




# State of New Jersey

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To: School Business Administrators, Charter School Leads; Non Public School Administrators;  
Food Service Directors of Schools Participating in the School Nutrition Programs

From: Arleen Ramos-Szatmary, Coordinator   
School Nutrition Programs

Date: July 15, 2020

Subject: USDA Nationwide Waivers for School Year 2020-2021

The USDA has released five nationwide waivers related to Child Nutrition Programs for the 2020-2021 School Year. Most notably, all SFAs must return to claiming meals under the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, and Afterschool Snack Program once the academic school year begins. SFAs will no longer be able to claim all meals at the free rate through the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) or Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) after August 31, 2020. This signifies that **meals must be available and accessible to all students, regardless of eligibility, and must be claimed at the applicable free, reduced or paid eligibility categories.** The return to standard National School Lunch and School Breakfast Program claiming also signifies that SFAs may no longer operate an open, restricted open or closed enrolled site.

The waivers allow reimbursable meals to be claimed for meals provided to students physically attending school, students participating in virtual instruction throughout the week, and a combination of physical and virtual instruction. SFAs may also claim reimbursable meals provided to students for off-site consumption on half day sessions. Meals can only be claimed on days in which instruction is provided, whether it be through physical or virtual attendance. Meals cannot be claimed on weekends or on days where no instruction takes place.

Meal distribution for virtual instruction days may include a variety of methods, including, but not limited, to home delivery, weekly distribution at a set time during the day or evening, or the provision of meals for the virtual instruction day(s) to students during their on-site day. SFAs must continue to strive to prevent overt identification while balancing the logistical challenges of providing meals during this unprecedented time.

The five USDA Waivers can be summarized below:

- ***Nationwide Waiver to Allow Non-Congregate Feeding (#33):*** Program Operators may provide non-congregate meals during COVID-19 related operations throughout School Year 2020-2021.
- ***Nationwide Waiver to Allow Meal Service Time Flexibility (#34):*** Program Operators may establish meal service times that support streamlined access to nutritious meals throughout School Year 2020-2021.
- ***Nationwide Waiver to Allow Parents and Guardians to Pick Up Meals for Children (#35):*** Program Operators may distribute meals to a parent or guardian to take home to their children for virtual instruction days. All SFAs must, however, have a plan to maintain accountability and Program

integrity. This includes putting into place processes to ensure meals are distributed only to parents or guardians of children with access to meals, and that duplicate meals are not distributed to any child.

- ***Nationwide Waiver to Allow Meal Pattern Flexibility (#36)***: SFAs may continue to request meal pattern exemptions as long as they are targeted, justified, and based on plans to support access to nutritious meals while minimizing potential exposure to COVID-19 during the School Year. SFAs will be able to apply for a meal pattern exemption for SY2020-2021 beginning in August.
- ***Nationwide Waiver of Offer vs Serve (OVS) Requirement in Senior High Schools in the National School Lunch Program (#37)***: The requirement for high schools to utilize Offer vs Serve is waived for SY2020-2021, allowing schools to safely provide unitized meals to all students during cafeteria service, pickup or home delivery. When indicating that OVS will not be utilized at the high school level in the Site Details section of the Application Packet, please enter, "COVID-19 Waiver" in the justification box. All SFAs should strongly consider providing a serve-only meal in order to increase efficiency and safety while decreasing meal service lines. SFAs may also choose to utilize OVS in the cafeteria while employing a serve-only method in other locations.

To remain consistent with New Jersey Department of Education and Centers for Disease Control guidelines, many SFAs will be serving meals in classrooms or other locations this year. A reminder that point of service counts must continue to be taken accurately. **If providing meals in the classroom or locations outside of the cafeteria, foodservice staff should continue to take all point of service counts.** This will ensure accuracy, prevent additional training requirements, and avoid additional burden on teachers.

The New Jersey Department of Education recommends discontinuing use of family-style, self-service, or buffet lines during meal service. The use of disposable food service items (e.g., utensils) and individually plated meals or meals in pre-packaged boxes or bags are also recommended. Share Tables are not allowed.

The NJDA recognizes and deeply acknowledges the commitment, effort and patience required by all school personnel in developing a plan to ensure that New Jersey students have access to nutritious and safe meals. Please continue to direct any questions to the School Nutrition Programs Office at 609-984-0693.