Executive Summary: School Nutrition Update

Orange County Schools (OCS) remains committed to ensuring students have consistent access to nutritious, high-quality meals that support their health, well-being, and academic success. Through strategic investments, federally funded nutrition programs, and community partnerships, the district continues to strengthen school nutrition services while expanding opportunities for students to develop lifelong healthy eating habits.

This report provides a comprehensive overview of School Nutrition Services for the 2026–2027 school year, including a comparative analysis of meal participation during the same reporting period in 2025–2026. It highlights key initiatives designed to reduce barriers to food access, increase student participation, and enhance the quality and variety of meals available across the district.

The report addresses five key areas:

- Community Eligibility Provision (CEP): Expanding equitable access to breakfast and lunch at no cost to students at eligible schools.
- Meal Participation Summary: Evaluating year-over-year participation trends and the reach of school nutrition services.
- Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP): Introducing students to nutritious food options through supplemental snacks and nutrition education.
- Farm to Fork Program: Strengthening local agricultural partnerships and incorporating locally sourced foods into school meals.
- Summer Food Service Program: Addressing food insecurity and maintaining access to nutritious meals beyond the traditional school year.

Collectively, these initiatives demonstrate the district's ongoing commitment to operational excellence and student-centered nutrition services that contribute to a healthy and supportive learning environment.

Executive Report

The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) is a federally authorized meal service option that allows eligible schools serving high concentrations of economically disadvantaged students to provide breakfast and lunch at no cost to all enrolled students, regardless of individual household income. For the 2026–2027 school year, seven schools participate in CEP, providing all enrolled students at these locations access to breakfast and lunch at no cost.

Participating schools include:

- A.L. Stanback Middle School
- Central Elementary School
- Efland-Cheeks Global Elementary School
- Gravelly Hill Middle School
- Grady Brown Elementary School
- New Hope Elementary School
- Partnership Academy High School

CEP School Participation: Comparing the first quarter of FY26 to FY25 across our seven active sites, increased student participation drove a 17.17% jump in core breakfast and lunch service—an additional 9,701 student meals served.

- **Program Drivers:** Growth was broad-based across both main programs. Student lunch participation grew by 17.80% (+6,209 meals), and student breakfast participation rose across every single site for a combined gain of 16.16% (+3,492 meals).
- **Higher student participation:** Higher student demand drove a 17.17% increase (+9,701 meals) in core breakfast and lunch service across Orange County Schools' seven active sites from Q1 2025 to Q1 2026. Including reimbursable snacks, total student meal volume grew by 16.20% (+9,662 meals).

CEP School Participation Analysis for Quarter 1

School	July 1 - September 30, 2025	July 1 - September 30, 2026	Net Change
A.L. Stanback Middle School	6,626	9,990	+3,364
Central Elementary School	6,269	6,507	+238
Efland-Cheeks Global Elementary School	13,672	14,831	+1,159
Gravelly Hill Middle School	6,228	10,122	+3,894
Grady A. Brown Elementary School	8,002	8,978	+976
New Hope Elementary School	14,625	14,913	+288
Partnership Academy High School	1,073	855	-218
Overall	**56,495**	**66,196**	**+9,701**

Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP)

Orange County Schools is expanding access to nutritious food options through a $107,671 federal grant award from the United States Department of Agriculture's Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP). This competitive grant supports the introduction of fresh fruits and vegetables to elementary students, particularly at schools serving high concentrations of economically disadvantaged children. The program is designed to

encourage healthier eating habits, broaden students' exposure to fresh produce, and strengthen nutrition education during the school day. From October 2026 through May 2027, students at four OCS elementary schools will receive complimentary fresh fruit and vegetable snacks twice weekly, provided outside of regular breakfast and lunch service.

Participating schools include:

- Central Elementary School
- Efland-Cheeks Global Elementary School
- New Hope Elementary School
- Pathways Elementary School

Beyond providing additional nutritious food, FFVP incorporates an educational component that connects healthy eating to classroom learning. Teachers receive weekly instructional resources highlighting the fruits and vegetables being served, allowing students to explore nutritional benefits, discover new foods, and develop a greater understanding of healthy choices.

The program provides several important benefits to the district:

- Expanded Nutritional Access: All students at participating schools receive fresh produce snacks at no cost to families.
- Nutrition Education: Classroom resources reinforce healthy eating habits and introduce students to a wider variety of fruits and vegetables.
- Equitable Student Support: Federal funding prioritizes schools with high concentrations of economically disadvantaged students.
- Whole-Child Wellness: Supplemental nutrition opportunities contribute to a school environment that promotes student health and readiness to learn.

The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program demonstrates how strategic use of external funding can enhance existing school nutrition services while creating meaningful educational experiences for students.

Farm to Fork Program — Strengthening Local Agricultural Partnerships

Orange County Schools continues to strengthen connections between school nutrition and local agriculture through its Farm to Fork initiative. In partnership with Firsthand Foods, the district is incorporating locally sourced beef patties into meal offerings at Orange High School and Cedar Ridge High School. The beef is sourced from local farmer David Pope of D&D Cattle Company, serving the Cedar Grove area, with involvement from local 4-H youth who helped raise the cattle. This initiative represents an opportunity to connect the district's school nutrition program with the agricultural community while highlighting the important role local farmers and youth agricultural organizations play in regional food systems.

Summer Food Service Program — Extending Nutrition Beyond the School Year

Recognizing that students' nutritional needs continue beyond the traditional academic calendar, Orange County Schools remains committed to providing access to meals during the summer months. Through funding from

the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the district supports summer nutrition services under the SUN Meals umbrella, which includes federally authorized programs such as the Summer Food Service Program and Seamless Summer Option. These programs help bridge nutritional gaps when school is not in session, ensuring eligible children and families have continued access to meals at no cost. The following schools served as non-congregate meal sites:

- New Hope Elementary
- Pathways Elementary
- Gravelly Hill Middle

Other sites included:

- A.L. Stanback Middle
- Cedar Grove Community Center
- Efland Cheeks Community Center
- Hillsborough Elementary
- Orange High
- Orange Middle
- River Park Elementary
- Union Grove United Methodist Church
- Gravelly Middle
- New Hope Elementary

Below is a comparison table that outlines the summer meals distributed in 2025 versus 2026. The district reported increased meal service volume in 2026, reflecting substantial growth in summer nutrition program utilization. The table shows 194,391 meals and snacks were served in 2026, an increase of 27,454 (16.4%) compared to 2025.

Summer Food Service Program: 2025 vs. 2026 Meal Comparison

Meal Category	2025 Total	2026 Total	% Increase
Breakfast	65,958	70,251	+7%
Lunch	89,204	110,594	+24%
Snacks	11,775	13,546	+15%
Grand Total	**166,937**	**194,391**	**+16.4%**