

## Educator's Guide to School Meals During the 2020-21 School Year: What School Meals Look Like Now & How You Can Help Connect Students with Meals During the Ongoing Coronavirus Pandemic

Although this school year looks different than usual, it hasn't stopped the provision of school meals. School nutrition departments have put into place new ways to provide meals to kids, whether they're learning virtually, in-person or both.

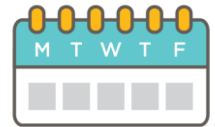


This resource was designed specifically for educators to help you understand what school meals look like now during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic and identify ways that you can help ensure your students are accessing the critical nutrition they need.

### What School Meals Look Like Now

School nutrition departments are continuing to serve meals using a model or mix of models that complement the current instructional model – be it 100% in-person, 100% virtual or hybrid learning. Service models include traditional cafeteria-based meal service modified for social distancing; meals in the classroom; drive-through or curbside pick-up; mobile or school bus route delivery; and direct home delivery.

Menus vary and may include a mix of hot meals, cold meals, shelf-stable meals and cooked meals served cooled along with instructions for reheating. To maximize safety and efficiency, some districts are opting to distribute more than one day of meals at a time. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), which administers the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program at the federal level, has approved certain flexibilities to help students access meals easier.



If you're not sure how your district is currently serving meals, reach out to your school nutrition department or principal to learn more. Also check your district website for updates.

### Connecting with Students & Families

Educators are uniquely positioned to assess student wellbeing. We encourage you to find opportunities – in person, via phone or through video – to check-in with your students about their access to food, and share information with them and their families about local meal distribution.

#### Assess Student Need

Here are some prompts to help you assess your students' nutrition needs during this time:

- 🍏 Ask students to describe or write about their daily schedule or routine. *Through this exercise, you may notice that mealtimes are not mentioned or students might specifically note certain specifics about food that give you an indication of need.*
- 🍏 Ask students to tell you about their responsibilities at home. *Students might be taking on more responsibility at home right now, including helping to care for siblings and other family members. This can help you understand the bigger picture of their current situation.*
- 🍏 Ask students about their current concerns or worries. *This approach is a bit more direct and can help surface issues like food insecurity.*



If you get the sense that a student and their family is struggling with food insecurity, contact your school nutrition director, principal, social worker or nurse so that the appropriate support can be provided.

## Share Information

We encourage you to share information about local meal availability with all of your students. As an educator, you are well-positioned to help spread information throughout the school community.

Here are some ideas for sharing information about meal availability including service times and menus:

- Share information with students during class – in-person or virtual – or during one-on-one check-ins.
- Check your school and district social media channels to see if there are any posts about meal distribution that you can share on your own social media channels.
- Provide information directly to parents and caregivers; be sure to know where to direct them for more information if they have questions beyond your scope of knowledge.

If you have others ideas for supporting your school nutrition department, such as partnerships you can leverage for donations, connect with your school nutrition director to brainstorm together.

## Other Ways to Take Action

Start by reaching out to your school nutrition department or your principal to see what is currently being done. From there:

- Offer a hand supporting meal distribution—this could include assembling meals or packing bags, delivering meals, creating or posting signs, helping to direct traffic during pick-up and more.
- Connect with local community organizations or food banks to see if they are offering additional support for students and families (i.e. meal kits or backpack programs) to supplement what your district is offering.
- Find out if the No Kid Hungry texting hotline has been activated in your state and if yes, promote it as an additional resource for locating meal sites. Parents & caregivers can text the word “FOOD” (or “COMIDA”) to 877-877 to find the nearest sites. The service is currently available in select states. Our team is working to expand the service to the entire country. You can find more information, updates on state availability and promotional assets that you can share on social media [here](#).
- Find out if your state is participating in Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT) and if yes, share information with families. P-EBT provides food benefits for children who have temporarily lost access to free and reduced-price meals at school due to coronavirus triggered school closure. You can learn more about P-EBT for children in schools by reading this [resource](#).

## Looking Ahead

School meal service will likely continue to look different than it has in the past. We encourage you to be adaptable and work in partnership with school nutrition staff to ensure the safety and success of your students and overall school community. We see you, we support you and we thank you for everything you’ve done and continue to do to support your students during these challenging circumstances.

For more information and resources, visit: <http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org>