



Maintaining Integrity in School Meals Served Outside the Cafeteria

In a push to further expand access to nutritious food, school districts are adopting service models that provide students with additional times and locations to obtain school meals. Alternative meal service locations, such as classrooms, hallways, and other designated service areas, can help address barriers created by early start times, late arrivals, short meal times, and school closures. But alternative models are not without their challenges. Errors, particularly in counting and claiming, can occur when there is a change in the location of the point of service or when responsibility for obtaining the meal count is placed on non-food service staff. Some of the practices listed on page 2 can be adapted for pricing and non-pricing schools and may help reduce the risk for error when meals are served outside the cafeteria.



Meal Service Tips

1. SIGNAGE WITH INSTRUCTIONS

Visual aids can guide students toward the components they must take for a reimbursable meal. For example, step-by-step instructions with pictures of meal components can be attached to coolers and trays used to store food. These signs also serve to remind teachers of the meal requirements and can provide information on appropriate meal component substitutions.

2. BUNDLE COMPONENTS

Meals that are packed with all required components may help reduce meal selection errors. Unlike Offer Versus Serve (OVS), this method avoids requiring teachers and students to be aware of what constitutes a reimbursable meal. Bundling meal components is an option for all non-congregate feeding situations. With the exception of high schools, which are required to use OVS during normal lunch service operations, bundling is also an option for all meals offered to students.

3. GRAB 'N' GO SERVICE

Grab 'n' Go meal service aims to deliver reimbursable meals in a faster and safer manner. In this model, food is served in the cafeteria or other designated service area by food service staff. Students then take the meal with them to the classroom or alternative setting to eat. Meals are packed in a way that is easy to ensure the selection and identification of a reimbursable meal while being monitored by trained staff. Further, students may be assigned to specific service locations to improve speed and efficiency.

4. PRE-ORDERING SYSTEMS

Pre-ordering systems, both web- and paper-based, can help ensure all required components are delivered to each student by providing more time to select, prepare, and distribute a reimbursable meal. Students order a meal hours, or even days, ahead of time. The meal may be picked up by the student in the cafeteria or other designated service area. Staff then record who receives a meal and enter the information in the point of sale/service (POS) system. Some pre-ordering systems may be programmed to ensure only reimbursable meals are ordered.

Meal Counting Tips ...

5. MOBILE POINT OF SERVICE

Bringing the point of sale/service (POS) system to a cart, classroom, or other designated service area allows trained staff to count and record reimbursable meals served in a faster manner in both pricing and non-pricing schools. Staff may use tablets, handheld scanners, or keypads, among other options. To avoid errors, the main POS system must have the correct eligibility information for pricing schools, and only trained staff should enter the student's selection into the system to make sure the meal is reimbursable.

6. LAMINATED BARCODES

The use of laminated barcode tickets for classroom-based meal service allows for improved matching of meal counts with student eligibility and helps avoid duplicate meal counts. Each class has two envelopes: one containing laminated barcode tickets with student ID numbers and one empty. Students receive their tickets before meal service and place them in the second envelope as they receive their meal. Tickets are then scanned into the POS system by food service staff. The envelopes are different colors for easier differentiation.

7. CLASS ROSTERS

Class rosters are a simple way to record meals served in alternative settings. Rosters normally include a code for the student's eligibility information, which is used for meal claiming. This method can be operated with one person (staff or teacher) if meals are unitized but may require an additional person if components are served separately. It is important that the staff recording the information is trained on what constitutes a reimbursable meal. Examples of roster use include:

- **During Attendance:** School food service staff or teachers record which students receive a reimbursable meal while taking daily attendance.
- **During Meal Delivery:** School food service staff or teachers check off a student's name on the roster as the meal is served in an alternative setting. The roster is then returned to food service staff, who enter the information into the POS system.