



SCHOOL MEAL PARTICIPATION TRACKER

An Analysis of USDA FNS School Breakfast and Lunch Data



ABSTRACT

An analysis of SY 2021-22 breakfast and lunch average daily participation (ADP) and FY 2021-22 total meals served, as well as a preview of SY 2022-23 preliminary ADP data.

School Nutrition Association

March 2023



About This Report

This report compares the most recently available USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) data on school meal service to pre-pandemic data. The report provides insight on trends in school meal participation, before, during and after the existence of federal pandemic waivers that allowed schools to offer free meals to all students by:

- comparing average daily participation (ADP) in school lunch and breakfast programs in school year (SY) 2021-22, when all schools were permitted to offer free meals to all students without an application, to pre-pandemic school years (SY 2018-19, 2017-18, and 2016-17), when students had to apply for free or reduced price meals or pay full price;
- comparing total meals served in fiscal year (FY) 2022 to FY 2019;
- and providing a preview of ADP in lunch and breakfast programs in SY 2022-23, when most schools had to return to requiring students to apply for free or reduced price meals and charging students if they are ineligible for free meals.

SY 2019-20 and 2020-21 are conspicuously absent – this is because most schools were serving meals through the School Food Service Program (SFSP), and the unit of analysis for data provided during this period was total meals served; no ADP figures were available from that program (SFSP) or time period. Beginning in SY 2021-22, schools were required to return to serving meals within the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), the School Breakfast Program (SBP), or the Seamless Summer Option (SSO), which provide ADP and meals served data and allow for comparison to pre-pandemic data. For further information on pandemic school meal service data and trends, please see SNA's report [*School Nutrition Meals Served and Reimbursements During the COVID-19 Pandemic*](#).

The data analyzed are from two sources. First, SY 2022-23 and 2021-22 data are drawn from the National Level Monthly Data breakfast and lunch reports (published March 10, 2023) publicly available at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/child-nutrition-table>. Data from pre-pandemic school years are drawn from historical, finalized USDA FNS Keydata reports provided by USDA FNS staff by request.



The SY 2022-23 and SY 2021-22 data are based on preliminary data submitted by various reporting agencies. Users should anticipate changes in future reports as reporting agencies finalize data.

SNA would like to thank the USDA FNS staff for providing data at request and generously providing guidance for this analysis.

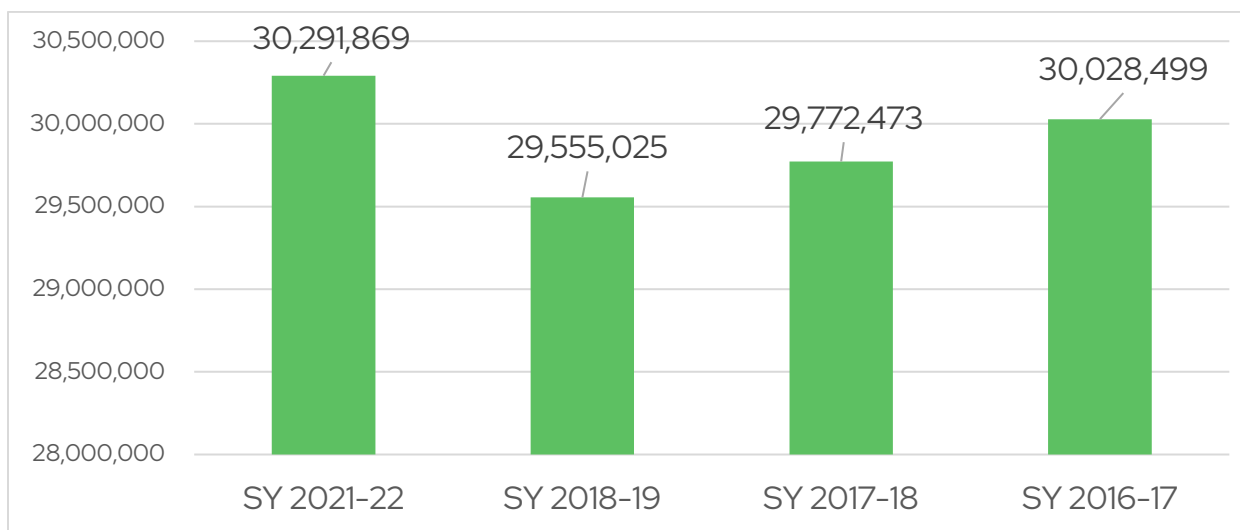


Average Daily Participation (ADP)

Lunch

Average daily lunch participation was 30.29 million students served in SY 2021-22, compared to 29.56 million in SY 2018-19. This was a 2.49% increase in ADP between SY 2018-19 and SY 2021-22.

Figure 1. Average Daily Lunch Participation: SY 2021-22 vs. Pre-Pandemic Years



Note: SY 2021-22 includes NSLP lunches and SSO lunches. All pre-pandemic school years include NSLP lunches only. SY 2019-20 and SY 2020-21 not included because the majority of schools were serving meals through the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the unit of analysis was total meals served; no average daily participation figures were available from that program or time period.

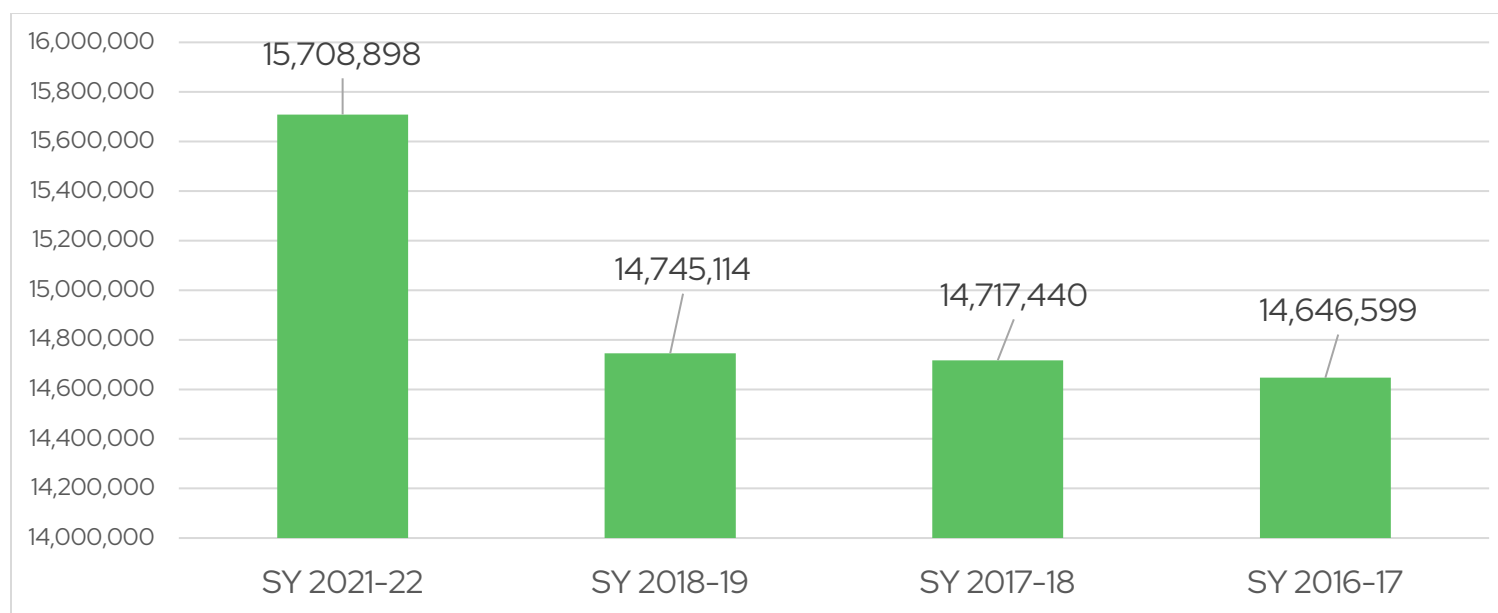
Sources: SY 2021-22 - National Level Monthly Data - National School Lunch Program, February 10, 2023. Available at: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/child-nutrition-tables>. All other SYs - USDA FNS KeyData Reports.



Breakfast

Average daily breakfast participation was 15.71 million students served in SY 2021-22, compared to 14.75 million in SY 2018-19. This is a 6.54% increase in ADP between SY 2021-22 and SY 2018-19.

Figure 2. Average Daily Breakfast Participation: SY 2021-22 vs. Pre-Pandemic Years



Note: SY 2021-22 includes SBP breakfasts and SSO breakfasts. All pre-pandemic school years include SBP breakfasts only. SY 2019-20 and SY 2020-21 not included because the majority of schools were serving meals through the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the unit of analysis was total meals served; no average daily participation figures were available from that program or time period. Sources: SY 2021-22 - National Level Monthly Data - School Breakfast Program, February 10, 2023. Available at: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/child-nutrition-tables>. All other SYs - USDA FNS KeyData Reports.

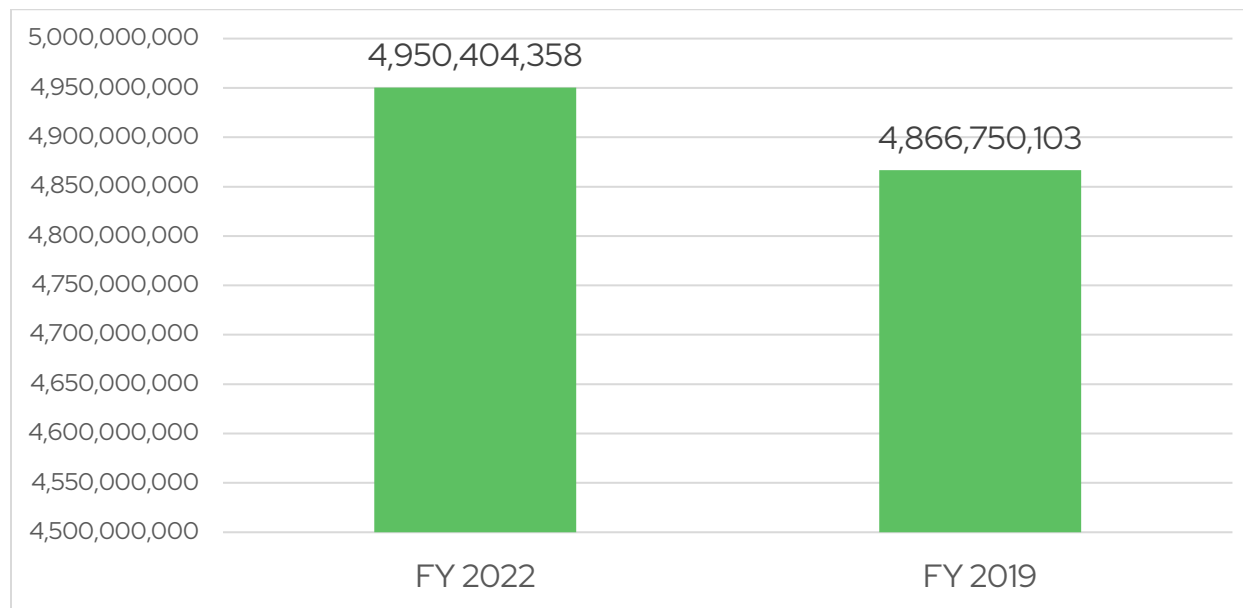


Total Meals Served

Lunch

4.95 billion total lunches were served in FY 2022, compared to 4.87 billion in FY 2019. This was a 1.72% increase in lunches served in FY 2022 compared to FY 2019.

Figure 3. Total School Lunches Served: FY 2019 vs. FY 2022



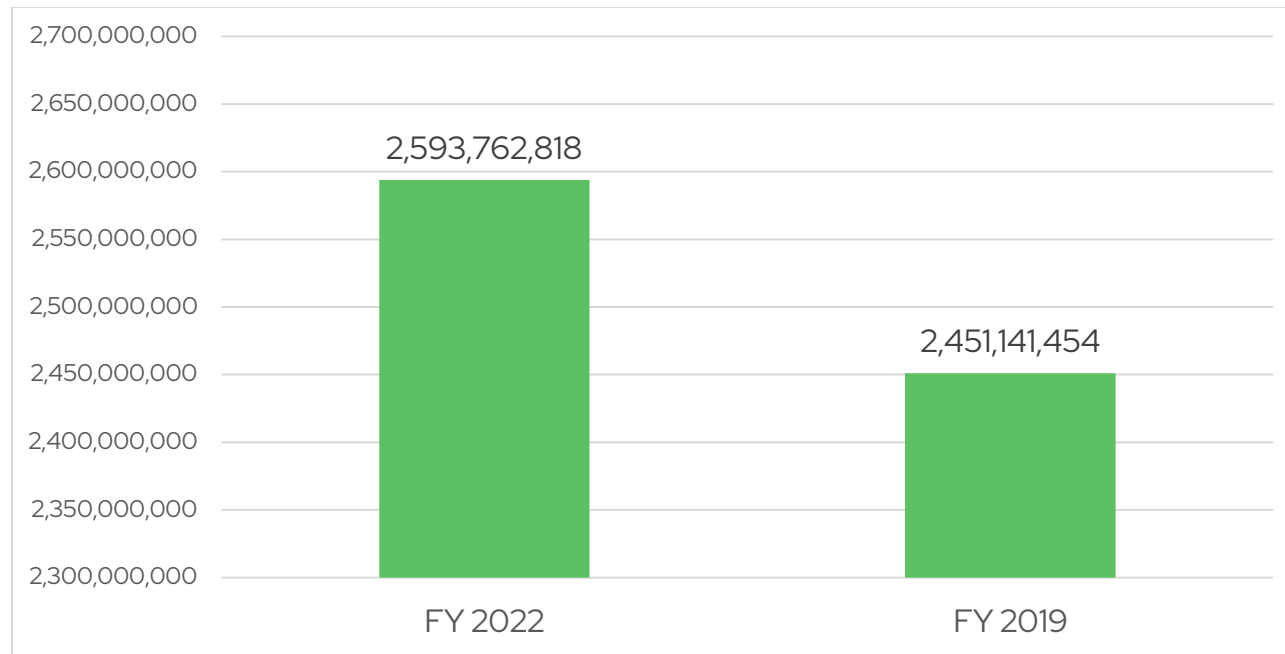
Source: National Level Monthly Data - National School Lunch Program, March 10, 2023. Available at: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/child-nutrition-tables>. FY 2022 includes meals served through NSLP and SSO. FY 2019 includes meals served NSLP.



Breakfast

2.59 billion total breakfasts were served in FY 2022, compared to 2.45 billion served in FY 2019. This was a 5.82% increase in total breakfasts served in FY 2022 compared to FY 2019.

Figure 4. Total School Breakfasts Served: FY 2019 vs. FY 2022



Source: National Level Monthly Data - School Breakfast Program, March 10, 2023. Available at: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/child-nutrition-tables>. FY 2022 includes meals served through SBP and SSO. FY 2019 includes meals served SBP.

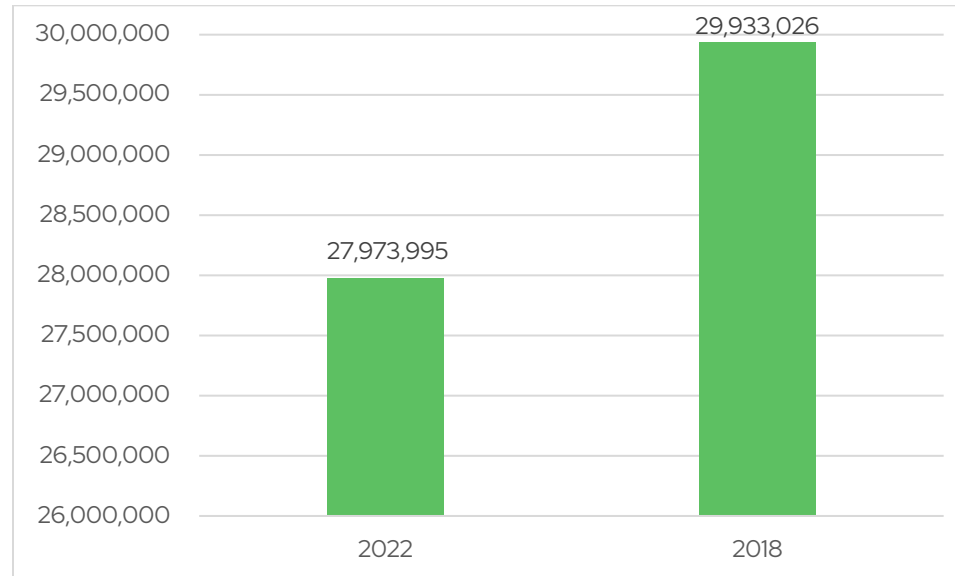


SY 2022-23 Preview of Available ADP Data

Lunch

In Fall 2022 (September - November), average daily participation for lunch was 27.97 million students served, compared to the same months in 2018, when average daily participation was 29.93 million students served. Therefore, lunch ADP was 6.54% lower in Fall 2022 than it was in Fall 2018.

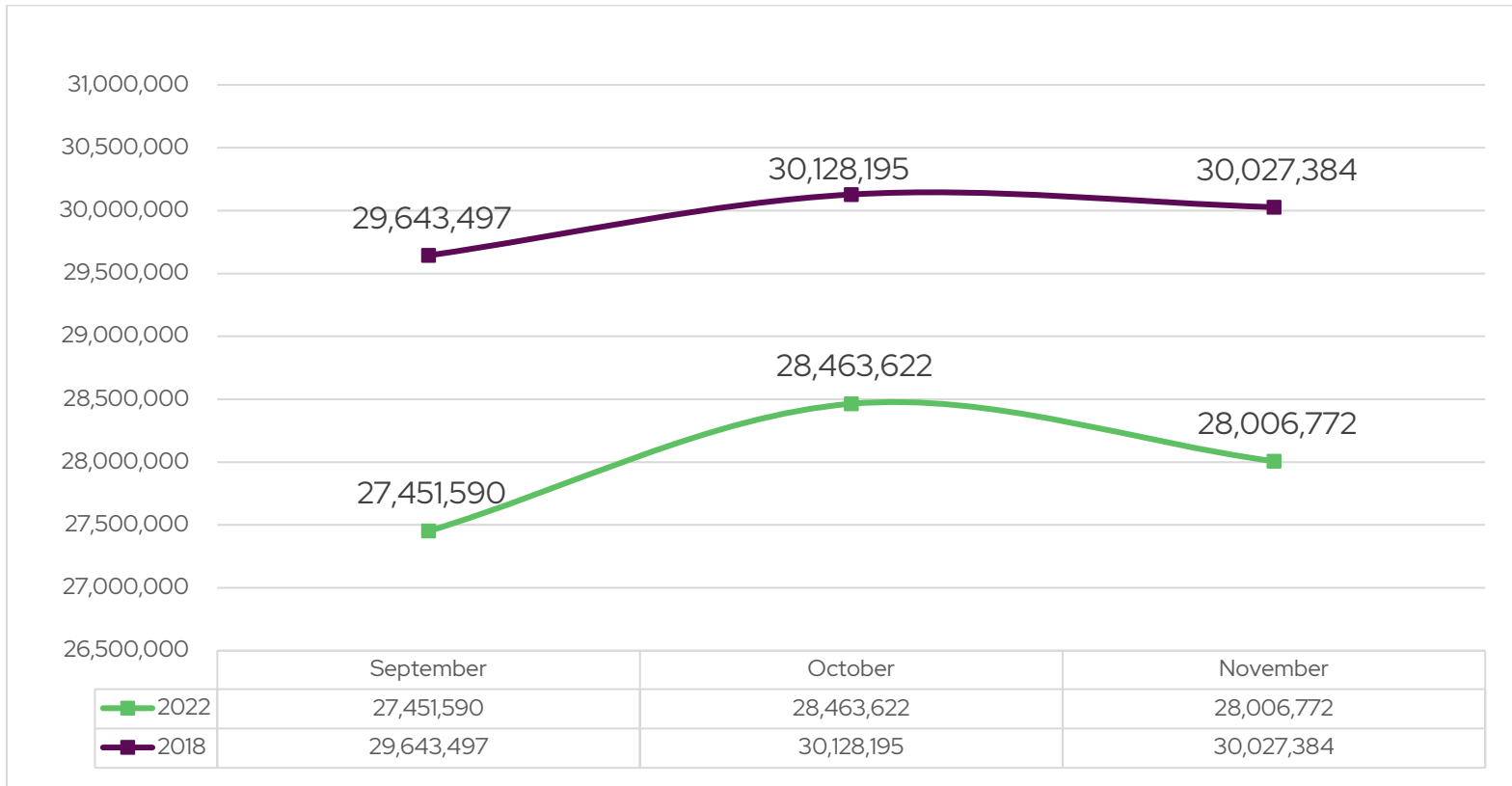
Figure 5. Lunch ADP: Fall 2022 vs. Fall 2018



Note: This graph is based in part on preliminary data submitted by various reporting agencies. Users should anticipate changes in future reports as reporting agencies finalize data. Fall 2022 data include NSLP lunches and SSO lunches. Fall 2018 data include NSLP lunches. Source: SY 2021-22 - National Level Monthly Data - National School Lunch Program, March 10, 2023. Available at: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/child-nutrition-tables>. All other SYs - USDA FNS KeyData Reports.



Figure 6. Monthly Lunch ADP: Fall 2022 vs. Fall 2018



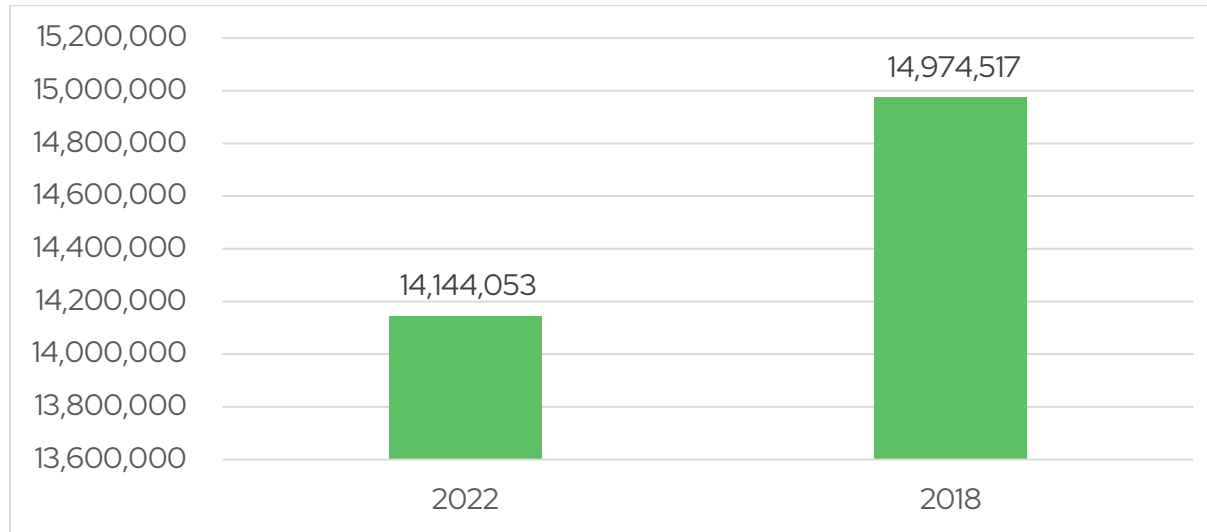
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Breakfast

In Fall 2022 (September - November), average daily participation for breakfast was 14.14 million students served, compared to the same months in 2018, when average daily participation was 14.97 million students served. Therefore, breakfast ADP was 5.55% lower in Fall 2022 than it was in Fall 2018.

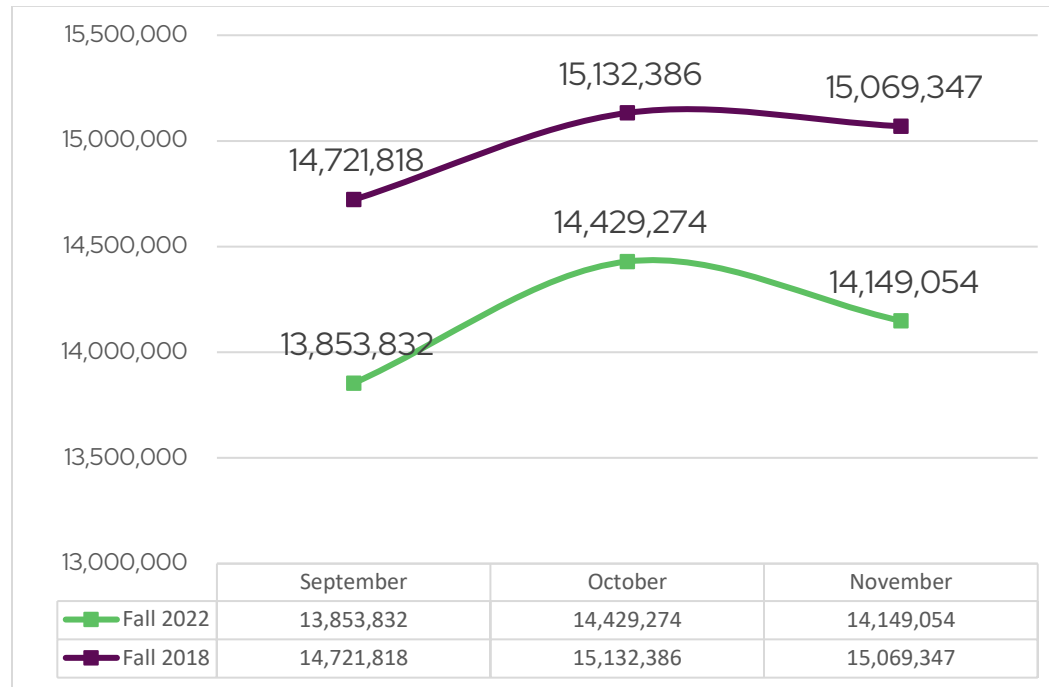
Figure 7. Breakfast ADP: Fall 2022 vs. Fall 2018



Note: This graph is based in part on preliminary data submitted by various reporting agencies. Users should anticipate changes in future reports as reporting agencies finalize data. Fall 2022 data include SBP breakfasts and SSO breakfasts. Fall 2018 data include SBP breakfasts. Sources: SY 2021-22 - National Level Monthly Data - School Breakfast Program, March 10, 2023. Available at: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/child-nutrition-tables>. All other SYs - USDA FNS KeyData Reports.



Figure 8. Monthly Breakfast ADP: Fall 2022 vs. Fall 2018



Note: This graph is based in part on preliminary data submitted by various reporting agencies. Users should anticipate changes in future reports as reporting agencies finalize data. Fall 2022 data include SBP breakfasts and SSO breakfasts. Fall 2018 data include SBP breakfasts. Sources: SY 2021-22 - National Level Monthly Data - School Breakfast Program, March 10, 2023. Available at: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/child-nutrition-tables>. All other SYs - USDA FNS KeyData Reports.