



SELL BY APR 09

Frequently Asked Questions

Chicago Public Schools'

School Meal Program

Created in Partnership with Chicago Public Schools + Healthy Schools Campaign

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Introduction

Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and Healthy Schools Campaign (HSC) have been working together for the past decade to transform the district's school meal program. CPS and HSC know that students who eat healthier at school and at home have better attention spans, better class participation and higher test scores. This is why CPS, HSC and other partners have been working together to ensure that positive change for school food in Chicago is meaningful, sustainable and in the best interest of the students whose health and learning it directly affects.

Parent voices are key to this work. Through HSC's Parents United for Healthy Schools program, parents develop the knowledge and skills to help bring about health-promoting changes at their children's schools and reinforce healthy eating habits at home. Since 2006, Parents United has been at the forefront of helping make Chicago schools healthier places for their children. Parent leaders were instrumental in championing the Breakfast in the Classroom program at individual schools and at the district level. Parents have also tirelessly advocated for healthier school menus and supported schools' successful efforts to achieve the USDA's HealthierUS School Challenge, which later inspired the Healthy CPS School Indicator.

In 2013, CPS and HSC piloted and launched a series of School Food 101 workshops to raise awareness of the new changes to the school meal program, increase understanding of school meal basics and hear about how those changes are being implemented at the school level. We asked elementary school parents to survey their kids about the school meals they were receiving. From this learning process, CPS and HSC launched a comprehensive school meal survey for parents in

the fall of 2014. The results from this survey made it clear that parents and school administrators needed more resources and information and ways to share their feedback. It's with that need in mind that CPS and HSC partnered to create new resources around school food.

As a parent, you know how important nutritious food is to making sure your child is healthy and ready to learn. You can help your child make healthy choices at home, but what about at school?

Schools play a powerful role in shaping students' lifelong habits and behaviors. Schools can create environments supportive of students' efforts to eat healthy and be active by establishing a school culture that supports and provides opportunities for students to learn about and practice these healthy behaviors.

In 2010, CPS adopted new nutrition standards that require school meals to include more fruits and veggies; more whole grains; fewer potatoes and nachos; and no more doughnuts and breakfast pastries. And with robust health promoting districtwide CPS Wellness policies in place, schools are off to a good start.

This document will address frequently asked questions about the school meal program from parents just like you. Want to know how CPS is reducing processed food? Want to know how you can get involved? You've come to the right place.

You can access this resource and more at healthyschoolscampaign.org/school-food-resources.

School Meal Program

Basics



How and why did the school meal program start?

The National School Lunch Program was established under the National School Lunch Act, which was signed by President Harry Truman in 1946. The program was designed to “safeguard the health and well-being of the Nation’s children.” The CPS meal program is the third largest K-12 food service in the U.S. and serves annually 75 million meals to more than 400,000 students through its 665 food campuses.

What meals does CPS offer?

CPS offers breakfast, lunch, after school snack, after school supper and Saturday meals to all students during the school year. CPS also serves breakfast and lunch to students during the summer months.

Why and when did CPS launch Breakfast in the Classroom?

CPS adopted Breakfast in the Classroom in 2011 to ensure that all students have access to—and eat—breakfast each day. This program is a proven strategy to increase breakfast

participation, which helps students focus and do better in class. In fact, we’ve found that when breakfast is offered to students in the classroom, participation in the program increases significantly—from about 23% of students (before school) to close to 70% of students (in the classroom) eating breakfast at school. Given the very positive health and academic benefits of breakfast consumption, our goal is to extend these benefits to as many students as possible.

How much time do students get to eat?

Students are given 10 minutes at the beginning of the school day to eat breakfast in the classroom. Lunch period times vary per school. Contact your principal or school clerk to find additional information related to your school’s schedule. CPS recommends that elementary schools schedule lunch after the district-required 20 minutes of recess.

What are the different types of school kitchens and how does each receive and/or prepare food?

Regardless of preparation methods, all schools follow the same core menu year round. While there may be variations due to equipment and facilities (i.e. only cold meals, less total options, etc.) the menu is the same for each school, every day.

CPS schools have three different types of kitchens:

- **Cooking:** Schools with adequate space, equipment and facilities are able to prepare all components of the school meal on site. CPS strives to use scratch cooking whenever possible. While many of the menu items are prepared and then reheated, all menu items meet the USDA and CPS nutrition guidelines.
- **Receiving:** Schools that do not have capacity to cook meals due to facility limitations may be a receiving school. This means that a nearby cooking school prepares meals that are then delivered to receiving school kitchens. Depending on the equipment and facilities available, each receiving school has a unique service model.
- **Open Kitchens:** Starting in 2014-2015, CPS contracted with a company named Open Kitchens located in the heart of the Pilsen neighborhood. Open Kitchens serves approximately 125 schools that, due to severe equipment and/or facility needs, cannot prepare food on site. Schools receive two to

three deliveries each week of all student meals that are fresh and never frozen. Schools then reheat the foods to the proper temperature to serve to students. Since these foods are fresh and never frozen, the quality of the product is better, and schools are best able to serve items that are cooked properly.

Why should I encourage my child to eat school meals?

Parents and guardians play a vital role in the development of students' eating habits both in and out of school. Meals served as part of the school meal program meet science-based nutrition standards. A well-balanced and healthy diet will help students to be more alert and ready to learn. Research shows that school meals often exceed the nutritional content of meals packed from home. Additionally, all CPS students can participate in the school meal program for free, so families can save time and money by choosing school meals.

Does CPS have a Farm to School program?

Yes, in partnership with Aramark and FarmLogix, CPS has made a commitment to offer students more foods that are grown within 250 miles of Chicago. CPS indicates which items are local by placing an "L" next to the menu item. Each monthly menu features: a local frozen item once a week, fresh items twice a month and chicken raised without antibiotics twice a month. Information about this program and the monthly local foods menu are posted on cpsfarmtoschoolmarket.com.

Does the school meal program include child nutrition education?

Yes, students K-8 receive nutrition education at all grade levels, middle school students receive nutrition education in at least two grade levels and high school students receive nutrition education in two required courses. Each month CPS, in partnership with Aramark, will highlight one locally grown produce item on the menu. Monthly posters displaying nutrition education messages and at least one featured healthy food are placed in all K-8 dining centers. All high school dining centers also have healthy food/nutrition education messages posted throughout. Along with the larger posters, all local menu items are highlighted on the service line through farmer specific marketing materials.

What training does CPS provide to kitchen and cafeteria staff?

All school dining staff hold a Chicago Food Service Manager certification and/or a Food Handler card. They are trained on food safety, food allergy awareness, CPS Healthy Snack and Beverage Policy (competitive foods/vending policy) as well as Point of Sale (POS) applications. Other areas of annual training include Ethics and Compliance. The goal is to ensure consistent and regular training to improve food service operations and customer service. In total, staff members receive a minimum of 7.75 hours of training annually.

About the Office of Nutrition Support Services at Chicago Public Schools

What is the mission of the Office of Nutrition Support Services?

The mission of Nutrition Support Services (NSS) is to support Chicago Public Schools' academic community by providing nutritious and appealing meals with superior service to every student, every school day. NSS is the third largest K-12 food service in the U.S. and annually serves 75 million meals to more than 400,000 students through its 665 food campuses.

What is the organizational structure of NSS?

Leslie Fowler is the Executive Director of Nutrition Support Services. Leslie oversees all staff in the department including central office and school-level staff. The NSS central office staff includes: Human Resources, Staffing, Budget, Compliance and Student Wellness.

CPS contracts with the foodservice management company, Aramark. Aramark has field employees called Area Managers that each oversee the daily operations of 10-15 schools. While the Aramark Area Manager has daily contact with the school dining staff, all staff reports to the school Principal and Executive Director of NSS.

Who staffs the school meal program and what are they in charge of?

School Dining Managers oversee daily food service operations at the school level which includes ordering, forecasting, entering meal counts and supervising dining center staff. Each school has an Aramark Area Manager assigned to oversee operations at the school and support dining managers to meet the necessary standards.

What are some key initiatives NSS is leading to improve the school meal program?

NSS wants to increase participation in the breakfast, lunch, snack, dinner, and summer meal programs by providing healthy and delicious meals. CPS implemented the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) so that all students can participate in the free meal program regardless of income. NSS has increased meals per labor hour which means staff are operating at a higher and more efficient level which provides better service to students and more dollars to the classroom. In school year 2014-2015, NSS implemented the district's first ever Point of Sale (POS) system in an effort to more efficiently track and report daily meal counts.

About School Food

Nutrition Standards

Are school breakfasts and lunches nutritious?

Yes, school breakfasts and lunches meet USDA federal nutrition guidelines. The guidelines include more whole grains, more fruits and vegetables (and greater variety), as well as lower sodium, fat, and sugar contents. In addition to USDA guidelines, CPS has implemented district specific guidelines to provide higher quality nutrition to our students including: no dessert-like items for breakfast; no reformulated breakfast cereals; limited servings of starchy vegetables (peas, corn, and potatoes); and limited service of nachos and french fries. CPS has also increased use of fresh, healthy garnishes in place of traditional high-fat, high-sugar condiments.

What are the federal nutritional requirements for school meals?

The federal nutrition standards ensure students are offered both fruits and vegetables every day of the week; increase the availability of whole grain-rich foods; offer only fat-free or low-fat milk varieties; limit calories based on the age of children being served to ensure proper portion size; and reduce the amounts of saturated fat, trans fats and sodium. CPS school meals meet or exceed the federal standards.



How do I get more information about the ingredients in school food?

Please contact food@cps.edu to get more information about ingredients in specific food items.

Are school lunches high in fat, sodium and calories?

No, the school food nutrition standards set limits on fat, sodium and calories for meal components based on age. In grades K-5, the calories range for lunch is 550-650 calories. In grades 6-8, the lunch calorie range is 600-700. For high school students, the lunch calorie range is 750-850 calories. Lunches served to all grades cannot exceed 10 grams of saturated fat. Lunches need to have fewer than 640 milligrams of sodium for grades K-5, 710 milligrams for grades 6-8, and 740 milligrams for high school.

Do lunches brought from home have to meet the same nutritional standards?

While we encourage families to pack nutritious snacks and lunches for their children, there is no board policy that requires home packed food to meet specific nutrition guidelines. There are guidelines for foods brought in for classroom celebrations or foods to be shared with other students. Absolutely no homemade foods can be shared during classroom celebrations for risk of food safety and student food allergies. Additionally, all outside foods brought for celebrations must meet the district's Healthy Snack and Beverage Policy. You can access the policy at bit.ly/CPS-healthy-snack.

In an effort to reduce sodium, what other seasonings are used?

To enhance the flavor of menu items, seasonings and herbs such as cilantro, garlic powder, onion powder, oregano and chili powder are used in place of salt. Additionally, CPS provides condiments to accompany menu items including pico de gallo, salad dressing and sandwich toppings.

About School Meal Access

and Payment

Do all students have access to school meals?

Yes, all CPS students have access to school breakfast and lunch everyday. Students participating in after school programming can also enjoy after school snacks or meals. Some schools also participate in Saturday meal programs.



How do children qualify for free and reduced price meals?

With the adoption of the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), students do not need to turn in any forms or information in order to receive a free meal. All students are now eligible to eat for free, every day.

What are the meal rates?

All students are provided breakfast and lunch free of charge. Additional breakfasts can be purchased for \$2.00 in elementary schools and \$2.25 in high schools. Additional lunches can be purchased for \$2.45 in elementary schools and \$2.90 in high schools. Milk is \$0.35. Adults can purchase breakfast for \$2.25 and lunch for \$3.50.

Is CPS really offering free meals for all students?

Yes, under the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) all students may participate in the meal program free of charge, every day.

Is my child required to eat school breakfast and lunch?

While CPS encourages families to take advantage of the free, healthy meals provided daily, no student is ever required to take any meal offered by CPS.

Can I pay for my child's meals online?

Yes, beginning in September 2015, CPS Nutrition Support Services will offer MySchoolBucks to parents. This online payment service provides an easy way for parents and guardians to add money to their child's cafeteria account using a credit/debit card. The money they add to this online service will be made available to students when they purchase food at school. Students may use funds to purchase additional meal items beyond the free meals such as extra milk, fruit, vegetables or entrées. This service also allows you to view your child's school menus and associated nutritional information. Parents can access this service at myschoolbucks.com.

About School Meal Menus

How are school menus planned?

The new nutrition standards require schools to include a daily fruit and vegetable with each meal. Vegetables are split into several subgroups (dark green, red/orange, beans/peas, starchy and other) to ensure that students get a variety of vegetables. For example, a meal needs to have at least $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of vegetables per day but limits starchy vegetables (like potatoes) to $\frac{1}{2}$ cup a week. All grains served must be whole-grain rich, meaning they contain at least 50% whole grains.

School menus are planned by a team of registered dietitians from both Aramark and CPS. The team of dietitians works to closely monitor student participation and feedback from parents and students to continuously improve menu options. The dietitians must ensure that first and foremost all USDA and CPS nutrition guidelines are met.

How does CPS choose menu items?

Menu items are chosen using feedback from students, parents and dining staff. Additionally, CPS engages students in taste tests prior to including a new item or recipe on the menu.

Are students involved in menu planning?

At least once a month, CPS includes a student-planned recipe on the menu. Recipes were developed by students who participated in Healthy Schools Campaign's Cooking up Change program. CPS engages students in taste tests prior to including a new item or recipe on the menu.

How are menus culturally appropriate?

CPS menus are designed in an effort to reflect and celebrate the diversity of our students. In addition to different cultural foods, CPS also aims to incorporate some Chicago favorites. Developing culturally diverse menus is a priority for the district and in an effort to address this CPS has established parent and community advisory groups to help improve school food.

Where can I find the school menus?

In an effort to save paper and supplies CPS has moved to posting core menus electronically. Menus are posted on the first of the month and can be found at cps.edu/menu. Aramark Area Managers will also send monthly e-mails to principals with the menu attached. Schools are encouraged to share the menu with students and community members by posting the menu on school specific webpages, sending the menu to the parent/guardian listserv, and encouraging teachers to post a menu in the classroom for students to review.



How does the portion size differ for elementary and high school students?

Federal standards require lunches have between 550-650 calories for grades K-5, 600-700 calories for grades 6-8 and 750-850 calories for high schools. Breakfasts need to have between 350-500 calories for grades K-5, 400-550 calories for grades 6-8 and 450-600 calories for high school. Snacks can't exceed 150 calories for elementary schools and 200 calories for high schools. Packaged fruits can't exceed 150 calories for elementary schools, 180 calories for middle schools and 200 calories for high schools. Juice servings sizes are 6 ounces and less than 100 calories for elementary schools and 8 ounces and less than 120 calories for high schools.

How does CPS ensure there are a variety of foods available?

CPS tries to offer five entree choices everyday: two hot entrees, two cold entrees and a salad. In addition, the meals include a rotation of healthy side dishes, vegetables, fruit and milk.

About the Food Being Served

How is CPS reducing the amount of processed food in the school meal program?

CPS strives to serve minimally processed foods as often as possible.

CPS co-convenes with Healthy Schools Campaign a citywide school food advisory group whose main charge is to help the district provide healthy school food in a fiscally responsible way. A recent focus has been on transitioning away from highly processed menus to healthy, less processed food. Last year, working with the University of Illinois-Chicago, CPS benchmarked the level of processed food the district serves and the district is now working on strategies for reducing the amount of processed food served.

CPS works with national partner School Food FOCUS to identify and then reduce a set of ingredients of concern. The ingredients that have been targeted include items such as added sugars, nitrates, food dyes, binders, fillers and preservatives. Many of these items CPS has already removed. To learn more about the meal program, check out the DINEWell toolkit, which you can access at bit.ly/Dine-WELL. For more information, contact studentwellness@cps.edu.



How much fresh food is served in the school meal program?

Fresh options are available to students daily.

Does CPS serve organic foods?

CPS strives to serve students organic and/or minimally processed foods as often as possible.

Why is fruit served whole instead of cut, which would make it faster for students to eat?

Fruit is served whole in an effort to provide students fruit in its most nutrient dense form. Serving whole fruit also helps kitchen staff order the appropriate amount of fruit for that day, therefore, reducing food waste. Due to student demand, CPS has moved to apple slices instead of whole apples and will continue to review pre-sliced options as budget allows.

What are the beverage options with school meals?

Students are offered white 1% low-fat milk, fat-free milk and water.

Are soft drinks and candy available to students during the school day?

No, candy and soft drinks are not sold in the lunch line or in vending machines.

How is school garden produce incorporated into the school meal program?

If you would like more information on how to include produce from your school garden or have CPS assess your garden, please contact studentwellness@cps.edu.

What are "Competitive Foods"?

Foods sold in competition with the school meal program are considered "Competitive Foods." These foods include those sold in vending machines, school fundraisers, a la carte, and in school stores. Schools must adhere to the regulations outlined in the Healthy Snack and Beverage Policy regarding the sale of these items. For more information, please view the CPS Competitive Foods Document located on the Knowledge Center.

What are reformulated foods and does CPS serve them?

Reformulated foods are the same brand and packaging as those sold in stores, but are reformulated to comply with school nutrition standards set forth by the district, as well as by the USDA. In 2014, CPS removed reformulated breakfast cereals from its meal program so students receive consistent messaging about the types of foods that help fuel their learning and growth. This can help foster healthy eating habits outside of school.

Does CPS serve pork products?

CPS does not serve pork or pork products.

About Reducing Waste



What is CPS doing to help reduce food waste?

Several CPS schools participate in the FoodShare Program that distributes whole produce to local food pantries. Throughout School Year 2014-2015 more than 9,000 pounds of produce were donated. School Dining Managers keep production records to monitor consumption and estimate the amount of food to be prepared. If you are interested in starting the FoodShare program at your school please contact studentwellness@cps.edu.

How is CPS reducing non-food waste?

CPS is implementing the use of compostable meal trays in all schools starting school year 2015-2016. The plates are made from recycled newsprint, instead of polystyrene. The new plates break down in weeks. The plates are slightly more expensive than the previous trays: \$0.049 compared with \$.04.

Accommodations for Children

with Special Dietary Needs



What beverage substitution is made for students who are lactose intolerant or have milk sensitivity?

Water is available to all students every day. If a student is lactose intolerant or has sensitivity to dairy products, a product similar in nutritional makeup will be available provided parents have submitted the Physician Statement for Food Substitution form complete with a signature from a medical authority. You can obtain this form from the Office of Student Health and Wellness. The medical authority may be a doctor, a nurse, or a physician's assistant. Soy milk or juice may be substituted for milk only if the medical statement prescribes that substitution for milk.

Are schools required to make menu substitutions for children who cannot eat the regular lunch or breakfast?

If a student has a documented food allergy and has submitted all appropriate documentation (504 Plan/IEP and Physician's Statement for Food Substitution), alternative menu options will be provided to the student where available.

Who qualifies as a physician or other recognized medical authority?

A physician is a person licensed by the State to practice medicine. The term includes osteopathic physicians or doctors of osteopathic medicine. These are fully trained physicians who are licensed by the State to prescribe medication or to perform surgery. A recognized medical authority is a licensed physician, physician assistant, nurse practitioner or other health professional specified by the State agency.

Are there vegetarian options available to students daily?

Yes, meat-free options are available to students daily.

Does CPS have peanut-free menu options?

Yes, at the Principal's request CPS will provide schools with peanut/tree-nut-free menu options. This means that peanuts/tree-nuts are not used as an ingredient in the recipe. Currently the only menu items that include peanuts/tree-nuts are the peanut butter and jelly sandwich and the peanut butter and jelly bars. A peanut/tree-nut-free menu means these items are removed or replaced with sunbutter. All other menu items may be processed in facilities that also process peanuts or tree nuts. Additionally, schools are discouraged from labeling the building as peanut/tree-nut-free as it provides a false sense of security. For more information please contact oshw@cps.edu.

About School Meal Policies



Are schools allowed to deny meals as punishment?

Teachers cannot withhold food or require alternative lunch (such as a brown bag lunch or eating lunch in the classroom) as punishment.

How does CPS ensure food safety for foods brought into schools?

In order to ensure food safety, CPS follows Chicago Department of Public Health guidelines that prohibit homemade food/beverages to be served to students as part of a school-wide or classroom celebration. All food items brought to school with the intention of being shared should be pre-packaged with a nutrition facts/ingredients label.

Are the foods sold in vending machines subject to the same regulations as school meals?

Yes, all food and drink sold on school grounds has to meet the criteria set out in the Healthy Snack and Beverage Policy.

- Snacks are 150 calories for elementary schools and 200 for high schools. No more than 35% of total calories in snacks can come from fat, and no more than 10% of total calories can be from saturated fat. Snacks need to be completely free of trans fat. Snacks must include no more than 230 mg of sodium.
- Drinks are low-fat or fat-free milk, 100% fruit juice or water. Drink serving sizes are 6 ounces for elementary schools and 8 ounces for high schools. Vending machines that sell snacks are not allowed in elementary schools and are not permitted to be in the dining center in high schools. While beverage vending machines are allowed in elementary schools and high schools, current vendors do not meet the serving size requirements for milk or juice. Vending machines should be stocked with only water or turned off until they can be replaced.

Concerns and Feedback



I have concerns about the school meal program, who should I contact?

Food@cps.edu. Be sure to include your school name, student's lunch period, date and any comments.

I would like to share positive feedback about my school's cafeteria, who should I contact?

Food@cps.edu. Be sure to include your school name, student's lunch period, date and any comments.

I have suggestions for school meal ideas that I think students will love, who should I contact?

Food@cps.edu accepts meal feedback and suggestions.

I've noticed discrepancies between the school lunch menu and what is actually being served, who should I contact?

Food@cps.edu. Be sure to include your school name, student's lunch period, date and any comments. In this case, CPS will work closely with Aramark Area Managers and school dining staff to correct any menu compliance issues and provide additional training to staff.

If I have concerns about the operations of the school meal program at my child's school, who should I contact?

Food@cps.edu. Be sure to include your school name, student's lunch period, date and any comments.

Get Involved



What can I as a parent, grandparent, and/or caregiver do to help support a healthier school food environment?

Parents and caregivers in CPS are leading the charge for better student health, and as a parent, you can use CPS wellness policies as a valuable tool for making your child's school healthier. Here are some ideas about how you can become involved in helping your child's school:

- Become familiar with the CPS Local School Wellness Policy, Healthy Snack and Beverage Policy and Physical Education Policy, and learn how your child's school is working to implement these policies.

- Join your School Wellness Team, and encourage other parents and community members to participate. Help your school achieve LearnWell healthy school certification. Learn more at bit.ly/LearnWELL.
- Help your child's school make celebrations and fundraisers fun and healthy by incorporating some of the ideas (or suggest your own!) found on the Healthy Celebrations guide (bit.ly/CelebrateWELL) and Fundraising guide (bit.ly/fundraiseWELL).
- Encourage your children to try different foods, including vegetables, and emphasize the importance of eating a varied and balanced meal.
- Let us know how we are doing by sharing feedback: If you have any questions about the meals CPS provides or other aspects of the service, please do not hesitate to contact Nutrition Support Services at food@cps.edu. Be sure to include your school name, student's lunch period, date and any comments.

Online Resources



CelebrateWELL

bit.ly/CelebrateWELL

CPS Local School Wellness Policy

bit.ly/wellness-policy

DineWELL

bit.ly/Dine-WELL

FundraiseWELL

bit.ly/fundraiseWELL

Healthy Schools Campaign

healthyschoolscampaign.org

Healthy Snack and Beverage Policy

bit.ly/CPS-healthy-snack

LearnWELL

bit.ly/LearnWELL

Menus

cps.edu/menu

Monthly Local Foods Menu

cpsfarmtoschoolmarket.com

MySchoolBucks

myschoolbucks.com

Pathways to Excellence in School Nutrition

bit.ly/CPS-Pathways-report



Healthy Schools Campaign is the leading voice for people who care about our children, education, and our environment. We teach and empower people to advocate for children to have fresh air, healthy food and physical activity to shape their lifelong learning and health. As an independent, not-for-profit organization, we help facilitate collaboration between parents, teachers, administrators and policy makers. Our goal is to help prepare this diverse group of stakeholders to lead change at the school, district, state and national levels.

healthyschoolscampaign.org