TDOE Receives Waivers for Continuing School Nutrition Programs during COVID-19 Closures

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TDOE Issues Guidance to Schools and Districts on Continuing School Nutrition during Closures

NASHVILLE, TN—The Tennessee Department of Education applied for, and received two nutrition waivers, https://www.tn.gov/education/snp-resources/snp-forms.html , from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to provide School Food Authorities (SFAs) flexibility to feed children utilizing non-congregate feeding sites.

- **Where Meals Can Be Prepared:** USDA generally only permits community sites, not school sites, to serve meals during unexpected school closures. Our waiver approval permits SFAs to continue to use school sites to prepare food even during unexpected closures.
- **How Meals Can Be Served:** USDA generally requires students to congregate for meals, meaning that the meals must be served to students in a common setting (e.g. school). This waiver approval permits schools to use innovative methods to ensure children receive food, including grab-n-go, bus stop delivery, etc., to get food to kids without having kids come and sit in the cafeteria.

In both cases, districts may serve meals to children under the age of 18, regardless of enrollment. The child must be present to receive the meal. Both of these waivers only apply to area-eligible zones (over 50% free and reduced-price meals).

“This is a challenging time, and our top priority is to ensure children will be fed during school closures. We are thankful to the federal agencies that granted these waivers to ensure our districts can continue serving children in their communities by providing nutritious meals they may not otherwise have received,” said Commissioner Penny Schwinn.

The Department has also prepared an application to submit to USDA to waive the requirements to only serve meals in area-eligible zones. At this time, the Department has been notified that this waiver approval would be contingent on a presidential declaration of a natural disaster. Because it is a state of National Emergency, some districts currently will not qualify for distribution of food to all students. The Department continues to partner with these districts to identify alternative options to ensure nutrition supports are provided to students.

The Department also issued two guidance resources on continuing to provide nutritious meals when a Local Education Agency (LEA) or School Food Authority (SFA) closes due to COVID-19.

This, along with other guidance documents and resources are available to schools and districts on the Tennessee Department of Education’s coronavirus webpage: https://www.tn.gov/education/health-and-safety/update-on-coronavirus.html .

School Nutrition COVID-19 Guidance: https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/health-&-safety/NutritionGuidance.pdf

School Nutrition FAQ document: https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/health-&-safety/Nutrition%20FAQs.pdf