Maine DOE Newsroom

MEDIA RELEASE: USDA Approves Waiver from Maine DOE to Allow Schools Flexibility in Meal Services During School Closures

The Maine Department of Education's Child Nutrition Team today received approval for a waiver from United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Services. The waiver will allow schools the ability to provide meals offsite to students, if the school or community currently has, or qualifies for, a USDA Summer Food Service Program(SFSP). The Department of Education applied for the waiver as they continue to assist Maine schools in the proactive planning for a disruption to schools in the face of the concerns of COVID-19.

"Our schools are often a critical partner of Maine families to ensure that our children receive nutritious and consistent meals" said Department of Education Commissioner Pender Makin. "I am grateful for the advocacy of the Child Nutrition Team and for the response from USDA, allowing our schools to continue with this important work, regardless of any interruption that may occur due to school closings."

The following information was included in the USDA's notification approving the waiver:

These USDA supported meals are available at no cost to low-income children, and under the waiver granted today are not required to be served in a group setting (called congregate feeding), to ensure kids receive nutritious meals in the event schools are temporarily closed. Approved meal sponsors can then allow meals to be taken away from the site and consumed elsewhere, thereby allowing for social distancing.

In summary, the statewide waiver is to the National School Lunch Act congregate feeding requirement, it is effective immediately, and will continue through June 30, 2020 or upon

expiration of the federally declared public health emergency, whichever is earlier.

Through the USDA's Summer Food Service Program, Maine schools and communities provide children with access to nutritious meals and snacks at approved off-site locations when school is not in session, typically during the summer months. The waiver will extend those services to allow schools to make food available so that children can eat provided meals at home, increasing social distancing and improving general prevention strategies.

The waiver will provide schools with further flexibility in continuity of educational services to students, in the event they need to close their facilities or opt for remote school days.

Following approval of the waiver, the Maine DOE is working on further guidance to schools and will make that information available as soon as possible.

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