



## Policy Guidance for School Food Authorities (SFAs) to Serve Meals in the 2021-22 School Year:

(Updated **Aug. 10**, 2021)

The Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) issues this guidance to school food authorities (SFAs) in the District of Columbia to ensure students have continued access to meals throughout the 2021-22 school year. The following guidance should be used as an operational resource for serving meals upon the reopening of schools in the 2021-22 school year. It should be used in conjunction with [DC Health’s Guidance for Schools](#) to support meals’ being provided in the safest way possible. Changes to this guidance will be highlighted in yellow in future versions.

For more information on the District of Columbia Government’s response to coronavirus (COVID-19), please visit [coronavirus.dc.gov](https://coronavirus.dc.gov). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) most recent, supplemental guidance for schools can be accessed [here](#).

**Applicable Meal Programs:** Seamless Summer Option (SSO), School Breakfast Program (SBP), National School Lunch Program (NSLP), Afterschool Snack Program (ASSP), Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP), Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)

**Effective Date:** July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022. This guidance is only applicable to meals served during the 2021-22 school year. This guidance **does not apply to meals served in summer 2021 programming**, even if summer programming is after July 1, 2021.

### Table of Contents

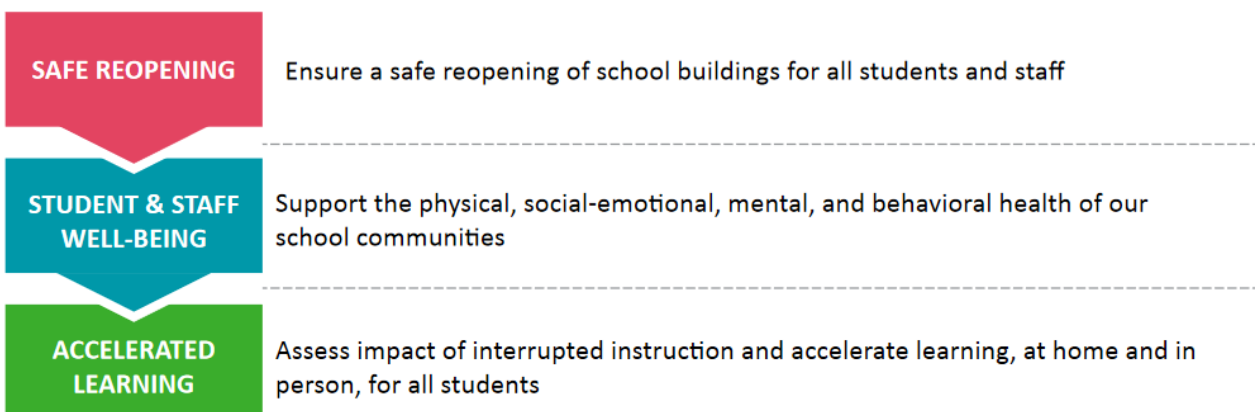
Introduction .....	3
Seamless Summer Option (SSO) .....	4
Operating SSO in the 2021-22 School Year .....	5
Table 1. SSO Reimbursement Rates .....	6
Afterschool Meals .....	6
Waivers and Flexibilities .....	6
Table 2. USDA Meal Waivers .....	7
Electing the Use of Waivers .....	7
Waiver and Flexibility Guidance .....	8
Non-congregate Feeding .....	8
Meal Service Times .....	8
Parent/Guardian Pick-up .....	8

Meal Pattern .....	8
Pre-K Meal Pattern.....	9
Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP).....	9
Meal Service Models.....	10
On-Site .....	10
Outdoor Meals .....	10
Non-congregate Meal Service.....	11
Communication Plan.....	11
Counting and Claiming.....	12
SSO, ASSP .....	12
School Meal Programs (SBP, NSLP).....	12
Student Eligibility .....	12
Community Eligibility Provision (CEP).....	12
Free and Reduced-price Meal (FARM) applications for SSO.....	13
Verification.....	13
P-EBT .....	13
Food Safety Guidance .....	14
Food Service Employees .....	14
A Healthy Food Service Environment .....	15
Meal Distribution .....	16
Meal Service.....	16
Serving Fresh Produce .....	17
Fresh Produce Safety .....	17
Meals for Students Engaged in Distance Learning.....	17
School Gardens .....	17
Procurement.....	18
Food Service Management Companies (FSMC), Vended Meal and Emergency Contracts.....	18
Contract Amendments.....	18
Procuring Local Food.....	18

## Introduction

OSSE's [Guiding Principles for Continuous Education in the 2021-22 school year](#) prioritizes a **Safe Reopening, Student and Staff Well-Being, and Accelerated Learning**. These three priorities capture the most critical areas of focus for LEAs in developing a comprehensive plan for continuous education.

### RECOVERY PRIORITIES



The second priority, **Student and Staff Well-Being**, ensures LEAs account for the pandemic's impact on the physical, social-emotional, mental and behavioral well-being of students, staff and families.

A dark blue banner with a teal diagonal stripe on the right side. On the left, a circular icon contains the word 'PRIORITY' and the number '2'. To the right of the icon, the text reads: 'STUDENT & STAFF WELL-BEING' followed by 'For accelerated learning to take place, LEAs must account for the pandemic's impact on the physical, social-emotional, mental and behavioral well-being of students, staff and families.'

Specifically, LEAs **must ensure access to nutritious food** for all qualifying students regardless of their learning environment, either through meal service managed by the school and/or through referral to community resources. A complete plan to ensure access to nutritious food will:

- Identify the service model (such as meals in the classroom or grab and go meals) schools will use to make breakfast, lunch and afterschool meals (if applicable) available to all students in-person.
- Identify the service model schools will use to make breakfast, lunch and afterschool meals (if applicable) to students in a distance learning environment, or what referral will be provided so students have access to meals through a community resources, including a schedule for meal distribution;
- Include a communications plan to promote meals available to students learning both in-person and in a distance learning environment.

This guidance document will support LEAs in developing a meal service plan that ensures access to nutritious food for all qualifying students.

## Seamless Summer Option (SSO)

**SFAs are recommended to provide breakfast and lunch free of charge to students through the SSO** of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). The SSO better positions schools to serve more nutritious meals by:

- Eliminating the collection of meal payments. **SSO allows breakfast and lunch to be provided free of charge to all students.**
- Allowing meals to be claimed at the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) reimbursement rates, which are higher than the traditional school meals program rates. This provides additional funding to offset the costs associated with providing a safe meal service.
- Speeding up service of meals, thereby reducing contact and potential exposure to COVID-19.
- Facilitating the implementation of CDC recommendations for safe school meal service, which include serving meals outdoors or in classrooms.
- Schools may not have electronic systems typically used to take point of service (POS) and collect payment when meals are served outside the cafeteria. Instead of spending time confirming each student at a central POS, SSO gives SFAs greater flexibility to distribute meals at a variety of safe meal locations.
- Reducing administrative functions traditionally required by the school meal programs. The following are not required under SSO:
  - Taking meal accountability by student eligibility (additional details provided further in this guidance). SSO allows meals to be tracked via a meal count sheet.
  - Collecting and processing Free and Reduced-price Meal (FARM) applications to determine student meal eligibility<sup>1</sup>.
  - Reporting and processes associated with FARM applications including:
    - Verification and the submission of the FNS-742 report
    - Second review of applications and submission of the FNS-874 report
    - Paid Lunch Equity (PLE)

Although not recommended, SFAs may still operate the SBP and NSLP but must speak with their [program specialist](#) before electing this option.

---

<sup>1</sup> The impact of FARM applications for Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) program is still undetermined for the 2021-22 school year. Guidance will be updated when information becomes available.

## Operating SSO in the 2021-22 School Year

The 2021-22 school year may be the first time many SFAs operate the SSO. The following information provides an overview of the program.

**Eligible sponsors:** SFAs including residential child care institutions (RCCIs).

**Eligible participants:** Students enrolled in a school of high school grade and under; including persons enrolled in a school program for the mentally or physically disabled; and persons younger than age 21 enrolled in an RCCI. Additional eligibility for open and open restricted sites is detailed below.

**Meals:** SFAs may provide up to two meals each day. Meals may be any combination of breakfast, lunch, AM or PM snack, or supper, EXCEPT for lunch and supper<sup>2</sup>. Meals must follow the SBP and NSLP meal pattern unless a waiver has been approved. Details for requesting a waiver are included below.

**Meal cost for children:** All meals are free.

**Site Type and Eligibility:** SFAs may operate different site types. An SFA may choose the site type based on the mode of instructional delivery (such as in-person or in a distance learning environment); the health, safety and space constraints at sites; other feeding options available to children who are not enrolled in school; and resources and capabilities. Each allowable site type is described below.

- **Open:** Meals must be available to persons 18 years or younger and persons 19 or older with a physical or mental disability, as defined by the state agency.
- **Open Restricted:** An open site may be classified as restricted if an SFA chooses to restrict or limit the site's attendance for reasons of security, safety, or control.
- **Closed Enrolled:** SFAs may operate closed enrolled sites that limit participation to only students enrolled at the school site<sup>3</sup>.
- **Mobile:** A mobile feeding site operates like an open feeding site. Each stop on the mobile feeding route is considered its own site and must complete a site-level application within the SFAs programmatic application.

**Meal Service Days:** Meals can be served on days with scheduled summer programming (as is traditional for SSO), and on operational school days in the 2021-22 school year. SSO meals may not be served on weekends or holidays once the 2021-22 school year begins. During the school year, weekend or holiday meals may be provided through the CACFP.

**USDA Foods:** SFAs may incorporate USDA Foods and [Department of Defense Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program \(DoD Fresh\)](#) products into meals served.

**Reimbursement Rates:** Meals will be reimbursed at the following SFSP reimbursement rates through Dec. 31, 2021. New rates are anticipated beginning Jan. 1, 2022 through June 30, 2022, and this

---

<sup>2</sup> SFAs may also operate the Afterschool Snack Program (ASSP) and/or the at-risk afterschool component of the Child and Adult Food Care Program (CACFP) concurrently with the SSO.

<sup>3</sup> SFAs must provide an explanation of why they want to operate an open restricted or closed enrolled site within their meal program application.

guidance will be updated accordingly. Meals are also eligible for [DC Healthy Schools Act reimbursements](#).

Table 1. SSO Reimbursement Rates

Meals	2021 Reimbursement Rate
<b>Breakfast</b>	\$2.4625
<b>Lunch or Supper</b>	\$4.3175
<b>Snack</b>	\$1.02

## Afterschool Meals

SFAs may also operate the Afterschool Snack Program (ASSP) and/or the at-risk afterschool component of the Child and Adult Food Care Program (CACFP) concurrently with the SSO, SBP and NSLP. All schools, regardless of their location, are eligible:

- To serve and claim all ASSP afterschool snacks at the free rate.
- To apply for participation in the CACFP at-risk supper program and claim all meals and snacks at the free rate.

To be eligible to serve the afterschool snack or supper program, the afterschool care program must provide children with regularly scheduled educational or enrichment activities in a supervised environment. SFAs that elect to use the non-congregate and parent pick-up waivers (detailed below) may conduct education or enrichment activities virtually or in other non-congregate ways. The afterschool care program must offer education or enrichment activities, but children are not required to participate in or complete the activity in order to receive an afterschool snack.

Program operators may consider offering online homework assistance, activity packets, electronic games and books, or other e-learning activities for children to partake in at home. [Team Nutrition](#) offers a variety of online games, books and nutrition education activities for children. Both programs can be applied for in Orchard. The ASSP application is included within the NSLP application. The CACFP application is a separate application in Orchard and interested participants should contact the [Out of School Time Programs Team](#).

## Waivers and Flexibilities

USDA has issued waivers and provided flexibilities to support access to nutritious meals while minimizing potential exposure to COVID-19. A full list of USDA memos can be found [here](#). Table 2 below provides an overview of waivers applicable to serving meals in the 2021-22 school year and is followed by additional detailed guidance.

Table 2. USDA Meal Waivers

Waiver	Regulation	What is Allowable	Programs	Expiration Date
<a href="#">Seamless Summer Option (SSO)</a>	Does not allow SSO to operate during the traditional school year. SSO traditionally only operates during the summer, or school vacations.	Allows SSO to operate when school is open during the regular school year through June 30, 2022. <b>Allows free meals to be served to all students.</b>	SSO	June 30, 2022
<a href="#">SFSP Reimbursement Rates</a>	SSO meals are reimbursed at the SBP or NSLP reimbursement rates.	Provides a higher per meal reimbursement for meals served under the SSO.	SSO	June 30, 2022
<a href="#">Non-congregate Feeding</a>	Requires that participants consume meals on-site in the child nutrition programs.	Allows for consumption of meals off-site and outside of group settings. Allows for after-school enrichment activities to be conducted virtually or in other non-congregate ways.	SSO SBP NSLP ASSP CACFP	June 30, 2022*
<a href="#">Meal Service Times</a>	Requires meals be served at specific times.	Provides flexibility for serving times. SFAs must still establish meal service or delivery times.	SSO SBP NSLP ASSP CACFP	June 30, 2022*
<a href="#">Parent/ Guardian Meal Pick-up</a>	Require that meals must be served to eligible children.	Allows for distributing meals to adults without a child present. SFAs must ensure integrity and have a system to verify that adults have eligible children.	SSO SBP NSLP ASSP CACFP	June 30, 2022*
<a href="#">Specific Meal Pattern Flexibility</a>	Require that meals follow a prescribed meal pattern.	With OSSE approval, allows SFAs to claim for reimbursement even if a meal does not meet all meal pattern requirements or include all meal components. Waivers granted on a case-by-case basis.	SSO SBP NSLP ASSP	June 30, 2022
<a href="#">Offer Versus Serve (OVS) Flexibility for Senior High Schools</a>	Require that OVS be implemented at lunch in all high schools.	Eliminates the requirement for high schools to implement OVS at lunch. This is intended to make it easier for schools to serve individually plated or pre-packaged meals.	SSO NSLP	June 30, 2022
<a href="#">Area Eligibility in Afterschool Programs</a>	Requires sites to meet the definition of “area eligible” to serve free afterschool snack or at-risk supper.	Allows schools, regardless of their location, to claim afterschool snacks at the free rate and to apply to participate in the CACFP and claim all meals and snacks at the free rate.	ASSP CACFP	June 30, 2022

\* While these waivers are available through June 30, 2022, flexibilities under the waiver may be implemented by SFAs only as long as necessary in accordance with the requirements and recommendations in [DC Health’s Guidance for Schools](#).

### Electing the Use of Waivers

SFAs must elect the use of each waiver they want to utilize and receive approval from OSSE prior to implementation. The waiver request form for the SSO, SBP, NSLP, ASSP, FFVP and can be found [here](#). Instructions for completing and submitting the waiver request form are included within the form.

## Waiver and Flexibility Guidance

The following sections provide additional detail about meal service under these waivers and flexibilities. This guidance document will be updated as new information becomes available.

### Non-congregate Feeding

As DC returns to in-person instruction for students five days a week, OSSE anticipates the majority of students to be served meals while in person at school. In situations where it may be beneficial, OSSE encourages meals to be offered in non-congregate settings. Non-congregate means that meals may be taken away from the site and consumed elsewhere, allowing for physical (social) distancing. Schools may choose to elect the non-congregate waiver for each meal type or for all meals. When electing the non-congregate waiver, schools must offer the same meal type to every enrolled student whether they attend through distance learning or in-person. For example, if the non-congregate waiver is elected for both breakfast and lunch, and those meals are available to students attending school in person, breakfast and lunch must be available to students in distance learning. Menus for each may vary.

### Meal Service Times

SFAs may establish meal times and service lengths that best support access to nutritious meals while minimizing potential exposure to COVID-19. Meals may be served outside of required breakfast, lunch, snack and supper serving times.

### Parent/Guardian Pick-up

Meals may be distributed to a parent or guardian to take home to their children without the children being present if certain processes are followed. SFAs must:

- Have a plan in place to ensure accurate accountability;
- Include a process to ensure that meals are distributed only to parents or guardians of eligible children, unless a proxy has been approved by a student, parent or guardian;
- Ensure duplicate meals are not distributed.

These [Best Practices for Parent Pick-Up of Meals and Snacks](#) can be used to support planning for parent or guardian pick-up.

SFAs electing the non-congregate, meal service time and parent pick-up waivers may provide bulk items, serve multiple days' worth of meals at a time, and conduct home delivery. Requirements for initiating home delivery are detailed in [questions 13-18 of this USDA memo](#). As a reminder, school should only use these waivers when necessary in accordance with the requirements and recommendations in [DC Health's Guidance for Schools](#).

### Meal Pattern

OSSE strongly encourages SFAs to maintain and meet the nutrition standards for each program to the greatest extent possible.

When there are targeted and justified plans to support access to nutritious meals while minimizing potential exposure to COVID-19, OSSE may approve a request to waive the requirement that meals meet meal pattern requirements. Waiver requests should be specific to each meal component and will be approved on a case-by-case basis. Meal pattern waivers may be approved for the duration of an SFAs



educational plan. SFAs should revise their meal pattern waiver if and when their educational plans change.

Meal pattern requirements that may be waived for the **SSO, NSLP and SBP** are:

- **Sodium levels:** School meal patterns are required to meet [sodium target two weekly sodium levels](#).
- **Vegetable subgroups:** As required by 7 CFR 210.10(c) and 7 CFR 220.8(c).
- **Milk:** To offer a variety (at least two different options) of fluid milk.
- **Age/grade group requirements:** To plan menus and offer food components for specified age/grade groups.
- All other meal pattern requirements remain in effect.

Additional whole grain and milk flexibilities are available federally, but are inconsistent with [DC Healthy Schools Act \(HSA\) nutrition standards](#) and therefore not available to DCPS, Public Charter Schools, or participating private schools.

Program operators are not relieved of their obligation to provide meal modifications for participants with disabilities and must adhere to all special dietary needs that have been submitted by a state-recognized medical authority. Recognized medical authorities are physicians, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, or other professionals specified by the state agency. Program operators should consider how individuals who require meal modifications will be identified and served.

#### Pre-K Meal Pattern

As a reminder, pre-kindergarten students must be served the pre-K meal pattern unless they are co-mingled with older students during meal service.

## Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP)

For the 2021-22 school year, FFVP will operate in a more traditional manner than the prior school year. Currently, there are no waivers or flexibilities in place for FFVP for the 2021-22 school year. If flexibilities are provided, this guidance will be updated and OSSE will notify FFVP sponsors. As a reminder, SFAs operating FFVP must serve the program a minimum of twice a week and are encouraged to include a nutrition education lesson associated with the fruit or vegetable offered. SFAs may:

- Only operate FFVP on operational school days.
- Serve FFVP over the summer months *only* in the case of a year-round school calendar. FFVP may not be served during summer school or camps.
- Utilize fiscal year 2021 funding through Sept. 30, 2021<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Only applies to SFAs operating FFVP in both the 2020-21 school year and the 2021-22 school year.

## Meal Service Models

### On-Site

To the extent feasible, schools should allow students to eat outdoors or in their classrooms, while increasing spacing between students, rather than mixing in the cafeteria. If not possible, then schools should stagger trips to the cafeteria by class and/or divide eating area by class, cleaning and sanitizing between groups. This [Modifying School Spaces During Mealtimes](#) CDC resource provides suggestions and layouts that may be helpful in planning meal times. If students are picking up meals from the cafeteria to bring outdoors or to their classroom, schools should also stagger trips to the cafeteria by class. **Meals are not prohibited from being eaten in the cafeteria.**

As a reminder, the DC HSA requires breakfast to be served via alternative serving models if more than 40 percent of students at a school qualify for free or reduced-price meals and breakfast participation is below 75 percent of average daily attendance.

- Elementary schools meeting these criteria must offer free Breakfast In the Classroom (BIC) to all students. If schools that meet these criteria feel that eating in the classrooms won't meet their needs, they can apply for a BIC waiver within their school meals application.
- Secondary schools meeting these criteria must offer free breakfast via alternative breakfast serving models. An alternative breakfast serving model is a model of serving breakfast, such as BIC or breakfast on grab-and-go carts, in which breakfast is offered in one or more locations with high student traffic other than the cafeteria. With alternative breakfast serving models, breakfast is also available after the start of the school day or both before and after the start of the school day.

Schools are encouraged to utilize OSSE's [Breakfast Resource Guide](#) to not only make the transition to an alternative breakfast serving model or support current alternative breakfast serving models, but also as a guide for serving lunch in the classroom as well. Utilize these [breakfast in the classroom](#) and [grab and go to the classroom](#) resources to plan for operationalizing meals in the classroom. Utilize this [Recommendations for Outdoor Meal Service Tip Sheet](#) to plan for eating meals outdoors.

### Outdoor Meals

Eating meals outdoors is one way schools may choose to apply health and safety guidance at meal time. Below are some suggestions from OSSE's [Recommendations for Outdoor Meal Service Tip Sheet](#):

- Whether distributing meals exclusively outdoors or through a combination of indoors and outdoors, make sure all necessary supplies and equipment is readily accessible.
- Help students move through the outdoor eating space by creating a clear flow that avoids congestion. Stagger mealtimes by class or assign one individual to bring presorted meals to students once they are seated in the outdoor eating space.



- Develop a back-up plan for severe weather, changing space needs, power fluctuations and other unexpected scenarios.
- Share plans for outdoor meal service with food providers and request recommendations for suitable food items.
- Prepare students for outdoor meal service by setting expectations around behavior, rules and safety considerations.
- Keep food and students safe. Follow food safety practices by keeping hot foods hot and cold foods cold. Also ensure items are properly labeled for students with specific dietary accommodations, allergies, or dietary preferences.



### Non-congregate Meal Service

In applicable situations, meals may be offered in non-congregate settings. Non-congregate means that meals may be taken away from the site and consumed elsewhere, allowing for physical (social) distancing. As a reminder, when electing the non-congregate waiver, schools must offer the same meal type to every enrolled student whether they attend through distance learning or in-person.

Examples of non-congregate feeding include:

- Grab and Go pick up outside the school building
- Drive through pick up
- Afterschool meals and/or breakfast for the next day sent home with students

### Communication Plan

SFAs are required to publicly notify students and families about the availability of free meals. SFAs operating SSO in the 2021-22 school year must fulfill the [public notification requirements](#) for non-pricing schools which includes posting a notification on the SFAs website about the availability of child nutrition programs. While this meets the minimum notification requirements, OSSE strongly encourages SFAs to widely communicate meal availability with students and families leading up to the start of school, and continuously throughout the school year. Suggestions for communicating the availability of meals are included below:

- Notify students and families about the availability of breakfast, lunch and after school meals (as applicable) free of charge to students via email or written communication prior to the start of school (applicable to non-pricing schools).
  - SFAs not offering all meals free of charge are also encouraged to send this communication and customize to include necessary details.
- Include reminders and updates on the meal programs in routine communications such as newsletters, progress reports/report cards and events such as Back to School Nights and parent/teacher conferences.

- Distribute monthly menus widely.
- Utilize social media to promote school meals.
- Use pictures! Show off how you are “tasting the rainbow” at school by sharing pictures of school meals in action.

## Counting and Claiming

The following section provides additional detail about taking proper accountability and claiming reimbursable meals. Meals are reimbursable at the federal and local reimbursement rates. SFAs should establish internal processes to ensure that the number of meals served does not exceed students in attendance.

### SSO, ASSP

Program staff may simply keep a count of all meals served to track and claim meals by type. Program staff may focus on quickly providing meals at meal sites instead of spending time confirming individual student enrollment and eligibility status. Meals may be recorded using a [daily meal count form](#). Point of Service (POS) must be taken at the point of distribution. POS protocols should be reviewed often, such as monthly, to assess accuracy.

### School Meal Programs (SBP, NSLP)

Since meal service through the SSO is now allowable through June 2022, very few SFAs will be operating the traditional school meal programs. Those operating the traditional school meal programs should reference OSSE’s [Accountability and Collection Procedures](#) for details on proper POS. The guidance below applies for SFAs operating these programs, but OSSE encourages SFAs to reach out to their program specialist to determine if switching to SSO operations may be more advantageous.

Accountability processes for providing meals to students attending non-provision schools must include a system to record the number of free, reduced-price and paid meals served. This is often recorded using student personal identification numbers (PIN) numbers or student rosters.

Accountability processes for providing meals to students attending schools participating in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) may include tallying the total number of reimbursable meals served, without accounting for student eligibility. Meals are then multiplied by a CEP eligibility rate when claiming for reimbursement. Meals served at CEP schools are often recorded using a [daily meal count form](#).

## Student Eligibility

### Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)

**SFAs operating SSO and eligible for CEP should elect to participate in the CEP and maintain their CEP election, even though they are not claiming meals under the NSLP.** CEP must have successive years, i.e., no gap years. Eligible SFAs **received** detailed CEP election information by June 30, 2021, and elections must be emailed to [program specialists](#) by July 30, 2021. **As a reminder, schools that elect CEP must not collect or process free and reduced-price meal applications.** OSSE anticipates further guidance on CEP to be released by USDA and will update this guidance accordingly.

## Free and Reduced-price Meal (FARM) applications for SSO

Traditionally, the FARM application is used to determine eligibility for free or reduced-price meals. SFAs that operate SSO and are not electing CEP **must** make FARM applications available to their community and process those applications accordingly. That said, the result of the applications will not have any impact on the student eligibility for meals since all SSO meals are free for students. The result of applications will impact P-EBT status and/or other programs that use student meal eligibility status. Template FARM applications for the 2021-22 school year can be found [here](#). Additional information related to the Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) program is included below.

## FARM applications and Eligibility Carryover for SBP and NSLP

The guidance below still applies for those operating the traditional SBP and NSLP, but OSSE encourages SFAs to reach out to their program specialist to determine if switching to SSO operations may be more advantageous.

Annually, children and families who attend schools that participate in the NSLP and do not attend CEP schools should submit a meal benefit application (commonly known as FARM application) to determine if students qualify for free or reduced-priced meals. COVID-related stimulus payments do not count as income for determining FARM eligibility for the NSLP or SBP and do not need to be included in FARM applications. Similarly, COVID-related stimulus payments do not count as income for CACFP and do not need to be included in the income section of the meal eligibility form.

Eligibility carryover allows children to maintain their prior school year eligibility status for up to 30 operating days into the next school year or until a new eligibility status is made. Schools that did not operate under the NSLP or SBP in the 2020-21 school year may begin the 30-day eligibility carryover if they transition to NSLP/SBP. The free and reduced-price eligibility carryover period is paused during SSO operations.

## Verification

SFAs operating SSO will not need to collect FARM applications for meal eligibility purposes, but may do so for other reasons. **SFAs operating SSO that receive applications prior to Oct. 1 must conduct verification and include these applications in the verification process.**

SFAs that operate the NSLP and collect FARM applications during the 2021-22 school year are required to conduct verification of eligibility for free and reduced-price meals through applications. The sample size used for verification should be based on the number of applications on file as of Oct. 1, 2021.

## P-EBT

Information on the P-EBT program can be found [here](#).

**Students who were eligible for free meals in the 2020-21 school year (up to June 24, 2021) are eligible for Summer 2021 P-EBT and there is no action needed.**

**If a student was not eligible for P-EBT in the 2020-21 school year and has had a change in circumstance (for example a loss of employment) and does not attend a CEP school, the student can complete a FARM application to determine eligibility for Summer 2021 P-EBT. The summer period will be defined as children who are approved for free or reduced-price meals between June 25, 2021 and Aug. 29, 2021.**

FARM applications must be approved and updated in the Student Information System (SIS) before Sept. 10, 2021.

The operational status of the P-EBT program is undetermined for the 2021-22 school year. Additional information will be provided as available. P-EBT inquiries should be directed towards the call center, details below:

### P-EBT Call Center

- 877-4DC-PEBT (877-423-7328); or
- TTY: 711
- Monday – Friday, 7:30 a.m. – 4:45 p.m.

## Food Safety Guidance

The recommendations presented below should be used in conjunction with [DC Health's Guidance for Schools](#), [CDC's Guidance for School Nutrition Professionals](#), all relevant Mayor's Orders and all applicable [local](#) and federal food safety requirements.

### Food Service Employees

- **Must** wear a **face mask** at all times while indoors and on school transportation, regardless of vaccination status. In general, people do not need to wear masks when outdoors. However, particularly in areas of substantial to high transmission, CDC recommends that people who are not fully vaccinated wear a mask in crowded outdoor settings or during activities that involve sustained close contact with other people who are not fully vaccinated.
- Should implement **physical (social) distancing of six feet** between adults at all times during school and school-related activities.
- **Must follow PPE requirements**, as required per food safety regulation or requirements.
- **Must not** have direct contact between bare hands and ready-to-eat food (except for when washing fruits and vegetables) and shall use suitable utensils such as deli tissue, spatulas, tongs, single-use gloves or dispensing equipment.
- Should reinforce frequent, [proper handwashing strategies](#) by staff and students, to include washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Key times to **wash hands** include:
  - Before and after eating or preparing food;
  - Before and after work breaks;
  - After going to the bathroom;
  - Before and after putting on, touching, or removing face masks or touching one's face; and
  - Before putting on and after taking off disposable gloves;

- After blowing one's nose, coughing, or sneezing;
- When entering and exiting a classroom or between activities.

#### A Healthy Food Service Environment

- All staff and essential visitors (including contractors) **must wear face masks** at all times while indoors and on school transportation, regardless of vaccination status. In general, people do not need to wear masks when outdoors. However, particularly in areas of substantial to high transmission, CDC recommends that people who are not fully vaccinated wear a mask in crowded outdoor settings or during activities that involve sustained close contact with other people who are not fully vaccinated.
- Schools should implement **physical (social) distancing of six feet to the maximum extent feasible**:
  - Between adults at all times during school and school-related activities.
  - During activities when face masks cannot be worn, such as eating. If schools allow students to eat in classrooms, strategies should be implemented to allow increased spacing between students during meal and snack times.
  - Instituting measures to physically separate and increase distance between employees, volunteers, other coworkers, students and their families, such as:
    - Planning menus, production and food preparation schedules to allow employees to maintain the recommended physical (social) distance.
    - Staggering shifts, start times and break times as much as possible.
  - Using tape to mark 6-foot workstations (boxes or stripes on the floor) in the kitchen, food service and food delivery points where interactions with students or their families occur, if possible.
- Schools should reinforce frequent, [proper handwashing strategies](#) by staff and students, to include washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
  - This includes implementing procedures for **students to wash hands before and after eating**.
- To the extent feasible, schools should:
  - Inform and remind third-party delivery drivers and any suppliers about **face mask requirements, physical (social) distancing and hand hygiene protocols**.
  - Clean and sanitize tables and chairs before and after each meal.
  - Routinely [clean and disinfect](#), when necessary, surfaces and objects that are frequently touched such as kitchen countertops, cafeteria and service tables, door handles, carts and trays.

- Conduct frequent cleaning of entrances, rest areas and other common areas, focusing on surfaces and objects that are touched by multiple people.

## Meal Distribution

- To the extent feasible, schools should allow students to eat lunch and breakfast outdoors or in their classrooms rather than mixing in the cafeteria. If not possible, then schools should stagger lunch by class and/or divide eating area by class, cleaning and sanitizing between groups.
- Given very low risk of transmission from surfaces and shared objects, there is no need to limit food service approaches to single-use items or packaged meals. Schools no longer need to prepackage meals, cutlery, or food items.
- To the extent feasible, if schools are providing grab-and-go meals to families, schools should implement a plan for curbside pickup of meals or contactless delivery service (if possible) to minimize contacts with students and their families, when possible.
- Schools may allow food preparation booths, sampling of food, or food or beverage self-service stations such as hot bars and salad bars (not including whole product). In these scenarios, it is of utmost important to incorporate food safety guidance listed above including wearing face masks, physical (social) distancing, proper hand washing, and cleaning and sanitizing.
- Grab and go meals that are not shelf stable must be placed in a refrigerator within two hours and stored under 41 degrees Fahrenheit. Hot foods must be reheated to 165 degrees Fahrenheit before consumption. Additional reheating instructions can be found [here](#). Foods that are known as “shelf-stable” can be stored at room temperature for an extended period of time (e.g., cereal, graham crackers, raisins).
- Detailed information on shelf-stable foods, those that can be stored at room temperature for an extended period of time, can be found [here](#). Shelf-stable milk may be used as needed. Other shelf-stable items include, but are not limited to, applesauce, sun butter, crackers, granola, dried meats and fruits, and juice. More information for crediting shelf-stable meat, poultry and seafood products can be found [here](#).

## Meal Service

- Given very low risk of transmission from surfaces and shared objects, there is no need to limit food service approaches to single-use items and packaged meals. Schools may use non-disposable food service items which are either manually washed, rinsed and sanitized in a three-compartment sink or in a dishwasher. Individuals should wash their hands after removing their gloves or after directly handling used food service items.
- Students may bring lunches from home. Schools are encouraged to keep each student’s belongings such as lunches separated from others’ and in individually labeled containers, cubbies, or areas. Communication with families about cleaning items brought from home is recommended.
- Schools must ensure adherence to students’ 504 plans, if applicable, and Anaphylaxis Action Plans, including ensuring that students are not exposed to foods to which they are allergic.



- Students should not share food. This helps prevent the spread of COVID-19 for all students and helps protect the safety of [children with food allergies](#).

## Serving Fresh Produce

There are many ways schools can safely serve fresh produce as a part of their meal programs. Food safety for fresh produce and strategies for offering a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables are listed below. See the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) section for additional guidance specific to that program.

### Fresh Produce Safety

- Currently there is no evidence to support transmission of COVID-19 associated with food, including fresh produce.
- CDC guidance recommends rinsing fruits and vegetables under running tap water, including those with skins and rinds that are not eaten (e.g., oranges). Scrub firm produce, such as apples or potatoes, with a clean produce brush. These recommendations pre-existed COVID-19 and continue to be in place.
- Serve produce that is evenly colored and firm all the way around.
- For general food safety recommendations, see the Food Safety Guidance section of this document.
- Find information on nutrition, storage and handling for a variety of produce at the [Produce for Better Health Foundation](#) website.

### Meals for Students Engaged in Distance Learning

- Send a menu indicating to eat fresh produce before frozen or shelf-stable items.
- Whole hand-fruit, like apples and pears, are easy to transport and do not require additional preparation once at home.
- Preserve meal quality. Provide pre-made salads with dressings packed separately from the salad greens or sandwich vegetables packed separately from the bread with instructions for how to prepare the salad or sandwich at home.

### School Gardens

School garden programs are another way to provide fresh produce to students. CDC has developed [Considerations for Outdoor Learning Gardens and Community Gardens](#) as a resource to help ensure school gardens are a safe learning environment and school garden produce as a means to increase access to healthy food. For more information on school gardens, visit OSSE's [Growing Strong: A Comprehensive Guide to Support All School Garden Programs in the District](#).

## Procurement

Food Service Management Companies (FSMC), Vended Meal and Emergency Contracts  
USDA's [Nationwide waiver of FSMC duration in the NSLP and SFSP extension](#) allows SFAs to extend contracts with existing FSMCs that would not otherwise be eligible for extension through the 2021-22 school year or June 30, 2022, whichever is later.

Due to the need to secure contracts without delay, SFAs with FSMC contracts expiring in the 2020-21 school year may use the emergency noncompetitive proposal procurement method to negotiate a new one-year contract for the 2021-22 school year. To ensure program integrity moving forward, contracts resulting from such noncompetitive proposals may not exercise renewal options.

Vended meal contracts have no explicit federal regulatory limit on renewals; therefore, this federal waiver extension is not necessary for vended meal contracts. OSSE grants authority to SFAs to extend contracts with existing vended meal providers that would otherwise not be eligible for extension through the 2021-22 school year or June 30, 2022. Such extensions must be documented, such as with a signed option year renewal.

SFAs not required to follow District of Columbia procurement rules (including public charter schools and participating private schools) may move forward utilizing this waiver extension.

Conversely, District agencies operating as SFAs (DC Public Schools and Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services) are required to follow District regulations, which generally limit the length of procurements to five years. (27 DCMR 2000.1; 5E DCMR 3710.1). These SFAs should consult with their procurement officer prior to utilizing any waiver extension authorized by USDA's policy guidance.

### Contract Amendments

SFAs operating SSO and extending contracts should develop an amendment with the vendor or FSMC that details all changes necessitated by transitioning to SSO for the 2021-22 school year. For example, amendments could include adding SSO, detailing needs for individual breakfast or lunches available for grab and go pickup, and counting and claiming students as free. The amendment should last for only the 2021-22 school year or shorter.

In fixed price contracts, if the vendor or FSMC requests a price increase, the increase should be re-evaluated on the basis of changes in the 2021-22 school year. Price increases should be justified by the vendor or FSMC with documentation. If the total price increase will raise the cost more than the small purchase threshold (\$100,000 for DCPS and DYRS, \$250,000 PCS and private schools), the SFA must do a cost analysis and get independent estimates to ensure the vendor or FSMC's charges are reasonable.

The SFA does not need to agree to a price increase if they do not believe the change is justified. As a reminder, any amendment to a contract with an FSMC for whatever purpose must be reviewed and approved by OSSE prior to execution.

### Procuring Local Food

Local food is especially important when national and global food systems are disrupted by large-scale events like a public health emergency. Buying from local growers not only supports our regional economy, it also helps schools have reliable access to local produce, dairy and proteins. See below for recommendations for procuring local food..

- Use OSSE’s [Choose What’s in Season poster](#) to determine which local food are in season throughout the year.
- Review OSSE’s [Is That Local? resource](#) for guidance on what is considered “local” and “unprocessed” per the Healthy Schools Act of 2010.
- Find contact information for regional growers that have sold locally grown and unprocessed products to DC schools on the [Locally Grown and Unprocessed Food Item Tracking Log](#).
- Search for local growers and processors in the DC region by using the resources listed in OSSE’s [Strawberries & Salad Greens Day Resource Packet for Schools](#).
- Reach out to your distributors for help in sourcing local food items.
- Order local produce through the [DoD Fresh Fruits and Vegetable Program](#).
- Review your FSMC or vendor contract for requirements related to local procurement or farm to school practices.
- Guidance for safely incorporating school garden produce into your meal program is available through [OSSE’s School Garden Program](#).
- Implement a “Meatless Mondays” campaign or any equivalent meatless day program.