



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF

EDUCATION

Policy Updates Related to COVID-19: LEA Meal Provision Guidance

Background

As a part of the District's response to the COVID-19 outbreak in the United States, OSSE is modifying, updating, and re-circulating certain policies. In all decisions, OSSE will consider relevant federal and local requirements, and fairness to LEAs and schools during this dynamic time.

Scope

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

Effective Date

This policy will take effect from March 9, 2020 and will remain in effect until further notice.

Policy Guidance

In the event of temporary or prolonged school closures, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) provides local educational agencies (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. In order for District LEAs to use either of these options, OSSE must apply to USDA for a waiver. OSSE is seeking and expects USDA to approve the waiver.

Both programs:

- require OSSE approval;
- can be reimbursed for up to two meals each day;
- 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. LEAs using the SSO must follow the NSLP meal patterns.

(2) Summer Food Service Program

Currently approved sponsors of the SFSP from 2019 may serve meals and must follow the SFSP meal patterns.

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 school food authorities (SFAs) participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and/or the School Breakfast Program and sponsors participating in the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) to help ensure that children do not experience a lapse in food security when there are unanticipated school closures.

Q. Can School Food Authorities (SFAs) serve meals if schools are closed?

A. Yes. Meals can be served during unanticipated school closures.

Q. What must OSSE do to enable SFAs to serve meals at schools? What is the status?

A. OSSE must submit a waiver to USDA requesting meals be served at school sites. The waivers have been submitted to USDA, and we anticipate approval shortly.

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. Assuming the waivers submitted to USDA are approved and depending on the guidance from the Deputy Mayor of Education and the Department of Health, SFAs may have the option to serve in a congregate or non-congregate setting.

Q. What does an SFA have to do to be authorized to serve meals if schools are closed?

A. There are two USDA-approved programs that can be used to serve meals during unanticipated school closures: the SFSP and the Seamless Summer Option (SSO). SFAs must obtain OSSE approval to use either of these programs to serve meals if schools are closed.

SFAs can check with OSSE to determine the best course of action. Except for the six LEAs that are sponsors under the SFSP, OSSE recommends that SFAs apply for the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) in their NSLP application, through Orchard. This application may be submitted now, in advance of the need for this option.

Q. Where may school meals be served?

A. Examples of where meals can be served include:

- School sites (once OSSE is approved for its waiver)
- Churches
- Community Centers
- Libraries
- 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. Any additional meals will be not reimbursed by USDA.

Q. Who can school meals be served to?

A. Children 18 and under.

Q. What health-related considerations should be taken into consideration?

A. Schools and sponsors should review guidance provided by USDA, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and DC Health on proper sanitation and cleaning protocols in response to the COVID-19 virus. 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 style service method and discourage children from congregating at these locations.

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

For more information, please visit <https://www.fns.usda.gov/disaster/pandemic>

Questions?

If you have questions relating to this policy please contact OSSE's Director of Nutrition Programs, Lindsey Palmer, at Lindsey.Palmer@dc.gov .