TIPS & CONSIDERATIONS FOR SERVING REMOTE LEARNERS

The importance of equity and virtual learners

Providing meals to all students

Well-nourished children learn better, tend to have higher test scores and less behavioral problems. Feeding virtual students is an important way to ensure all students are fed and stay connected to their school community.

Operating through the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) and utilizing the available waivers makes it possible for schools to serve their virtual learners this year, whether students are still enrolled in their traditional school but taking advantage of a virtual option or enrolled in a separate virtual academy.[1]

Disparities continue for students of color

Students of color have been a larger percentage of virtual learners compared to white students[2] for various reasons. This has added to learning disparities and inequitable access to resources including healthy school meals.

Feeding Virtual Students in Action
Hay Elementary – Dallas ISD (TX)

At Hay Elementary School in Dallas ISD, they are planning on using a hybrid model to provide both virtual and in school meals to students. The virtual students will attend school two days per week and meals will be provided on Thursdays for the Friday, Monday and Wednesday of the next week. They will also have the option of ordering their meal preferences online with a new pre-ordering system.

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[1] This might not be the case for all-virtual schools that are not affiliated with a physical school or run by a traditional school food authority. Schools should work with the agency that administers the school meals programs in their state to determine eligibility.

[2] American Enterprise Institute (June 7, 2021). Return to learn tracker: https://www.returntolearntracker.net/race-charts/

How to Serve Virtual Students

Determine the Need

Clear communication with families that choose to continue virtual learning is key. Reach out to these families to determine their school meal needs and what service model is preferred.

Survey families about their meal preferences through email, social media, phone calls or host virtual focus groups.

- Learn more about adapting your meal program to meet families' needs with our Conversation Starters for Designing More Inclusive Meals Programs and Designing More Inclusive Meals Programs Workshop Recording.

Evaluate Your Capacity

Staffing shortages, students returning to in-person teaching, and alternative meal service models like breakfast and lunch in the classroom may limit your capacity to feed virtual learners. Utilizing resources and innovative production methods you relied on during School Year 2020-2021 can stretch your capacity to feed more students.

For example, if you purchased a food sealer and extra freezer space during the pandemic, use that to pack and freeze the meals you are preparing for in-person students. Those meals can later be distributed to virtual students through any of the service models outlined in our **Serving Remote Learners: Meal Service Model Guide.**

Choose Service Model(s)

Bulk meal or grocery service may be the easiest and quickest method of providing healthy meals to your virtual students. How do you distribute the bulk meals and/or groceries will depend on you school's resources, staff capacity, and virtual family preferences. **Learn more about meal service models in our Serving Remote Learners: Meal Service Model Guide.**

Quick Tips	
Food Safety	Follow food safety standards while packing & storing meal boxes/bags.
Staffing	Recruit volunteers to pack and distribute meals. Tips for Staffing Summer Meals Programs.
Allergies	Pay close attention to your virtual student roster and allergy needs.
Equipment Needs	Learn more about how to use different equipment for meal service models with our Equipment Tips For Meal Service During The 2021-2022 School Year.
Storage	Find open spaces in school to box/bag meals.
Menu Planning	Plan to use UDSA commodities.
Communications	Consistent weekly reminders are crucial to families.
Meal Tracking	Use a tracking/ text system to let parents know when meals will arrive.