

# K12 Industry 2023 Outlook

## Key findings and trends for K12 in 2023.

### Top School Meal Program Concerns:

Districts cite increasing costs, staff shortages and menu item shortages as the top three challenges for school their meal programs. The School Nutrition Association (SNA) 2023 School Nutrition Trends Report released Jan. 11 found critical economic and regulatory challenges threatening the sustainability of school meal programs, with increasing costs, staff shortages and menu item shortages topping the list of challenges. In response, SNA's 2023 Position Paper urges Congress to permanently increase federal reimbursements, allow schools to offer all students free school meals and maintain current school nutrition standards. "School meal programs are at a tipping point as rising costs, persistent supply chain issues and labor shortages jeopardize their long-term sustainability," says SNA President Lori Adkins.

### Increase in meal debt continues.

Meal debt can add more financial burden to a district if a student does not pay it off. Often, a district will have to offset the costs through its local funds when families cannot pay overdue balances. Districts are also worried current meal reimbursement rates are not enough to keep pace with rising costs. A majority of surveyed school districts — 96% — said the end of the federal pandemic waiver allowing universal school meals caused an increase in unpaid meal debt charges, according to a survey of 1,230 school districts from the School Nutrition Association.

### K-12 Issues to be faced in 2023 and beyond.

As staffing shortages and student absences continue to hamper progress, budget certainty will become even more difficult. Additionally, mental health support, a primary concern for educators when students first re-entered the classroom after pandemic closures, continues to be top of mind right alongside academic recovery. To best improve the teacher staff shortages and to better recruit, retain and diversify staff, districts will continue to develop registered teacher apprenticeships and grow-your-own programs — building on the traction gained in 2022.

Source: [Food Management](#)  
[k12 dive](#)  
[Food Management](#)