



Beyond the Tray: Five Benefits of School Meal Programs

School meal programs, including the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the School Breakfast Program (SBP), play an essential role in fueling students' bodies and minds for learning. Here's how:

1. **Boosts Nutrient Intake:** studies have shown that students who participate in school meal programs consume more nutrient-dense foods like lean meats, low fat dairy, fruits, vegetables and whole grains, improving overall diet quality.^{1,2}
2. **Promotes Healthy Growth:** school meals offer nutrient-dense protein sources, like dairy and beef, which can support healthy growth and development by providing essential nutrients like calcium and iron.³
3. **Supports Academic Performance:** studies link the consumption of school breakfast with better concentration and memory, higher scores on standardized tests, and greater achievement in reading and math.⁴
4. **Advances Nutrition Security and Equity:** all students in California have access to free nutritious school meals regardless of race, ethnicity or household income promoting nutrition security and equity in education.
5. **Empowers Brighter Futures:** California's Universal School Meals program reduces barriers to food access and ensures that every child has access to the nourishment they need to thrive academically and beyond.⁵

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