



## **Ensuring Access to the Child Nutrition Programs In the Event of School Closures**

As more schools close as a result of COVID-19, a growing number of children are losing access to the school breakfasts and lunches that support their health and well-being. Advocates, school districts and out-of-school time program providers have an important role to play mitigating the impact on families who rely on free and reduced-price school meals to keep hunger at bay. School and community partners can leverage federal resources and work together to ensure access to nutritious meals during these school closures.

### **Summer Nutrition Programs**

The Summer Food Service Program and the Seamless Summer Option through the National School Lunch Program are available to provide meals during unanticipated school closures. Schools and other Summer Food sponsors (which can include local government agencies and private nonprofit organizations) should consider providing meals, and there is room to expedite approving sites. Before beginning program operations, schools and sponsors should communicate and work with their state agency in order to ensure reimbursement.

### **Encourage Your State Agency to Apply for Program Waivers**

To provide meals in a way that supports social distancing and addresses the urgent crisis, schools and sponsors will likely need a waiver from the requirement to provide meals in a congregate setting. [USDA-FNS already has approved state waivers](#) to provide meals in a non-congregate setting.

Additional waivers that might be helpful include:

- waiving the area eligibility requirement for the summer meal site. Currently, schools and other sponsors can only offer summer meals (in lieu of school meals) in areas where 50 percent or more of the children qualify for free or reduced-price meals.
- allowing schools and other sponsors to provide children with multiple meals and meal supplements at a time to limit physical visits, support social distancing, and reduce transportation barriers.
- providing flexibility on the meal patterns if there is a supply chain disruption.
- allowing schools and other sponsors administrative flexibility in meal procurement if there is a disruption with existing contractors or vendors.

### **Work Collaboratively to Develop a Plan of Action**

School districts and key community stakeholders, such as summer food sponsors and food banks, can work together to develop a plan to ensure that children's nutritional needs are met when schools close. Make sure to include stakeholders who already are experienced with organized meal delivery and distribution (i.e. food banks, meals on wheels, summer meals mobile meals vehicles, food pantries) in the planning. Effective plans should maintain safety and social distancing and include:

- utilization of the Summer Nutrition Programs and other federal nutrition programs;
- the schools or other organizations that are providing meals and where and how those meals are provided to ensure that efforts are complementary. USDA has directed state agencies to ensure that efforts are not duplicative.



### **Model Programs**

Many communities that have closed schools have set up creative approaches to distribute meals. Some best practices include:

- Provide multiple meals at the same time. This will minimize the logistical challenge of students and/or parents coming to pick up food every day, and will minimize community transmissions.
- Set up meal sites strategically throughout the community (including at schools) to offer 'grab and go' meals. Schools have designated pick-up spots outside the school building, as well as drive-thru options. Hold as flexible hours as possible. This enables maximum access to food-insecure families while also improving social distancing.
- Deliver meals using school buses and their regular delivery routes so families can pick up meals at their regular bus stops.
- Deliver meals directly and mobile delivery.

[FRAC's summary of school districts and program providers' efforts to serve meals during school closings](#)

### **Communications**

Streamline messaging to let families know where and how they can access school meals. Schools should clearly communicate information to let families know where and when meals are available when they close the schools and throughout the time that schools are closed. Community partners can amplify those messages through their distribution channels. Many of the strategies used during the summer months to get the word out, such as robocalls and robotexts; information on school websites; press releases and PSAs, can be helpful.

### **Resources**

- [USDA's Child Nutrition Program Meal Service during COVID-19 Outbreaks: Questions and Answers](#)
- [USDA's COV-19 SFSP and SSO Meal Delivery Using Existing Authority: Questions and Answers](#)
- [Waiver Requests by State Agency](#)
- [FRAC's Summer Mapper](#) can help identify eligible meal sites.

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It is important to note that the situation is fluid. FRAC will continue to update this document as things evolve. For additional information on efforts and opportunities to ensure children have access to nutritious meals during COVID-19 school closures, visit [FRAC's website](#).