# Attachment A, SNP Memo No. 2019-2020-33

# March 18, 2020

# **Virginia Department of Education logo**

# Office of School Nutrition Programs

# **Frequently Asked Questions: COVID-19**

# **March 13, 2020**

1. **What is the first step to completing our SFSP or SSO application in SNPWeb?**

You will have to open your new application in the 2019-2020 school year for SFSP. Information from last year should prepopulate to make completing the application easier. For SSO you will need to revise your current NSLP application.

1. **In completing the application, do I have to make pre-operational site visits and provide training before operating the SFSP program?**

If the site was approved and operated last summer, then you do not have to provide training and do a pre-operational visit. New sites must complete the full application process. Sponsors must do a pre-approval visit and training for new sites only.

1. **Our School Food Authority (SFA) is thinking about virtual learning. Can we still apply for the non-congregate waiver to feed the students**?

You can still apply for a non-congregate wavier. We will provide additional guidance as it becomes available.

1. **If parents are under quarantine and are not able to work, can they complete an application to apply for free and reduced benefits**?

The income eligibility guidelines for free and reduced price meals are based on annual income. Meal applications can be completed at any time during the school year and households with employees that are quarantined can apply for benefits during this time. SFAs should manage the application process in a manner which reflects their unique circumstances. During the quarantine period, these households may not have information on the duration or its ultimate impact on household income. Therefore, it is reasonable for SFAs to remind households that free or reduced price eligibility is intended to reflect actual annual income. See Superintendent’s memo 029-19.

1. **Can meals be served on Saturday and Sunday**?

No. SFSP and SSO cannot be used for Saturdays and Sundays because school was not scheduled for those days. The same situation applies to breaks.

1. **Can multiple meals be sent home with students?**

Yes, but you must apply and be approved for a waiver for non-congregate meal service. Multiple meals must be unitized and all components must be served. You may claim up to two meals or one meal and one snack, per child, per day, in any combination except for lunch and supper.

1. **Does divisionwide participation in the Community Eligibility Program allow all schools to qualify as SFSP sites?**

No. SFSP sites are based on free and reduced area eligibility. Sites would still have to provide the free and reduced eligibility for the area. A good reference tool is the 2019 Free and Reduced Eligibility that is posted on the [VDOE website](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/nutrition/statistics/index.shtml).

1. **How do I provide meals to the schools that are less than 50 percent free and reduced?**

For closed schools with less than 50 percent enrollment, meal distribution methods must more directly target the households of low-income children. In your application and waiver request, provide details of how you will target the low-income families in the area of the school with less than 50 percent free or reduced eligibility. You may send an email to the families or call them to let them know about meal distribution.

1. **If we want to use buses to distribute meals along the school’s bus routes, how would we complete our site applications?**

In the application, the site should be the school location. The SFA will distribute meals in a non-congregate setting by delivering meals via the bus and using planned bus routes. A non-congregate waiver must be submitted to use this distribution method. Food safety practices must be detailed in the waiver.

1. **Can a school accept and use donated foods (from a food bank, pantry, grocery store, etc.) to help serve during the unexpected closures?**

If the SFA can guarantee that safe food handling practices were used in the life cycle of the food, they could potentially help distribute the food to families in need. However, this food cannot be used as part of a reimbursable meal. **As always**, **USDA Foods can be used in any meal preparation.**

1. **We were told that all schools in Virginia are able to provide non-congregate meals? Is that the case?**

The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) applied for a waiver that would allow VDOE to grant approval to SFAs that choose to provide meals in a non-congregate setting. Each SFA that wants to provide meals in a non-congregate setting must submit a waiver to VDOE and have it approved before they start to serve meals.

1. **If we are providing multiple meals, how many meals can we send home with students?**

The sponsor can send home up to one week of meals. Only two meals can be claimed per student per day. Meal combinations can include two meals or a meal and a snack, but not lunch and supper.

1. **Can we donate our perishable foods?**

Foods can be donated to charitable organizations. You cannot distribute foods to individuals.

1. **Can schools that have been approved for non-congregate feeding through SFSP or SSO deliver meals directly to students’ homes?**

Yes. If the SFA determines there is a need and it is logistically feasible to deliver meals directly to homes. This option is only available to SFA sponsors of school sites due to the confidentiality and logistical requirements. The SFA would have to get consent from the parent and adhere to all other federal confidentially requirements. Delivery could be completed by mail or delivery service, or hand-delivered by school staff. Schools electing to deliver meals may only serve children who are in an area eligible location or who are eligible for free or reduced meals. The SFA would have to submit a waiver for non-congregate feeding and also complete the section for a waiver of meal service times. In addition, the SFA must document their delivery plan with designated delivery times, distribution details, and how the SFA will ensure student confidentiality is maintained.

1. **What funding is available for meal delivery?**

There is no additional reimbursement for home delivery or mobile meal delivery. Expenses related to delivery, such as postage or delivery service fees, would be considered an allowable expense under SFSP or SSO. Delivery costs could also be paid with non-program funds such as state, local funds, or private donations.

1. **Who is eligible to receive home-delivered meals under SFSP and SSO?**

Schools operating an open SFSP or SSO site in an area eligible location may deliver meals to all children in their eligible area. Schools operating a closed-enrolled site may enroll children who are certified for free or reduced price meals, and deliver only to the enrolled, eligible children. It is the responsibility of the school to confirm the eligibility of each participating child. All children attending Provision 2 or Community Eligibility (CEP) schools are considered eligible for delivered meals.

1. **What are the requirements for initiating home meal delivery for a household?**

Schools must first obtain written consent from households of eligible children (this could include email or other electronic means) that the household wants to receive delivered meals. In addition, schools should confirm the household’s current contact information and the number of eligible children in the household to ensure the correct number of meals are delivered to the correct location.

It is critical that schools protect the confidentiality of students and their households throughout this process. The National School Lunch Act (NSLA) and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) do not authorize release of household contact information for children without first obtaining the written consent of the child’s parent or guardian. The school must be the entity that makes the first contact about meal delivery with the households of eligible children, and must notify the household if contact information will be shared with an external organization, for example, a local nonprofit that will provide meal delivery. Once the school receives written consent from the parent or guardian to release contact information, the schools may share the information with other organizations involved with meal delivery. If the school is using a private vendor, then under the regulations implementing the NSLA, they must have a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the vendor concerning the confidentiality requirements. The MOU should include information such as what will be disclosed, how the information will be used, how the information will be protected from unauthorized uses and disclosures, and penalties for unauthorized disclosure.

1. **How many home-delivered meals per child may be delivered at once?**

The maximum number of meals that may be offered each child remains the same as under SFSP or SSO: up to two meals, or one meal and one snack, per child, per day, in any combination except lunch and supper. The distribution approach can include meals for multiple days, up to one week at a time. The SFA must submit a waiver for non-congregate feeding and also ask to waive the meal service times. In addition, the SFA must submit a detailed distribution plan including delivery times, food safety requirements, and how they will maintain student confidentially.

1. **Do home-delivered meals need to be shelf-stable?**

No. The type of meal offered will depend on the resources and capacity of the site. Those that are able to prepare ready-to-eat meals and have the capacity to deliver meals daily in a way that meets State or local food safety requirements may do so. Home-delivered meals still have to meet all meal pattern requirements of the SFSP or SSO.

1. **Does a child need to be present for home meal delivery?**

No. As long as the school has obtained the household’s written consent to deliver meals and has verified the current address, the student does not need to be present at the time of delivery. If the meals are shelf-stable, no one need be present, as long as the address has been verified. Please consider state and local food safety requirements and best practices.

1. **If a household has children in multiple schools, can the school coordinate to provide one home delivery for all children in the household?**

Yes. To the extent feasible, SFAs or schools are encouraged to coordinate their deliveries to make best use of their resources.

1. **What options do schools have if the school facilities are closed but they continue to offer online learning?**

If school buildings are closed unexpectedly during the school year due to reasons provided in 42 U.S.C. 1761(c)(1), this is an unanticipated school closure. Even if virtual learning is provided, if the building is closed and students cannot attend their physical school location for classes, SFAs and community organizations (COs) may operate SFSP and SSO programs as permitted under program requirements. SFSP and SSO open sites must meet area eligibility criteria, i.e., be located in an area where at least 50 percent of the children are low income. For sites that are not area eligible, the SFA or CO may operate a closed-enrolled site, basing the site eligibility on the percentage of enrolled children being eligible for free and reduced price meals.

If an SFA is considering school to be in session and wishes to continue offering the NSLP and SBP during such building closures, the SFA must request a non-congregate meal waiver when school buildings are closed, but children continue to attend classes online. In this situation, schools would continue to claim and be reimbursed for meals based on the eligibility status of the individual student. All other NSLP and SBP requirements would apply; waiver and exception requests would be considered.

1. **If a scheduled spring break was postponed or cancelled due to COVID-19, may meals served while schools were closed be claimed under SFSP/SSO, provided the school has an approved unanticipated school closure waiver?**

Yes, in the case of school closures due to COVID-19, FNS can allow SFSP/SSO sponsors to claim federal reimbursement for meals served during scheduled spring breaks that were cancelled or postponed due to the unforeseen public health emergency.