

Child Nutrition Programs—CBO’s January 2019 Baseline

Several programs and activities of the federal government provide nutrition assistance to school-age children. Under the National School Lunch Program, the School Breakfast Program, the Child and Adult Care Food Program, the Summer Food Service Program, and the Special Milk Program, the government provides commodities and cash payments to reimburse participating schools and institutions for at least part of the cost of each meal served. Reimbursement rates vary by program, meal type, and participant’s household income. Schools in the school breakfast and lunch programs—the two largest such programs—receive relatively small subsidies for meals served to students from households with income above 185 percent of the federal poverty level and larger subsidies for meals served to students from households with income below that level.

Federal child nutrition programs are funded mostly out of mandatory spending, with a small discretionary component. Annual appropriations for child nutrition programs generally cover the cost of providing benefits to all eligible applicants. However, CBO’s baseline is constructed under the assumption that in the event of a shortfall, the Department of Agriculture would request an additional appropriation.

