

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT AFTERSCHOOL MEALS



## WHY AFTERSCHOOL MEALS?

Serving Afterschool Meals is a win-win-win for schools by bringing more money to the school nutrition department, increasing interest in afterschool programming, and most importantly, fueling hungry kids to continue learning and growing. The At-Risk Afterschool Meals component of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), sometimes known simply as Afterschool Meals or the Supper Program, is the newest option under the federal child nutrition programs, and with that comes questions on how it works.

The School Nutrition Foundation and No Kid Hungry have partnered to answer some of the most commonly asked questions on implementing Afterschool Meals so that you can take advantage of this added resource for your department and students.

## AREA ELIGIBILITY

### **Q: What is the free and reduced-price eligibility criteria to qualify for Afterschool Meals?**

**A:** Each school or community location that serves meals or snacks through CACFP At-Risk Afterschool must be within the attendance zone of a public school where at least half (50 percent) of the students qualify for free or reduced-price school meals. If a school is the meal site, it does not need to reach the 50 percent threshold as long as it is within the attendance boundary of an eligible school.

### **Q: Many schools in my district do CEP (Community Eligibility Provision). Are those schools automatically eligible?**

**A:** No, they are not automatically eligible, but they are likely eligible. Area eligibility must be determined for each school; unlike with CEP, there cannot be any school groupings or averaging. The individual school's identified student percentage (ISP) multiplied by 1.6 must be 50 percent or higher in order to qualify as area eligible, or it must be within the attendance zone of another school that qualifies.

### **Q: Is attendance zone the same thing as the feeder pattern?**

**A:** No. Only attendance zones may be used to determine area eligibility.

One way to think about this is to consider a hypothetical child living at the address of the potential meal site. That child would be assigned to attend one elementary school, one middle school, and one high school. The free and reduced-price eligibility data for any one of those three schools could be used to determine the meal site's area eligibility.

Usually, many elementary schools eventually feed into one middle school and several middle schools to one high school, but the many schools within that feeder pattern do not necessarily confer area eligibility on each other. A meal site would ordinarily have only three schools it could use for determining area eligibility: an elementary school, a middle school or junior high, and a high school.

**Q: What if my district has school choice or busing?**

A: See the USDA Memo [SP 11-2011, CACFP 02-2011, SFSP 01-2011](#): Effects of Busing on Area Eligibility in the CACFP, SFSP, and Afterschool Snack and Seamless Summer Option through the NSLP. Your State Agency can also help you to understand how to determine area eligibility given your exact situation.

**Q: I operate a charter school. Do I have to use data from traditional public schools to determine eligibility?**

A: No. Meal sites located in private schools and public charter schools may use that school's data. If the private or charter school does not qualify based on its own data, you can opt to use local public school data, just like any other community site. However, meal sites in public schools or other community locations may not use private or charter school data to determine area eligibility.

**Q: There are some schools over 50 percent in my district, but the overall district average is under 50 percent. Can I still serve Afterschool Meals, and is it still worth it?**

A: Yes! As long as you have one school at or over 50 percent free or reduced-price eligible, you can serve Afterschool Meals at that school and any other school or site within its attendance boundary. Districts and individual schools in this situation can still be successful with a well-run and promoted program.

**Q: None of the schools in my district are at or over 50 percent free or reduced-price eligible. What can I do?**

A: While none of the schools or sites within the bounds of your district are eligible for Afterschool Meals, you can still serve snacks through the NSLP and receive reimbursement according to each child's eligibility status. You could also serve as an Afterschool Meals sponsor or vendor to meal sites outside of your district's boundaries.

## EDUCATIONAL OR ENRICHMENT PROGRAMMING

**Q: What counts as educational or enrichment programming?**

A: Many things! It doesn't have to be fancy. The [USDA's CACFP At-Risk Afterschool Meals Guide](#) states, "Although there are no specific requirements for the types of educational and enrichment activities that a program can offer, examples include, but are not limited to, arts and crafts, homework assistance, life skills, remedial education, organized fitness activities, etc." (Page 8). You could have one activity or several options. If you're unsure if an activity qualifies, check with your state agency.

**Q: So does tutoring count?**

A: Yes!

**Q: Does the school or school staff have to provide the activities?**

A: No, it's perfectly fine to have an outside organization or volunteers operate the afterschool program.

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**Q: Can the program charge a fee for enrollment or activities?**

A: Yes, as long as the state agency agrees that it is a reasonable fee that does not present an undue barrier to the low-income children who most need the afterschool meals. You cannot charge a separate fee for the meal, though. All meals must be served at no cost to participants.

**Q: Does the program have to be supervised?**

A: Yes, the regulations say that there must be a structured and supervised environment. However, there is no federal guidance on what that means, nor is there a specified staff to child ratio unless it is required by state or local licensing or safety standards. Work with school and district administrators, afterschool program coordinators, and state agency staff to determine an appropriate level of supervision.

**Q: Does everyone have to participate in an activity?**

A: No, children are not required to participate in an activity in order to receive a meal. There is no requirement to track participation, just attendance. However, an activity must be available to everyone who receives a meal. In other words, you could not serve meals to the entire student body if the only afterschool activity was a small program with a selective application process and enrollment fee.

**Q: What if the only program operating at a school or community site is a selective program? Could I serve meals to the children enrolled in that program at least?**

A: Yes, you would most likely be approved to serve meals just to that group as long as it's not a competitive athletic program. The [guide](#) states that programs designed for the needs of enrolled participants, including gifted children, may be eligible (page 9). So for example, a selective educational or enrichment program like the school quiz team could be eligible for Afterschool Meals.

**Q: Can I serve meals to athletes?**

A: Yes, as long as both the meal program and an educational or enrichment activity are open to all students. Many schools with a variety of afterschool programs and activities likely meet this criteria. You cannot operate the Afterschool Meals Program for the sole benefit of athletes on competitive sports teams, whether school or community-based. Likewise, a school that only had sports and a selective educational program would likely not be able to serve meals to athletes since that school does not have an open-to-all activity option. However, a school that had sports, selective programs, and a drop-in tutoring program or other open-to-all activities would be eligible to serve all students, including athletes.

**Q: What if there are a variety of programs happening Monday through Thursday but only sports practices on Friday? Could I still serve meals to athletes on Fridays?**

A: Probably not, but work with your state agency, school administrators, and afterschool activity leaders to see if you can work out a plan to serve meals all week long.

**Q: Does everyone, including athletes, have to eat together at the same time?**

A: No. The [guide](#) explicitly states that different activity groups may eat separately (page 54). Many schools have been successful delivering meals to sports teams and other activity groups. The coach or program staff is responsible for distributing meals as well as maintaining and returning the records. This lowers the burden on the staff serving meals elsewhere, cuts down on the line for meals elsewhere, and allows the teams and activity groups to eat whenever works best for them.

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**Q: Does that mean that sports teams could eat together off of school grounds during “away” games?**

A: Yes, if you inform your state agency (or get approval in advance, depending on your state’s policies). You must also ensure proper food handling and transportation in addition to maintaining usual daily records. (See page 55 of the [guide](#).) This also holds for other activity groups that take field trips.

**Q: Do non-competitive sports count as an enrichment activity?**

A: Yes! Recreational sports that are not selective or limited for reasons other than space, security, or licensing restrictions are permitted as an activity. This could include an intramural sports league or other supervised physical activities, like a running club or even simple games like tag.

**Q: Does there have to be an educational program for athletes specifically, or do they have to participate in the educational program?**

A: No. As long as there is at least one other educational or enrichment activity available to all students, meals can be made available to all students, including athletes. Athletes are not required to participate in that activity in order to receive a meal. While it’s great to have tutoring or educational programming available to athletes, it is not required in order to make the meal available to them.

**Q: Can I serve children who are not students at the school, like siblings or kids who live in the neighborhood but attend other schools?**

A: Yes, as long as they are age 18 or under as of the beginning of the school year. There is no requirement for children to be enrolled at the school or in the afterschool program. However, there should be age-appropriate programming available to anyone who receives a meal.

## MEALS, MEAL PATTERNS, AND REIMBURSEMENTS

**Q: Do I have to follow the CACFP meal patterns?**

A: No. School food authorities have the option to follow either the NSLP or [CACFP meal patterns](#).

**Q: I’ve heard that the CACFP meal patterns changed recently. Does that affect me?**

A: If you choose to follow the CACFP meal patterns, then you must comply with the [new CACFP meal patterns](#) that became effective on October 1, 2017 and will be enforced starting October 1, 2018. The changes are not as extensive as the recent NSLP meal pattern changes, but some provisions may necessitate changes, such as the requirement for a whole grain-rich item at least once daily and bans on grain-based desserts and on-site deep-frying.

**Q: What are the reimbursements?**

A: All meals and snacks served through the Afterschool Meals Program are reimbursed at the “free” rates set for the CACFP. There are also commodities or cash-in-lieu of commodity payments for each lunch or supper served. The rates for each meal type change annually on July 1. You receive the CACFP reimbursement rates regardless of whether you follow the CACFP or NSLP meal patterns.

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**Q: Does the food service staff have to serve meals?**

A: No, not unless it is required by state or local health standards. There are many examples of afterschool program staff, teachers, or volunteers serving meals. Unitized meals are often easier in these situations.

**Q: Do suppers have to be hot meals?**

A: No, all-cold meals are allowable. While many schools report that children prefer hot meals and like the variety possible with hot entrees and vegetables, cold meals may be preferred or work better for you.

**Q: Can I do offer versus serve (OVS)?**

A: Yes! It is not required, but it is allowed. Ensure that whoever serves meals understand OVS requirements.

**Q: Can I still serve a snack in addition to a supper?**

A: Yes! You can claim reimbursement for up to one meal and one snack per child per day as long as they are served during your regular program hours. You cannot claim reimbursement for snacks through both NSLP Area-Eligible Snacks and CACFP At-Risk Afterschool, though. You also cannot serve a meal and a snack at the same time. Contact your state agency to see if they require a certain amount of time in between meal services.

**Q: When can I serve meals?**

A: Any time during the program's regular hours, as approved by the state agency. On school days, the meal or snack must be served after the final bell unless the school qualifies as extended day or expanded learning time (see [USDA Memo SP 04-2011, CACFP 01-2011 Revised](#) for more information). Meals and snacks can be served in any order: meal first and snack later, or vice versa.

Serving the meal immediately following the final bell can often maximize participation since children have to get to their activities, and they often leave from their activities at different times. Growing and active students are often hungry immediately after school, especially if there are early lunch periods. You can still serve a snack later as well.

**Q: Can I serve meals on non-school days?**

A: Yes! With advance approval, you can serve any one meal (breakfast, lunch, or supper) and/or snack during programs on non-school days, including weekends, holidays, school breaks during the year (i.e. winter or spring break), scheduled administrative closures (i.e. teacher work days), or unanticipated or emergency closures (i.e. snow days or teacher strikes). There must be an educational or enrichment program offered on non-school days in order to receive meal reimbursements.

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## RECORD KEEPING

### **Q: What records do I have to keep on a daily basis?**

**A:** The basic required daily records are:

- **Attendance**
  - The handbook suggests a roster or sign-in sheet. Your state agency can approve other methods.
  - As noted earlier, this does not have to indicate a child's participation in a specific activity.
- **The number of meals prepared or delivered**
  - This does not have to be a production record unless required by your state agency.
- **The number of meals or snacks served to eligible children at each meal service**
  - This does not have to be recorded at the point of service, but it is recommended.
  - This does not have to be recorded by name.
- **The number of meals or snacks served to any adults who work on the meal service**
  - These meals are an allowable cost but not reimbursable.
- **Menus for each meal or snack**

It is important to develop record keeping plans in advance with the input of your state agency, food service staff, and afterschool program coordinators as well as any volunteers. Check with your state agency in case there are additional records required.

### **Q: Does the food service staff have to maintain the records?**

**A:** No. Afterschool program staff or volunteers may be responsible for some or all records. Regardless of who maintains records, it is important to provide training and oversight to ensure compliance.

### **Q: Do I have to keep track of which children are eligible for free or reduced-price meals?**

**A:** No. All meals served through the CACFP Afterschool Meals Program are reimbursed at the free rate. There is no requirement to track the eligibility status of the children who receive meals.

### **Q: Do I need enrollment records?**

**A:** No. There is no requirement for enrollment in the afterschool programming or the Afterschool Meals Program. Afterschool programs may require enrollment or be open to drop-in's.

### **Q: I've heard that some schools use their POS system for attendance and meal counts. Can I do that?**

**A:** Check with your state agency. Many schools have been approved to use their electronic point-of-sale (POS) system to record attendance and meal counts since students and food service staff know how to use it, and it ties a meal count to a name for the attendance.

If afterschool program staff or volunteers are serving meals instead of food service staff, they may not have access to the POS system or know how to use it. If you are serving children who are not enrolled students, there must be a way to record their attendance and meal counts for the reimbursement.

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## MISCELLANEOUS

### Q: Most students take the bus and leave soon after the bell. What can I do?

A: There are a few options:

- **Supper in the Classroom**
  - Serve the meal in the classroom immediately following the final bell (or before the bell for expanded learning time schools). Teachers can lead a brief activity (reading aloud, homework help, etc.) while students eat.
  - In No Kid Hungry pilot tests, this led to more students eating supper than lunch.
- **Change the final bell time**
  - If the school doesn't qualify as expanded learning time but still exceeds any state or local requirements for instructional time, it is possible to make the final bell earlier. This leaves time for the meal and afterschool programming without changing teacher or bus schedules.
- **Optimize the logistics of loading kids on buses**
  - This simple step can free up a significant amount of time.
- **Work with district officials to change the bus schedule**
  - Pushing back the bus time by even 15 minutes can often provide enough time for the meal.
  - If some schools in the district are eligible for Afterschool Meals but others are not, work with the district transportation officials to have the bus come later to eligible schools so that those students have time for the meal.
- **Run additional "activity buses" in the evening**
  - Many districts have later buses for children who participate in sports or other activities. Based on the demand for meals, some regular buses could be shifted to later.

### Q: Can I serve meals to parents?

A: Yes, but the meals are not reimbursable and cannot be funded with CACFP reimbursements or the non-profit food service account.

While serving meals to parents may not be financially sustainable on a regular basis, doing it for back-to-school night or other special events can be a great way to promote Afterschool Meals.

### Q: Can I serve meals to coaches or activity leaders?

A: Yes, but the meals are not reimbursable. The meals may be funded with CACFP reimbursements or the non-profit food service account, but only if the staff assist with the meal service. If not, then meals are neither reimbursable nor an allowable expense.

For more details on starting an Afterschool Meals Program, see the No Kid Hungry and School Nutrition Foundation guide, [Three Meals a Day: A Win-Win-Win](#).

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