



#144-21

Commonwealth of Virginia
Virginia Department of Education
Superintendent's Memo #144-21

DATE: May 28, 2021
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 memorandum is to encourage local school divisions to promote and participate in the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) or Seamless Summer Option (SSO) of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) to provide meals for children when school is not in session.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated childhood hunger and school food authorities (SFAs) worked tirelessly during school year 2020-2021 to ensure children had access to nutritious meals. During the summer months, children continue to be vulnerable to food insecurity, especially those not attending summer school. This year the need is even greater and the election by the Virginia Department of Education, Office of School Nutrition Programs (VDOE-SNP) of U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) waivers provides opportunities for SFAs to continue current programs to provide summer meals. There are several programs and options available to ensure students have access to nutritious meals this summer.

The SFSP

The SFSP is federally funded through the USDA and administered by the VDOE-SNP. SFAs and other community sponsors are currently participating in either the SFSP or the SSO and can continue to do so until schools reopen in the fall. The SFA applications in SNPweb have been approved for continued meal service through the summer months. The only revision required

is updating the dates and any site locations. The SFSP offers higher federal reimbursement than the SSO and all children accessing meals are eligible with meals reimbursed at the free rate. SFAs may be the sponsor of the SFSP by preparing and serving meals and earning federal reimbursement or they may opt to be a vendor to another organization and provide meals at a contracted price. SFAs may also collaborate with nonprofits and faith-based organizations to provide these meals to children.

The SSO

The SSO is only available to SFAs and combines features of the 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 during 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 2021 during COVID-19

National waiver extensions have been issued for non-congregate feeding to allow meals to be taken off-site, for parent pick-up to allow parents to pick up meals on behalf of their children, and for meal time flexibility to allow multiple meals to be served together and at various times. These waivers have been extended through September 30, 2021. Meal pattern flexibility, allowing food items to be substituted if not available, has been extended through June 30, 2021, for the SFSP and June 30, 2022, for the SSO. These waivers allow SFAs to continue to serve meals under the SFSP or the SSO throughout the summer with no disruption to meal service.

Program Promotion

Federal regulations require SFAs to make information on their summer meals programs widely available to the public. The VDOE-SNP encourages SFAs to promote their summer meals programs through local media, social media, and school webpages. As plans change

throughout the summer, SFAs should continue to update the public on when meals are available at feeding locations.

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. No Kid Hungry Virginia is also available to support with marketing ideas and the creation of promotional materials to help spread the word about summer meal sites.

Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT)

P-EBT provides a nutritional supplement to children who qualify for free or reduced-price meals in the NSLP and are learning remotely or in a hybrid environment through school year 2020-2021. All students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals, regardless of in-person or remote learning status, are eligible for benefits through summer 2021. ***Children receiving P-EBT benefits are eligible to also receive summer meals in the SFSP and SSO, as a means of maximizing access to nutritious meals during the summer months.***

Strategies for Summer Meals

This summer presents additional challenges because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The VDOE-SNP encourages SFAs and sponsors currently providing meals to assess their current capacity for continuing service through the summer. Ensuring meals are provided to all communities in Virginia is a priority during the pandemic. It is important that SFAs, community 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 is eligible to 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 they 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? What strategies can you use to spread the word about summer meal programs in your community?
6. Identify any barriers and adapt strategies to address those barriers.
7. Reach out to your SNP or Child Nutrition Programs regional specialist for technical assistance.
8. Put your plan into action and update your SFSP or SSO application.

For more information

This summer we must work together to ensure that children have equitable access to nutritious meals. The VDOE-SNP 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 via email at Sandra.Curwood@doe.virginia.gov.

JFL/SCC/cc