

Overview

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) are federally funded programs that assist schools and other agencies in providing nutritious meals and snacks to children at reasonable prices. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is responsible for overseeing the program nationally. In California, the program is administered by the California Department of Education (CDE), Nutrition Services Division. Public and private nonprofit schools are eligible to participate in the National School Lunch Program. Also eligible are public and private nonprofit licensed residential child care institutions (e.g., group homes, juvenile halls, orphanages).

For children, the National School Lunch Program provides nutritious meals containing one-third of the recommended dietary allowances. For parents, the program offers a convenient method of providing a nutritionally balanced meal each day. For schools, the program enhances children's learning abilities by contributing to their physical and mental well-being. Studies have shown that children whose nutritional needs are met have fewer attendance and discipline problems and are more attentive in class.

The National School Lunch Program is operated on a reimbursement basis, with agencies paid on the number of meals served. Agencies submit a monthly reimbursement claim form to the CDE through the Child Nutrition and Information Payment System (CNIPS). Agencies that participate in the program are reimbursed from two sources: the USDA and the State of California. State reimbursement is paid for all free and reduced price meals. Federal reimbursement is paid for all free, reduced-price, and paid meals. Schools participating in the NSLP also receive food directly from the USDA through the USDA Foods Program. The USDA is responsible for overseeing the program nationally.

The meal program must be open to all enrolled children. Free or reduced-price meals must be provided to those children who qualify for such benefits according to specified family size and income standards. Your agency staff must verify income on a percentage of those children receiving free or reduced price lunches to confirm their eligibility. Records must be kept to document that the meal program follows all federal and state rules and regulations. Some of the records that must be kept are:

- menu production records,
- inventory records that document the amounts and types of food used
- the number of meals claimed each day, by site and by category (free, reduced- price, and full price)
- applications submitted by families for free and reduced-price meals
- documentation of verification activities that verify a percentage of eligibility applications
- Records of income, expenditures, and contributions received

Developed for the SNP Primer
Cal-Pro-NET Center at San Jose State University
in conjunction with California Department of Education
February 2016

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The CDE/NSD oversees the state-wide operation of the local school nutrition programs and ensures consistency in the administration of the programs across the state. CDE/NSD provides training and technical assistance to school food authorities and conducts administrative reviews of the programs in individual schools to ensure compliance with federal requirements. CDE/NSD is also responsible for ordering and distributing USDA Foods.

This training will walk you through some of the requirements for your participation in the National School Lunch Program. You will be provided with basic information with resources and hyperlinks for more detailed information.

The School Nutrition Primer can be utilized by food service directors and administrators as a Professional Standards training resource. Reviewing the “Quick Reference Guides” with staff and administering the “Apply Your Knowledge” self-check quiz may count for 15 minute training. Each training topic page lists the Key Areas, Key Topics and Learning Objectives to which the topic applies.

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