

Child Nutrition and School Meals Fact Sheet

Congress has provided \$8.8 billion in additional [funding](#) for child nutrition programs and temporarily removed some existing program requirements in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act); the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has provided administrative flexibilities.

Federal Options to Provide Meals During COVID-19

While school districts and states are not required to provide meals to students during unexpected school closures several federal nutrition programs allow local governments, school districts and community organizations to provide meals for children. These federal programs include:

■ **National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program:** These programs provide school food under normal circumstances. During the pandemic, if school districts are considered open but students are learning remotely new program flexibilities allow food to be distributed and eaten at home.

■ **Summer Food Programs:** On March 9, 2020, the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) began approving waivers enabling sponsors of the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and National School Lunch Program Seamless Summer Option (SSO) to serve meals outside of a group setting and at school sites during school closures. FNS also issued [guidance on meal delivery](#) using existing authorities in summer meal programs

- **Summer Food Service Program (SFSP):** Operated by local governments, schools, and nonprofit organizations this program normally provides meals to low-income students during the summer. The program is now being used to provide meals during unexpected school closures.

Child Nutrition Program Background

- 30 million students eat school lunch every day and 22 million of these children rely on free or reduced price school lunch.
 - School lunch and breakfast are free for households under 130% of the federal poverty level and reduced cost for households under 185% of poverty (Federal Poverty Line is \$26,200 for a family of four in 2020)
 - **Reimbursement rates 2019-2020**
Lunch: \$3.50, Breakfast: \$2.20 (free rates)
 - **National School Lunch Program Funding 2016**
\$12.5 billion
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- **Seamless Summer Option (SSO):** Available to schools that operate the NSLP. This program operates with less administrative work than the SFSP by allowing schools to operate a summer meal program under similar rules and reimbursement rates as the NSLP.
 - **Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP):** This program, run by sponsor sites and nonprofit organizations, normally provides children with after-school snacks and suppers. These sites can transition from normal operations to provide a take-home lunch and snack or breakfast and snack.
 - **Pandemic EBT:** The FFCRA authorized the USDA to allow states to provide income-eligible families with Electronic Benefit Transfer

cards with the value of the daily reimbursement rate of free school breakfast and lunch. All students who qualify for free or reduced price school meals qualify for the program. This program offers a way for states to ensure all vulnerable students receive meals.

USDA Child Nutrition Program Waivers

- **Nationwide Meal Times Waiver:** allows meals to be served to kids outside normal meal times to maximize flexibility for meal pick-up.
- **Nationwide Non-congregate Feeding Waiver:** allows meals be served in non-group settings to support social distancing.
- **Nationwide Afterschool Activity Waiver:** allows a pause in enrichment activities to accompany afterschool meals and snacks.
- **Nationwide Meal Pattern Waiver:** gives states the flexibility to serve meals that do not meet meal pattern requirements when needed.
- **Nationwide Parent/Guardian Meal Pick-Up Waiver:** allows parents/guardians to pick-up meals without having children present children.

- **Nationwide Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) Data Waiver:** extends CEP election, notification, and reporting and deadlines for school year 2020-21.
- **Nationwide Waivers of Child Nutrition Monitoring:** extends certain administrative deadlines related to CEP because of school closures.
- **Area Eligibility Waivers:** allowing states to waive the requirement in the summer meals programs that “open site” meal service is limited to areas with at least half of the children in the area are low-income households.

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