

District Vision: We prepare **every** student for lifelong success by developing critical thinkers who are curious and ready to engage in our society.

Department Mission: Provide quality nutritious meals that support the growth and development of our students to fuel their learning.

2024-25 Update:

The MN Free School Meals Program continued to provide state reimbursement to schools that participate in the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program so that students can have one breakfast and one lunch at no cost at school. The Free School Meals Program began on July 1, 2023.

What is included in the MN Free School Meals Program? In schools, like Northfield, who have implemented “Offer versus Serve”:

- At breakfast, the student must choose at least three items to be counted as a reimbursable meal. The student must choose a ½ cup serving of fruit or vegetable as part of their breakfast.
- At lunch, the student must choose at least three components to be counted as a reimbursable meal. The student must choose a ½ cup serving of fruit or vegetable as part of their lunch.

What is NOT included in the MN Free School Meals Program? Single item purchases and non-reimbursable meals are not free. Some examples include: • carton of milk • snack items • second entrée • A second breakfast or a second lunch • Meals that do not meet the minimum requirements are considered non-reimbursable meals • Meals served to teachers, staff, and other adults.

Breakfast: Breakfast has been proven to positively affect learning in children in terms of behavior, cognitive, and school performance. Offering free breakfast for all students at Northfield schools ensures that every student can be ready to learn every day. Data collected through January 31, 2025 shows that during the first semester of school we served **65,267** breakfasts. This was an increase in breakfast meals by approximately 1% from the 2023-24 school year during the same time period.

Lunch: Additional data collected through January 31, 2025 shows that we have served **228,250** lunches which is an increase of approximately 2% from the 2023-24 school year during the same time period.

While the overall percent increase in breakfast and lunch participation from 23-24 to 24-25 was minimal, it is important to recognize that we have sustained the substantial increase in participation after the implementation of the MN Free School Meals Program. The increase may have been even more significant without the impact of incremental declining enrollment.

Community School: Community School is offered at all three elementary schools and the middle school. Through March 31st, we have provided 12,945 after school snacks free to all students attending this program.

Global Trends Line at the High School: In alignment with our mission to offer appealing meals, student voice and choice were prioritized in the development of a new “Global Trends” menu. After extensive taste testing and student input, culturally diverse entrees were introduced, including items such as pupusas with a side of curtido slaw, tikka masala served with naan bread, tamales, swedish meatballs and cherry blossom chicken along with favorites such as orange chicken, general tso’s and our burrito bowl. This was a win-win for students and the department. We have seen increased lunch participation and students were able to have a voice in their lunch options.

Farm to School - MN Mondays at the High School: We continue each year to try and expand our farm to school program offering students access to locally and regionally grown produce and protein sources. We received a state funded Full Tray Grant in the amount of \$25,000 to purchase a new double convection oven for the high school and \$15,000 to purchase locally and regionally grown foods. Our food and equipment awards must be matched on a 1:1 basis. This year at the high school we introduced new locally produced items and featured them on our global trends line every Monday. We offered items that included Ferndale Farms turkey,

Deeply Rooted plant based crumbles in a vegetarian chili, burgers and pizza burgers using MN Beef.

St. Olaf Environmental Studies Students Partnership: The child nutrition department partnered with St. Olaf students in the Fall and Spring semesters completing an academic civic engagement (ACE) project. The Fall semester focused on wasted food and composting at Northfield High School. [They created this video that was shared out to students and staff.](#)

Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) Child Nutrition Review: The review ran smoothly and we did not have any findings. Commendations from our reviewer included: Outstanding attention to detail and documentation; work well together and assist each other as needed, show great dedication to the program and its continued success and growth.

District Wellness Update: MDE Commendations from our review included the comment “The Wellness Policy was complimented by both myself and a colleague; it is thorough, well-organized, and shows attention to detail. It aims to ensure that wellness is a priority for students across the district; it is well-written to outline flexibilities within reason. The food service director does a wonderful job communicating with other staff in the district to ensure that proper procedures are followed.” MDE Reviewer

2024-25 Budget Revision

The adopted budget included revenues of **\$2,550,906** and expenditures of **\$2,746,877**. Due to higher than expected food costs and a revised revenue forecast with actual participation, as well as the actual reimbursement rates that were shared in June of 2024 we recommend the revised budget include revenues of **\$2,864,620** and expenditures of **\$3,096,321**. This represents an increase in both revenues and expenditures over the adopted budget. The increase in expenditures outpaced the increase in revenues, resulting in a lower fund balance projection. The adopted budget anticipated ending 2024-25 at **\$817,425** and the revised budget anticipates ending at **\$781,695**.

2025-26 Proposed Budget

Revenue Assumptions: Revenue for the school year 2025-26 was calculated using data from the previous three school years' actual budgets with an emphasis on 2024-25. It is our goal to provide quality nutritious meals for all students that support their growth and development to fuel learning potential but also understand as a business operation the need to remain fiscally responsible. School Nutrition Program funds may not subsidize meals served to non-program adults. The adult meal price must be set high enough so the customer fully pays the cost of the meal. For school year 25-26 updated minimum adult meal prices and second meal prices will be available from MDE this summer once reimbursement rates are received from the USDA. We are proposing to keep adult and second lunch prices at \$5.00, unless the required minimum exceeds this amount, and increase ala carte prices by approximately 7% to keep pace with inflation. The proposed budget revenue for the school year 2025-26 is **\$2,840,324**.

Expenditure Assumptions: The primary food vendor has expressed uncertainty regarding potential food cost impacts in the upcoming year. This uncertainty stems from concerns related to proposed tariffs and the Buy American regulation mandating that effective for the 2025-26 school year, 90% of food purchases be sourced within the United States. While this requirement will necessitate enhanced tracking within the Child Nutrition Department, it has also raised concerns among manufacturers about their ability to fulfill the volume necessary to school food authorities across the country. The current Consumer Price Index (CPI) for food indicates a 2-3% increase over the past 12 months, with a higher percentage observed for meat. To ensure a conservative budget, a 7% increase in food costs is projected, and this will be monitored closely. The staffing budget is established based on the existing staffing model, forecasted with the agreed-upon contract increases. In addition, the expenditure budget includes an increase in the indirect cost chargeback from the general fund as identified in the priority-based budget process. The proposed budget expenditures for the 2025-26 school year total **\$3,325,982**.

Budget Plan: We propose a 2025-26 budget with total revenue of **\$2,840,324** and expenditures of **\$3,325,982**. Due to the above-mentioned expenses, we anticipate spending down our fund balance for the 25-26 school year. Our department's goal is to work towards maintaining 14% of expenditures to be consistent with other funds in the district. For 2025-26, 14% of our expenditures would be approximately \$465,637. Our projected fund balance is below the maximum fund balance requirement from MDE. The fund balance maximum for the school year 2025-26 should not exceed \$1,108,661 or 3 months' average operating expenditures, assuming a 9 month operating year. We are projecting to end FY26 with a fund balance of **\$296,037**.