

Good morning SFSAs,

The COVID-19 emergency has been unlike any other we have faced and there is still a great deal that is unknown. This is demonstrated by the need for daily Federal and State level briefings, frequently changing guidance, and the wide range of “models” that have been presented. We understand there is a great deal of anxiety over how Child Nutrition Programs will be implemented next school year. Unfortunately, due to the continually changing circumstances, neither the USDA nor the CDC is able to issue final guidance at this time. Each federal agency, much like our office and your programs, continues to alter plans, adapt, and react as conditions change.

There is a quote by then General, and later to be President, Dwight D. Eisenhower that seems very fitting for the current situation: “Plans are useless, but planning is invaluable”. A step by step, one size fits all, stationary plan, designed during these changing times would be of little use. Instead, we need to engage in planning, which means remaining flexible, considering multiple alternatives, and thinking creatively. With that in mind, today’s email will offer thoughts and guidance for moving forward.

Returning to School

Due to the continuing uncertainty regarding the spread of COVID-19, it is still unknown what model(s) schools may use next year. As such, USDA has not yet issued waivers that might fundamentally change the nature of our programs for School Year 2020-2021 and possibly beyond. However, this is the time to consider alternatives to traditional school settings and meal service. Three general models are often discussed for the beginning of next year:

- All students at school
- All distance learning
- Hybrid model, limited students on each day

All students at school

Should all students return to school, it is likely that additional safeguards and procedures will be needed. Students may need to practice social distancing for picking up meals and may not be allowed to eat in the cafeteria to reduce the size of gatherings. This will require creative thinking on how to serve hundreds of students in a short period of time, but in small groups. Below are some considerations:

- Adopt safety plans that include the latest COVID-19 guidance
- Prepare to serve meals to students as they arrive in the bus loop and car drop off lines (breakfast)
- Plan for Lunch meals to be eaten in classrooms
- May require additional Points of Sale
 - Inquire about mobile devices, such as tablets
- Unused cafeteria seating area
 - Repurpose for food preparation – distancing
 - Set up additional mobile lines, perhaps for grab and go or cold items only
- Plan for social distancing for students picking up meals
- Work with Principals
 - Well planned schedules for classes to arrive to pick up meals will be critical
 - For High Schools, “Power Hour” will not be an option

Distance Learning

With this model, all SFAs and all schools should be prepared to provide meals.

- Continue plans implemented for Unanticipated School Closures
- Plan for all grab and go meals
 - o Staffing levels or times may change
 - o Different menus
 - o Additional foam and paper products needed
- May need parent pick up option
- Providing multiple days' meals at one time may be allowed

Hybrid Model

In some ways, the hybrid model is the most challenging for Child Nutrition Programs. In this example, 50% of students are on site and 50% are distance learning each day. SFAs would both provide on-site meals under new guidelines while also preparing grab and go meals. This would mean implementing elements of both models described above, at the same time.

For example, on Monday, 50% of students may be on site and be served breakfast meals as they arrive and eat lunch in classrooms. But there may also be a third meal service, which sends home Tuesday breakfast and lunch for Monday's students. While this could maintain high participation, it would also require creative scheduling of staff for both meal preparation and meal service.

CDC Guidance

Below are three links from CDC that will be useful in planning for SY 2020-2021. Please note the CDC Considerations for Schools are not final guidance. These are ideas for planning and will be updated as the emergency progresses.

[CDC: CONSIDERATIONS FOR SCHOOLS](#)

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/building-water-system.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html>

The Office of Child Nutrition here to support you. We will continue to forward guidance as we learn more from our Federal partners. While the answers may not yet be available, we need your questions so that we may address them as possible. Please send your questions to Charles Crawford of our Schools Support section: ccrawford@mdek12.org

Stay safe and remain flexible!
Scott

Scott Clements, **State Director**