



Opportunities for Program Recognition Featuring AHS and Laveen School District

March 17th, 2026

1:30 PM - 2:00 PM

Professional Standards Learning Codes: 4110, 4120



Meet Your Host



Kim Ruiz, RDN

HEALTH AND NUTRITION SERVICES SPECIALIST

Welcome!



upLIFT was designed specifically for child nutrition professionals like you. It offers resources to help you LEARN about nutrition, get INSPIRED on meal choices for your participants, FEED students healthy meals, and TEACH others in your community about your programs.

You can look forward to materials and monthly webinars featuring unique upLIFT content showcasing Arizona child nutrition professionals, and providing ongoing inspiration throughout the year. This will empower you to upLIFT your programs in your own unique way!

Overview

1. Overview of America's Healthiest Schools
2. Award Criteria and Guidance with Emily Thege
3. Guidance from the Field with Jennifer Gordon

Overview of America's Healthiest Schools

Overview

Alliance for a Healthier Generation

- Established in 2005 by the Clinton Foundation and the American Heart Association
- A national nonprofit organization focused on addressing childhood chronic illnesses while promoting equitable, “whole child” health
- Collaborates with schools, districts, and communities to enhance nutrition, boost physical activity, and foster social-emotional well-being
- Their programs and resources have benefited thousands of schools and youth organizations, ensuring that policies and practices encourage children to eat healthier and be more active.

Overview

America's Healthiest Schools

- Sponsored by the Alliance for a Healthier Generation
- A recognition program that celebrates schools excelling in promoting health for both students and staff.
- Has developed to assess schools in nine comprehensive areas, including nutrition, physical education, staff well-being, and family engagement.
- In 2025, 1,120 schools from 34 states and the District of Columbia were honored. This program is regarded as one of the longest-running and most effective initiatives aimed at enhancing school health.



Emily Thege, RD

America's Healthiest Schools
Alliance for a Healthier Generation





America's Healthiest Schools recognizes schools that are actively implementing policies and practices that support student health and well-being.

- School level application for one topic area
- Apply in up to nine topic areas
- National recognition

2026 Award Topics

Schools may apply in up to nine topic areas, based on policies and practices in place during the school year.



Increasing Family
& Community
Engagement



Strengthening Social-
Emotional Health &
Learning



Cultivating Staff
Well-Being



Improving
Nutrition & Food
Access



Implementing
Local School Wellness
Policy



Enriching Health
Education



Promoting
Tobacco-Free
Schools



Supporting School
Health Services



Bolstering Physical
Education & Activity

Arizona Awardees



America's Healthiest Schools 2025

1,120 schools in 34 states and Washington, DC earned recognition for creating healthier learning environments.



Ranks 6th
nationwide in number of
awarded schools.



79 schools
awarded in one or
more topics



Ranks 5th
nationwide in number
of schools awarded in
Nutrition & Food Access

Bringing Visibility and Attention

Award Recognition



Awardees receive:

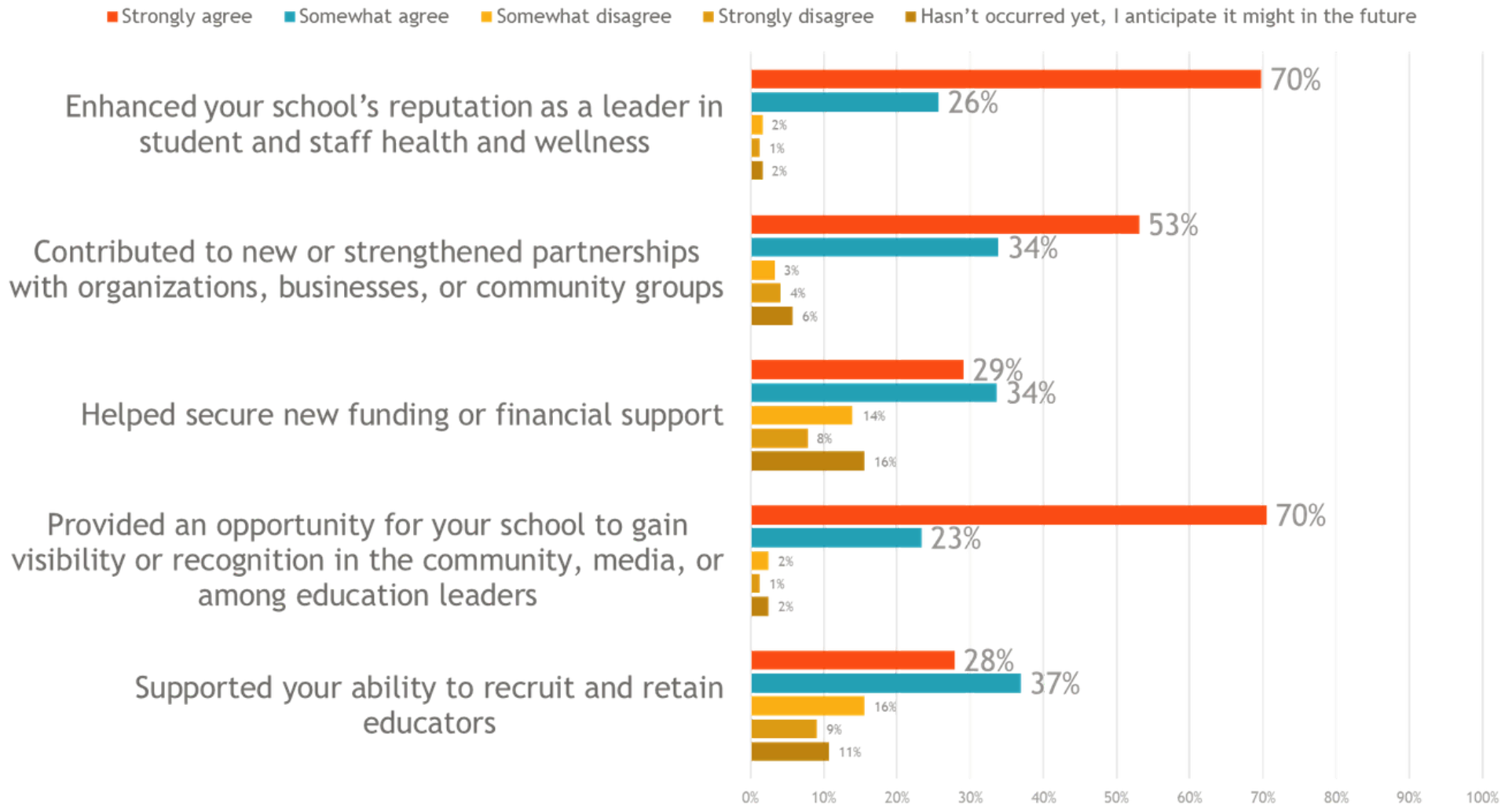
- Banner
- Communications digital award package
- National media campaign
- School name published on the list

America's Healthiest Schools shows up in:

- District Board Meetings
- Local News
- School Community
- Internal Communications



To what extent do you agree that being recognized as an America's Healthiest School has:



Visibility in the Media

Conway School named one of nation's healthiest schools

AVA RONNING Skagit Valley Herald Oct 31, 2025 0



Conway School students chat with Mount Vernon Parks and Recreation officials.

This Greensboro elementary embraced movement, named among nation's healthiest schools

WUNC NEWS
Published September 12, 2024 at 1:17 PM EDT



Greensboro Elementary Principal Paul Thomas says in a press release students at Greensboro Elementary School are active and healthy. The photo shows Mrs. Thomas and students "learning movement" in a classroom.

All Santa Cruz City Schools make America's Healthiest Schools list

District schools recognized across 4 different categories



gather at the Food Services farmers market at Santa Cruz High School Wednesday. For the third consecutive year, Santa Cruz City Schools have placed on the list of America's Healthiest Schools in four different categories. (Caroline - Santa Cruz Sentinel)

OLINE HEMPHILL | chemphill@santacruzsentinel.com | chemphill@santacruzsentinel.com
ED: October 8, 2025 at 4:54 PM PDT

Getting your Trinity Audio player ready...

SANTA CRUZ — For the third year in a row, all 10 Santa Cruz City Schools have placed on the list of America's Healthiest Schools, created by the nonprofit

Springhill Lake Elementary Only School in Maryland to Receive Top Award

Thirteen FGPS schools have been recognized as 2025 America's Healthiest Schools by the Alliance for a Healthier Generation — a national honor that highlights schools going above and beyond to support student and staff well-being.

Out of more than a thousand schools across the country recognized this year, these schools stand out for their commitment to creating healthy, supportive learning environments. From inspiring school meals to promoting physical activity, providing school health services and staff wellness, these schools are making health a priority every single day.

Among the honorees, Springhill Lake Elementary School received the 2025 All-Star Award, the highest recognition given by the Alliance. It's the only school in Maryland to earn this honor — and one of just 100 schools nationwide.

"We're incredibly proud to be recognized as an All-Star School—our team has worked so hard to earn that title," said Principal Tere Wilson. "We've made wellness a core part of our school culture by integrating regular physical activity, participating in a produce program, and sending fresh fruits and vegetables home with students each week. As a community school, we also partner with Boone Produce to provide monthly food boxes that help combat food insecurity and support healthy eating at home. Our students enjoy physical education twice a week, and one of the biggest shifts we've made is moving from a test-based rewards to activity-based incentives—like a special go-kart day—to encourage healthy habits in a fun way!"



The San Diego Union-Tribune

DEL MAR TIMES > DEL MAR TIMES NEWS

All 9 Del Mar Union School District schools named among America's healthiest schools 2025



One of DMUSD's visionary teachers leads a class in a warm-up before PE. (Courtesy of Del Mar Union School District)

Team Morale



“Seeing our banners each day fills us with pride and reminds us what's possible when we work together for wellness.”

Amanda Kennington
Healthy Community School Coordinator
Goose Creek Consolidated Independent School District

District Reputation



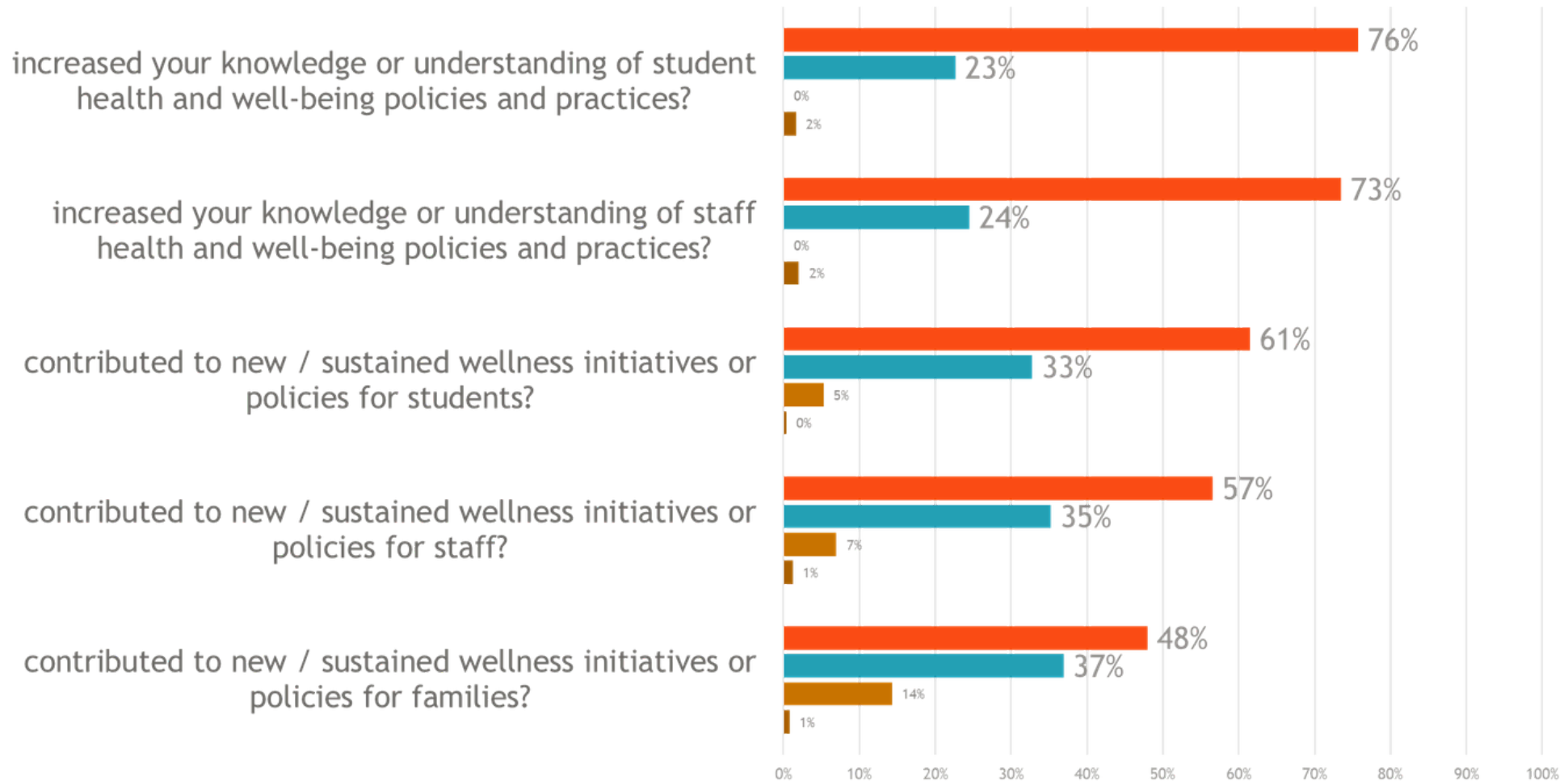
“We have built a strong tradition of supporting student health initiatives through the Alliance for a Healthier Generation. (10th year!) This recognition reflects the hard work and dedication across the district. Together, we are creating healthier learning environments where students can thrive.”

Martina Carrillo

Health & Physical Education Coordinator
Mission Consolidated Independent School District

To what extent has participating in the America's Healthiest School's recognition program:

Significantly Moderately Not at all, but I believe it could in the future Not at all



Increased Understanding



“Shannon, Frankie, and Tony, we couldn’t have done this without you. Your tireless work in the kitchen day in and day out shows your commitment to providing healthy food for our students every week.”

Sarah Lynch
Communications and Community
Engagement Coordinator
Westminster Community Charter School

Support for Wellness Initiatives



“John Haley, Food Service Manager, and Karen Magara, Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations, moved the district from heat and serve meals to scratch prepared foods.”

Sandra Brundage
Grant Administration
Salamanca High School



Salamanca, NY

Strengthening SHACs



Richland County School District One, SC celebrating a third consecutive year of district-wide participation with 48 awarded schools



AMERICA'S HEALTHIEST SCHOOLS



2026 Award Application is NOW OPEN!



Guidance from the Field

Laveen School District



Jennifer Gordon

Child Nutrition Services Director
Laveen School District





CONGRATULATIONS

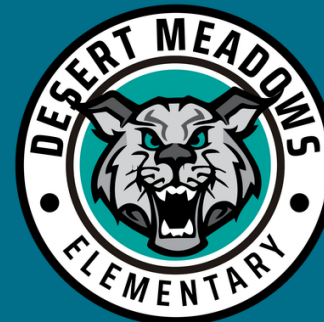
2025 AMERICA'S HEALTHIEST SCHOOLS



AMERICA'S
HEALTHIEST
SCHOOLS



9 TOPICS
ALL-STAR



7 TOPICS



5 TOPICS



3 TOPICS



3 TOPICS



4 TOPICS



3 TOPICS



1 TOPIC



3 TOPICS



ALLIANCE FOR A HEALTHIER GENERATION

IMPROVING NUTRITION & FOOD ACCESS AWARDEES

2023-2024



2024-2025



Application Process

Improving Nutrition & Food Access Topic Area

1. Identify at least three strategies that help to maximize school meal participation
 - Universal free meals
 - Alternative breakfast models
 - Alternative points of sale
 - Marketing/merchandising techniques
 - Seeking feedback from school community
2. Identify at least one nutrition education opportunity that occurred within the year for all students that involved collaboration between food service staff and teachers
3. Identify at least one community organization that helped to support nutrition and food access for the school community

Provide evidence and a narrative for all three criteria in this topic area.

Laveen

Ways Laveen Leads and Succeeds



Laveen's Strategies to Improve Nutrition & Food Access

Improving Food Access

- District-Wide Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)
- Alternate Breakfast Models and Second-Chance Breakfast
- At-Risk After School Meals Program
- Serve Free Lunches During Fall, Winter and Spring Break, Weekends
- Promote Community Partnership with St. Mary's Food Bank

Supporting Healthy Eating Behaviors

- Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program at 7 out of 9 Schools
- Nutrition education provided twice a week

Promoting Local and Culturally Relevant Foods

- Non-Congregate Waiver During Ramadan

Boosting School Meal Participation

- Engage Students and Promote School Meals During School Breakfast Week, School Lunch Week and School Lunch Hero Day
- Market and Promote School Meal Programs Through Quarterly Newsletters and Social Media
- Provide Student Taste Tests at all Schools Throughout the Year
- Lead District Wellness Committee Meetings Regularly

Building Supportive Nutrition Environments

- Sharing Bins
- Utilize Smarter Lunchroom Techniques
- Precept for Nutrition and Dietetic Interns Throughout the Year

Challenges

1. **Time Investment**

- Time required to create application responses and gather evidence
- School-based award - **applying for all schools**

2. **Gathering information and evidence**

- a. About any collaborative partnerships or school-based initiatives such as school gardens or other school activities/events

3. **Identifying schoolwide nutrition education**

- a. Highlighting any education that involved all students and showing evidence of the collaboration between food service staff and teachers
- FFVP is a great option, if participating
- School-wide taste testing opportunities
- Utilize interns

Tips for the Application

1. Visit the the Alliance Action Center online and become familiar with navigating the system
2. Review the Award Guide and ensure you meet all criteria
3. Review webinars and other resources provide by The Alliance for a Healthier Generation
4. Seek help and feedback from Alliance staff to ensure you're on the right track!
5. Grab your Low Hanging Fruit
 - a. *What are you doing now that makes you eligible?*
6. Type everything out beforehand in a Word document
7. Gather all of your uploaded materials
 - a. Photos, newsletters, flyers, social media post screen shots
8. Ensure uploads show how each item was communicated by each individual school
9. Copy and paste district-wide initiatives and then tailor to each school application

Resources



LOCAL KALE IN ARIZONA!

Harvest Months: November to April

Farms to get the local produce:

- AgriTopia Farms, Gilbert, AZ
- Blue Sky Organics, Litchfield Park, AZ
- Duncan Family Farms, Goodyear, AZ
- Healing Earth Farms (Formerly True Garden), Mesa, AZ
- New Roots (JRC), Tucson, AZ
- Maya's Farm, Phoenix, AZ
- Westover Farms, Tucson, AZ

Connect with Local Producers!
SCHOOL INTEREST FORM

LOCAL KALE RECIPE: Kale and Apple Salad

This refreshing salad starts with a dressing of honey, salt, pepper, lemon juice, vinegar, and oil. Mix it with kale and dried cranberries, then refrigerate overnight. The next day, add sliced apples to the marinated mixture and chill at 41°F until serving.

To ensure food safety with kale always thoroughly wash and trim before cooking and eating.

March 2020 | Taste AZ | The Arizona Department of Education
USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

QUICK MATH: KALE

Raw	Blanched
1 pound fresh, raw kale = 10 cups dark greens	1 pound blanched kale = 10 cups dark greens
1 cup blanched kale = 1/10 cup dark greens	1 cup blanched kale = 1/10 cup dark greens

Taste AZ

Fresh Perspectives Series

Examining common misconceptions surrounding school meals to offer guidance on how to steer the conversations within your community.

Claim: "School Meals Are Paid For by the School's General Education Fund"

Let's Take a Closer Look...

School nutrition departments operate as **self-sustaining, not-for-profit** "restaurants" within the district. They receive financial support from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for providing **"reimbursable meals."** A reimbursable meal is one that adheres to the meal pattern and includes sufficient food to promote a healthy diet. Here's how the reimbursement process works:

- USDA allocates funds to ADE (Arizona Department of Education).
- ADE distributes reimbursement funds to school nutrition programs based on the number of free, reduced price, or paid meals served each month.
- Reimbursement for school meals is maintained in a separate account from other school funds.

The Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) clearly outlines how these funds can be used, and are not permitted to support other departments within the school. School food service funds must be allocated for labor, equipment, food, kitchen utilities, and enhancements to the program.

Crucial Points to Chat About...

Here are our recommended points to offer up during any discussion to effectively explain how funding, revenue and financial support works in your program:

- Explain that federal reimbursements do not cover the "full cost" of every meal served which includes food, labor, equipment, supplies, and administrative overhead. Furthermore, any adult meals served cannot be reimbursed with federal funds, requiring school meal programs to charge, or find another avenue to pay for these meals.
- Inform that schools are prohibited from using federal funds to pay off unpaid meal debt.
- Clarify that schools do not make money or profit from selling lunches. Any surplus revenue must be reinvested back into the program for things like kitchen equipment or better ingredients.
- Discuss additional funding sources for school meals:
 - **Federal:** Schools that opt in to the USDA Foods in Schools Program can receive cash subsidies and "commodity" foods for every qualifying meal served.
 - **State:** Arizona provides subsidies for schools serving reduced-price meals, aiding lower-income families and assisting in reducing school meal debt.
 - **Local:** Includes student payments for meals and "competitive foods" like those from vending machines and a la carte sales.

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Fresh
Perspectives

Foodborne Illness Prevention

By staying informed about foodborne illness and vigilant on best practices for prevention, you can play a part in keeping food, and students safe at your school sites!

Foodborne Illness Defined

Foodborne illness, defined as any illness resulting from the consumption of **contaminated food**, can have a wide range of symptoms with varying degrees of severity. These illnesses are often caused by bacteria, viruses, parasites, or chemical substances entering the body through food or drink.

Food Safety Best Practice

Ensuring food safety is essential in preventing foodborne illnesses. By implementing robust safety practices, we can **minimize** the risk of contamination from harmful pathogens. Education and awareness are vital components in this goal, as they empower individuals to make **informed** choices and take proactive steps in maintaining a **safe food environment**.

Handle with Care Thaw frozen food in the refrigerator or under cold running water. Refrigerate perishable food within 2 hours.	Safe Food Storage Use the First In, First Out (FIFO) method, placing older products in front in order to use first.
Cook Use a food thermometer to ensure foods reach safe internal temperatures.	Separate Keep raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs separate from ready-to-eat foods in the grocery cart and refrigerator.
Clean Wash hands with soap and water for 20 seconds before & after handling food.	Produce Handling Rinse fresh fruits and vegetables under running water, even if they have inedible skins.

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TEACH

Nutrition Knowledge
Fact Sheet

<https://www.azed.gov/hns/nslp/uplift/>

Looking Ahead

Join us next month!

April upLIFT Webinar: Creating Confidence in the Kitchen - Scratch Cooking Edition

April 21, 2026

1:30 PM - 2:00 PM

Join us for an in-depth exploration of how to boost your confidence in the kitchen by mastering scratch cooking techniques! This interactive session will equip you with practical tips and tricks to make scratch cooking both enjoyable and efficient. Listen as we walk you through essential cooking methods, selecting ingredients, and creating delicious meals from scratch. Don't miss this chance to transform your kitchen experience and elevate your culinary confidence! Register now to secure your spot and take the first step toward mastering the art of scratch cooking.



Thank you!

Any questions?
Please type them into the Q&A now.

If you are attending the live webinar, you will receive an email once attendance has been completed. Once you have received this email, your training certificate will be available in Arizona Professional Learning Development (APLD).

If you are watching the recorded webinar, you can access the survey link and certificate of completion at the end of the webinar slides.



Congratulations!

You have completed the recorded webinar: **Unlocking Opportunities: Grants, Awards, and Recognition for Your Program!**

To request a certificate, please go to the next slide.

In order to count this training toward your Professional Standards training hours, the training content must align with your job duties.

Information to include when documenting this training for Professional Standards:

- Training Title: **Unlocking Opportunities: Grants, Awards, and Recognition for Your Program!**
- Length: **0.5 hour**

Please Note:

- Attendees must document the amount of training hours indicated regardless of the amount of time it takes to complete it.

Congratulations!

Requesting a Training Certificate

Please click on the link below to complete a brief survey about this webinar. Once the survey is complete, you will be able to print your certificate of completion from Survey Monkey.

*This will not appear in your ADE Professional Learning Development (APLD) Account.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/upliftrecordedwebinar>

The information below is for your reference when completing the survey:

- Training Title: **Unlocking Opportunities: Grants, Awards, and Recognition for Your Program!**

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To file a program discrimination complaint, a Complainant should complete a Form AD-3027, USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form which can be obtained online at: <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/USDA-OASCR%20P-Complaint-Form-0508-0002-50811-28-17Fax2Mail.pdf>, from any USDA office, by calling (866) 632-9992, or by writing a letter addressed to USDA. The letter must contain the complainant's name, address, telephone number, and a written description of the alleged discriminatory action in sufficient detail to inform the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (ASCR) about the nature and date of an alleged civil rights violation.

The completed AD-3027 form or letter must be submitted to USDA by:

Mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or

Fax: (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or

Email: program.intake@usda.gov

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