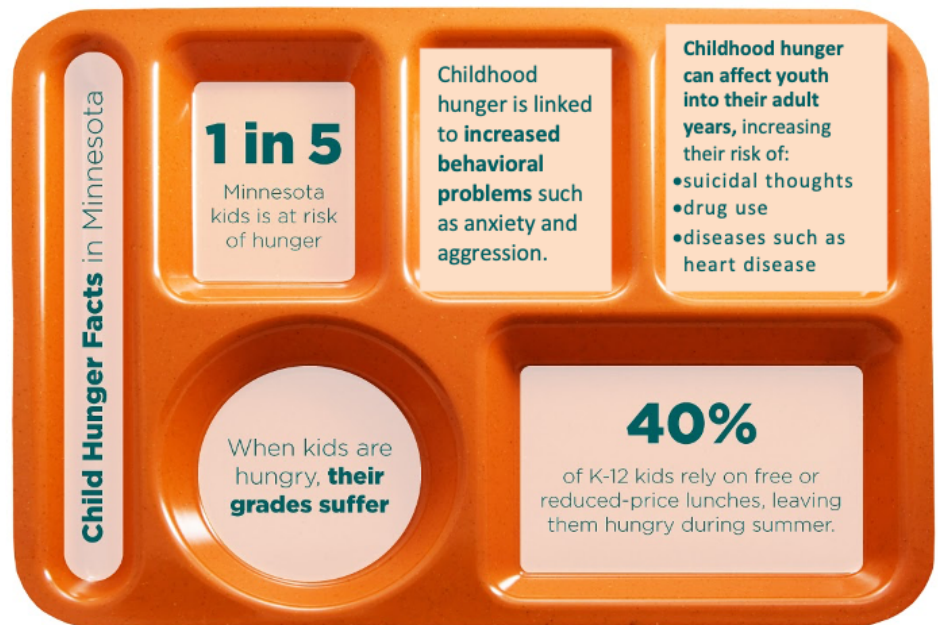


# Universal Free Lunch

## A policy brief on preventing childhood hunger in Minnesota.

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1 in 5 children in Minnesota live in homes that don't have enough to eat. That means that 200,000 Minnesota youth are at risk of poor health and academic outcomes (1). A Universal Free Lunch Program in the state of Minnesota would make sure that no child goes hungry by providing lunch at no cost to all students regardless of their families socioeconomic status. This cost-saving and efficient program will improve health and learning outcomes while decreasing burden on school staff.



<https://www.2harvest.org/who--how-we-help/services-and-programs/childhungerinitiative.html>

## The Issue: Addressing Food Insecurity & Universal Free Lunch

The National School Lunch Program feeds millions of children every day. Having free lunch has shown to reduce food insecurity, obesity rates, improve grades, and support racial and economic equity. Children who are food insecure are at risk of poorer health outcomes in the future.

- More than **12.4%** of children are food insecure, compared to 8.2% overall in Minnesota (3)
- Average meal cost for a child in Minnesota is **\$3.08** (3)
- Over **93 million lunches** (including snacks) served in 2019 in Minnesota (4)
- **48%** of lunches sold that are free or reduced price, equaling **\$33,283,426** by 663 schools (4)

**Children who face hunger are more likely to:**

- repeat a grade
- miss school
- pay less attention in class
- face behavioral issues.

(2)

## When children eat school lunch they benefit in many ways:

### BIG IMPACT

In the State of Minnesota, almost 840,000 students currently eat school lunch, with almost 300,000 of those students needing free or reduced-price meals.

#### A healthier diet

- + fruit
  - + vegetables
  - + milk
- (at breakfast and lunch)



#### Better academic performance

- + attendance
- + test scores
- + grades
- + classroom behavior



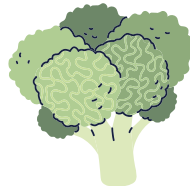
#### Reduced health risks

- obesity
- hunger
- food insecurity



<https://www.2harvest.org/who--how-we-help/services-and-programs/childhungerinitiative.html#X6tDH5NKHE4>

## Why Universal Free Lunch?



### Universal Free Lunch

#### Addresses Childhood Hunger

- For some families, **even affording reduced priced meals is difficult.** Universal free lunch ensures all children eat when they are at school.
- For some children, **receiving free lunch when their friends don't can be embarrassing.** Providing free lunch to all students stops "meal shaming" and makes sure all kids get the same good food. (5)
- Universal free lunch ensures that all children are receiving the same quality of nutrition.

### Universal Free Lunch Improves School Performance

- Students who participate in school meal program have an overall better diet **quality** than non participants.
- Prepared school meals found that participating students **scored higher** on English and science tests than students who didn't eat school meals. (6)
- Poor nutrition can leave students susceptible to illness, resulting in school absences.
- School meals can **improve memory and physical fitness.** (6)

### Universal Free Lunch Reduces Costs

- Universal free lunch **reduces per-meal costs** by **increasing program participation** and decreasing amount of food thrown away. (7)
- Universal free lunch **reduces administrative costs** by decreasing paperwork and eliminating the need to keep track of money (7)
- It **eliminates financial losses from unpaid lunches** that have to be covered by other parts of the school budget. This makes budgeting easier for administration and ensures that other parts of the budget can be used for their intended purpose. (4)



Food Insecurity In childhood leads to long-term poor outcomes such as lower education level and lower wages

Providing universal free lunch makes sure all children receive enough of the healthy foods required to help them grow and excel. (2)



## *Universal Free Lunch Success Stories*

Investing in children can save the United States money in the future. It is estimated that for every \$1 dollar invested in childhood programs can yield an economic return of up to \$9 dollars. These savings come from reduced costs for academic programs, governmental support, and healthcare. (8)

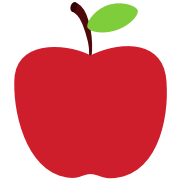
- In 2011, Detroit public schools implemented free meals for all students and found that children were **less likely to skip meals due to meal shaming**. (9)
- In 2013, Boston public schools began serving free lunch to all students. They saw an increase in school lunch participation and **documented saving \$350,000** dollars that were previously lost to unpaid lunch fees. (10)
- In 2017, New York City public schools adopted a universal free lunch program as a way of addressing childhood food insecurity. As a result, **academic performance improved among all children** and saved families **\$300 in food cost per year per child**. (11)

To achieve our policy goal of implementing a universal free school lunch program, additional funding must first be given to schools. Without these funds a universal free lunch program will not be possible. Our proposed policy is modeled after similar success stories, as seen in New York, and will aid in improving students' learning and food security. (12)

Universal free school lunch is not a radical idea. Not only is it economically achievable, it's been done before and can be done again. (12) If Twin Cities public schools commit to this policy proposal, it will show their commitment to the health and development of their students.

# How to Move Universal Free Lunch Policy Forward In Minnesota?

Providing universal free school lunch to all students is the first step to addressing hunger and academic achievement among Minnesota's children.



## Know The Facts

- Know the numbers and how food insecurity impacts children in your community so you can be prepared to talk with others about this issue. Here are some resources you can use:
- <https://www.fns.usda.gov/nsfp>
- <https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/FNS/SNP/>
- <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/minnesota>

## Advocate for Universal Free School Lunch

- Once you have gathered information about food insecurity in your community, you can help by talking to others and making them aware of the problem. Here is a list of people you can contact:
  - MN Governor Tim Walz, 651-201-3400, <https://mn.gov/governor/contact/o>
  - MN Representative Cheryl Youakim on the Committee for Education, [rep.cheryl.youakim@house.mn](mailto:rep.cheryl.youakim@house.mn)
  - MN Representative Jeanne Poppe on the Committee for Agriculture and Food Finance and Policy Division, [rep.jeanne.poppe@house.mn](mailto:rep.jeanne.poppe@house.mn)
  - Minneapolis Board of Education Chair Kim Ellison, [Kim.Ellison@mpls.k12.mn.us](mailto:Kim.Ellison@mpls.k12.mn.us)
  - Saint Paul Board of Education Chair Jeanelle Foster, [Jeanelle.Foster@spps.org](mailto:Jeanelle.Foster@spps.org)

## Look for Parental Support

Parents are a great source of support during transition times at school and it is important they remain aware of large changes.

- Make sure parents know:
  - How the school lunch program is changing
  - How these changes will benefit their children
  - What food will be served to their children and why their child's participation in lunch is important.

## Individualize your UFLP to your schools needs

The implementation of Universal Free Lunch for all Minnesota schools will look different for each school district. Address your schools:

- Student population and needs.
- Financial limitations and goals.
- Administrative changes (i.e. paperwork, modifying employee responsibilities during lunch service, etc.
- Work with your lunch service staff to ensure a smooth transition and set expectations and goals.

## Work With Local Food Groups

- Even with free school meals, families may need support to access enough food for their children. Here are some resources you can use or share with someone you know that might be suffering from food insecurity:
  - <https://www.2harvest.org/>
  - <https://www.foodpantries.org/>
  - <https://www.foodbanks.net/>
  - <https://www.loavesandfishesmn.org/>



<https://www.nycfoodpolicy.org/new-york-city-public-schools-offer-free-lunch-to-all-students/>

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