

Nutrition Program Updates

3.30.20

COVID-19 Response Efforts

As the COVID-19 response efforts continue to unfold, the department will provide additional updates related to nutrition programs, including updated available flexibilities. The information below reflects key program requirements with new options to ensure students may continue to receive these essential services.

March 30, 2020 Updates

1. **Area Eligibility Waiver:** The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has approved Tennessee's waiver request to permit school food authorities (SFAs) to operate outside of the area eligibility requirements where justification has been provided. In order to utilize the waiver, SFAs must send notice to the state agency for approval. Requests should include a brief justification of the challenge creating the need to waive area eligibility requirements. These requests should follow the template available on TDOE's COVID-19 page (*Area Eligibility Flexibility Form*) and be sent directly to Sandy.Dawes@tn.gov, School Nutrition State Director. This waiver **will permit SSO sites to serve meals outside of the area eligible zones** identified as being below the required FRPL thresholds. The waiver is currently in effect until June 30, 2020. (Waiver approval notice is available on TDOE's COVID-19 web page.)

March 26, 2020 Updates

1. **Meal Pattern Waiver:** The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has released a nationwide waiver to states to permit school food authorities (SFAs) to vary from meal pattern requirements. In order to utilize the waiver, SFAs must send notice to the state agency for approval. Requests should include a brief justification of the challenge creating the need and details of which meal pattern component is impacted. These requests should follow the template available on TDOE's COVID-19 page (*Meal Pattern Flexibility Form*) and be sent directly to Sandy.Dawes@tn.gov, School Nutrition State Director. While nutrition programs are encouraged to maintain and meet nutrition standards for each program to the greatest extent possible, approved waivers will allow districts to serve meals without all meal pattern requirements in place. The nationwide waiver is currently in effect until April 30, 2020, and will be reassessed on a rolling basis. (Waiver memo is available on TDOE's COVID-19 web page.)
2. **Child Present for Meal Service Waiver:** Under a recently released nationwide waiver, TDOE is now waiving the requirement for children to be present at the time of meal service. Parent and guardians may now pick-up school meals from service sites on behalf of their children. SFAs must have plans in place to ensure accountability and program integrity, specifically ensuring meals go to children under 18 and duplicate meals are not distributed to any child. This waiver is effective immediately and remains in effect until June 30, 2020, or until expiration of the federally declared public health emergency, whichever is earlier. (Waiver memo is available on TDOE's COVID-19 web page.)
3. **Support Opportunities:** USDA, TDOE, and various partner organizations are continuously exploring new support strategies to ensure meal service and nutrition supports continue for students. As these opportunities become available, the department will share the program information with both Directors of Schools and local nutrition directors to support any applications and program implementation. These will also be updated in the School Nutrition Toolkit.
 - a. **Meals to You:** USDA has partnered with the Baylor University Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty to expand its Meals to You program to target rural schools that need assistance in

providing meals to FRPL students. The program partners districts with vendors to provide 5 days' worth of shelf-stable, nutritious meals that are packaged and delivered directly to student homes. The program will prioritize students who do not currently have access to a nutrition program site and have an active outbreak of COVID-19. Schools must also have closures scheduled for at least four weeks at the time of the application to be eligible. USDA hopes to continue to expand the capacity of the program in the coming weeks and months. More specific application information is available on the program website, available [here](#), or please contact Rachel Draper (Rachel.E.Draper@tn.gov) for additional questions.

- b. **No Kid Hungry:** No Kid Hungry is providing the opportunity for school districts and nonprofit organizations to apply for some additional funding during these uncertain times. \$5 million in emergency grant funds is being offered nationwide to support local school districts and nonprofit organizations to ensure kids get nutritious foods during school closures. For more information please visit the [No Kid Hungry website](#).

March 18, 2020 Updates

1. **Spring Break Meal Service Now Permitted:** The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) released guidance documents now permitting school food authorities (SFAs) to provide meal services to students through scheduled spring breaks that were cancelled or postponed due to the unforeseen public health emergency. Programs that begin operations under the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) may offer meal services through their spring break periods. (USDA Guidance document available [here](#))
2. **Multiple Meals (Same Type) Served at Once:** Under the current circumstances and operating SSO programs for unexpected closures, the department may permit SFAs to serve multiple of the same meal type to students at one time. This would allow for up to a week's worth of breakfast, for example, to be provided at a single delivery service. Nutrition programs should consider the shelf-stable status of planned meals when considering this option. (USDA Guidance document available [here](#))
3. **Lunch Meal Time Exemptions:** The department also has the authority to exempt SFAs from lunch meal time requirements, generally required to fall between 10:00 AM – 2:00 PM, upon request from the SFA. *Through this unexpected closure, the SSO site application submitted in TMAC with the planned lunch meal times will serve as a request and approval for this exemption all in one.* SFAs will not need to take separate action to request this exemption, apart from entering the planned meal times into the SSO applications. **This exemption will permit SFAs to serve breakfast and lunch simultaneously.** (Citation: 7 CFR 210.10(i))

The combination of flexibilities afforded by item 2 and 3 above means that districts may provide both breakfast and lunch meals for up to an entire week at one delivery time.

All nutrition directors are receiving targeted support and guidance on implementing these options from the School Nutrition team, including regionally based nutrition consultants. If school nutrition directors have specific questions, please contact respective regional consultants.

Additional Resource:

The department is partnering with Hoonuit to make available a site finder for families on where the closest meal services will be available to them. While USDA also facilitates a site finder that is updated weekly, this additional resource will be updated daily, and populated based on site addresses loaded into TMAC for each SSO application (the department will not upload home addresses if home delivery is the being implemented).

As soon as this site is available with Tennessee-specific data, the department will share out the resource to districts and the public.

If you have questions, please contact the School Nutrition hotline at 800-354-3663, or Sandy Dawes, State Director of School Nutrition at Sandy.Dawes@tn.gov.