# Superintendent’s Memo #127-20


**COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department of Education**

DATE: May 29, 2020

TO: Division Superintendents

FROM: James F. Lane, Ed.D., Superintendent of Public Instruction

## SUBJECT: Options for Providing Meals to Students in the Summer

The purpose of this memo is to provide information to local school divisions about how to ensure that children continue to have access to nutritious meals throughout the summer. Feeding children during the unanticipated school closure continues to be a priority for local education agencies (LEAs). During the summer months, children continue to be vulnerable to food insecurity while schools remain closed. This year the need is even greater and the election by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) of U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) waivers provides opportunities for LEAs to continue current programs to provide meals. There are several programs and options available to make sure students have access to nutritious meals this summer.

### The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)

The SFSP is federally funded through the USDA and administered by the VDOE. LEAs and other non-school sponsors are currently participating in either the SFSP or the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) of the National School Lunch Program and can continue to do so until schools re-open in the fall. The SFA applications in SNPweb are already approved to continue to provide meal service through the summer months. The only change required is to update the dates and any site locations. The SFSP offers higher federal reimbursement than the SSO, all children accessing meals are eligible, and the meals are reimbursed at the free rate. School food authorities (SFAs) may be the sponsor of the SFSP by preparing and serving meals and earning federal reimbursement or they may be a vendor to another organization and provide meals at a contracted price. SFAs can also collaborate with non-profits and faith-based organizations to provide these meals to children.

### The Seamless Summer Option (SSO)

The SSO is only available to SFAs and combines features of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), and the SFSP. The SSO requires less paperwork with a streamlined process for schools to provide meals when school is not in session in the summer. Under the SSO, schools with at least 50 percent of students eligible for free or reduced-priced meals can provide meals at no charge to all students. All meals are reimbursed at the free rate. The area eligibility waiver extension would allow all schools to continue to participate independent of their student eligibility status (this is currently pending USDA approval).

### Summer 2020 - During COVID-19

National waiver extensions have been issued for non-congregate feeding to allow continuance of meals to be taken offsite, parent pick-up to allow parents to pick up meals on behalf of their children, and meal time flexibility to allow multiple meals to served together and at various times. These waivers have been extended through August 31, 2020. Meal pattern flexibility, allowing food items to be substituted if not available, has been extended through June 30, 2020. These waivers provide for SFAs to continue to serve meals under SFSP throughout the summer with no disruption to meal service.

### Other Resources Available

No Kid Hungry Virginia is available to assist SFAs in finding partnerships and connecting other resources to help meet the needs of the community.

**Emergency Meals-to-You** delivers shelf stable meals, by mail, to students in rural school divisions during an unanticipated closure and where transportation is a major barrier. This program is available to eligible schools at no cost and connects the school or sponsor with vendors who purchase, package, and deliver a box of meals that meet SFSP requirements. To qualify, eligible schools must be closed for at least four weeks, have at least 50 percent free or reduced-priced eligible students, and must be designated as rural.

### Strategies for Summer Meals

This summer presents additional challenges because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The VDOE encourages SFAs and sponsors currently providing meals to assess their current capacity for continuing service through the summer. Making sure meals are provided to all communities in Virginia is a priority in the wake of the pandemic. It is important that SFAs, non-school sponsors, and community partners meet to discuss meal service this summer. Transitioning into summer will take careful and thoughtful planning. Here are a few guidelines for planning.

1. Assess your individual capacity to continue meal service through the summer. What resources do you have and need? What is your capacity to serve meals in the area? Consider staffing, meal distribution, program integrity, and other available resources.
2. Reach out to community partners and other SFSP sponsors to determine the coverage area and who can participate? Is there an interest in collaboration?
3. Define the needs in your community. Where are your most vulnerable children? How can they be served?
4. What assets does each stakeholder have and how can you collaborate?
5. Develop your plan for summer meal service. How can you maximize student participation? How can you continue to provide meals that best serve your community?
6. Identify any barriers and adapt strategies to address them.
7. Reach out to your SNP regional specialist for technical assistance.
8. Put your plan in action and update your SFSP or SSO application.

This summer we must work together to ensure that children have equitable access to nutritious meals. The VDOE and No Kid Hungry Virginia are available to help facilitate discussions and provide support to communities throughout this process. If you have any questions, please contact your assigned regional specialist or Dr. Sandy Curwood at sandra.curwood@doe.virginia.gov .

JFL/SCC