts approved for the NSLP and SBP may participate in the Michigan School Meals Program.

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4. Can an online school participate?

It depends. Students must be enrolled in a school that is eligible for the NSLP. If an online school does not have a congregate meal service, it is not eligible to participate in the NSLP. To discuss program eligibility, please email mde-schoolnutrition@michigan.gov.

5. Do I need to participate in the NSLP to receive the state reimbursement?

Yes, a school will need to operate both the NSLP and the SBP to participate in the Michigan School Meals Program.

6. Do I need to participate in the SBP to receive the state reimbursement?

Yes, a school will need to operate both the NSLP and the SBP to participate in the Michigan School Meals Program.

7. Can a school remain in the federal NSLP only and NOT participate in Michigan School Meals Program that requires breakfast and lunch?

Yes, participation in Michigan School Meals is optional for sponsors of the NSLP.

8. Is there a way that we can serve lunch only (not breakfast) and still receive state reimbursement?

No. Schools must serve breakfast and lunch to be eligible for the state reimbursement through Michigan School Meals Program.

9. Can our school operate the NSLP and/or the SBP only some of the days that school is in session?

No. The NSLP and the SBP must operate on all academic school days that students are on campus.

10. Is there a minimum percentage of free and reduced-price eligible students that our school must have to participate in Michigan School Meals Program?

No, there is not a minimum percentage of free and reduced-price eligible students required for a school to participate in the Michigan School Meals Program.

11. Do I still need to collect Applications for School Meals and Summer EBT?

Yes, federal regulations require applications to be distributed. Schools should continue to directly certify students and collect [Applications for School Meals and Summer EBT](#) to determine if a student qualifies for free or reduced-price meals. Applications for School Meals and Summer EBT are not needed to determine eligibility for students on the direct certification list.

Students who receive meals at no charge, but who are not approved for free meals

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through federal school nutrition programs, must be reported correctly in the [Supplemental Nutrition Eligibility](#) (SNE) record in the Michigan Student Data System (MSDS) according to their actual school meal eligibility status – either reduced-price or paid. **Meals served to these students must be correctly claimed as reduced-price or paid meals to receive the correct federal and state reimbursements.**

12. Why is it important to continue to collect Applications for School Meals and Summer EBT?

A school's eligibility for federal Child Nutrition Programs such as the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and after school snack and supper programs is based on free and reduced-price eligibility.

Additional federal meal reimbursement is available to schools/districts that meet severe need criteria based on free and reduced-price eligibility.

Students and families may qualify for other program fee reductions based on their eligibility for free or reduced-price meals.

Federal and state education funding uses free and reduced-price eligibility.

13. Can a non-public school participate in Michigan School Meals Program by teaming up with a public school district?

A non-public school can still work with their local school district/public school academy as an alternate agreement. However, the meals served to pupils in non-public schools will not be eligible for the state reimbursement.

14. Will preschool students be included in Michigan School Meals Program?

Breakfast and lunch served to pre-k students enrolled in the Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) will be eligible to receive the state reimbursement.

15. Will meals be free for teachers and staff?

No. School Nutrition Programs funds may not subsidize meals served to adults; therefore, teachers, administrators, staff members, and any other adults must be charged a higher price than students, even if the meal is the same. The adult meal price must be set high enough so that the cost of the meal is fully paid by the customer. For School Year 2022-2023, the minimum price for a breakfast served to an adult is \$2.83 and the minimum price for a lunch served to an adult is \$5.01. Updated minimum adult meal prices for the 2023-2024 school year will be on the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) website this summer once reimbursement rates are received from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

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16. Where can I find a list of the schools that are participating in Michigan School Meals Program?

MDE has not yet started the process for schools to apply to participate in Michigan School Meals Program; therefore, there is currently no list of participating schools available.

17. Can we provide meals to our students through this program on weekends, during the summer, or on other school breaks?

The NSLP and the SBP can only operate on academic school days. Other federal child nutrition programs, such as the SFSP and the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), may be available for schools to operate on non-academic days.

18. What do we need to do to participate in the Michigan School Meals Program that begins in the 2023-2024 school year?

Sponsors will be notified when it is time to complete an application/amendment in the Fiscal Year 2024 Coordinated Application in NexSys. MDE anticipates NexSys will be ready in August 2023. Watch for more information to come out soon on when and how to complete the process to apply for the Michigan School Meals Program.

Community Eligibility Provision

1. Is my school required to participate in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) to participate in the Michigan School Meals Program?

Sponsors will be required to maximize federal reimbursement by opting into the CEP. The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) is extending the deadline for CEP election until a sponsor's first day of school for the 2023-2024 school year. Information is available at: [Community Eligibility Provision \(michigan.gov\)](https://www.michigan.gov/cep).

MDE will host CEP webinars in July and August to provide information on how to apply for and review your CEP data.

2. What if my school is already participating in the CEP and receives the maximum 100% federal reimbursement?

If your school is already participating in the CEP at the highest federal reimbursement rate, you do not need to opt into the Michigan School Meals Program state reimbursement.

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3. Our school was planning to apply for the CEP for the 2023-2024 school year. With the Michigan School Meals Program, should we still consider applying for CEP?

Yes. Schools that opt into the Michigan School Meals Program state reimbursement must maximize federal reimbursement by opting into CEP.

4. Do I need to collect Education Benefit Forms from students in CEP schools?

Yes. Schools should collect Education Benefits Forms to determine if a student is eligible. Education Benefits Forms are not needed to determine eligibility for students on the direct certification list.

Students must be reported correctly in the [Supplemental Nutrition Eligibility](#) (SNE) record in the Michigan Student Data System (MSDS) according to their actual eligibility status as determined via the Education Benefits Form.

5. Why is it important to continue to collect the Education Benefits Form?

A school's eligibility for educational funding, such as 31a State At-Risk funding, is based on data collected from the Education Benefits Form. Other local efforts such as pay to participate or backpack programs use data from the Education Benefits Form as well.

Meal Pattern

1. Since the Michigan School Meals Program is a State of Michigan program, do we still need to follow the Federal National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) meal patterns?

Yes. Schools participating in the Michigan School Meals Program must participate in the NSLP and the SBP. Schools must follow the federal meal patterns and all other federal requirements for these programs.

2. How can a parent or student advocate for improved meal quality at their school?

Parents and students should first contact the school's food service director with concerns related to meal quality. While meal pattern requirements are set at the federal level, school menus are set at the local school or school district level.

Federal requirements include minimum servings for vegetables, fruits, milk, grains, and meat or meat alternate components. In addition, schools must adhere to requirements for calories, trans fat, saturated fat, and sodium content.

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Meal Service in the Michigan School Meals Program

1. Can meals be sent home like we did during the pandemic?

No. Congregate meal service is required in the NSLP and the SBP. Meals may not be taken off campus, sent home, delivered, or picked up by parents or others.

2. How should we count meals?

Schools that opt into Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) may use a CEP Meal Count Sheet to count the total reimbursable meals served. Although the CEP count sheets are allowed for total counts for CEP schools, all schools must have proper controls in place to ensure that students are not being counted and claimed for more than one reimbursable breakfast and one reimbursable lunch per day. MDE recommends schools continue to use electronic point of sale systems even in CEP schools.

Schools that are not in CEP must count and claim meals based on the eligibility of the student receiving the meal. Students who receive meals at no charge, but who are not approved for free school meals, must be correctly listed on meal eligibility rosters or electronic systems according to their actual school meal eligibility status – either free, reduced-price, or paid. Meals served to these students must be correctly claimed as free, reduced-price, or paid meals to receive correct federal and state reimbursements.

3. Can students get second meals for free?

This legislation provides a maximum of one free breakfast and one free lunch per day to students at participating schools. A second breakfast and/or a second lunch is/are considered a la carte items and must be priced accordingly.

4. Can schools sell a la carte items?

Yes, schools may sell a la carte items that meet the federal Smart Snacks requirements. In addition, the prices charged for a la carte items must continue to meet federal nonprogram food sales requirements found in [USDA Memo SP 20-2016](#). A second breakfast/lunch or a milk with no meal is considered a la carte and must be priced accordingly.

Financial Questions in the Michigan School Meals Program

1. How are the free meals reimbursed?

Claims for reimbursement are submitted in the Michigan Nutrition Data System (MiND). Schools must have an approved Fiscal Year 2024 Coordinated Application in NexSys before a claim can be submitted. Additional information will be provided in future FAQs regarding claims for reimbursement in MiND. It will be important to

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ensure that meals are claimed in the correct federal eligibility category to receive correct federal and state reimbursements.

2. Students in our district have prepaid accounts that they have used to pay for meals, a la carte milk, and/or a la carte snack items. Will we need to refund the money on these accounts next school year?

If your school/school district will sell a la carte items or second meals next school year, funds can remain on students' prepaid accounts to pay for these a la carte items. Refunds should be made if a la carte will not be available for students to purchase and/or if a parent requests a refund of funds on the account.

3. With meals being available at no cost, should schools continue to complete the Paid Lunch Equity Tool to determine the cost of a meal?

MDE is working with the USDA on an answer and will provide it in the Frequently Asked Questions when available.

4. What can state reimbursement funds be used for?

The Nonprofit School Food Service Account (NSFSA) or Food Service Fund (Fund 25) is a restricted account. All revenue from food service operations must be retained solely for the operation and improvement of school meal programs. This includes expenses such as food, labor, supplies, and equipment used to prepare and serve reimbursable meals.

5. More students are going to eat meals now that they are available at no cost. Is there any money available for upgrades to our kitchen, serving line, or cafeteria?

A sponsor's NSFSA or Food Service Fund (Fund 25) may be used to purchase needed equipment and supplies for the purpose of upgrading kitchens, serving lines, and cafeterias to accommodate an increase in meals prepared and served. MDE has developed a [Pre-approved Food Service Equipment List](#) of items that do not require MDE approval. The School Food Authority (SFA) may purchase those equipment items, following proper federal, state, or local procurement procedures, as applicable, without submitting a written request to the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) for approval. Prior written approval from MDE must happen before ordering or purchasing equipment when the selected equipment is not on the MDE-approved list. Information is available at: [Equipment and Excess Fund Balance \(michigan.gov\)](#).

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1. When can I complete the amendment in my NexSys Coordination Application to elect the Michigan School Meals Program?

Implementation of the Michigan School Meals Program requires an update to the Coordinated Application. Sponsors will be notified when the Coordinated Application is ready for amendments.

2. Do we need an electronic point of sale system to count meals?

Schools that opt into the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) may use a CEP Meal Count Sheet to count the total reimbursable meals served. Although the CEP count sheets are allowed for total counts for CEP schools, all schools must have proper controls in place to ensure that students are not being counted and claimed for more than one reimbursable breakfast and one reimbursable lunch per day. MDE recommends schools continue to use electronic point of sale systems even in CEP schools.

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Other

1. My question was not answered in this FAQ. Who should I contact?

Additional questions can be submitted to MDE's School Nutrition Programs by emailing mde-schoolnutrition@michigan.gov.