Policy Updates Related to COVID-19:
LEA Meal Provision Guidance
Updated March 24, 2020

Background

As a part of the District of Columbia's response to coronavirus (COVID-19), the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) is modifying, updating, and re-circulating certain policies.

Scope

This document contains details and policies specifically relating to the **provision of meals to students** by LEAs, or School Food Authorities (SFAs).

Effective Date

This policy will take effect from March 24, 2020, and will remain in effect until further notice. This policy supersedes the OSSE policy on this topic released on March 9, 2020.

This updated policy is complemented by the [Questions and Answers related to COVID-19: LEA Meal Provision](#) guidance, also released on March 24, 2020.

Policy Guidance

In the event of temporary or prolonged school closures, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) provides LEAs with options for providing meals to children. While LEAs are not required to feed children during closures caused by pandemics, building repairs, or natural disasters, OSSE strongly encourages LEAs to do so following USDA's guidance and with the approval of OSSE and in coordination with public health authorities.

USDA provides two options, the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) and the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), to provide meals at school settings and in a non-congregate format during unanticipated school closures.

Both the SSO and the SFSP:
- require OSSE approval;
- can be reimbursed for up to two meals each day;
- can provide up to seven days' worth of meals at one time (14 meals);
- provide meals to children 18 and younger; and
- provide meals free of cost to children.

    (1) Seamless Summer Option

Currently approved LEAs operating the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) may serve meals

under the SSO.

(2) Summer Food Service Program

Currently approved sponsors of the SFSP from 2019 may serve meals. New sponsors may complete a 2020 SFSP application.

OSSE recommends SSO for those LEAs that are not currently approved sponsors of the SFSP because the approval process is less time-consuming.

Questions and Answers

Q. Are schools required to serve meals if schools are closed?
A. No; however, the USDA and OSSE encourage SFAs participating in the NSLP and/or the School Breakfast Program and sponsors participating in the SFSP to help ensure that children do not experience a lapse in food security when there are unanticipated school closures.

Q. Can SFAs serve meals if schools are closed?
A. Yes. Meals can be served during unanticipated school closures.

Q. Are SFAs allowed to serve meals at school sites?
A. Yes. OSSE received a waiver from USDA allowing meals to be served at school sites during this time.

Q. In a situation when schools are closed and SFAs are using either SFSP or SSO to provide meals, do the SFAs have to serve meals in a congregate setting?
A. Although SFAs may serve meals in a congregate or non-congregate setting, OSSE strongly encourages meals be offered in non-congregate settings to allow for social distancing. Non-congregate means meals that may be taken away from the site and consumed elsewhere, allowing for social distancing. We also often refer to this as "grab and go."

Q. What does an SFA have to do to be authorized to serve meals if schools are closed?
A. Two USDA-approved programs can be used to serve meals during unanticipated school closures: the SFSP and the SSO. SFAs must obtain OSSE approval to use either of these programs to serve meals if schools are closed.

SFAs can check with their OSSE nutrition program specialist to determine the best course of action. Except for the six LEAs that are sponsors under the 2019 SFSP, OSSE recommends that SFAs apply for the SSO in their NSLP application, through Orchard. New SFSP sponsors may complete a 2020 SFSP application in Orchard.

Q. Where may school meals be served?
A. Examples of where meals can be served include:
- School sites
- Churches
- Community Centers
- Afterschool centers

Q. What meals can be served?
A. SFSP and SSO sponsors can serve up to two meals per day, including breakfast, lunch, supper and an AM or PM snack, except for lunch and supper.

SFAs that are already approved to participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) to provide supper or snack may serve a third meal, to be claimed under CACFP. SFAs that are not currently enrolled in CACFP may not apply during unanticipated closures.

SFAs may provide up to seven days' worth of meals at a time and home delivery of meals. For additional information on those opportunities, please see the Questions and Answers related to COVID-19: LEA Meal Provision.

Q. Must meals be served during the SFA's normal meal service times?
A. SFAs and sponsors can establish meal times and service lengths that best support non-congregate meal service in a manner that maintains health and safety standards. USDA's waiver released on March 20, 2020, allows meals to be served outside of required breakfast, lunch, supper and snack serving times. SFAs and sponsors must update their application in Orchard to reflect new pick-up schedules or delivery plans with designated times for distribution.

Q. To whom can meals be served?
A. Children age 18 and younger.

Q. What health-related considerations should be taken into consideration?
A. Schools and sponsors should review guidance provided by USDA, the CDC and DC Health on proper sanitation and cleaning protocols in response to coronavirus (COVID-19). In general, to limit additional exposure in the event of a large-scale closure, meal service sites should create a plan to provide meals quickly to children through a grab-and-go service method and discourage children from congregating at these locations.

Schools that have closed should coordinate with OSSE, DOH and DME related to further specific local public health guidance.

For more information, please visit fns.usda.gov/disaster/pandemic. For more information on the DC Government's response to coronavirus (COVID-19), visit coronavirus.dc.gov.