

Why Are School Meals No Longer Free This Year?



For the past two years, students could get school meals for free whether their parents filled out a meal application or not – unfortunately, that won't be the case this fall. The USDA made it possible for our school nutrition program to serve all students free breakfast and lunch through federal waivers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Congress did not extend these waivers for the upcoming school year, so this new school year **we will be back to regularly priced meals.**

Our school lunch program is a solely funded entity that only receives revenue from meals served. When parents and students choose to purchase a lunch from school, it is the equivalent of supporting a small business. If you're worried about paying for meals again, we encourage you to add one more item to your to-do list before school starts: **fill out an application for free and reduced-price lunch.**

Who needs to fill out the form and when does it need to be filled out?

If you feel you need help covering the cost of school meals, we encourage you to fill out a meal application, available from the school district. The form asks for information about your income and household size to determine if you qualify.

You can fill it out anytime during the school year, but the forms aren't retroactive. If you wait until October to fill it out, even if you are eligible for free lunch, you would still be charged for meals that your children take from the start of the school year, until whenever your form is approved. Even if you've filled out a form in the past, you need to reapply each school year.

Who sees the information I put on my form?

Your privacy is very important to the school district. We minimize the number of people involved in reading and processing the forms. While state auditors sometimes request to look at some of the forms to verify that we're processing the forms correctly, we keep these applications as confidential as possible.

If I don't qualify for free lunch, or my child doesn't eat school meals, why should I fill it out?

There are additional benefits to families and our school that are determined from the forms, like waivers and reduced fees for school sports and academic testing or reduced price for your home internet service. The forms are used to measure financial hardship in our community, which may allow our school to receive more resources for students. So do yourself, your children, our school, and our community a big favor and send in the application this week!

