

Afterschool Nutrition Programs

Federal nutrition programs allow schools and community organizations to provide healthy meals and snacks to children participating in afterschool activities.



Basic Information

Afterschool nutrition programs allow public or non-profit private schools, private non-profit organizations and child care institutions to serve snacks and meals to children who participate in a variety of afterschool programs. Snacks and meals are administered through three different federal programs: the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), and the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). Recent data indicate that 458,564 meals were served in California afterschool nutrition programs in March, 2012.¹

Eligibility

Sites participating in afterschool nutrition programs include public or private schools, non-profit community based organizations, government agencies, and for-profit community based organizations.

Sites participating in afterschool nutrition through NSLP can be “area-eligible,” whereby all snacks and meals are served free of charge to participants and sites receive federal reimbursement at the free rate for each snack/meal served.² A site meets area-eligibility criteria if it is located at a school where at least half of enrolled students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals, or if it is located in an area where at least half of students enrolled in a nearby school are eligible for free reduced-price meals.

If a site is not area eligible, it can still participate in NSLP and SFSP afterschool nutrition programs, where food is reimbursed according to each participant’s individual eligibility for free and reduced-price school meals.³

Benefits

- In some cases, meals at school are the main daily food source for low-income children. Afterschool meals and snacks ensure that low-income children are well- nourished and ready to learn throughout the day.
- Snacks and meals are an attractive component of afterschool learning programs, which keep students safe and engaged.
- Afterschool nutrition provides an opportunity to model healthy eating habits and to ensure that basic nutrition standards are met.

Food and Beverages in Afterschool Nutrition Programs

All snacks served in afterschool nutrition programs must meet federal guidelines. Many sites receive specific types of funding and must also meet California competitive food requirements. Afterschool meals need to meet CACFP standards.

Snacks must include at least one serving from two of the following four food components: milk, grain, meat or meat alternative, fruit or vegetable or 100% fruit juice. Beverages must be fruit/vegetable-based drinks made of at a least 50 percent juice with no added sweeteners, water, or low-fat milk.

Meals must adhere to federal guidelines, which were updated in 2012 to provide more whole grain foods, fruits and vegetables, foods low in sodium and fat, and non-fat or low-fat milk.

California requirements recommend the use of whole grains, and do not allow certain deep-fried, par-fried, or pan-fried foods or trans-fats to be served. California law also requires that drinking water must be made available throughout the day, including at meal times.

¹ Data provided directly from CA Department of Education Nutrition Services Division, March 2012.

² Unlike NSLP, CACFP and SFSP sites that are deemed “area eligible” can serve snacks and meals to all youth and students in the community, not just those participating in afterschool enrichment programs.

³ In sites operated by SFSP that are not area-eligible, meal service is only available to children participating in summer learning programs. Sites operated by CACFP must be area eligible.