

FAQ Sheet

Unlike many other departments in the school, the Food Service Department is a financially self-supporting, non-profit entity and must generate its own revenue to cover its expenses.

School food service departments are the entities responsible for providing school meals. This involves purchasing food, paying staff salary and benefits, as well as repairing and replacing equipment. Contrary to popular belief, the food service department does not receive money from the school budget or the local government. Revenue for school meals comes from federal reimbursements that subsidize part of the meal costs, while student payments for full price and reduced price meals, adult meal payments, a la carte food and beverage sales, and make up the remainder of revenue needed to cover costs.

But doesn't the federal government reimburse schools for the full price of the meals?

No. Federal reimbursements cover a portion of the cost of school meals, but not all. According to the School Nutrition Association USD383 average cost to prepare a school meal in 2016-17 school year was \$3.61, yet the maximum federal reimbursement for a free lunch in SY 2016-17 was only \$3.49. This means that food service departments lose money on every free meal that they serve.

**Does that mean that the kids who pay for their meals subsidize the free meals?
Is that why meal prices are going up?**

Rising food and fuel prices nationwide and the higher cost of healthy foods such as fresh fruits and whole grains have put significant financial pressure on school food service departments. School districts nationwide are increasing their prices in order to cover their costs. All meal price increases must be approved by the local school board.

Would it be cheaper to make my child's lunch at home?

Despite price increases, school meals are still a great deal! The School Nutrition Association cost estimates show that an equivalent meal prepared at home, including milk, a meat or meat alternate, grains, and fruits and/or vegetables, would cost parents \$3.43!