USDA Extends Waiver To Provide Needed Flexibilities To Feed All Kids

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August 31, 2020

LANSING – The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced earlier today the extension of federal waivers allowing flexibilities in child nutrition programs to continue feeding all Michigan children during the pandemic. Effective immediately, meals will continue to be provided to children ages 18 and under at no cost to the families.

The approval of the federal waivers by U.S. Secretary of Education Sonny Perdue followed pressure last week by State Superintendent Dr. Michael Rice, U.S. Senator Debbie Stabenow, State Board of Education Casandra Ulbrich, and Michigan and national organizations not to end the waiver today, as was planned by USDA.

“We’re fighting for our kids,” Dr. Rice said. “We are delighted that Secretary Perdue heard the voices of those in Michigan and across the country who advocated for full flexibility in feeding our children. Given that the pandemic continues, the secretary’s decision to continue his waivers of the last six months, although delayed, is welcome and appreciated.”

USDA announced today that it is extending a suite of nationwide waivers for the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and Seamless Summer Option (SSO) through the end of 2020, or until available funding runs out. This includes:

- Allowing SFSP and SSO meals to be served in all areas and at no cost;
- Permitting meals to be served outside of the typically required group settings and meal times;
- Waiving meal pattern requirements as necessary; and
- Allowing parents and guardians to pick-up meals for their children.

According to USDA, these flexibilities ensure meal options for children continue to be available so children can access meals under all circumstances.

“We have served nearly 100 million meals to kids in Michigan since in-person schooling ended in mid-March with these federal waivers,” Dr. Rice said.

“We were fighting to have USDA continue allowing meals to be provided seven days a week and not just five. We were fighting for meals to be provided at locations other than schools. We were fighting for parents to be able to pick up meals for all their kids at one school and not have to go to each child’s school. We were fighting for communities that had both more than and less than 50 percent of their kids qualify for free or reduced priced lunch to be able to provide meals for their children.

“To have ended these flexibilities would have had a harmful effect on our children and families, who are already struggling during the pandemic,” Dr. Rice added. “To limit the necessary feeding of children at any time is reprehensible. In a pandemic, it would have been an outrage.”

As the USDA publishes its waiver guidance, the Michigan Department of Education will share this guidance with local districts in implementing these flexibilities during the coming weeks. Families will still need to return free/reduced price meal applications or household income surveys as local districts use these for additional federal title funding and state aid funding.

The timing of this announcement is especially fortunate with the release of Michigan’s revised Top 10 Strategic Plan on August 11 by the State Board of Education. In the plan, one of the goals is the improvement of health, safety and wellness of students.

For more information, contact Dr. Diane Golzynski, Director of the Office of Health and Nutrition Services, at GolzynskiD@michigan.gov.

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