HOW AFTERSCHOOL MEALS REACH KIDS

Last year, over 170 million meals were served to kids after their school day ended, powering them through homework, tutoring, sports, and other afterschool activities. For too many children, that was their last healthy meal of the day. The At-Risk Afterschool Meals component of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), also known as the Afterschool Meals Program, makes this possible. Here’s the path that the funding takes from Congress to kids’ plates.

CONGRESS
- Created the CACFP in 1968.
- In 2010, allowed afterschool programs in low-income areas nationwide to serve meals through the CACFP.
- Allocates federal funding for afterschool meals, which continues regardless of the federal budget status.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
- Provides nutrition guidelines for afterschool meals.
- Oversees state implementation of the CACFP.
- Passes along federal funding to states.

STATE AGENCY
- Provides training and reviews applications to participate in the CACFP.
- Oversees organizations participating in the CACFP within the state.
- Passes along federal funding to organizations operating afterschool meal programs.

SPONSOR
- Applies to the state agency to operate the CACFP.
- Receives federal meal reimbursement funding to support afterschool meals.
- Oversees afterschool meal operations at participating afterschool programs.
- May be a school district or school food authority, government agency, or private non-profit organization.

AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAM
- Serves afterschool meals at no cost to kids and teens.
- Offers supervised activities in a low-income area.
- May be located in or run by a school, a public entity like a library, or a private organization.

The sponsor’s budget for federal nutrition programs like the CACFP is separate from the budget of other programs it runs. Meals do not compete with schools’ education funding or enrichment programs’ funding for activities.
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHAT DOES THE “AT-RISK” PART OF THE NAME MEAN?
The “At-Risk” in “At-Risk Afterschool Meals component of the CACFP” refers to the goal of supporting programs that keep kids in low-income neighborhoods safe and engaged after the school day ends or on weekends and breaks during the school year. To qualify as being in an “at-risk” area, the afterschool program must be located in the attendance area of a public school where at least half of the students receive free or reduced-price meals.

CAN PROGRAMS SERVE SNACKS?
Yes, afterschool programs may serve a snack instead of or in addition to a meal. Each snack must have two of the five supper items and garners $0.91 in federal reimbursement funding.

IS THERE A LIMIT ON FEDERAL FUNDING?
No, there is no cap on how much money states can receive. Federal funding is provided to participating sponsors and programs for all meals and snacks served to eligible children that meet USDA requirements.

WHERE DO THE MEALS COME FROM?
Sponsors may prepare meals, either in a central kitchen or at each program location. Or, sponsors may contract with an external company to prepare and deliver the meals. Or, sponsors may pass along federal funding to afterschool programs so that each program can choose how to prepare or obtain meals.

DO PROGRAMS HAVE TO WORK WITH A SPONSORING ORGANIZATION?
No. Afterschool programs that meet the requirements to participate in the CACFP independently may choose to work directly with the state agency, which offers more control over their operations and funding. However, many afterschool programs are already affiliated with an organization that acts as their sponsor, like schools within the school district, or recreation centers run by the municipal parks and recreation department. Other afterschool programs may still benefit from the experience and resources of an unaffiliated sponsoring organization, like a food bank or community services agency.

WHAT IS AN AFTERSCHOOL MEAL?
An “afterschool meal” typically means five items served together: a protein item, grain item, vegetable, fruit, and milk. This is sometimes called a supper. It can take many forms, from a hot, hearty meat-and-potatoes meal to lighter fare with cold items. Afterschool programs have the option to serve the full meal together or allow children to select the items they want.

WHO SETS THE FUNDING LEVELS?
Based on laws passed by Congress, the USDA sets specific reimbursement payment rates for each afterschool meal served. The 2018-2019 federal reimbursement rate is $3.54 per supper meal, including the value of USDA foods.

DO THE KIDS HAVE TO BE AT-RISK?
No, “at-risk” does not refer to the kids who benefit from the meals and activities. In fact, programs serving meals through the CACFP’s At-Risk component do not have to collect enrollment records or family income information.

DO KIDS OR FAMILIES PAY ANYTHING?
No, all meals must be served at no charge, but programs may charge a reasonable fee for activities or afterschool care.

WHAT IF A LOCATION ISN’T AREA-ELIGIBLE?
The NSLP Afterschool Snack Program and CACFP Outside-School-Hours-Care component may still be options for afterschool programs that aren’t area-eligible.