

Use Innovative Delivery Service Models to Serve Meals as Schools Reopen

As states and school districts start to plan and prepare to reopen schools, it is critical to think about what changes should be made to meal service to protect students and staff. The *Centers For Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Interim Guidance for Administrators of US K-12 Schools and Child Care Programs to Plan, Prepare, and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)* recommends that school districts ensure students have continued access to meals and that distribution of meals avoids large groups of students eating in common areas, including cafeterias. Schools can use innovative delivery models, such as delivery to the classroom and “grab and go,” to serve breakfasts and lunches to students during this time. (Traditionally, and with successful results, both models have been used for increasing school breakfast participation.) These service models make participation convenient by serving it in places where children can easily access the meal, such as in classrooms or hallway kiosks, and limit the extent that students mix with each other and with students from other classes or grades. School nutrition staff, administrators, teachers, and custodians should collaborate and use breakfast after the bell best practices to evaluate models and develop a revised plan to serve school breakfast and lunch in a way that supports access.

Direct-Delivery to the Classroom

Direct-delivery, commonly known as breakfast in the classroom (BIC), has been proven to be one of the most effective ways to increase school breakfast participation, and offers an important model for serving lunch. Many teachers and principals cite meals in the classroom as an opportunity to incorporate social and emotional learning for younger students into the school day. This model may be an important resource as many students may need extra support for coping with changes and disruptions due to COVID-19. After an extended school closure and distance learning, models that provide structure, quality relationship building, and safe social distancing may prove to be essential.

What It Looks Like

- School nutrition staff pack meals into coolers or insulated bags to be transported to each classroom by school nutrition staff, designated students, or volunteers.
- Teachers or school nutrition staff members record which students participate, or how many meals are served, and students eat the meal at their desks.
- Students clear meal trash and wipe down desks (recommended to be placed six feet apart).
- Trash can be placed in the hallway to be collected by custodial staff, and liquid milk can be discarded in the sink or, if there is no sink, a designated bucket.
- Custodial staff collect the trash from the hallways after meal service. Coolers, bags, and any leftover food are picked up by school nutrition staff or returned to the cafeteria by designated students or volunteers.

With all meal service models, it is important to engage administrators, staff, teachers, and parents early in the planning process to ensure success when schools reopen. It is critical that each plan include a healthy cleaning regimen and that proper training is provided to staff and students.



“Grab and Go”

During COVID-19 school closures, school districts across the country have implemented “grab and go” models to continue school meal service to students and their families while they are at home. Schools can transition this service and make it part of the school day by providing “grab and go” meals at school once the building has reopened. “Grab and go” is a great option for schools that may find it difficult to deliver meals directly to the classroom or that prefer food service staff to manage the counting and claiming of meals.

What It Looks Like

- School nutrition staff pack meals into bags to be picked up in the cafeteria or from carts or kiosks located in the hallway or other high-traffic areas.
- Students pick up meals from carts in the hallway or from the cafeteria on the way to class and eat at their desks or in other designated areas.
- Participating students are counted by school nutrition staff when the meal is picked up either through the point of sale (POS) system already in place in the cafeteria or using mobile POS systems or manual lists at each cart.
- Menu items are typically portable and easy to eat on the go.
- When finished eating, students clear meal trash and wipe down desks. Meal trash can be placed in the hallway to be collected by custodial staff, and liquid milk can be discarded in the sink or, if there is no sink, a designated bucket.

Offering Meals at No Charge to All Students

Child hunger continues to rise as a result of COVID-19, making school meals even more important when schools



reopen. The effectiveness of these models is amplified when meals are offered at no charge to all students because it reduces stigma and increases participation, which can support the school nutrition department budget through increased federal reimbursements. Eligible schools use

Eating in the Cafeteria

If it is not possible to suspend the use of the cafeteria, the CDC recommends that schools should come up with a plan that limits the extent to which students mix with each other, especially with students from other classes. Possible strategies include staggering lunch by class, separating meal and recess areas by class, and creating a schedule that avoids all classes using the bathroom right after lunch.

the [Community Eligibility Provision](#) to offer free meals to all students. With millions of families being hurt by the economic crisis caused by COVID-19, and turning to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to help put food on the table, it is anticipated that more schools will be eligible to opt in to community eligibility as a more financially viable choice than before the pandemic.

In response to COVID-19, the U.S. Department of Agriculture issued a [nationwide waiver](#) regarding community eligibility to extend the election, notification, and reporting deadlines that apply to state agencies for the 2020–2021 school year. For school districts, the waiver allows calculating the identified student percentage using data drawn between April 1, 2020, and June 30, 2020 (instead of the normal April 1 deadline), which allows the percentages to reflect more accurately the increased poverty level within schools. The waiver also extends the deadline to elect community eligibility for the 2020–2021 school year from June 30, 2020, to August 31, 2020. For more information about community eligibility, visit <https://frac.org/community-eligibility>.

Additional Resources

- [FRAC’s School Breakfast Resources](#)
- [Partners for Breakfast in the Classroom website](#) (which offers resources on implementing innovative service models, including best practices, case studies, assessment tools, and a new guide about operations and equipment)
- [CEP Financial Calculators](#) — School districts and other stakeholders should use these tools to group schools strategically and to maximize the federal funding received.
- [Community Eligibility: Making it Work with Lower ISPs](#)