



Afterschool Meal Program: Feeding Students for Free After School

What is the Afterschool Meal Program?

The Afterschool Meal Program allows schools to provide a free meal and/or a snack to kids involved in afterschool enrichment programs like tutoring, music and sports. The Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) oversees the Afterschool Meal Program as part of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).

Schools have always been able to provide a snack to students attending afterschool programs using the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). However, if a school chooses to enroll in the Afterschool Meal Program offered through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (also known as At-Risk Afterschool), then the schools can provide each student a full meal and be reimbursed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Reimbursements for all afterschool meals are at the highest rate or “free rate”. Schools running afterschool enrichment programs that are two hours or longer may serve both a snack and a meal.

To qualify for the Afterschool Meal Program, a school must be located in an area where at least 50 percent of children qualify for free or reduced-price school meals. Schools can also qualify if they operate the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), which allows them to serve free meals to all students without collecting applications. To qualify as part of the CEP, a school must have a high enough percentage of qualified students.¹

Why the Afterschool Meal Program is Great for Texas Schools

Afterschool meals are cost effective.

- The USDA reimburses each meal at the highest possible rate – the CACFP free rate.
- Schools can also get a small additional payment for each meal to cover the cost of commodities.
- The USDA will also reimburse meals for student

“Go for it. We are in the kid-business. The kids are the ones who are going to benefit. They get enrichment and nutrition that they may not get from somewhere else. The pros massively outweigh the cons. If you have any type of enrichment program that would qualify you for meals, there is no reason not to.”

- ATLANTA ISD (ATLANTA, TX)



Does Your School Qualify?

Any afterschool provider can qualify if they:

- Offer at least one enrichment activity open to all students (e. g. homework help, robotics, music, or sports);
- Are located in a school attendance area where at least 50 percent of children qualify for free or reduced lunch;
- Use the Community Eligibility Provision and the Identified Student Percentage (ISP) for that campus multiplied by 1.6 is at least 50 percent.

Example:

Identified student percentage = 35%
Multiplied by a factor of 1.6 = 35% x 1.6 = 56%
Qualifies for Afterschool Meals = YES!



“The success of the program is how many kids participate. It can be very successful if implemented correctly. If you can do breakfast and lunch, you can do supper. If you’re not sure, start small, but know the needs of your district and campuses.”

- SAN ANTONIO ISD

athletes as long as the school is providing at least one afterschool enrichment activity that is open to all students (not just athletes). For example, a school could provide afterschool meals to students on the football team if there is also an arts program or tutoring program which also provides meals to students.

- Schools can shape the program to best fit their staff, kitchen, and serving needs, so cost increases are minimal. **Schools can use the additional revenue to support their overall school nutrition budget and pay staff, buy equipment, or improve the quality of the food served.**
- By providing meals, afterschool programs have drawn more children to participate in these programs, which increases funding and boosts the opportunities for students to learn outside of the school day.

Afterschool meals are easy.

- School nutrition departments have flexibility about how to prepare and serve afterschool meals. They can serve hot meals through the cafeteria or can prepare the meals for afterschool during their usual meal preparation times and store them in coolers.
- Administrative work is minimal, requiring afterschool programs to simply take attendance, record meal counts and menus, and turn in receipts for food service, supplies and reimbursement claims monthly.
- If schools choose, they can allow students to choose the items they prefer to eat instead of serving a

standard set of foods without options. This “offer vs. serve” model cuts down on food waste and is popular with students.

- Finally, schools that have participated in other federal nutrition programs – such as the National School Lunch Program – qualify for an expedited application process and Child and Adult Care Food Program training.

Afterschool meals are flexible.

- Schools can use the Afterschool Meal Program to provide meals for their own programs, like sports, and/or sponsor eligible afterschool programs like Parks and Recreation agencies, Boys and Girls Clubs and YMCAs.
- Schools that provide enrichment programs on the weekends and/or during school breaks can also feed students at those times. Schools that do so are not required to serve afterschool meals on a regular basis throughout the year and may serve either breakfast, lunch or dinner and one snack.

Sample Afterschool Meals Menu

- Ham and cheese sandwich, roasted sweet potatoes, vegetarian beans, baked chips and assorted fruit, milk
- Chicken tenders, whole grain roll, garden salad, and fresh fruit, milk
- Pepperoni pizza, steamed fresh carrots, and fresh fruit, milk

Afterschool Care Program (NSLP)

VS.

Afterschool Meals (CACFP At-Risk)

Only snacks	Snack, meal, or snack and meal*
May not use “offer vs. serve”	May use “offer vs. serve” for meals only
Recertify eligibility every school year	Recertify eligibility every five years
Cannot serve on weekends, holidays, or vacation periods	Can serve on weekends, holidays, or vacation periods
May charge for reduced-price snacks (less than 15 cents)	Cannot charge for food service

*There must be at least two hours between the snack and meal if both are served

Both programs require that snacks and/or meals are served after the end of the regular school day.

Afterschool meals are an important part of keeping kids healthy, focused, and ready to learn.

- The Afterschool Meal Program is important because it feeds kids healthy food, eases the burden on low-income parents, and improves focus and learning for all students.
- The Afterschool Meal Program prevents children who are at school long after lunch from going hungry, meaning they are better prepared to learn and to participate in afterschool enrichment activities. The meals meet federal standards for nutrition and are popular with students.
- Finally, by drawing more kids to afterschool programs, the meals program helps to keep kids involved in safe afterschool activities.

How Does Your School Apply?

1. Complete a pre-eligibility form online at: bit.ly/afterschool-meals. (For the question of whether your district operates multiple Child Nutrition programs, select “yes”)
2. Once granted access, apply at <https://txunps1.texasagriculture.gov>.
3. Schools must train staff at their sites on CACFP At-Risk program operation before starting the program and then annually after that. Find information on these trainings on Education Service Center webpages and newsletters.
4. Although schools must submit recertification materials each year, the application and additional documents demonstrating eligibility are valid for five years.²

How are the Afterschool Care Program and Afterschool Meal Program Different?

Schools that have been using the National School Lunch Program’s After School Care Program to provide snacks may want to switch to the Afterschool Meal Program as it offers more flexibility in both the number of meals and when they can be served.

Tips from Texas School Districts

- **Create a plan** to get administrative support, including superintendents and school nutrition directors. Then bring the program to the campus level.
- **Start small!** Begin with just a few schools in the first year, and incorporate lessons learned the next year.
- Ensure **good communication** between afterschool programs and the school nutrition department. Share information about the benefits of the program with program coordinators.
- **Get creative** to meet staffing needs -- smaller districts can allow staff to rotate through the new supper shift, while larger districts may use staff from different schools. Food services staff often like the extra hours.
- Include **kids’ favorite foods** in the majority of the menu, since menu rotations can be shorter.
- If your district has the capacity, sponsor afterschool programs that are run by a non-school entity.
- Consider a **prepackaged main dish** and one vegetable -- it is easier for staff to count the meals for reimbursement, and requires less training.
- **Train afterschool staff** to count meals and take attendance.
- **Promote the program** to increase participation by sending flyers home, posting on the school website, and putting an ad in the local newspaper.

Sponsoring an Organization

Schools have the ability to sponsor non-profit organizations like their local YMCAs, Boys & Girls Clubs, and Parks and Recreation programs through the Afterschool Meal Program. Sponsorship is an opportunity to strengthen relationships with existing community organizations, serve more children, and lower costs by spreading out labor, reducing overhead costs, and increasing funding. As a sponsor, a school is responsible for administrative and financial responsibilities of the site(s) that they are sponsoring, such as conducting site reviews.

To Sponsor

1. Consider existing organizations in your community and contact them about enriching their afterschool programs with meals. Evaluate the viability and capability of any site that you are considering before applying.
2. Begin the application process online at: <http://bit.ly/CAFCP-squaremeals>
3. Once approved, the sponsor and site will create a management plan, undergo training, and determine policies and procedures.

All students need enough healthy food to learn and grow. When kids stay at school after classes to participate in enrichment activities they need food to sustain them. Fortunately, the Afterschool Meal Program allows eligible schools to feed students for free. We encourage all school districts to explore this beneficial program.

“[The Afterschool Meal Program] has been very positive. The students are really hungry after school and they really appreciate having a larger amount of food. It is more work for food service, but once they had the chance to see the kids using the program, a lot of them were like, “wow, it’s worth it” because they saw how appreciative the kids are.”

- **NORTH EAST ISD** (SAN ANTONIO, TX)

For More Information:

1. Food Research & Action Center. Facts: The Afterschool Meal Program. Food Research and Action Center, 2017. <http://bit.ly/FRAC-factsheet>.
2. Texas Department of Agriculture. Child and Adult Care and Food Program- At-Risk Afterschool Care Centers Handbook. Texas Department of Agriculture, 2014. <http://bit.ly/CACFP-handbook>.
3. Education Service Center, Region 1. “CACFP At-Risk Afterschool Care Centers: Application Cheat Sheet for School Districts.” <http://bit.ly/CACFP-cheatsheet>.

ENDNOTES

- 1 For CEP schools the Identified Student Percentage (ISP) for that campus multiplied by 1.6 must be at least 50 percent.
- 2 Exception: Either the school or TDA obtains information indicating that the afterschool program would no longer be eligible based on the percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch.

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