



Food and
Nutrition
Service

DATE: April 20, 2021

Braddock
Metro Center

CODE: COVID-19: Child Nutrition Response #84

1320

Braddock
Place

Alexandria
VA 22314

SUBJECT: Child Nutrition Nationwide Waiver Update for School Year 2021-2022

TO: Regional Directors
Special Nutrition Programs
All Regions

State Directors
Child Nutrition Programs
All States

This memo announces a new suite of Child Nutrition Program nationwide waivers and flexibilities to support a successful school reopening in school year 2021-2022.

School nutrition professionals across the nation have engaged in a heroic effort to connect children with nutritious meals throughout the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. On the frontlines since March 2020, school nutrition professionals have worked hard to adapt their meal service to meet the needs of children in their communities. To support their efforts, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) established nationwide waivers to streamline access, enhance program flexibility, and reduce administrative burden. These waivers, first established in spring 2020, were most recently extended through summer 2021.

As we look ahead to next school year, we know that even as the nation recovers, school nutrition professionals will continue to face challenges in their work. State and local officials are working hard to plan for the new school year, and FNS recognizes that providing flexibility will support their extraordinary efforts. Some schools may provide a virtual learning option for students who are not ready to return to in-person learning this fall, for example, due to an increased risk of severe illness and/or special healthcare needs.¹ Schools will need flexibility to provide meals to virtual learners. Flexibility will also allow schools to continue with classroom meals, outdoor meals, and other meal service models that support social distancing for in-person students.

To support a successful school reopening, and to promote afterschool and child care, FNS is releasing a new suite of waivers and flexibilities to increase funding, support access, and balance operational needs with the goal of providing nutritious meals:

- Nationwide Waiver to Allow the Seamless Summer Option through School Year 2021-2022

¹ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend families consider whether their child is at increased risk of severe illness, as well as their child's academic and social-emotional needs, when considering a learning format. See: *Making Decisions about Children Attending In-person School During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Information for Parents, Guardians, and Caregivers*, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/decision-tool.html>. Accessed March 29, 2021.

- Nationwide Waiver to Allow Summer Food Service Program Reimbursement Rates in School Year 2021-2022
- Nationwide Waiver to Allow Non-Congregate Meal Service for School Year 2021-2022
- Nationwide Waiver of Meal Time Requirements for School Year 2021-2022
- Nationwide Waiver to Allow Parents and Guardians to Pick Up Meals for Children for School Year 2021-2022
- Nationwide Waiver to Allow Specific School Meal Pattern Flexibility for School Year 2021-2022
- Nationwide Waiver to Allow Specific Meal Pattern Flexibility in the Child and Adult Care Food Program for School Year 2021-2022
- Nationwide Waiver to Allow Offer Versus Serve Flexibility for Senior High Schools in School Year 2021-2022
- Nationwide Waiver of Area Eligibility in the Afterschool Programs and for Family Day Care Home Providers in School Year 2021-2022
- Nationwide Waiver of Onsite Monitoring Requirements in the School Meals Programs – Revised – EXTENSION 3
- Nationwide Waiver of Onsite Monitoring Requirements for State Agencies in the Child and Adult Care Food Program – EXTENSION 3
- Nationwide Waiver of Monitoring Requirements for Sponsors in the Child and Adult Care Food Program – EXTENSION

Under the *Nationwide Waiver to Allow the Seamless Summer Option through School Year 2021-2022*, all school food authorities in States that opt in to the waiver are permitted to serve and claim meals through the Seamless Summer Option, regardless of their location. State agencies are not required to target school or student participation; all school food authorities and schools may use this waiver. Further, FNS has used its authority to increase meal reimbursement rates for Seamless Summer in school year 2021-2022, recognizing the increased costs schools have incurred when providing safe meals during the pandemic. The continued availability of the Seamless Summer Option will provide maximum administrative flexibility for schools and access for children.

In addition, as more students return to in-person learning, it is important to ensure they receive high-quality, nutritious meals that help them succeed in the classroom. For school year 2021-2022, schools will be returning to the school meal pattern, which emphasizes healthy eating with a focus on fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and sensible calorie levels. However, FNS understands that many child nutrition professionals will continue to face operational constraints in the new school year, and therefore will require continued flexibility regarding the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Program meal requirements. Continued COVID-19 safety protocols at some schools may require school nutrition professionals to continue using alternative meal service models that allow for social distancing. Certain meal pattern requirements may be difficult to meet when using these models, and schools may require targeted flexibility. To that end, FNS is issuing a nationwide waiver to allow schools to utilize specific meal pattern flexibilities, as outlined in the waiver. FNS is committed to supporting schools in serving the most nutritious meals possible as they transition back to normal school meal program operations during the upcoming school year. We expect that the flexibilities

provided for this school year will only be utilized as needed, and that schools will seek to meet the nutrition standards to the greatest extent possible. In support of that goal, FNS will focus its technical assistance resources on the specific challenges schools face during this transition period.

The return to school and work also means a return to afterschool and child care for many families, and FNS appreciates that child care providers will also need flexibility to provide safe meals to children. Similar targeted meal pattern flexibility is available for child care providers in school year 2021-2022.

FNS recognizes the continued need to adapt program oversight to the uncertain and potentially diverse circumstances that State agencies and schools will face in school year 2021-2022. As part of its continued effort to support any necessary protocols for social distancing in schools and child care facilities, FNS is extending nationwide waivers to allow offsite monitoring for the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, and Child and Adult Care Food Program until 30 days after the end of the public health emergency, which was declared on January 31, 2020, by the United States Department of Health and Human Services.

While many waivers in this suite provide flexibility for an extended timeframe, FNS expects schools and child care providers to use the flexibilities for only the duration and extent that they are needed. Program operators should continue to refer to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for the latest information on mitigation and prevention measures, including those around food and drink consumption. For example, schools may refer to the webpage *Safely Distributing School Meals During COVID-19*: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/safely-distributing-meals.html>.

The Child Nutrition Programs play an essential role in the health and development of our nation's children, and a successful and timely return to in-school program operations a priority for FNS. Looking ahead, FNS remains committed to providing schools and child care providers the resources they need to offer a high-quality meal service in the new school year. State and local program operators across the country have worked tirelessly to make sure children have access to nutritious meals despite unprecedented challenges of the pandemic, and we will do our part to support them.



Angela M. Kline
Director
Policy and Program Development Division