



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF

**EDUCATION**

## **Policy Updates Related to Coronavirus (COVID-19): Early Child Care Meal Provision Guidance**

### **Background**

As a part of the District's response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak in the United States, OSSE is modifying, updating and re-circulating certain policies. In all decisions, OSSE will consider relevant federal and local requirements, and fairness to early learning providers, during this dynamic time.

### **Scope**

This document contains details and policies specifically relating to the **provision of meals to children** by early learning providers.

### **Effective Date**

This policy will take effect from March 12, 2020, and will remain in effect until further notice.

### **Policy Guidance**

In the event of temporary or prolonged closures of early learning programs, early learning providers are not required to feed children. However, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and OSSE encourage early learning providers to consider opportunities to connect children and families with healthy, low or no cost food options.

Based on current United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) guidance, meals provided during times of temporary or prolonged closures are *not* eligible for reimbursement under the Child and Adult Care Food Program in traditional child care settings. Additional guidance is expected from USDA within the coming days, and OSSE will notify early learning providers and stakeholders of any additional updates.

However, options do exist for early learning providers wishing to serve or refer families for meals. See below.

#### *1) Summer Food Service Program*

States are eligible to operate a version of the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) specifically for natural disasters, pandemics, and building closures. Further, states may apply to USDA for a waiver allowing such meals to be served in schools and/or in non-congregate settings. OSSE has applied for such a waiver on behalf of the District of Columbia and expects to be approved.

**Early learning providers that participated in the Summer Food Service Program in summer 2019 may be eligible to participate and be reimbursed for continued meal service if their SFSP sponsor applies and is approved to serve meals during temporary or prolonged closures.**

Providers who participated last summer in SFSP and are interested in this opportunity should contact their sponsor.

## 2) *Refer Families to Approved Meal Service Sites*

As meal service operators and sites are approved to serve meals in the event of unanticipated school or early learning program closures, OSSE and our District agency partners will post online lists of locations approved for meal service. Early learning providers are encouraged to share this information with families.

Early learning providers are also welcomed to serve meals without reimbursement from USDA or OSSE, should they have sufficient funding and capacity to do so. Given the risk of transmission of infectious disease in group settings, early learning providers wishing to serve such meals are strongly encouraged to do so in a non-congregate setting (e.g. via grab-and-go).

## Questions and Answers

### **Q. What happens if schools are closed but my center is open?**

A: Centers currently participating in CACFP may continue to operate as usual as long as they are open and receive USDA reimbursement.

### **Q. What happens if my center AND schools are closed?**

A. When centers are closed, they are no longer eligible to participate in CACFP and receive reimbursement. Options for meal service are outlined above, including: (1) partnering with an approved SFSP sponsor; (2) referring families to meal service sites across the District; (3) serving meals in a non-congregate setting *without* reimbursement from USDA or OSSE.

### **Q. If my center is closed, how can I identify nearby meal service sites to which to refer my families?**

A. OSSE and our District agency partners will provide online lists of locations of approved meal service sites where meals are offered free of cost.

### **Q. If approved by OSSE, what meals can a SFSP sponsor serve?**

A. SFSP sponsors can serve up to two meals per day, including breakfast, lunch, supper and an AM or PM snack. Any additional meals will be not reimbursed by the USDA.

### **Q. Who is eligible to receive meals at approved SFSP locations?**

A. Children 18 and under are eligible to receive meals at these locations.

### **Q. What health-related considerations should be taken into consideration?**

A. Early learning providers, schools, and sponsors should review the guidance provided by the USDA, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and DC Health on proper sanitation and cleaning protocols in response to the COVID-19 virus. In general, to limit additional exposure in the event of a large scale closure, meal service sites should create a plan to provide meals quickly to children through a grab-and-go style service method and discourage children from congregating at these locations.

Early learning providers that are considering closing must coordinate with OSSE, DOH and DME related to further specific local public health guidance.

For more information, please visit <https://www.fns.usda.gov/disaster/pandemic>

**Questions?**

If you have questions relating to this policy please contact OSSE's Director of Nutrition Programs, Lindsey Palmer at [Lindsey.Palmer@dc.gov](mailto:Lindsey.Palmer@dc.gov) or 202-304-2153.