

# Universal Free School Meals For DC Students



DC Food Policy Council  
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# The Case for Universal Free School Meals for DC Students

**“Universal free school meals” is a policy that can be passed federally or at the state level to provide free breakfast and lunch to every student.**

- **Benefits:**
  - Increase access to school meals; and
  - Reduce stigma for children who rely on free meals.

**Federal waivers expired on June 30, 2022.**

- During the 2020-22 school year, USDA issued waivers for states to provide universal free school meals.
- For the 2022-23 school year, USDA now requires schools to once again collect meal applications and charge students who do not qualify for free meals.
- **Challenges of the current system:**
  - Creates burden for families;
  - Decreases participation in school meals; and
  - Creates stigma for children.



# Benefits of Universal Free School Meals

## Free school meals improve health and academic performance. Students:

- Improved academic achievement;
- Experienced lower obesity rates;
- Consumed more fruits and vegetables;
- Lowered risk of behavioral issues; and
- Experienced reduced nutrition deficiencies.

## Free school meals enhance racial equity. In DC:

- Black and Latinx students experience higher rates of food insecurity than white students;
- 29.3% of Latinx and 21% of Black households with children face food insufficiency; and
- For many children, school meals constitute the majority of their calories for the day.



# Universal Free School Meals would benefit DC children at a reasonable cost

Estimated new local budget cost just over: **\$8 million annually**

DC currently receives **\$50 million** in federal and local reimbursements annually for serving **breakfast, lunch, and snacks** during the school year.

Meal	Annual Cost
Breakfast	\$2.1 million
Lunch	\$5.9 million
Snacks	\$25,200
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$8 million</b>

**86%**

of the cost would be covered by existing federal and local reimbursements





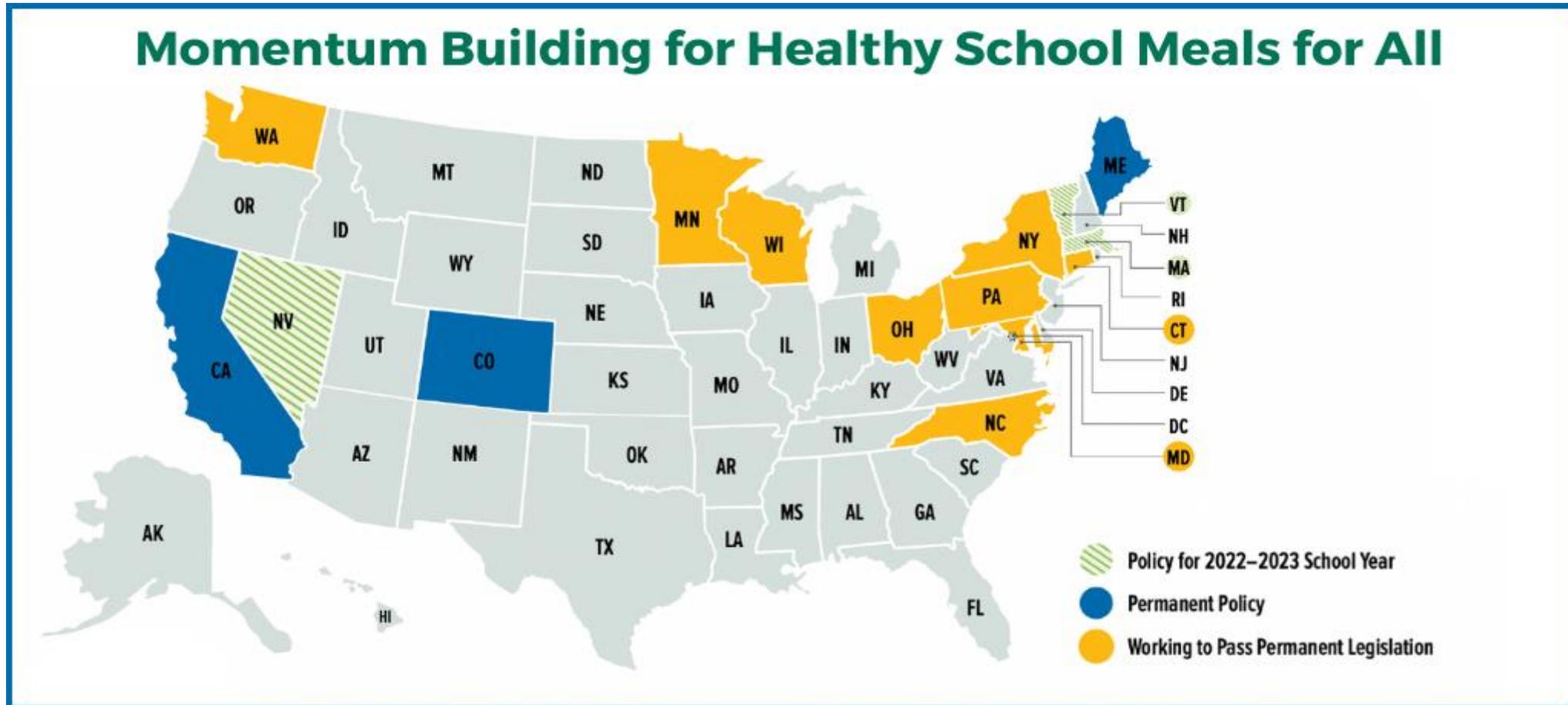
# DC's high participation in Community Eligibility Provision will drive down costs

**Community Eligibility Provision (CEP):** Federal program that enables schools to provide universal free meals when a high percentage of families qualify.

## DC Schools (DCPS and DCPCS) participating in CEP for the 2021-2022 school year

DC Schools CEP Participation	% Participating
Participating in CEP	180
Eligible for CEP	212
DC Schools	251
<b>Total</b>	<b>85% DC Schools Participate in CEP</b>

# Momentum is building nationally





# Bringing Universal Free School Meals to DC

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## Implementing Universal Free School Meals Benefits Students, Families, and School Administrators



OSSE, the implementing agency, would need the following local budget investment:

- \$8 million annually: support meal reimbursements for universal free school meals
- Additional funding would be needed to support updating systems and staff to educate, train, and maintain universal free school meals administration.