

School Closure Toolkit for Districts: Nutrition

Updated 5/14/2020

I. Summary

Ensuring children continue to receive nutritional services is of paramount importance during unexpected closures as many children rely on these school-based services for meals.

The purpose of this document, in complement to guidance and updates provided on the department's website, is to provide district leads with the concrete action steps needed to quickly and efficiently plan and implement a nutrition strategy within available resources and in consideration of local contexts.

For questions, related to nutrition, please contact Sandy.Dawes@tn.gov, Director of School Nutrition Programs or call the school nutrition hotline at 800-354-3663.

Requirements & Flexibilities Updated 5/14/2020

The department has filed multiple waivers to ensure maximum flexibilities in meal services, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is regularly releasing additional guidance to do the same. For the most up to date list of waiver and flexibilities, please be sure to check the department's website [here](#).

The key requirements to keep in mind in planning meal service through unexpected closures will be ensuring all **food safety protocols are implemented with fidelity** and **keeping accurate counts of meals served**. Local nutrition directors are district's resident experts on these requirements, as well as other compliance expectations, and should be involved in decisions in planning meal service.

Flexibilities for School Food Authorities (SFAs) already afforded through waivers or USDA guidance include:

- **Ability to Serve:** Under the Seamless Summer Option (SSO), any child under 18 and those children over 18 with a disability, as defined by the Tennessee State Board of Education in chapter 0520-01-09, may be served meals within area-eligible zones.
- **Spring Break:** SFAs are now permitted to continue meal service through spring breaks due to the closures in response to COVID-19.
- **Meal Times:** SFAs may overlap or vary their meal service times outside of the standard hours.
- **Numerous Meals Simultaneously:** SFAs may opt to serve up to a week's worth of meals at one delivery.
- **Meal Pattern Requirements:** The meal pattern is still strongly encouraged to keep intact to the best of the district's abilities; however, if SFAs are experiencing difficulties with food distribution and supply chain issues arise, the state agency can temporarily waive requirements on a case by case basis. Districts must contact Sandy Dawes, Sandy.Dawes@tn.gov, with documentation and justification via the meal pattern flexibility form of supply chain issues in order to get approval any meal pattern requirements.

- **Area Eligibility:** The state agency has the ability to waive area eligibility requirements. This flexibility will be addressed on a case by case basis. Districts must contact Sandy Dawes, Sandy.Dawes@tn.gov, with a completed area eligibility flexibility form.
- Based on the July 1, 2017, implementation of the local school wellness policy regulations, the first triennial assessments are due June 30, 2020. However, FNS recognizes that in light of the current public health emergency, providing a revised deadline for completion of these requirements is vital to ensure SFAs can continue to focus on providing meals. The waiver provides a new first triennial assessment deadline of June 30, 2021. If an SFA wishes to accept the new deadline they **must inform the state agency by June 30, 2020** by completing this [form](#) and submitting to Sandy.Dawes@tn.gov.

Primary Points of Contact

In addition to the school nutrition hotline (800-354-3663) and central office team, all SFAs are assigned a regional consultant who regularly supports nutrition programs and nutrition directors. These team members provide technical assistance and support and serve as a key resource in planning meal services through unexpected closures. A contact list of consultants by region is included below.

Mike Bishop Shelby County/Memphis (901) 830-3010 Michael.D.Bishop@tn.gov	Thomas Wilson Upper Cumberland Region (931) 257-6003 Thomas.Wilson@tn.gov
Tami Simpson Northwest Region 731-819-7583 or 731-514-2624 Tami.Simpson@tn.gov	Lindsay Baldwin Mid Cumberland Region (615) 332-1633 Lindsay.Baldwin@tn.gov
Audra Henderson Southwest Region 731-265-0409 Audra.Henderson@tn.gov	Leslea Miller First TN Region 865-606-0205 Leslea.Miller@tn.gov
Gary Gluch South Central Region (931) 488-3050 Gary.Gluch@tn.gov	Frankie Norton East TN Region 865-594-9453 Frankie.Norton@tn.gov
Brooke Babbs Southeast Region (423) 634-2306 Brooke.Babbs@tn.gov	

II. Checklist

Below is a checklist that district leaders should consider during unexpected closures. Directors should partner with their local nutrition leads to ensure all of these steps are completed.

☐ **Notify the department of district's plan to participate**

Local nutrition leaders should email Sandy Dawes, Director of School Nutrition, and copy their regional nutrition consultant to signal intent to participate in Seamless Summer Option (SSO). Information for this program is available on the department's website ([Nutrition FAQ](#)).

☐ **Determine which meals will be provided, on what days and at what times**

Districts will have the opportunity to provide two meals per day (e.g., breakfast/lunch, lunch/snack, etc.). Districts may also provide meals on weekends, and over holiday breaks as part of the COVID-related flexibility.

☐ **Plan service strategy**

Work with your nutrition leads and regional consultant to map out meal service for your district by determining the following (see Recommended Procedures for Planning Template)

☐ **Plan for Counts**

Work with your nutrition team to estimate meal counts needed. How many kids do you believe you will serve for each meal over the course of the week? (Anticipate an evolving number)

☐ **Identify capacity constraints and opportunities**

Determine the bounds for your meal planning (incl. staffing, partner organizations, and logistics)

☐ **Plan for meal prep**

Ensure your nutrition lead is able to order necessary food supplies and/or other supplies (e.g. lunch bags, etc.), plan timing of meal preparation based on capacity (location and staffing), and other staffing needs to the package meals.

☐ **Plan for delivery & tracking**

Set specific procedures for delivery and tracking of meals that include:



- ☐ Select delivery method as either school pick-up (grab-n-go), bus delivery (bus stops, bus delivery), home stops, or other centralized delivery sites
- ☐ Identify logistics lead to coordinate delivery, including loading meals on buses and tracking counts of loading
- ☐ Ensure delivery methods include additional staff to support tracking of meals served; work with nutrition lead on best tracking method
- ☐ Contact department School Nutrition team to address any area-eligibility zone requirement concerns. The team will help identify solutions to ensure all kids are served.

☐ **Communicate with Staff & Families**

- ☐ Notify staff and schools who will be participating in providing ongoing services, including nutrition staff, custodial staff, and other staff needed to help support meal distribution. Communicate delivery strategy, work time expectations, and designated site leads.
- ☐ Notify your communities and families through as many avenues as possible, leveraging existing resources like www.SchoolMealFinder.com. Be clear on sites, times, and availability.

☐ **Implement Service**

- ☐ Preparation: Ensure staff have morning briefings on the plan for the day, communicating the strategy, lessons learned from prior day, and important messages.
- ☐ Delivery: Ensure communication methods are available to all delivery sites (e.g. phones for drivers or other staff on buses or in drive-thrus), as well as back-up plans in case issues arise.
- ☐ Tracking: Ensure all delivery teams have a clean method for tracking meals served, either electronically or on paper (to be compiled at end of day). Local tracking records by delivery site must be maintained.

☐ **File Complete SSO Applications with Department**

Update SSO applications to reflect service sites as tracked locally during initial implementation.

☐ **Adjust Course as Needed**

Plan for end of day/week briefing calls with all site leads and your nutrition director to adjust counts and/or strategy as needed.

☐ **File Claims in TMAC**

Nutrition directors should continue to file claims in TMAC to be approved and processed for payment from the department.

III. Best Practices

Identify What Families Are Already Familiar with Doing and Communicate Change

In selecting a meal delivery method, consider what families are already most familiar with doing, what they are able to do during this time, and what path minimizes direct contact. For example, if most of a school's students are car-riders, families may be unfamiliar with bus stop locations. This should not necessitate a grab-n-go method, but may signal the additional emphasis needed on communicating bus stops through communications to families or site finders like www.schoolfoodfinder.com. This may also mean considering implementing hybrid models of both grab-n-go and bus delivery if a site's students tend to do both. The important note is communication of meal service sites and times.

- **Utilize bus routes as a mobile feeding option.** Whether to community sites, bus stops, or home delivery, utilizing bus routes as delivery mechanisms will bring meals to the families over having families coming to the meals. This method also leverages existing staff/teams and logistics via bus routes that can ease the planning of meal services. Bus drivers would be coupled with additional staff on the bus to provide meals at designated stops.
- **Provide Grab-N-Go and drive thru options.** For schools with more car-riders or walkers, a Grab-N-Go and drive thru option may include pre-packaged meals served from the car drop off line at the school. This option may best suit districts with less transportation capacity via buses or where parents are more familiar comfortable with coming to school sites over navigating to bus stops.
- **Utilize nutrition service locations beyond schools to locations throughout the community.** This may include location like libraries, regularly used or visited community sites, etc.
- **Partner with local agencies to support delivery of meals to families without transportation.** The sheriff's department and highway patrol have offered to help distribute meals. Similarly, DHS has demonstrated interest in supporting delivery and locations for distribution sites. Please contact your local law enforcement to see if they are able to provide additional support.

Leverage Your Staff Beyond the Nutrition Team & Partner Organizations

To implement these plans successfully, districts must create teams comprised of more than just nutrition staff. Many plans will also rely on the transportation team and may also likely require additional personnel to help package, deliver, and track meals. This presents a great opportunity to provide ongoing work for hourly employees. Additionally, community organizations and partners are often willing to help provide assistance. This includes leveraging the state guard for food distribution efforts as needed. Consider reaching out to these resources in planning and implementing your meal strategies.

Plan for Shelf-Stable Meals

While not a requirement of the SSO program, planning for shelf-stable meals will provide flexibility in delivery options, including how many meals may be delivered within a given week to children and the ability to use extra meals from one day to the next.

Recommended Schedules/Procedures

- SSO Planning Template
- Family Communications Template
- Meal Counting Template: Available [Here](#)

IV. Recommended Schedules and Procedures

SSO Planning Template

Topic	Key Questions	Responses	Recommended Action Steps
Meal Counts	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is your average meal service by site, including free, reduced, and full-price for any of the meals you intend to provide through unexpected closure (e.g. breakfast, lunch, snack)? 2. Do you have any known estimates of additional children likely to take advantage of meal services? This data could be shared from local childcare facilities, non-area eligible zones for which a strategy to leverage area-eligible serving zones has been determined, etc. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with nutrition lead to estimate meal counts needed across the district, and plan with TDOE team how to address non-area-eligible zones.
Capacity Constraints & Opportunities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is the capacity of the transportation team? Are all drivers ready and willing to work? Do you have any limitations on use of buses if you plan for delivery service? 2. What other staff members (e.g. hourly employees) are available to help assist with duties on meal service? 3. What, if any, partners are available to provide additional capacity and what supports can they offer? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convene planning team comprised of nutrition, transport, HR, finance, and community engagement leads • Contact staff members to gauge availability and confirm capacity • Contact community partners or state guard (through county emergency operations office) if additional capacity is needed
Site Determinations & Meal Prep	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Based on meal needs and capacity, how many kitchen sites need to remain open and where? 2. What staff need to be notified to report to those sites and with what specific duty assignments? 3. What meal supplies are ready (food in stock or already in transit for delivery), and what needs to be planned to increase shelf-stable status? 4. What orders need to be placed in preparation for coverage (including for Spring Break)? 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select kitchen sites needed given the planned logistics (may often be easiest to maintain all sites) • Plan for amount of meal time prep needed (especially if multiple days meals to be delivered simultaneously) • Take stock of current inventory and immediately place orders for new supply needs • Identify site owners to lead daily briefings and consolidate any successes or needed improvements in operations

Delivery	Select Delivery Method: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Grab-n-Go 2. Bus Delivery – Stops (bus stops or community sites) 3. Bus Delivery – Home 4. Hybrid 5. Other 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grab-n-Go: Plan timing information for families; clearly demarcate drive-thru lanes in bus/car pick-up areas; set up delivery station tables pre-stocked with meal boxes • Bus Delivery: Coordinating through transportation lead, pull route information and adjust as needed to align to alternative stops or home delivery; communicate to families expected delivery times by stop; identify additional staff to aid bus drive on routes to hand out and track meals • Utilize nutrition service locations beyond schools to locations throughout the community. This may include location like libraries, regularly used or visited community sites, etc. • Partner with local agencies to support delivery of meals to families without transportation. The sheriff's department and highway patrol have offered to help distribute meals. Similarly, DHS has demonstrated interest in supporting delivery and locations for distribution sites. Please contact your local law enforcement to see if they are able to provide additional support.
Tracking	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is the current system used to count meals? Can that be mobilized on other mobile technology to use for drive-thrus or bus deliveries? 2. If not, need to identify standard tracking sheet to count meals delivered and assign someone responsibility to entering data into the system of record (necessary to generate claims) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop clear plan for tracking by delivery site • Identify site owner to consolidate data by site for each meal type served • Ensure all site owners report data centrally to local nutrition team • Nutrition team to file claims in TMAC regularly for approval and payment

Communication Templates

Use the below template to help communicate key information to families around meal services.

COVID-19 Public Guidance Regarding School Meals

Ensuring children continue to receive nutritional services is of paramount importance during unexpected closures as many children rely on these school-based services for meals.

All children 18 years and younger are eligible for free meals during school closures due to COVID-19!

Please see the location and schedule below to find a meal site near you during school closures:

Site Name	Site Address	Service Time(s)
Site Name	Site Address	Service Time(s)
Site Name	Site Address	Service Time(s)
Site Name	Site Address	Service Time(s)
Site Name	Site Address	Service Time(s)

(Insert map here if you have one)

Please visit ([insert district's website](#)) for a list of our meal service sites and any updated information.

If you have any questions please reach out to:

[Insert district contact](#)

For updates on Coronavirus please see the Department of Education's COVID-19 guidance webpage: <https://www.tn.gov/education/health-and-safety/update-on-coronavirus.html>.

V. Resource List Updated 5/14/2020

- Summer Feeding Options: https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/health-&-safety/school-nutrition-covid-19-updates/SFSPSSOonepager_5.7.2020_SP.pdf
- Seamless Summer Option information: <https://www.tn.gov/education/snp-resources/snp-programs.html>
- School nutrition regional consultants: https://public.tableau.com/profile/t.andrew.mccluskey#!/vizhome/ConsultantMap_15810124347790/TennesseeSchoolNutritionConsultants?publish=yes
- USDA: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/disaster/pandemic/covid-19>
- Area-Eligibility: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/areaeligibility>
- Department of Human Services: <https://www.tn.gov/humanservices/children/dhs-nutrition-programs.html>
- Transportation: <https://www.tn.gov/education/health-and-safety/school-safety/transportation.html>
- CDC COVID-19 Guidance for Businesses and Employers: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fspecific-groups%2Fguidance-business-response.html
- CDC COVID-19 Fact Sheet: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/sick-with-2019-nCoV-fact-sheet.pdf>
- EPA List Approved for COVID-10: <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>