



FUEL YOUR ATHLETES WITH AFTERSCHOOL MEALS

You know that student athletes need good nutrition in order to practice and perform. Without healthy fuel, kids can't grow much less build muscle and endurance. Sadly, some student athletes may struggle to get the food they need because their families can't afford it: one in seven kids in the U.S. lives in a household facing hunger.

Fortunately, your school nutrition department may be able to help by providing afterschool meals and snacks.

The Basics

Any school where more than half of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches can serve afterschool meals as well as snacks. Schools that don't meet the 50% threshold may be able to offer meals if a nearby school qualifies. All schools can at least offer snacks through the National School Lunch Program, but some students may have to pay if they are not eligible for free school meals.

Other educational or enrichment activities are crucial – afterschool meal programs cannot operate for the sole benefit of competitive sports, but **athletes can eat if there is an open-to-all activity or a broad range of activities that any student could take part in.** Tutoring, study hall, or homework help are easy options. The wide variety of clubs and extracurricular activities (band, student government, yearbook, etc.) available at many schools may also count.

The Benefits

- Reduced fundraising requirements for students, families, or boosters since they do not need to fund or provide food for athletes. Or, the meals free up more money for uniforms and other expenses.
- Fewer food safety concerns compared with food provided by families or volunteers.
- One less meal for students and families to worry about, especially if students get home too late to supper with their families.
- Avoids students' reliance on less healthy options from vending machines, corner stores, or fast food outlets.
- No risk of students leaving campus for food and being late for practice or games.
- Builds a sense of community among teammates and gives coaches time to talk with athletes.

Donna Martin, School Nutrition Program Director for the Burke County Board of Education in Georgia, says "This is an essential program in our district. The kids are willing to stay after school for tutoring because of the hot meal. The graduation rate has increased, and the athletes are gaining weight and muscle and performing better." In fact, the high school football coach directly attributed the team's first-ever state championship title in 2011 to the afterschool meals.

The Food

- All meals feature the basic food groups: protein, grains, fruits, vegetables, and milk.
- Snacks feature any two of the five food groups.
- All meals must meet nutrition standards.
- Meals do not have to be heavy or hot; “super snacks” are a popular option to provide more food and more items than a traditional two-item snack without seeming like a full meal, which can be good for athletes heading off to a practice or game.
- Offer versus serve (OVS) is an option that permits students to take more or less food depending on their current needs.



During the spring 2019 track season, Springfield Public Schools in Missouri hosted three middle school track meets that included schools from other districts. The district's nutrition services team set up a tent with coolers in wagons to serve “super snacks” to all students and handed out nearly 200 meals during each meet. As an added bonus, Stephanie Hanning, the district's Registered Dietitian who had just run the Boston marathon, was available to student athletes for “Ask the Dietitian.”

Who, When and Where

- Afterschool meals are served to all students at no cost. The entire team for any sport can eat the same nutritious food. Schools that don't meet the eligibility requirements may serve snacks according to students' eligibility status for school meals.
- Teams may be able to take meals to go for away games.
- Opposing teams from other schools could eat the afterschool meal at your school.
- Afterschool meals almost always have to be served after the final bell of the school day. Beyond that, a meal can be served any time during the afterschool program's hours.
- The school nutrition staff *may* be able to deliver the meals directly to where your athletes practice, or the meals could be served in a central area that may be easier to get to than the cafeteria.
 - If the meals are delivered to each team, the coach may be responsible for maintaining attendance and meal count records and then returning them to the school nutrition staff.

Goose Creek ISD in Texas used a No Kid Hungry grant to buy a golf cart that helps to deliver meals across the high school campus.

Talk with your district's school nutrition director or your school's cafeteria manager to find out if your district or school already offers afterschool meals so that you can get started.

For more information on starting an afterschool meals program in your district or at your school, visit bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/programs/afterschool-meals/starting-afterschool-meals#schools.

