

COVID-19 Child Nutrition Waiver Policy Recommendations



Waivers and flexibilities granted through the federal COVID-19 relief bills and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) have been crucial to supporting students in this time of crisis. They have also illustrated ways in which we can better address the issue of child hunger in the United States. While we hope the pandemic and the economic crisis end soon, we also hope that the lessons learned from greater flexibilities in federal programming are carried into the future. Below are policy recommendations to achieve these goals.

Meals for All

We recommend that local, state, and federal school nutrition leaders continue universal free meal programs for all students in the nation either by continuing the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) nationwide, expanding options through the National School Lunch Programs (NSLP) like the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) and Provision 2, or simply eliminating the income eligibility criteria through the NSLP. When every child can eat for free there is no judgment or stigma, academic performance improves, absenteeism and tardiness drops, and administrators can focus on teaching, not collecting meal debt or completing paperwork. This would also put our nutrition programs more in line with our nation's ethos of a free public education.

Greater Flexibility in SFSP

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, local school nutrition programs have found success using meal delivery and pick up options to get more food to the areas that need it most. Distributing multiple meals at once and at varying times of day have also increased participation. We recommend that the USDA continue to offer these flexibilities to better meet the needs of sprawling urban and rural districts, areas with high concentrations of poverty, and parents and students working, without transportation, or facing other barriers to food access.

“Nutrition staff should be able to focus on feeding kids, not on the administrative burdens of new changes and waivers.”



These recommendations are based on research, interviews, and observations as reported in Nebraska Appleseed's "Federal COVID-19 Child Nutrition Waiver Implementation: Best Practices from Four States" For more information and to see our full report, visit neappleseed.org/summerfood.



Support Essential Nutrition Staff as Essential

At the beginning of the pandemic, we, as a nation, honored the critical role school nutrition staff play in our communities. Their work continues to help countless families avoid the pain and stress of food insecurity. To continue supporting these essential workers, we recommend that the pay and benefits of nutrition staff be raised to better support the front line workers who are supporting our students.

Make Flexibilities Easier for Frontline Workers

Local school nutrition program staff are overwhelmed with the added responsibilities of managing risk, adapting to new service models, and managing staff shortages. We should work to reduce administrative burdens on these hard working and dedicated individuals by streamlining waivers, program changes, and reporting requirements coming down from state and federal agencies so that local nutrition staff can focus on feeding students, not administration.

The needs revealed by the COVID-19 pandemic are not new. However, COVID-19 has highlighted gaps in programs supporting school-aged children. We must update these programs in order to meet the needs of our modern reality and address



child hunger across the country. For more details, please see our full report on COVID-19 federal waiver implementation.

If you have questions or would like more information, please feel free to reach out to Eric Savaiano, Economic Justice Program Manager for Food and Nutrition Access, at Nebraska Appleseed.

P: 402-438-8853
NEAPPLESEED.ORG



PO BOX 81613
LINCOLN, NE 68501-3613