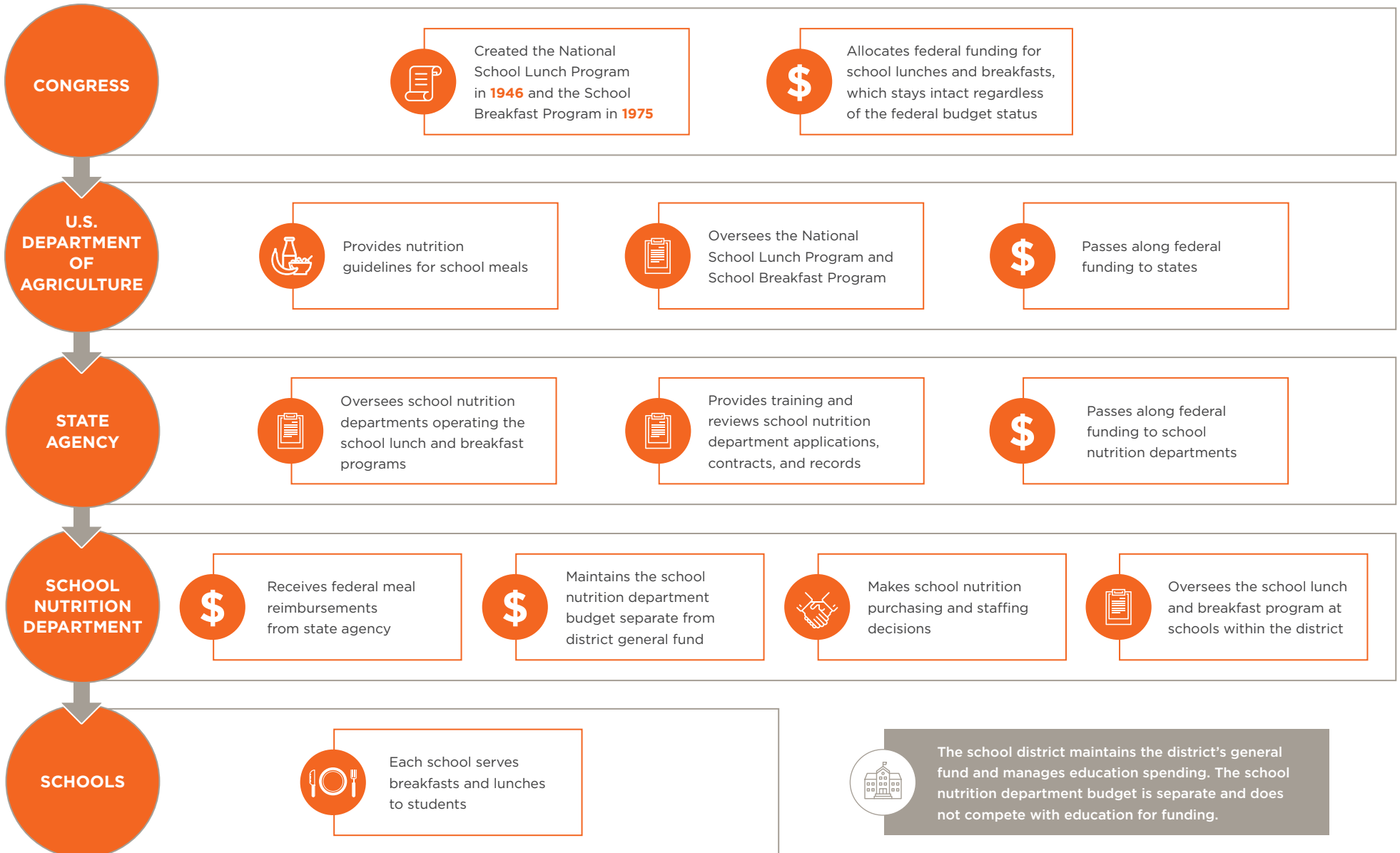


# HOW SCHOOL MEALS REACH KIDS



Over 30 million students participate in the National School Lunch Program and nearly 15 million participate in the School Breakfast Program. The vast majority receive free or reduced-price meals. Have you ever wondered who pays for them? Here's the path that funding takes from Congress to cafeteria.





# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



## WHERE DO MEALS AT MY SCHOOL COME FROM?

The school nutrition department (the department) manages meal services for all schools in the district. Depending on the district, breakfast and lunch may be prepared on site at each school or prepared in a central kitchen. The department may employ its own staff to prepare meals or contract with an external food service company to prepare meals.

## WHO FUNDS THE SCHOOL NUTRITION DEPARTMENT?

The department may receive money from multiple sources, such as:

- Federal reimbursements for student participation in the school lunch and breakfast programs, which are authorized by Congress and come from U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) via the state agency;
- Department of Defense funding; and
- Additional ventures, like catering or a la carte food sales.



## IS THIS DIFFERENT THAN EDUCATION FUNDING?

Yes. School meals are funded by the school nutrition department budget, which is separate from the school district's education budget and general fund.

The school nutrition budget funds the salaries of school nutrition staff, school meals, and other items for the school nutrition department.

The district's general fund pays for teacher and principal salaries, books, desks, and anything not related to school meals.

## DO STUDENTS PAY ANYTHING?

Yes, if the student does not meet USDA requirements for free school breakfast or lunch. Some students may be eligible for a reduced rate. In schools with a high level of need, the department may choose to offer all meals at no cost to students by taking advantage of options like the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP).



## HOW DO STUDENTS QUALIFY FOR FREE OR REDUCED-PRICE MEALS?

The department must determine each student's eligibility for free or reduced-price meals. The department may collect applications and compare a family's reported income to federal guidelines. Or, the department may use information about whether a student's family participates in other programs that have strict income requirements, like SNAP or Medicaid.

## IS THERE A LIMIT ON HOW MUCH FEDERAL FUNDING THE DEPARTMENT CAN RECEIVE?

No. The department will receive federal funding for each breakfast and lunch served to students each day as long as the meal meets USDA requirements. Each meal is federally reimbursed at a set rate depending on a student's eligibility for free or reduced-price meals. The department gets more federal funding for serving more students. Expanding the breakfast and lunch programs brings more federal funding into the school nutrition department to further invest in the programs and benefit students.

## DO THE MEALS MEET NUTRITION STANDARDS?

Yes. Based on laws passed by Congress, the USDA creates the nutrition standards and meal requirements for school breakfast and lunch. Each federally reimbursed breakfast and lunch must meet strict nutrition standards and contain certain food items. For example, a reimbursable breakfast must contain a fruit, a grain item, and milk. There are also limits on sugar, salt, and calories.

## WHO MONITORS SCHOOLS FOR COMPLIANCE WITH REGULATIONS?

The state agency oversees the school breakfast and lunch program at districts within the state, including auditing and monitoring for compliance. In most states, the state education agency is also the state agency for the school breakfast and lunch programs. The USDA oversees the state agencies.