

Governor Mike Parson, Commissioner of Education Margie Vandeven and other leaders across the state have continued to thank school food staff members and administrators for their dedication to continue feeding students during COVID-19. Your students and their families will not forget what you have done!

DESE Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) is working quickly and closely with local schools, and making efforts to be as flexible as possible to ensure local schools can continue to get food to the children who need it during the COVID-19 pandemic. DESE is evaluating the continued need for the waivers as the situation continues to evolve. The [FNS website](#) supports these efforts, serving as a quick resource for local schools to access disaster information along with Seamless Summer Option (SSO) safety tips and any/all program updates.

During COVID-19 school closures, hundreds of sites have participated in SSO and may want to continue to feed students after the last day of school. Schools are allowed to continue SSO through the summer months (May-September). After your school year ends, SSO may operate under normal summer conditions, and for some of you the COVID-19 waivers may still apply to summer meals. The SSO is designed to encourage more school districts administering the National School Lunch (NSLP) or School Breakfast Program (SBP) to provide meals during summer months. Meal service is not tied to summer curriculum. The SSO application must be submitted and/or revised through the DESE School Nutrition Program DESE Web Applications system. DESE FNS will approve the applications.

Normal summer conditions require reimbursable meals to be consumed on-site in a congregate setting during designated meal times; however, during COVID-19 closures, certain waivers are allowing flexibility for school districts to continue providing meals to be taken and consumed offsite to allow for social distancing. We have included more details and information on this topic in the newest updates to the DESE FNS COVID-19 Q&A Document. This waiver has been extended until August 31, 2020 for meals to be consumed off-site.

With new authority provided by the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, schools currently operating Closed-Enrolled sites under SSO are eligible to apply to operate an open site. Effective April 9, 2020, DESE was approved for an [Area Eligibility](#) waiver, which applies to school districts and meal site locations that are not located in “*Areas in which poor economic conditions exist*” and allows school districts operating SSO who are in good standing to submit a request to operate open sites. To operate an open site, the LEA must provide documentation showing an increased need. Your LEA can apply for this waiver here: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/eligibilitywaiver>. An open site must be committed to feeding all children age 18 and under in the community.

Please remember to revise your SSO application in the DESE Web Applications, complete with changes to the dates and times you are continuing to feed students. We also ask that you notify DESE FNS if you are making the decision to stop meal service.

If your district is considering stopping meal service, we encourage you to review the following “Stay Strong Child Nutrition Directors” list for considerations and guidance before making a final decision.

Considerations and Guidance

Reminder: Always notify families and DESE of any changes made to meal service

Have you made contact with a food bank or food pantry in the area that could pick up meal service or rotate days? Existing services being offered statewide can be found here: <https://mo.servicesnavigator.org/s4s/WhereILive/Council?pageId=1&lockla=true>.

Check out [the Feeding Missouri service map](#) to see which food bank supports the work of your local pantries and food programs. Find the nearest location for food assistance with the organization's [Pantry Finder](#).

Have you made contact with another non-profit partner in the community to sponsor a meal service site where students could pick up a reimbursable meal that isn't located at school site?

DESE allows any of the following: multiple breakfast and lunch meals to be distributed at one time, multiple days or a week's worth of meals to be distributed at once, or bulk meals to be delivered for an entire week to reduce exposure and eliminate staff and delivery burdens. See question #15 here: <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/SP14-2020s-a.pdf>. These meal service strategies can help reduce costs and better support social distancing.

Are you able to donate your food inventory to a local food bank or pantry so that organization could prepare meals for students? Find a local food bank or pantry here: <https://mo.servicesnavigator.org/s4s/WhereILive/Council?pageId=1&lockla=true>.

Rural school districts are eligible for the [Emergency Meals-to-You program](#).

Have you applied for the Meal Pattern Waiver to help reduce food inventory issues? If not, [apply here](#).

Did you know Panera Bread will prepare and deliver lunch meals for your students for \$3.20 per meal? For more information, email schoolmeals@panerabread.com.

Are you in contact with your County Emergency Management Directors for access to PPE?

Have you checked out DESE SSO meals and safety tools and tips to help reduce exposure and protect staff? Find that information here: <https://dese.mo.gov/financial-admin-services/food-nutrition-services/seamless-summer-option-meals-and-safety-resources>.

Do you need resources to create Standard Operating Procedures and employee awareness? Visit: <https://theicn.org/prevent>.

Prevent staff burnout by using tools to help build stronger teams and streamline your work. Find more information here: <https://www.lunchassist.org/covid-19.html>.

Are families in your district aware of the Pandemic-EBT benefits? More information will be released soon. All questions will be addressed through the DSS Family Support Division. The Call Center (855-FSD-INFO) will have an option available on the main menu to transfer callers to one of the P-EBT processing staff.

Are you aware of how to safely disinfect after a staff exposure so that the school may continue meal service? Get information here: <https://foodsafety.ces.ncsu.edu/covid-19-resources/>. For cleaning and disinfecting details from the CDC, visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/disinfecting-building-facility.html>.

DESE allows for ineligible sites to be approved to operate an SSO open site under area an eligibility waiver effective April 9. More sites can qualify for area eligibility to spread out meal sites and reduce exposure.

Howies normally supplies athletic equipment to teams and schools. During COVID-19, the company is now producing bags for school meals. Visit: www.HowiesAthleticTape.com.

The FDA recently hosted a call to discuss newly released information on best practices for retail food stores, restaurants and food pick-up and delivery services to protect workers and customers during the COVID-19 pandemic. [Click here](#) for instructions on how to listen to the audio replay of the call or view the call transcript (available until August 20).

Team Nutrition has developed a series of resources that assist in planning meals during COVID-19. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn>

The Missouri Food Finder <https://mofoodfinder.org/> is a new online tool that easily connects Missouri consumers with people growing and selling locally produced food in their region.

A fact sheet for School Nutrition Professionals is in development and will be available online at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/businesses-employers.html>.

The Food to Families Program is designed to deliver \$3 billion of food to families in need. Producers and distributors may respond to the RFP from USDA Agriculture Marketing Service to distribute boxes of food (through nonprofit organizations) to end-consumers (i.e. families). LEAs are eligible entities for distributing this food to end-consumers, but this is separate from FNS Child Nutrition Programs. Distribution of the food boxes can be localized or regional. <https://www.ams.usda.gov/selling-food-to-usda/farmers-to-families-food-box>

View School Nutrition Association [resources here](#).