

August 24, 2021

During the 2020/21 School Year, the School District of Waukesha participated in the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). We based this decision on the potential need of our school community as the health emergency evolved. As we began to discuss the best approach for the upcoming 2021/22 school year, we gathered data on the previous year's level of participation and better defined the program's potential impact on all aspects of the District's operation.

Here are some of the things that we discovered and what our thinking was:

- Free & Reduced Meal Applications: When the District decided to participate in the SFSP last year, families were no longer required to complete the forms to receive free/reduced-price meals.

On the surface, it made sense because everyone was getting a free meal(s). However, it elevated its importance as you think about how this data (free/reduced meal percentage) is used in our funding and other community assistance programs. We have a serious concern that our family's willingness to complete the applications would continue to decline over the period of time free meals were provided. Our data reinforces this concern:

Fiscal Year	Approved Free or Reduced Meal Applications	Total Number of Free or Reduced Meal Applications	Percent Change in Total Applications from 2018/19
2018/19	654	773	0.00%
2019/20	505	606	(21.6%)
2020/21	243	297	(61.6%)

It is our thinking that another year of free meals would further drop the number of students seeking to access these benefits via the application process by an additional 10-20%. When you consider this in with the fact that when the SFSP program ends, and we all return to the previous free/reduced meal program, we will start that next school year with very few approved applications on file for our neediest students. The prior year's approved applications cover students the first six weeks of the following year (under current rules) as we gather the new year's applications.

The state and federal funding component is also a significant factor in addressing current and future challenges. For example, the District's Title One Grant allocation uses the level of free & reduced lunch participation as one of their key determinants in calculating our annual allocation. This Title One measure of socio-economic need was also used in the recent and potential future distribution of Federal Covid Response Funding.

As you can see in the table above, with free & reduced meal students declining, it doesn't paint an accurate picture of need in our District. These artificially low levels of applications and participation may not only interrupt a student's ability to access meals, but it might also lead to the defunding of instructional programs that assist our students.

- A return to the National School Lunch Program: Deciding not to participate in the SFSP does not mean we are not providing for our neediest students. The District will be returning to the National School Lunch Program (free/reduced lunch program) that has served students across this country for decades. We will continue to have universal free breakfast at the schools that meet the program qualifications. We will continue to work directly with families on an individual basis.
- The School District of Waukesha may be the only District in the state choosing to leave the SFNP program and return to the National School Lunch program. That does not mean we are the only ones to not participate in the SFSP. There are District's (or just their high school's) in the state that don't participate in any federal lunch program that will likely not participate in the SFSP in 2021/22.
- When you compare last summer's number of meals served to the current summer's level of participation, it is down 40%. This indicates a lowering in the demand for this program.
- When looking at the free breakfast program, especially at the high school level, each student was handed a meal as they walked in the door. This led to a significant amount of uneaten food and meal-related materials (napkins, plastic wear, etc.) ending up in the trash.
- This is not a decision being made to bolster the Food Service program's bottom line. In all likelihood, looking only at this part of the District's operation, the Food Service program would have been better off staying with the SFSP. We feel that the other issues outweigh this small financial gain for this program.