

Why School Meals for All?



No child should go hungry in Pennsylvania.

[1 in 8 children in Pennsylvania experience food insecurity.](#)

Studies show that school meals:

- [Reduce childhood hunger](#)
- [Decrease childhood weight issues and obesity](#), and [improve child nutrition and wellness](#)
- [Enhance child development and school readiness](#)
- [Support learning, attendance, and behavior](#)
- [Contributes to positive mental health outcomes](#)
- [Are the healthiest meals for many children](#)

It's about equity:

- The existing policy for school meals, where some children are expected to pay while others receive their meals for free, [creates stigma and shame](#) for those students who rely on school meals for their basic needs, and a barrier for [those students who are not eligible but are still experiencing food insecurity](#).
 - In 2018, a family of four living in PA, had to earn at least [\\$69,648 a year to be able to afford the basic necessities to live](#). Yet, a family of four is not eligible to receive free school meals if their [annual income exceeds \\$37,000 per year](#). In 2021, the [median household income in PA was \\$67,587](#) which is below the income identified to afford basic housing, food, transportation and clothing, but well above the level to qualify for free school meals.
 - Due to the [limitations of the current method of collecting family income data through school meal benefit applications](#) and the [restrictive USDA income guidelines](#), the school meal eligibility rate never fully captures the need.
- [BIPOC students are disproportionately impacted by food insecurity](#).
- Students aren't expected to pay for books, desks, or bus fare. Why should school breakfast and lunch be any different?

School Meals for All would streamline and strengthen school nutrition programs:

- [Participation by all students in school meal programs increases when meals are provided for free](#), resulting in increased revenue by way of federal reimbursements.
- [School Meals for All would eliminate issues of unpaid school meal debt and reduced administrative paperwork](#), freeing up school nutrition staff to focus on feeding kids.

The impact of hunger on outcomes for children:

- [Food insecurity leads to negative lifetime health outcomes for children](#) especially after [repeated exposure](#).
- [Childhood food insecurity results in high costs to society](#).



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