

## Policy Document: Germany's School Food Programs

### Overview

Germany does not have a school food program on a national level. Each federal state government is responsible for school education and school meals within its borders. This results in a broad variety of institutional, organizational, and financial structures of school meal systems.

In western Germany, the development of full school meal provision is a new field, because vending machines and school kiosks were the dominant forms for on-grounds school food availability. With the expansion of the all-day-school model since 2003 (formerly classes finished around lunchtime, so students were able to eat at home), more professional caterers engage in school meal provision.<sup>1</sup>

### Policy

Five ministries of Germany participate in designing healthy and sustainable meals: the Ministry of Science and Education, Ministry of Food and Agriculture, the Ministry of Environment and Nature Conservation, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women & Youth. Specific departments of each minister in all sixteen federal states develop their strategies independently. If other resources are to be involved, ministries will exchange content.<sup>2</sup>

National laws regulating food are in place:<sup>3</sup>

- A key regulation of the food law is Regulation (EC) No 178/2002 laying down the general principles and requirements of food law (Lebensmittel-Basisverordnung, [LM-BasisVO]).
- Like all EU regulations, it applies directly in all EU member states and fundamentally regulates how the protection of health and the prevention of fraudulent or deceptive practices is to be guaranteed at all stages of the process (“from farm to fork”).
- It includes several general principles, such as food safety, transparency, or the principle of public information, risk management, and traceability.
- Another general principle is the responsibility of food businesses, specifically the duty of care, which includes the principle of staged responsibility.

The federal states are responsible for establishing educational curriculum and the requirements of nutrition in schools. Communities are responsible for building schools, designing eating rooms, hiring contacting caterers, school room financing, and personnel management. The national government sometimes provides investments in school infrastructures and buildings.

Since traditionally, students finished school by noon and school lunches were unnecessary, but all-day schools have increasingly become the norm, by resolution of the Standing Conference of

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<sup>1</sup> Strassner, C., Noelting, B., Reimann, S. 2009. School food provision in Germany. From: [https://orgprints.org/id/eprint/17418/1/Paper\\_submission\\_-\\_Strassner.pdf](https://orgprints.org/id/eprint/17418/1/Paper_submission_-_Strassner.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> German Federal Ministries. n.d. From: <https://www.deutschland.de/en/topic/politics/germany-and-europe/federal-ministries>

<sup>3</sup> DGE Quality Standard for Meals in Schools. 2020. In Form. DGE, Bonn. From: [https://www.schuleplusessen.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/medien/DGE-QST/DGE\\_QST\\_Meals\\_Schools.pdf](https://www.schuleplusessen.de/fileadmin/user_upload/medien/DGE-QST/DGE_QST_Meals_Schools.pdf)

the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK)<sup>4</sup>, all-day schools are now obliged to offer lunch. According to the KMK, this affects around 3.5 million schoolchildren nationwide.<sup>5 6</sup> What this lunch looks like varies from state to state, from municipality to municipality, from school to school. "Nationwide there is not even a regulation as to whether it has to be a warm meal or whether a cold meal is sufficient," according to Stephanie Klein from the German Nutrition Society's "IN FORM in communal catering" project.<sup>7</sup>

## **Funding**

The country has a program to support school expenses called "Education and Participation," which includes free lunches for children who live in households at risk of poverty. In 2020, only 25% of eligible people applied for and redeemed free lunch through this program, due to assorted reasons: difficulty applying, time-consuming or unclear process, or unknown information.<sup>8</sup>

Most of the funding is covered by the school authorities on the community level.<sup>9</sup>

Local school authorities pay for operating costs, personnel costs, investment costs, and administrative costs. The parents pay for food costs, partial personnel costs, and partial operating costs.

Since 2019, Berlin (federal state) offers free school meals for students in the 1st to 6th grade-the costs for the school lunches are borne by the taxpayer.

From 2020, the price per serving will be adjusted so that the organic share of 50% can be achieved and regional foods can be used if available. In addition, certain foods will be mandated as fair trade.<sup>10</sup> *In many other federal states, the parents pay for meals.*

The amount spent on school food fees varies geographically. Parents usually pay 3-4 euros per school meal per day.

47.5% of schools in Germany have dining rooms.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs is the oldest conference of ministers in Germany and plays a significant role as an instrument for the coordination and development of education in the country. It is a consortium of ministers responsible for education and schooling, institutes of higher education and research and cultural affairs, and in this capacity formulates the joint interests and objectives of all 16 federal states. See: <https://www.kmk.org/kmk/information-in-english/standing-conference.html>

<sup>5</sup> The Coalition for Healthy School Meals. 2021. Germany's School Food Program Webinar. From: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9bdgtEBYnjU>

<sup>6</sup> Diehl, D. 2021. Lots of Cooks No Recipes. Tagesschau. From: [https://www.tagesschau-de.translate.google.com/inland/gesellschaft/schulessen-105.html?\\_x\\_tr\\_sl=de&\\_x\\_tr\\_tl=en&\\_x\\_tr\\_hl=en-US&\\_x\\_tr\\_pto=sc](https://www.tagesschau-de.translate.google.com/inland/gesellschaft/schulessen-105.html?_x_tr_sl=de&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=en-US&_x_tr_pto=sc)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> The Coalition for Healthy School Meals. 2021. Germany's School Food Program Webinar. From: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9bdgtEBYnjU>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Blog über Schulverpflegung und Schulesen. 2020. Die Schulköche GmbH. From: <https://dieschulkoeche.de/blog-schulverpflegung-schulesen-berlin/>

<sup>11</sup> The Coalition for Healthy School Meals. 2021. Germany's School Food Program Webinar. From: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9bdgtEBYnjU>

In terms of furniture for the dining room, around 98% of the schools are paid or paid in part by the local school authorities.<sup>12</sup>

For kitchen equipment, around 93% of schools are paid or paid in part by the local school authorities.<sup>13</sup>

56% of the operating costs (such as electricity and water) are paid by the schools. The remaining costs are negotiated between the schools and the meal providers.<sup>14</sup>

### **Food Literacy Education**

Nutrition education is not a central subject in schools in Germany.

In some schools that have kitchens (around 44.6% of schools in Germany), the students have weekly learning sessions in which they are taught what kind of food is healthy and how to prepare them.

Some school kiosks that provide snacks are led by kids, parents, and teachers, with some focusing on fair trade products or organic food. This is also where hands-on food literacy and ownership are established.

### **Nutrition**

Germany's school food philosophy includes:<sup>15</sup>

- Increase in mental and physical performance during the school day.
- Avoiding or reducing nutrition related to chronic disease.
- Contributing to the enjoyment and well-being of the students.
- Improvement of the immune system.
- Improvement of quality of life.
- Promoting sustainable eating behavior.

Germany has food and nutrient standards for school food.<sup>16</sup> The German Nutrition Society (DGE) sets them.<sup>17</sup>

The four goals that Germany keeps in mind when discussing sustainable nutrition include:

- Health: Health-promoting food consumption contributes to higher life expectancy, higher healthy life expectancy, and greater well-being for all.
- Social Aspect: Food consumption that guarantees minimum social standards along value chains.
- Environment: Environmentally and climate-friendly food consumption that fits in with Germany's medium and long-term sustainability goals.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> The Coalition for Healthy School Meals. 2021. Germany's School Food Program Webinar. From: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9bdgtEBYnjU>

<sup>16</sup> School Food Policy Country Factsheets. 2011. European Commission, From: [https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/sites/default/files/jrc-school-food-policy-factsheet-germany\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/sites/default/files/jrc-school-food-policy-factsheet-germany_en.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> The German Nutrition Society (DGE). n.d. From: <https://www.dge.de/en/>

- Animal Welfare: Food consumption that supports greater animal welfare and thus meets the changing ethical demands of society.

The German Nutrition Society (DGE) has set standards for school food in some German states. The Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) wants those standards to be spread federally. They joined forces to campaign for quality standards for school lunches to be anchored across the board in all schools since school catering falls "in the responsibility of the municipalities as school authorities", says a spokesperson for the Ministry of Consumer Protection Baden-Württemberg. There are therefore no binding requirements on the part of the state government planned. To promote high-quality and child-friendly food in school, the ministry offers an extensive range of support, such as several model projects.<sup>18</sup>

As early as 2016, the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture set up a National Quality Center for Nutrition in Day Care Centers and Schools (NQZ). It helps to ensure that children and youngsters eat well and enjoy eating in all daycare centres and schools in Germany. There are also networking centers for school catering support in every federal state.<sup>19</sup>

Germany focuses on bringing sustainability in school food quality standards and school food management. The German Nutrition Society is discussing different projects on action plans to improve school foods and how to implement them in some federal states.

### **Implementation**

On managing the local school food programs, the school authorities (including parents, students, teachers) and the community (including networking centers, supported by regional and federal states) work closely together, yet do not have an established workflow.

All-day schools are also required by the KMK to provide heated meals and more parents have been asking for all-day schooling (where meals are necessary), hence school food is in many discussions. Cafeterias (where hot meals are provided), bistros, and kiosks are often seen together.

Lunch offers are only compulsory in all-day schools. In some federal states, all-day schools are the rule (Hamburg, Berlin), while other states only have 50% of schools that are all-day schools. 3.4 million out of 8.6 million students in Germany are in all-day schools, which means less than 40% are receiving lunches from their school.<sup>20 21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Taste is a Matter of Luck, 2020, Taz Futurzwei. From: [https://taz-de.translate.goog/Standards-beim-Schulessen/15703158/?\\_x\\_tr\\_sl=de&\\_x\\_tr\\_tl=en&\\_x\\_tr\\_hl=en&\\_x\\_tr\\_pto=sc](https://taz-de.translate.goog/Standards-beim-Schulessen/15703158/?_x_tr_sl=de&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=en&_x_tr_pto=sc)

<sup>19</sup> Nationales Qualitätszentrum für Ernährung in Kita und Schule. 2021. From: <https://www.nqz.de/navigation/sub-footer-navigation/english> Diehl, D. 2021. Lots of Cooks No Recipes. Tagesschau. From: [https://www-tagesschau-de.translate.goog/inland/gesellschaft/schulessen-105.html?\\_x\\_tr\\_sl=de&\\_x\\_tr\\_tl=en&\\_x\\_tr\\_hl=en-US&\\_x\\_tr\\_pto=sc](https://www-tagesschau-de.translate.goog/inland/gesellschaft/schulessen-105.html?_x_tr_sl=de&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=en-US&_x_tr_pto=sc)

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> The Coalition for Healthy School Meals. 2021. Germany's School Food Program Webinar. From: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9bdgtEBYnjU>

Many schools still cannot offer or prepare school meals in school, instead depending on caterers and contract providers.<sup>22</sup>

In terms of service personnel for school food services:<sup>23</sup>

- Approximately 60% are paid or paid in part by the local school authorities.
- Around 40% are paid by the parents or people who paid for the students' school meals.

Around 30% of the schools do not have proper contracts with caterers or lunch providers. These schools do have providers, but with no commitment to the quality of the food, therefore they cannot control the food quality. Even for schools that have contracts, meal quality is still often not specified clearly in the contracts.<sup>24</sup>

In terms of procurement, there are networking hubs for school food in Germany which they have in every federal state, are providing guidelines and helping documents in how to deal with sustainable and European procurement regulations although not every local authority has problems with the EU law level constraints because some purchase under the amount of money that triggers EU guidelines.

Catering systems: Classically, there are four different catering systems in the communal catering of lunch for school children. These determine how the school meals are made. In addition to the fresh or mixed kitchen, there is the Cook & Serve model, Cook & Chill (chilled food), Cook & Freeze (frozen food), and Cook & Hold (warm food). All systems include the activities of purchasing, preparation, production, order picking, delivery as well as issuing, and cleaning. There are significant differences in the production processes. The dishes are either freshly prepared on-site or in an external production facility. Refrigerated and frozen meals are temporarily stored twice and re-thermalized before serving.

Here are some key critical factors for successful lunch at school programs according to a leading German caterer, Die Schulköche GmbH:

- Sufficient time for lunch (long lunch breaks of at least 1 hour)
- Modern, comfortable rooms (dining room, cafeteria, cafeteria), ideally tailored to the different age groups, as high school students, for example, have different demands and expectations than primary school students.
- Friendly, courteous staff when serving food.
- Optimized processes for serving food to reduce waiting times and queues.
- Appealing, varied, and contemporary menus with modern and traditional recipes.
- Consideration of the wishes and expectations of students, parents, and teachers through active participation options (e.g., meal committees, opinion polls).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Blog über Schulverpflegung und Schulessen. 2020. Die Schulköche GmbH.

From: <https://dieschulkoeche.de/blog-schulverpflegung-schulessen-berlin/> Also see <https://dieschulkoeche.de/>

In addition to these factors, influences such as volume, the lighting of rooms, and the general equipment with tables, chairs, and other items naturally also play a key role in optimizing the framework conditions for school catering. Teachers should also provide pedagogical support to the students at lunch, for example by conveying “rules of behavior when eating together” or by promoting nutritional education.

In practice, it is often common for certain activities, such as serving food, to be conducted by a partner or by the school itself. There are other supporting activities to be considered, without which the execution of the primary activities is not possible:<sup>26</sup> Eating rooms in Germany should be quiet, comfortable, well-ventilated – the students and school directors should be satisfied.

Low cafeteria lunch attendance, particularly among older students, puts economic pressure on caterers to optimize their meal revenue, by offering desserts.

Because bakeries, supermarkets, and fast-food restaurants are nearby, competition is inevitable. These competitions actively market soft drinks, sweets, or lower-cost meal alternatives to students.

Other programs/institutions that are promoting sustainable school feeding in Germany are InForm initiative (guidelines, even for snacks!), School Food Networking Hubs (“Vernetzungsstellen “), KEEKS-Schulen (Climate-efficient kitchens at schools), Field-to-school (European) network, and the EU Farm-to-Fork project “SchoolFood4Change.”<sup>27</sup>

### **Oversight and challenges**

The Berlin Senate has developed detailed quality criteria that are regularly checked by a control body at the providers of school catering.

School or daycare providers are responsible for clear structures to frequently look after external quality assurance for the Education and Participation program which supports school expenses.<sup>28</sup>

In terms of quality management of school food:

- If it is self-management: the local school authorities have frequent commissioned inspections and discussions with the kitchen staff.
- If it is (partly) external management: the local school authorities only have a few discussions with meal providers, school staff, and committee. Incoming inspections of procured goods and sample meals are conducted. Contract specifications are done poorly.<sup>29</sup>

Fragmentation is an issue that can be solved by a national school food program. Standards for nutrition and implementation should also be created.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> The Coalition for Healthy School Meals. 2021. Germany’s School Food Program Webinar. From: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9bdgtEBYnjU>

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

According to Michael Polster and the German School Catering Network, school lunches in Germany have been criticized as too expensive, too bland, and with too little organic content - and not just from concerned parents. The network organized a 12th German School Catering Congress in Berlin, November 2021. Polster sees a need for action on everything to do with school canteens, including adding food literacy activities, such as farm field trips.<sup>30</sup>

The German scientific advisory board recommended the German government make school meals free for all students. The calculated amount of money that would cost to give free meals at school, and per year was 5.5 billion Euros. This amount includes food, personnel, and the environment. The board cites that children are important for Germany's future so giving them free meals and making sure they consume a healthy diet will ensure that their future will be bright.<sup>31</sup> Pledging federal funding and mandating relevant standards across all states would improve health and educational outcomes nationally.

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<sup>30</sup> Deutschlandfunk Kultur. 2021. School catering must become part of the school philosophy. Michael upholstered in conversation with Liane von Billerbeck. From: [https://www-deutschlandfunkkultur-de.translate.googleusercontent.com/translate?hl=en&pt=00.html?\\_x\\_tr\\_sl=de&\\_x\\_tr\\_tl=en&\\_x\\_tr\\_hl=en&\\_x\\_tr\\_pto=sc](https://www-deutschlandfunkkultur-de.translate.googleusercontent.com/translate?hl=en&pt=00.html?_x_tr_sl=de&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=en&_x_tr_pto=sc)

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.