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USDA grants waiver to allow schools to serve students off-site meals

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News Release

Media Contact: Toni Konz Tatman
Chief Communications Officer
Office: (502) 564-2000, ext. 4602
Cell: (502) 229-1915
toni.tatman@education.ky.gov
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USDA grants waiver to allow schools to serve students off-site meals

(FRANKFORT, KY) – The Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) received notification early March 14 from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) that it has received approval to extend alternate meal service flexibility to students in the case of extended closures due to COVID-19.

The waiver allows Kentucky's schools to continue to serve students' meals following the guidelines of the Summer Food Service Program and National School Lunch Program Seamless Summer Option at state-approved sites within the community, even if a school district is closed.

USDA also clarified a concern raised by the KDE on feeding sites and districts that are participating in the Non-Traditional Instruction (NTI) Program.

“This will enable approved sponsors to allow meals to be taken away from the site and consumed elsewhere, thereby allowing for social distancing,” wrote Angela Kline, director of Policy and Program Development Division in Food and Nutrition Services of USDA. “This waiver applies to situations where non-traditional instruction is being carried out through virtual learning due to school buildings being closed and students being unable to attend their physical school location for classes.”

The waiver also allows the state to be reimbursed for the meals provided.

“We believe this flexibility allows our superintendents to make the best decisions for their individual districts throughout these evolving circumstances,” said Kentucky Interim Education Commissioner Kevin C. Brown.

Brown notified district superintendents and school nutrition directors; KDE’s Division of School and Community Nutrition is working with them to answer questions about the process.

“As soon as Kentucky had its first confirmed case of COVID-19, we immediately applied for a waiver because we know that food insecurity for students who rely on school meals is a major concern during school closures,” Brown said. “We appreciate the urgency of USDA to grant this waiver.”

According to National School Lunch Program, nearly 75% of Kentucky’s 650,000 public school students receive free meals daily.

Families can visit their district’s website or social media account about meal availability in their area. KDE also will publish a list of approved sites starting March 16 and will update the list regularly.

For more information about COVID-19, visit the Kentucky Department for Public Health's website. For more information about COVID-19 as it relates to schools, visit the Kentucky Department of Education's website.

Kentucky Department of Education

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