

Healthy
Eating
Research



NOPREN
Nutrition & Obesity
POLICY RESEARCH & EVALUATION NETWORK

Summer Speaker Series for Students 2026

(The contents and findings of this presentation are those of the speakers and do not represent the official views of the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention or Department of Health and Human Services.)

Getting Started!

- Update your name on Zoom, if needed
 - *Right click on your Zoom box, click “rename”*
- Type your name and institution into the chat box!
 - *Question: Which best describes you?*
 - *Ex. Undergraduate Student, Dietetic Intern, Masters Student, Doctoral Student, Post Doc, Public Health Practitioner, Researcher/Professor, Other*
- Remember to keep yourself on mute.
- Type your questions into the chat box.

NOPREN HER Summer Series for Students

Schedule and Topics

- June 10: Policy, Systems, and Environmental (PSE) Strategies to Support Young Children's Diet and Health
- June 24: Interventions to Improve Food and Nutrition Security
- July 8: Federal, State, and Local Nutrition Policy Updates
- **July 22: Food Policies in Schools**
- August 5: Career Paths in Public Health Nutrition
- August 12: Student Presentations

The series will take place on
Wednesdays **from**
4:00 - 5:00 pm EST

For more information or to register:

<https://nopren.ucsf.edu/content/her-nopren-summer-speaker-series-for-students-2026>

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Session 4: Food Policies in Schools



Impact of School Meal Policies: Past, Present, & Future

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Question

In what ways is food sold or provided to children at school?

(please respond in the chat)

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- National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs
- Snack foods sold in schools: cafeteria, school stores, vending machines, etc.
- Federal Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program
- Celebrations
- Rewards
- After School: At-risk Snack and Supper Programs

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Outline for Today

- 1) Background of School Meals
- 2) School Meal Policies
 - 1) HHFKA
 - 2) Universal Free School Meals
 - 3) Updated standards
 - 4) HR1
 - 5) Ultra-processed foods
- 3) Wellness Policies

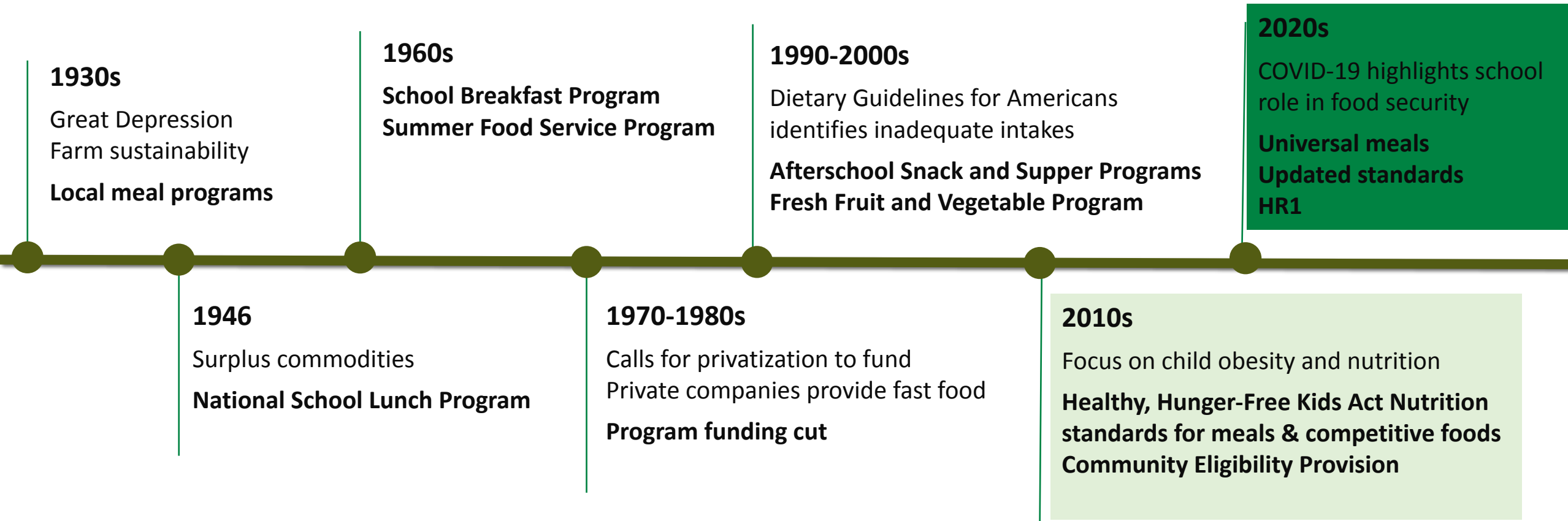


Image: USDA FNS, Lance Cheung

Did you eat school meals
as a child? (If yes, what
memories do you have
of them)?

*(please respond in the
chat)*

Background: School Meal Milestones



HHFKA School Meal Standards

• Must Offer:

- Fruit (↑ portion size)
- Vegetable (variety / ↑ portion size)
- (Whole) Grains
- Milk (skim or 1% / limited chocolate milk to skim)
- Meat/meat alternative

Limits on sodium, saturated fat, calories
(minimum and maximum values)

• Must Serve:

- 3 meal components (including a fruit or vegetable)

Hilton Central Schools
New York



New York City Public Schools
New York



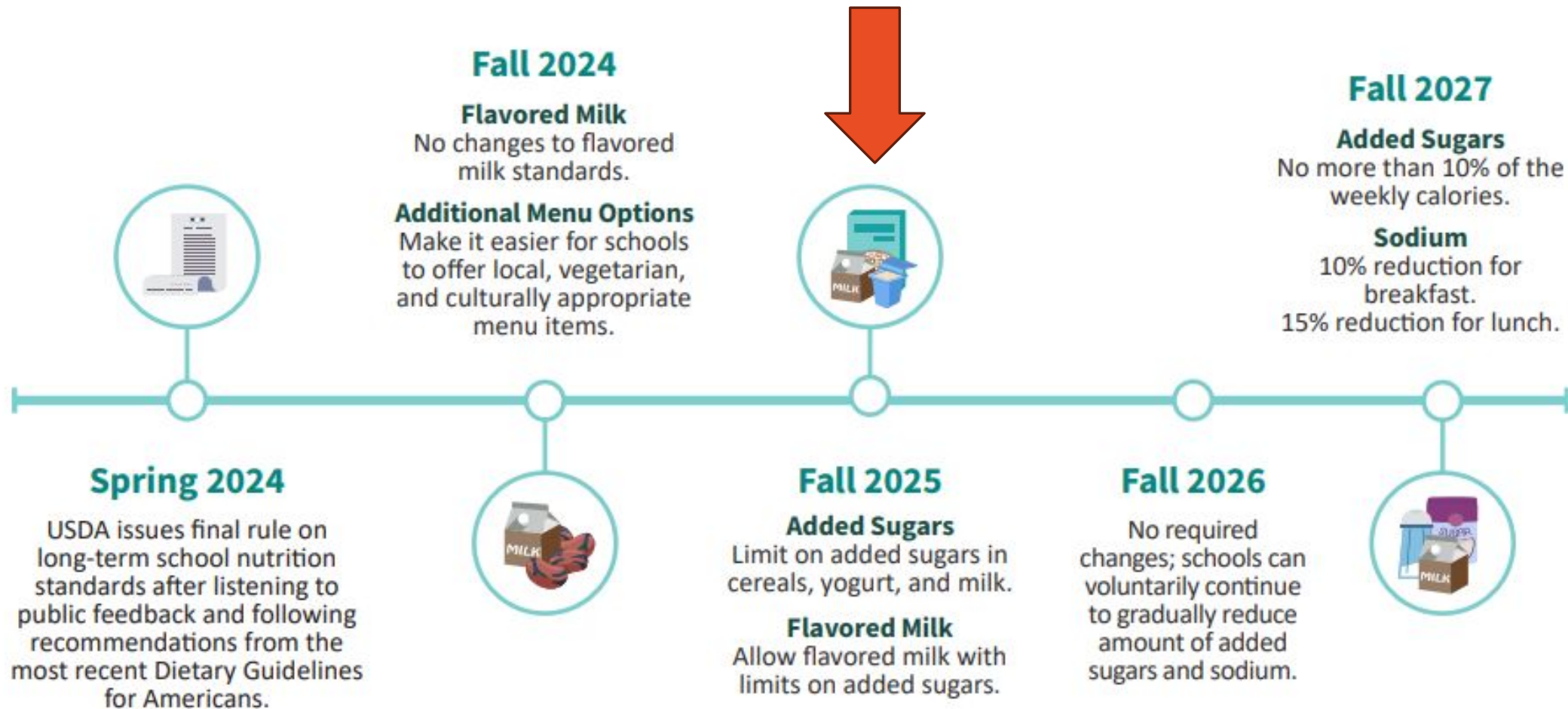
Greenville County Schools
South Carolina



Bellingham Public Schools
Washington



Updated School Meal Standards



What do you think are the biggest contributors of added sugar and sodium?

Biggest Contributors of Added Sugar in School Meals

Biggest Contributors of Sodium in School Meals

Why the focus on added sugars?

HEALTHY KIDS ARE SWEET ENOUGH

Kids age 2-18 should have **LESS THAN 25 GRAMS** or **SIX TEASPOONS** of **ADDED SUGARS DAILY** for a healthy heart.

less than six...

tsp tsp
tsp tsp
tsp tsp

Source: American Heart Association statement: Added Sugars and Cardiovascular Disease Risk in Children

American Heart Association.
life is why™

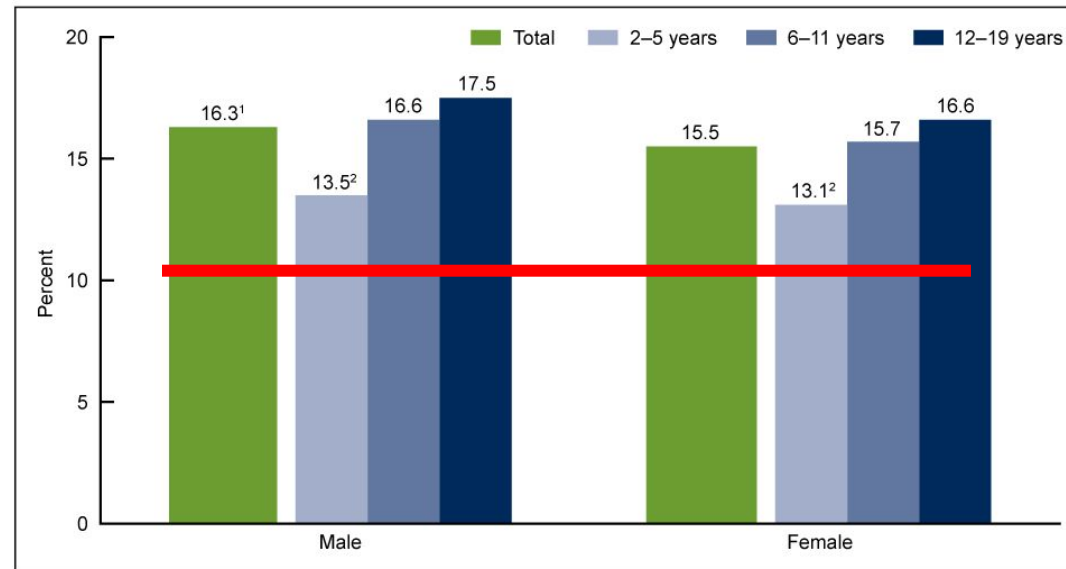
The infographic features three diverse children (a boy and two girls) on the left. To their right, six spoons are arranged in two columns of three, each labeled 'tsp'. The text 'less than six...' is written above the spoons. The American Heart Association logo is in the bottom right corner.

Why the focus on added sugars?

- Two-thirds of school-aged children currently exceed the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA) recommended daily limits for added sugars (<10% of total energy per day).



Figure 2. Mean percent of kilocalories from added sugars among children and adolescents aged 2–19 years, by sex and age group: United States, 2005–2008



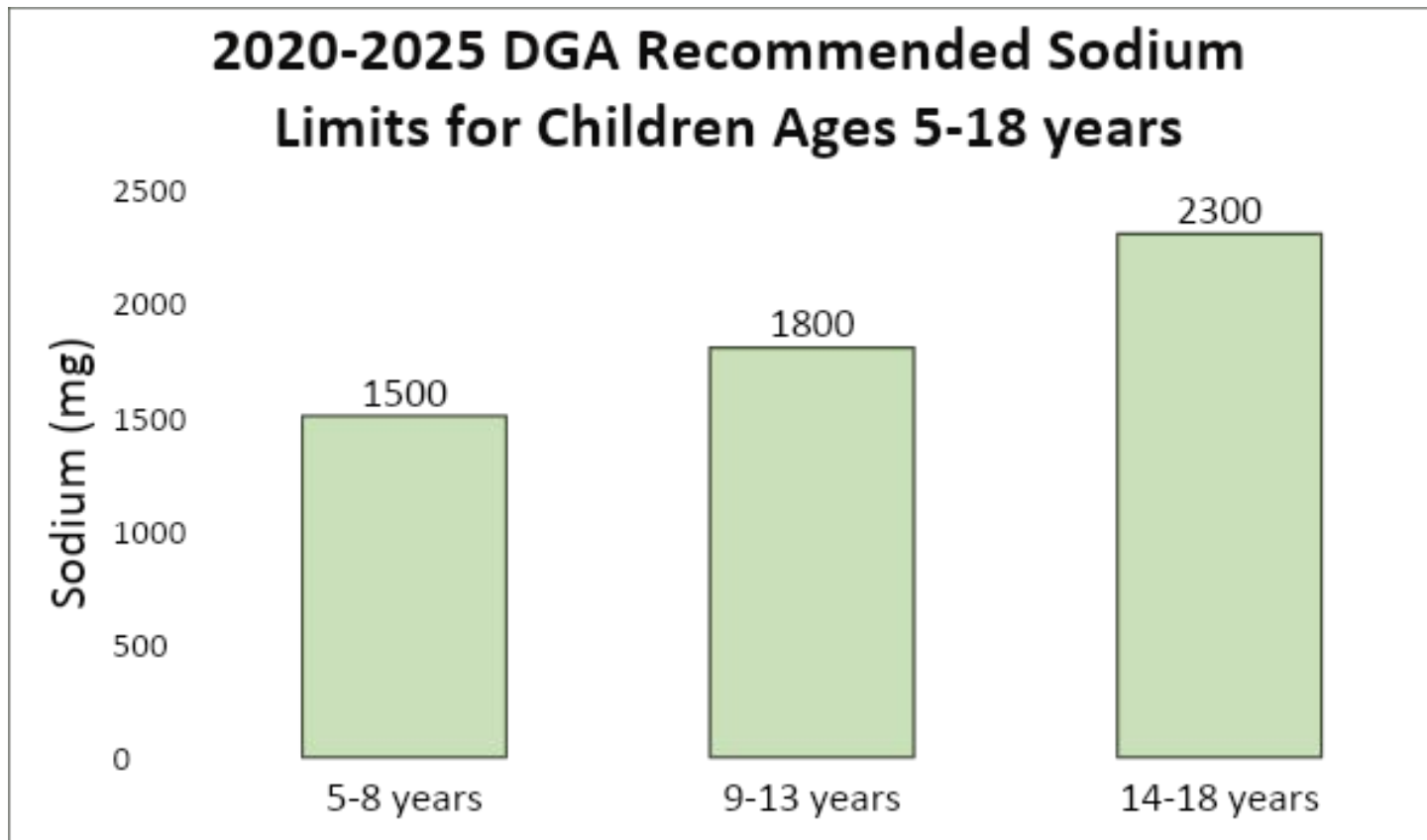
¹Significantly different from females, $p < 0.05$.

²Significant linear trend by age, $p < 0.05$.

SOURCE: CDC/NCHS, National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 2005–2008.

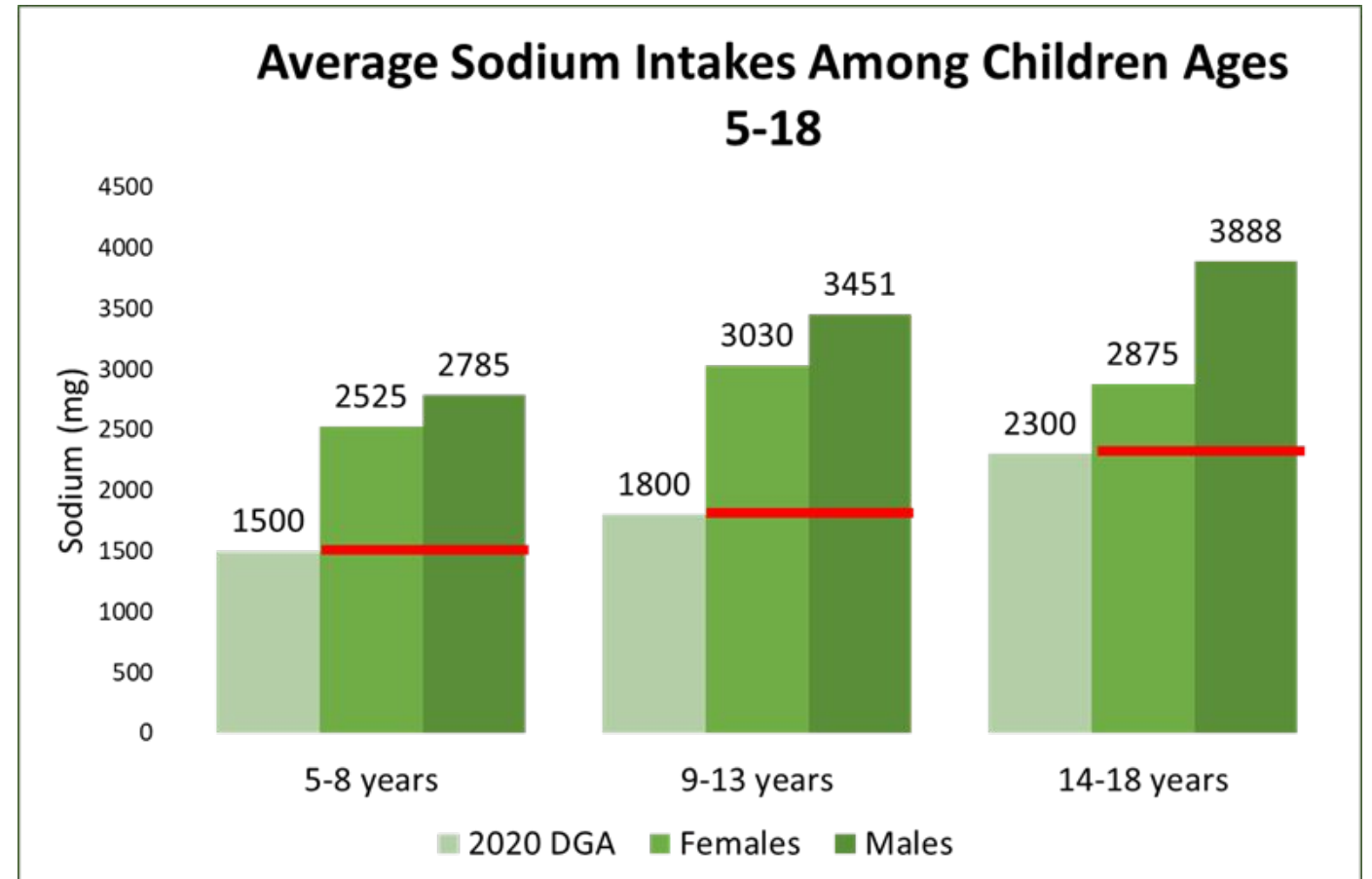
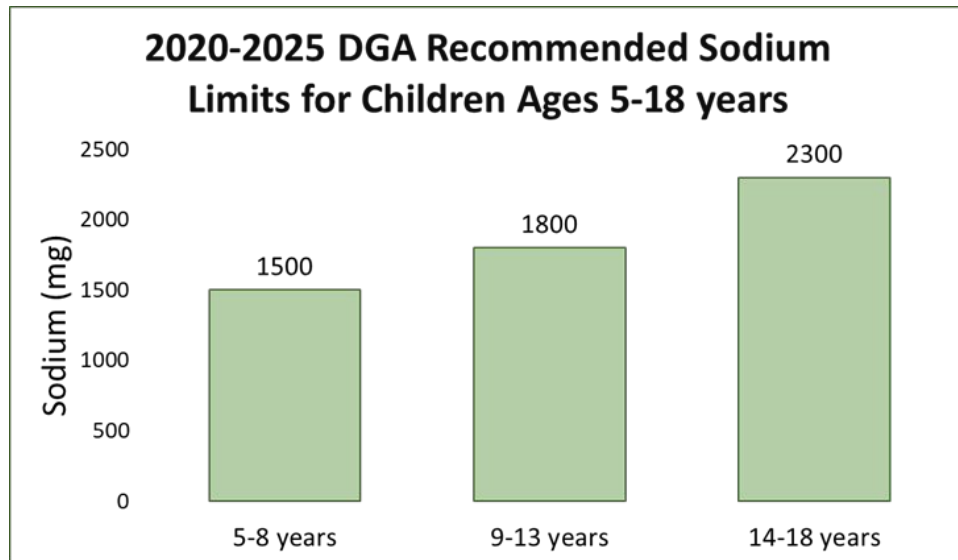
Why the focus on sodium?

What is *recommended* for sodium?



Why the focus on sodium?

What is *actually consumed* by children for sodium?



Why the focus on sodium?



15% of US children have high blood pressure, which can be lowered in part by a healthy diet, including less sodium

Biggest contributors of added sugar and sodium

Biggest Contributors of Added Sugar in School Meals



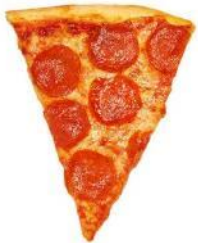
Biggest Contributors of Sodium in School Meals

Biggest contributors of added sugar and sodium

Biggest Contributors of Added Sugar in School Meals



Biggest Contributors of Sodium in School Meals

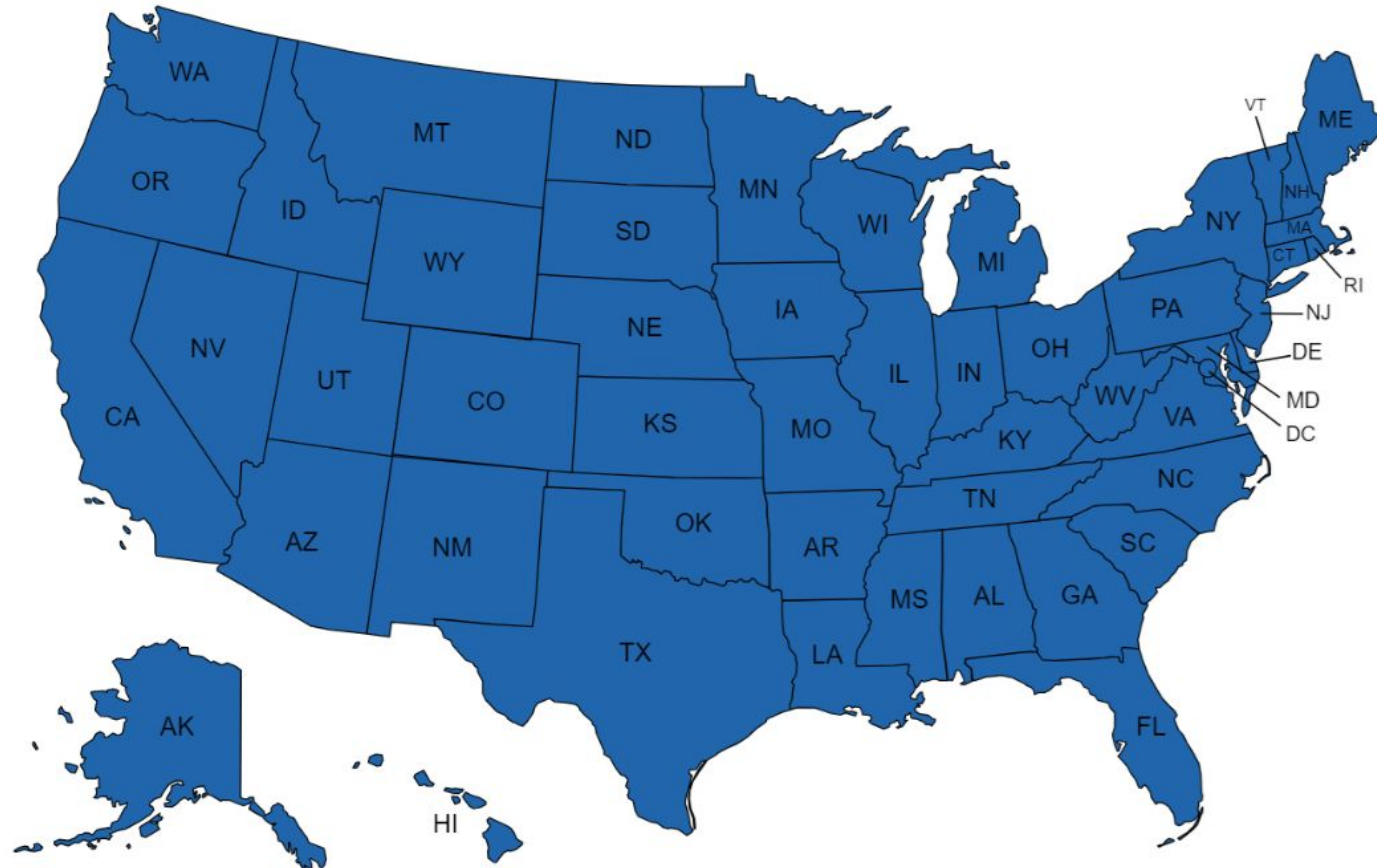


A white school lunch tray is held by two hands against a light wood background. The tray contains a hamburger, a salad with radishes, a compartment of green peas, a compartment of corn and tomatoes, and a compartment of blackberries and raspberries. The title text is overlaid on the center of the image.

Universal Free School Meal Policies

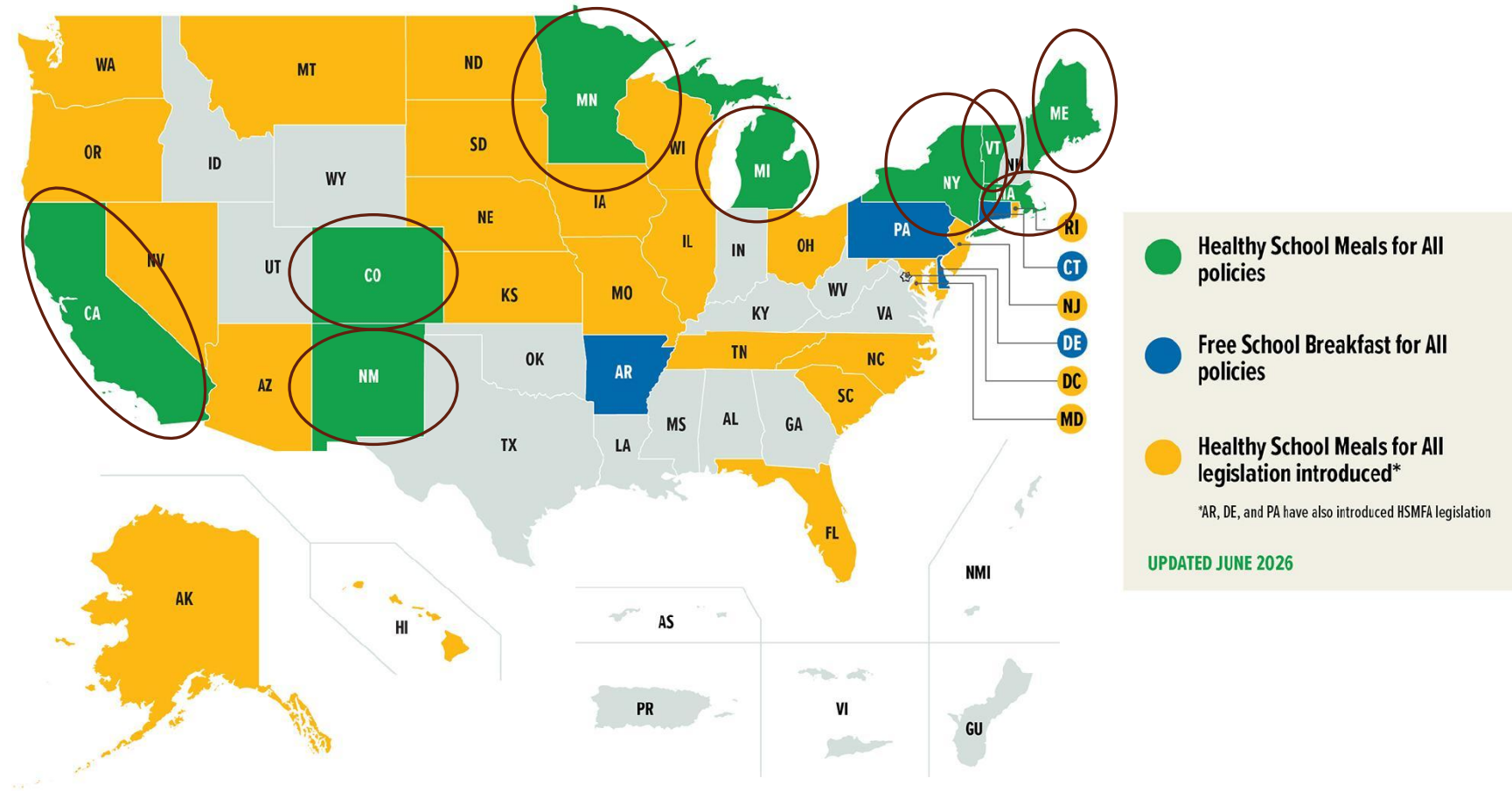
Universal Free School Meals (UFSM)

During COVID (2021-22SY): National UFSM



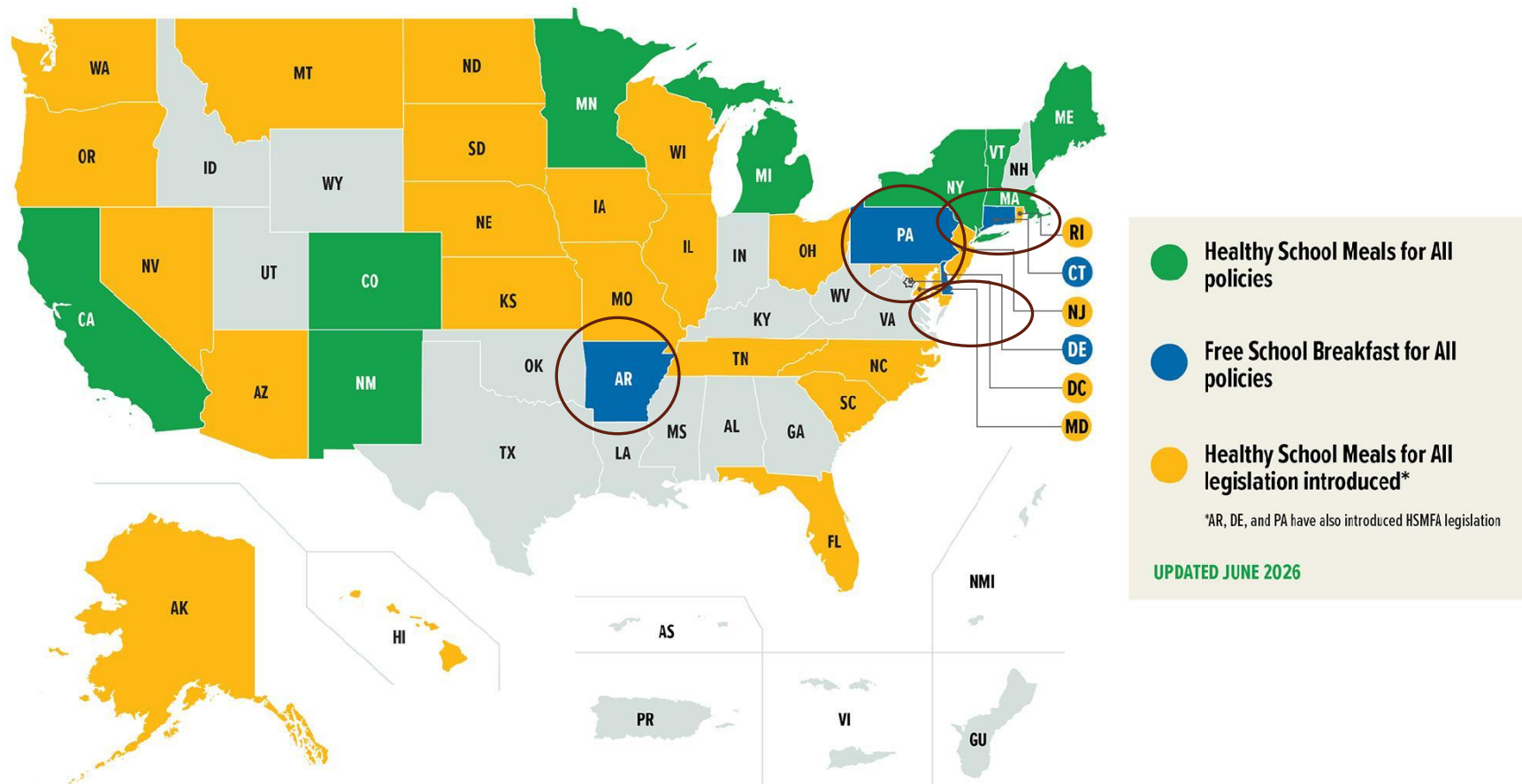
Universal Free School Meals (UFSM)

State-level UFSM: Free Breakfast and Lunch



Universal Free School Meals (UFSM)

State-level UFSM: Free Breakfast only



Source: FRAC <https://frac.org/healthy-school-meals-for-all>

Universal Free School Meals (UFSM)

Expanded access to free meals



MATAGALUEGA O AOGA A LE SETETE O HAWAII KA 'OIHANA HO'ONA'AUAO O LE MALO O HAWAI'I

Tusitala ▾ A'oga ▾ Tautua a'oga ▾ Polokalama a Tamaiti Aoga ▾ Punaoa ▾ Galuega ▾ Fa'amatalaga & Lipoti ▾  Samoa ▾ 

Expanded free school meals help ease costs for Hawai'i working families

Jul 16, 2026



HONOLULU (HawaiiNewsNow) - Nearly 12,000 more Hawaii public school students will receive free school meals this school year.

Starting Aug. 3, students from households with incomes up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level will qualify for one free breakfast and lunch each school day under Act 139, [signed into law by Gov. Josh Green last year](#).

The expansion builds on the first phase of the law, implemented during the 2025-26 school year, which eliminated meal charges for students who qualified for reduced-price meals under the National School Lunch Program.

More than \$3.3 million will be distributed to cover the cost of free meals over two school years.

7 Key Findings on The Benefits of Healthy School Meals for All

Healthy Eating Research

Schools play a vital role in promoting children's health and well-being. In the United States, schools contribute significantly to children's overall diet quality and can provide up to half of their daily calories, especially among children from low-income families. Providing healthy school meals for all is a policy opportunity to help all children eat healthier. Healthy School Meals for all, also known as universal free school meals, provides all enrolled children in a school operating the National School Lunch or School Breakfast Programs a free breakfast or lunch, regardless of their family's income.

A new [systematic review](#) included in a [Special Issue](#) in the journal [Nutrients](#) highlights the international evidence regarding the impact of healthy school meals for all on students' school meal participation rates, nutrition and dietary intakes, food security, academic performance, attendance, body mass index (BMI), and school finances. A total of 47 studies were included in the review; 25 were conducted in the United States and 22 were conducted in other countries with developed economies.

The 7 key findings from the systematic review in the Special Issue reveal how healthy school meals for all benefit students and schools.

1 School Meal Participation

Nearly all studies found that providing healthy school meals for all is associated with increases in the number of students participating in the school meal program.



2 Diet Quality

The majority of studies found that providing healthy school lunches for all is positively associated with better student diet quality, particularly in the presence of strong school nutrition standards that include fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.



3 Food Security

There is evidence that providing healthy school meals for all improves food security among students and families with lower incomes, although only a limited number of studies have evaluated this outcome.



4 Academic Performance

Nearly half of the studies found that providing healthy school lunches for all is positively associated with students' academic performance (and no studies found an adverse impact on academic performance). More research is needed to understand the link between breakfast and academic achievement.

Academic performance may be influenced by healthy school meals for all directly through improvements in nutrition, as well as indirectly through increases in school attendance rates.



5 Attendance

Half of the studies found that providing healthy school meals for all significantly improves student attendance among students from lower-income and food-insecure households (and no studies found an adverse impact on attendance).



6 Body Mass Index

Healthy school meals for all with strong nutrition standards has been shown to not increase student Body Mass Index.



7 Finances

There is some evidence in the U.S. that school food service budgets benefit from use of the community eligibility provision (CEP), an option that allows schools in high poverty areas to serve breakfast and lunch at no cost to all students; In particular, schools with a high percentage of students from low-income households may benefit financially from CEP due to increased revenues from federal reimbursements of school meals served.



Benefits of UFSM: Evidence from an International Systematic Review

Source: Cohen JF, Hecht AA, McLoughlin GM, Turner L, Schwartz MB. Universal school meals and associations with student participation, attendance, academic performance, diet quality, food security, and body mass index: A systematic review. *Nutrients*. 2021 Mar 11;13(3):911.

H.R. 1

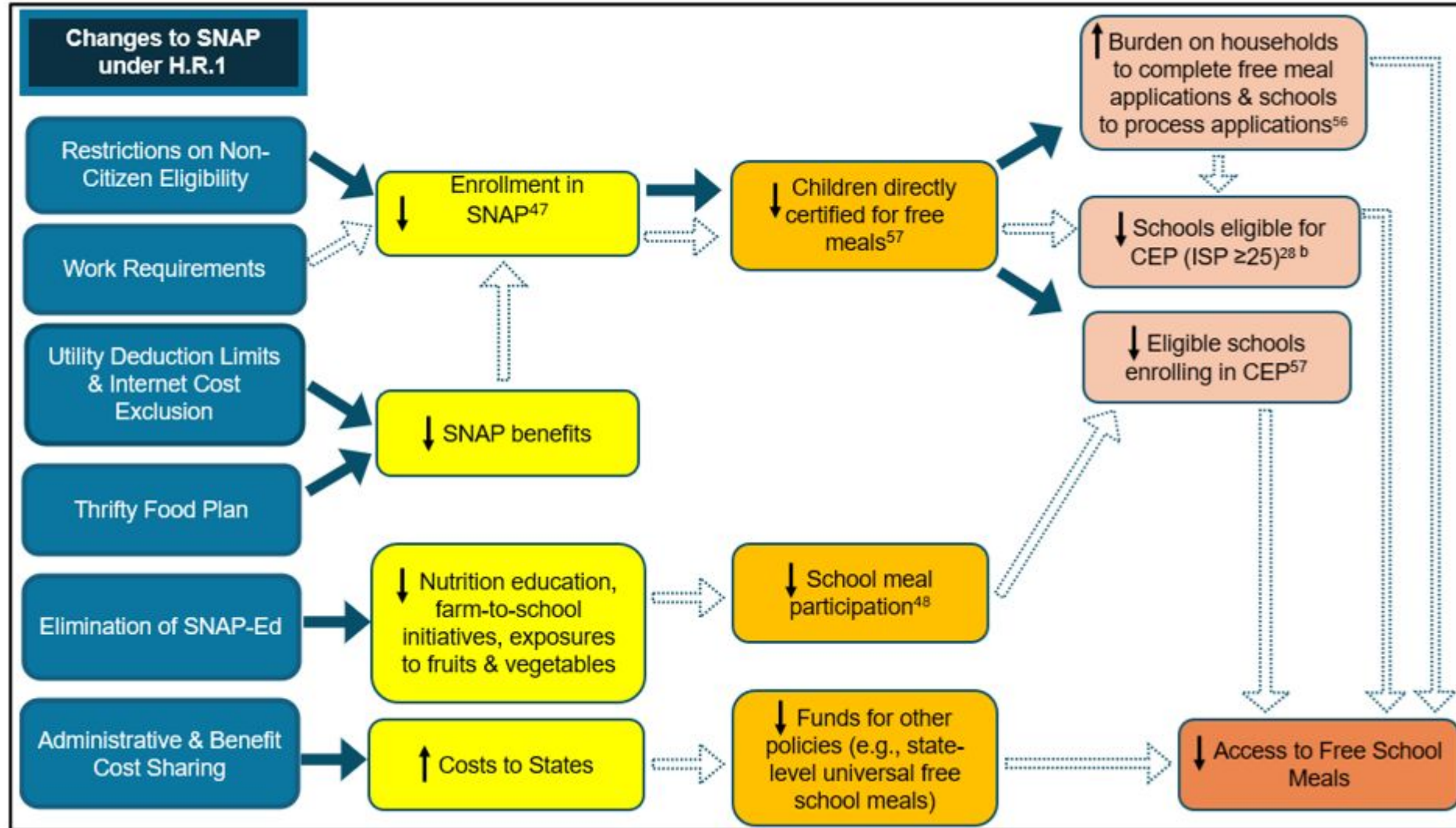
We Accept
SNAP
Benefits

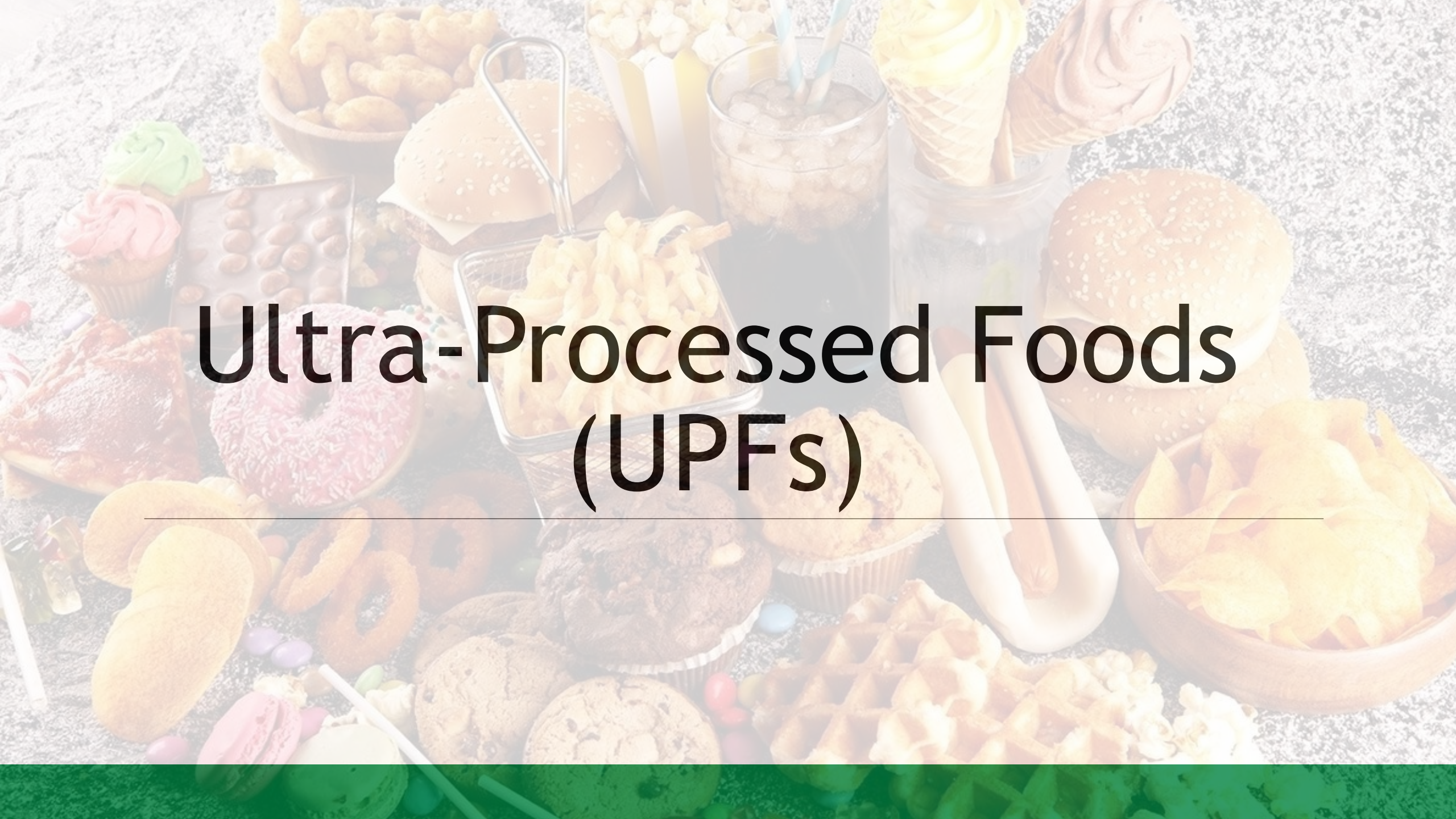


H.R.1

SNAP Policy	Update under H.R.1
1. Work requirements	Work requirements for able-bodied adults ages 18-65, including parents/guardians with children ages 14 or older.
2. Restrictions on Non-Citizen Eligibility.	Eliminates SNAP eligibility for refugees, asylum seekers, and noncitizen survivors of domestic violence.
3. Utility Deduction Limits & Internet Cost Exclusion	Eliminates internet and fuel assistance deductions.
4. Thrifty Food Plan	The Thrifty Food Plan must remain cost-neutral and will not be adjusted based on inflation or rising food costs.
5. Elimination of SNAP-Ed funding	Eliminates federal funding for SNAP-Ed.
6. Administrative & Benefit Cost Sharing	The federal government covers 25% of the cost of administering SNAP and states cover 75%. States cover a portion of the cost of SNAP benefits (up to 15%) dependent on their SNAP payment error rate.

Primary pathways by which the H.R. 1 can impact access to school meals



A collage of various ultra-processed foods including burgers, fries, donuts, ice cream, and snacks. The image is a top-down view of a variety of fast-food items arranged on a light-colored, textured surface. In the center, there's a burger with a sesame seed bun. To its left is a bowl of golden-brown fries. Above the burger is a glass of iced soda with two straws. To the right of the burger is another burger. In the bottom right corner, there's a bowl of potato chips. Other items include a cupcake with pink frosting, a chocolate bar, a donut with pink frosting, a muffin, a waffle, and various cookies and candies. The overall theme is a collection of common ultra-processed foods.

Ultra-Processed Foods (UPFs)

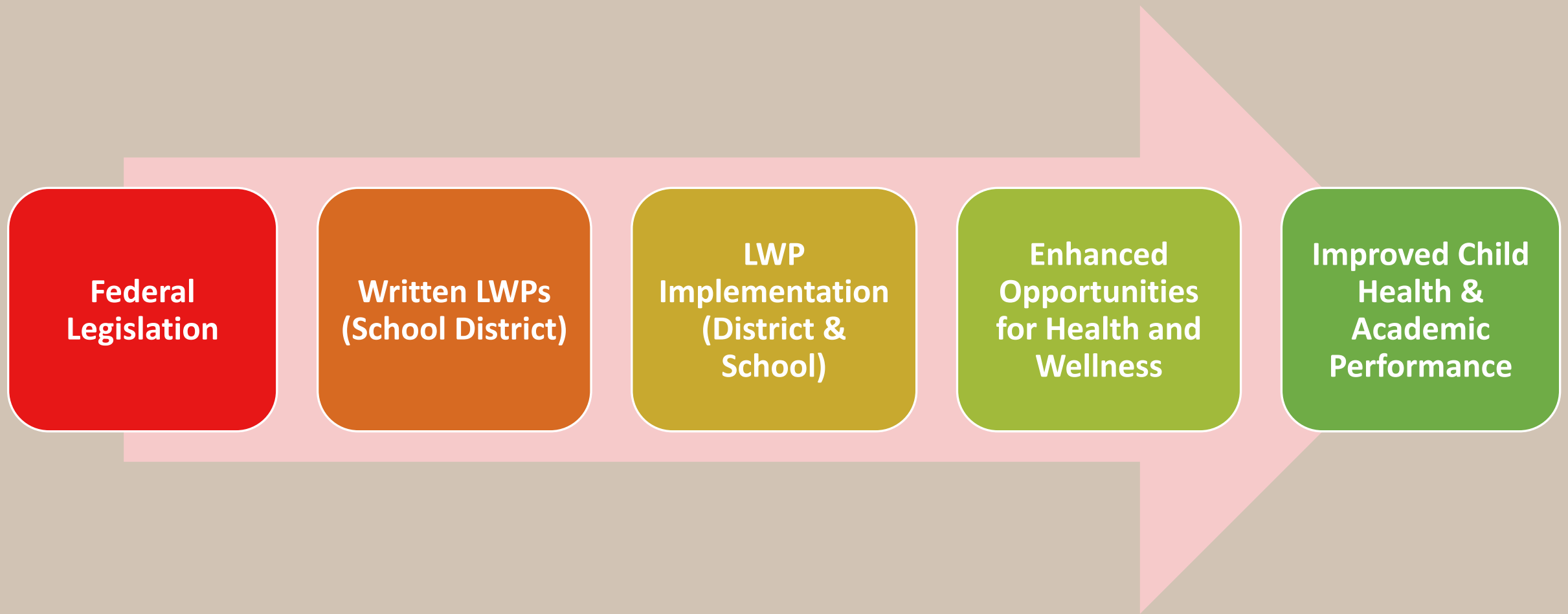
Example State UPF laws

State	Law	Foods or ingredients covered	Schools and settings covered	Implementation timeline	Key provisions
Arizona	HB 2164 (2025), Arizona Healthy Schools Act; Ariz. Rev. Stat. 15-242.01	Defines “ultraprocessed food” as a food or beverage containing one or more of 11 specified ingredients, including potassium bromate, propylparaben, titanium dioxide, brominated vegetable oil, and seven synthetic dyes.	Schools participating in federally funded or assisted meal programs. Applies to food served or sold, including by third parties, on campus during the normal school day. Parent-provided food is exempt.	Beginning in the 2026–27 school year.	Prohibits covered schools from serving or selling foods meeting the statutory additive-based definition of ultra-processed food. Schools must certify compliance to the Arizona Department of Education.
California	AB 1264 (2025), Real Food, Healthy Kids Act; Chapter 467	Establishes a broader statutory definition of ultra-processed food based on industrial formulation, specified additives or processing techniques, and nutrient characteristics. The Department of Public Health must identify narrower categories of “ultraprocessed foods of concern” and “restricted school foods.”	Public school districts, county offices of education, and charter schools serving grades K–12; applies to reimbursable meals, competitive foods, and vendors.	Regulations due June 1, 2028; phaseout begins by July 1, 2029; vendor prohibition begins July 1, 2032; school meal and competitive-food prohibition begins July 1, 2035.	Requires a science-based regulatory process rather than banning every food classified as ultra-processed. Also requires vendor reporting, annual state reports, training, and technical assistance. USDA Foods in Schools products receive certain exemptions.
Texas	SB 314 (2025); Tex. Educ. Code 33.9011	Eighteen listed additives or categories, including BVO, potassium bromate, propylparaben, azodicarbonamide, BHA, titanium dioxide, synthetic dyes, and certain caramel colors. Substantially similar additives are also covered.	Free or reduced-price meals provided by school districts and open-enrollment charter schools through specified state or federal meal programs.	Applies beginning with the 2026–27 school year, generally to food-service contracts entered into or renewed on or after September 1, 2026.	It applies specifically to food included in free or reduced-price meals. Waivers may be available under existing Texas education law.
Utah	HB 402 (2025); Utah Code § 53G-9-205.2	Potassium bromate, propylparaben, and seven synthetic dyes.	Food sold, donated, offered, or served on public-school grounds during the school day.	Beginning in the 2026–27 school year.	Exempts parent-provided food, teacher-provided food with parental permission, concession sales, and vending machines. It also does not apply to charter schools or districts with 5,500 or fewer students.

Wellness Policies



Poll: How familiar are you with Local Wellness Policies in Schools?



Local Wellness Policies (LWPs)

District policies established via Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act of 2004 (PL 108-265, Section 204)
Required to be in place by start of 2006-07 school year

Federal
Legislation

Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act Local Wellness Policy Implementation Final Rule (July 2017):

- Content of Wellness Policy
- Wellness Leadership
- Enhanced Documentation
- Public Updates
- Monitoring/Oversight
- **Triennial Assessments*****

Improved Child
Health &
Academic
Performance

Local Wellness Policies (LWPs)

District policies established via Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act of 2004 (PL 108-265, Section 204)
Required to be in place by start of 2006-07 school year

Triennial Assessment

Due in 2020/2021, 2024, 2027.... And so on

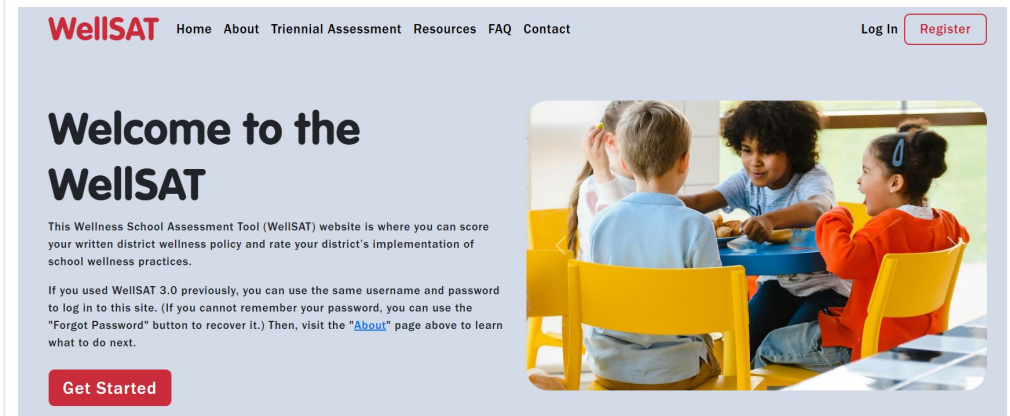
Three components:

1. Comparison with a model policy
2. LWP compliance (among 100% of district schools)
3. LWP goals; progress in meeting past LWP goals

Triennial assessment results **MUST** be made available to the public!



▶ Great resource: Wellness School Assessment Tool (WellSAT)



Comparison with a Model Policy: WellSAT Policy Assessment

Section 1: Federal Requirements

Section 2: Nutrition Environment and Services

Section 3: Nutrition Education

Section 4: Physical Education and Physical Activity

Section 5: Employee Wellness

Section 6: Integration and Coordination

Example: **NES13 - Addresses food not being used as a reward.**

0	Not mentioned OR only allows healthy food to be used as a reward.	
1	Discourages food as a reward.	Examples: "...strongly discourage the use of food/beverages as a reward or punishment." "...will encourage non-food alternatives as rewards." "Food should not be used as a reward."
2	Prohibits teachers or staff from using food as a reward.	Examples: "Food rewards or incentives shall not be used in classrooms to encourage student achievement or desirable behavior." "The use of food or candy as a classroom reward in any school is prohibited." "Schools will not use food or beverages as rewards for academic, classroom, or sports performances."

LWP Compliance

No standardized tool

WellSAT Practice Assessment

State or District-specific Assessments

Example: Maryland

Maryland Wellness Policies and Practices Project (MWPPP)

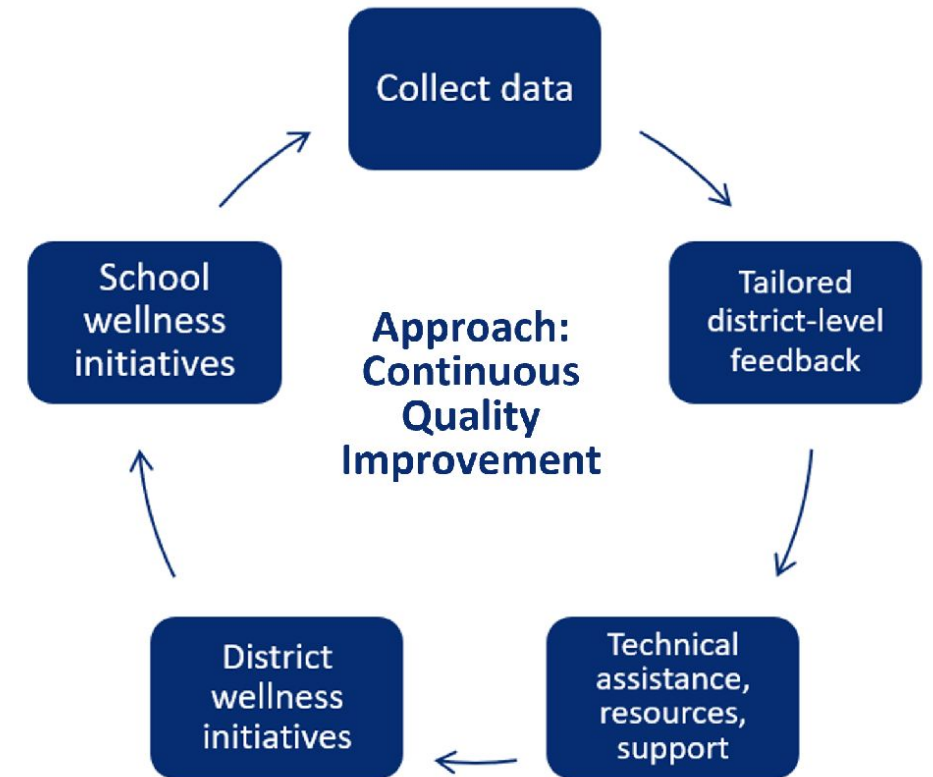
Overall goal: to enhance opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity for Maryland students by helping schools and school districts create and implement strong and comprehensive written LWPs

Focus: Quality, Implementation, and Impact of LWPs

State-Wide Initiative: 2012-2020

Partnerships: Maryland Departments of Education & Health, 24 School Districts

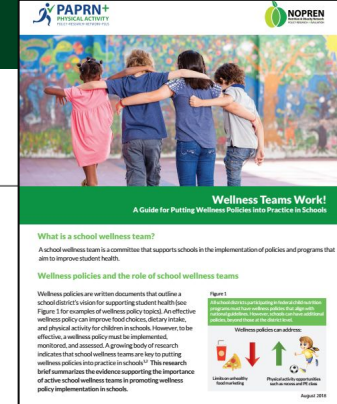
Supported the first triennial assessment



Key Lessons Learned from the MWPPPP

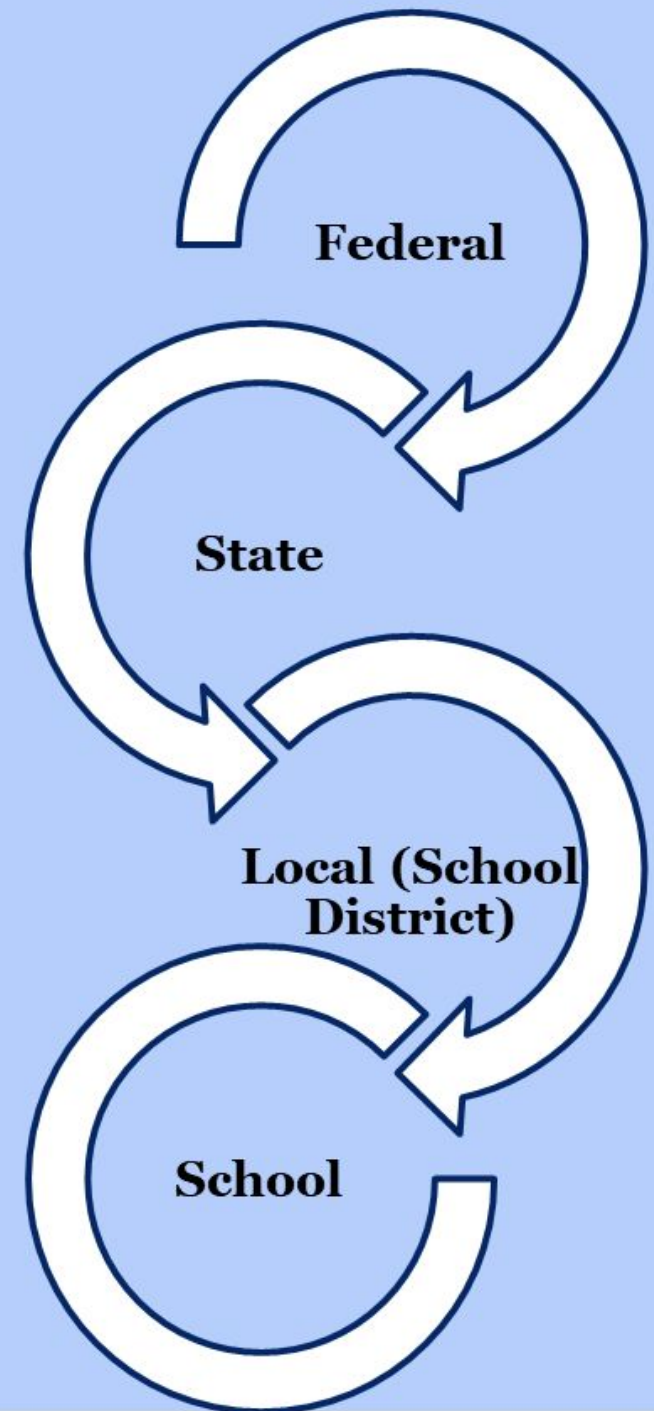
Importance of school-based wellness teams in supporting LWP implementation

Intervening to support the development of school-based wellness teams can improve LWP implementation (Wellness Champions for Change)



LWP Research & Practice Next Steps

- **Practitioners, Parents, Community Members:**
 - Read your School District's LWP & Triennial Assessment Report
 - Find out about your State or School District School Health Council & consider joining
 - Find out if your school has a wellness team. If so, ask to join. If not, consider starting one!
- Consider joining the NOPREN School Wellness Working Group
- Triennial Assessment (**2027!**): research & practice opportunities!
- Visit our website for measures and resources:
www.marylandschoolwellness.org
 - Data analysis and paper writing opportunities!



What is missing?

Policies for the “Whole Child”:

Whole School Whole Child,
Whole Community Model (WSWC)



CONCLUSIONS

- Strong evidence that:
 - Strong meal standards have led to improvements in school meal quality and positive outcomes for students
 - UFSM promotes school meal participation, which can have important implications for children, families, and schools.
 - Local Wellness Policies contribute to healthier school environments

Thank you

Striving To Reach Optimal Nutrition and Growth

<https://www.childnourishlab.org/healthy-school-meals-for-all>



www.marylandschoolwellness.org



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Nutrition & Obesity
POLICY RESEARCH & EVALUATION NETWORK

Q & A

Join us for the next session of the speaker series!

- Wednesday, August 5th from 4:00 - 5:00 PM ET
- Career Paths in Public Health Nutrition

To view past recordings, please scan the QR code:

