

Back-to-School Meal Service Toolkit

Feeding Students During the 2020-2021 School Year Amidst the Ongoing Coronavirus Pandemic

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Feeding Students During the Ongoing Coronavirus Pandemic

Kentucky Supplement

This comprehensive toolkit offers tips for beginning the planning process and explains the nationwide waivers available. For those districts looking for support with financial recovery, it offers information about FEMA Public Assistance Grants, CARES Act funds and other strategies for increasing revenue and avoiding further debt. Lastly, the toolkit dives into details about meal service models—both for meals consumed at school and meals taken to-go. A number of other resources are embedded within the toolkit.

Connect with No Kid Hungry Kentucky

We are available to provide technical assistance and support by phone and email. We can:

- Help navigate USDA waivers.
- Offer ideas around meal distribution, staffing, planning for emergencies, communication, partnerships and more.
- Troubleshoot challenges and identify solutions.
- Share best practices and lessons learned from districts across the state and country.
- Connect you with peer-to-peer support.

For more information, contact Kate McDonald, kate@feedingky.org

Visit us at www.feedingky.org

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INTRODUCTION

This Back-to-School Meal Service Toolkit has been designed to help you plan for the 2020-2021 school year, as we continue to navigate the coronavirus pandemic.

When the new school year begins, meal service will likely look very different than it has in the past. Changes are expected that will support social distancing efforts. Districts are currently considering a variety of scenarios: having all students in school, having no students in school or offering a blended learning/hybrid model (a mix of in-school and at-home learning). With each scenario comes implications for meal service.

Throughout this situation, school meals have been a lifeline to students and families; both to those who have depended on school meals in the past and to others who are now finding themselves in need amidst growing unemployment due to the coronavirus. We have seen school nutrition staff rise to the occasion— showing innovation and passion while working tirelessly to make sure kids get the nutrition they need. As districts think through what the reopening of schools will look like, school meals must remain a service kids and families can count on.

There are still many questions about what the “new normal” will look like. We recognize how incredibly challenging it is to plan for the future when the unknowns about how things will work far outweigh the knowns. However, we are here to support one another as we navigate this unprecedented situation. Just as we’ve always done, we will knockdown the barriers that stand between a hungry child and a nutritious meal.

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GETTING STARTED




Begin the Discussion

As districts think through what the 2020-2021 school year will look like, school meals must remain something that kids and families can count on. Whatever phase of back-to-school planning your district is in, it is critical that school nutrition leadership is part of the decision-making.

Given that school food service often operates with long order lead times and intricate production schedules, school nutrition departments should begin discussions now with their administration regarding how potential schedule changes and social distancing measures will affect food service in their district.

Here are some tips for beginning your planning process for the new school year:

-  Begin outlining a Plan A, B and C. In other words, have a plan, a contingency plan and a contingency plan for your contingency plan! Planning for a variety of scenarios at this point will allow you to be more flexible if the situation changes and you need to pivot. If your district is considering a variety of schedules, outline a feeding plan for each of those potential schedules so that you're ready to jump into action when a decision is made.
-  Plot how your staffing needs would change with each scenario. Consider changes to your number of staff- would you need more staff or fewer staff? Consider changes to the number of total labor hours. Consider how staff duties might change. Consider if you might encounter any labor contract concerns.
-  Forecast how your food costs may be affected by each plan. Given increased demand for certain items as well as potential supply chain issues, ask your vendors about any price changes. Also inquire about your vendors' ability to fulfill your orders. Consider how you might need to adjust your menus if certain items are unavailable.

-  Forecast equipment needs for each scenario and assess your department's financial readiness to purchase. Given the anticipated widespread demand for similar equipment, you should also inquire about your vendors' anticipated timelines for delivering any needed equipment. You may need to adjust your plans or establish an additional contingency plan based on equipment needs and the ability to obtain the needed equipment.
-  Identify key stakeholders whose collaboration and cooperation will be needed to successfully implement each plan. Discuss with them the importance of working together to ensure success for students and staff.
-  Present your feeding scenarios to your district decisionmakers so they are aware of what is feasible as they make other decisions related to reopening schools.

[Resource: Thought Starters for Reopening Schools](#)

To help kickstart these logistical conversations, check out SNA's *Thought Starters for Reopening Schools*, which is packed with information, tips and considerations from school nutrition directors across the country.

Understand the Waivers

Waivers Available for the 2020-2021 School Year

The USDA has implemented or extended the following waivers for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP) and Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) through June 30, 2021:

Congregate Meal Service Requirement

This allows students to eat meals off-site and outside of group settings.



Parent Meal Pick-Up

For schools distributing meals to distance learners, this allows parents or guardians to pick up meals without their child(ren) present.



Meal Service Time Requirements

This allows schools to serve meals whenever works, including extending service times to accommodate social distancing. Along with the congregate waiver, this allows schools with a blended learning model or hybrid schedule to send home both breakfast and lunch for the following day(s).



Meal Pattern Flexibility

This allows schools to still serve and receive reimbursements for meals, even if supply chain disruptions prevent them from meeting all meal requirements.



Offer Versus Serve (OVS) Requirement for High Schools

This allows high schools to serve bagged, boxed or pre-plated meals with all required components instead of giving the option to decline certain items. Schools may implement OVS if they can do so safely and correctly.

Collectively, these waivers will make it possible to implement a variety of meal service models that align with school reopening plans and ensure the continued provision of meals for students.

For the most up-to-date information on waivers, see the [USDA Food and Nutrition Service Policy Documents and Resources page](#).

Resource: Nationwide COVID-19 Response Waiver & Guidance Summary

This No Kid Hungry resource provides the number and title of each waiver, the programs to which it applies, release and end date, summary and additional notes. It also includes the Q&A memoranda that provide clarification and additional guidance around the nationwide waivers and operations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Waivers Not Currently Available

This information reflects nationwide waivers and guidance available as of July 23, 2020. This toolkit will continue to be updated.

Summer Food Service Program & Seamless Summer Option Waivers

None of the waivers granted so far apply to the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) or the Seamless Summer Option (SSO). No prior waivers for SFSP or SSO (such as area eligibility waivers) will be in effect for the school year. This means that needed flexibilities are not available should schools need to close and switch over from school meals to summer meals.

The non-congregate waiver for NSLP, SBP and CACFP states that planned building closures, whether partial or full, do not count as unanticipated school closures, so **schools and sponsors cannot continue using SFSP or SSO to serve meals once schools reopen for SY2020-2021**, even if schools remain fully remote.

Afterschool Activity Requirement for Afterschool Meals & Snacks

Without this waiver, sites that serve afterschool meals and snacks are still required to provide enrichment or educational activities in a structured and supervised environment on any day that meals are served. *Unless the school qualifies as extended day, the school day does not count as enrichment.*

On-Site Monitoring Waivers

School food authorities and sponsoring organizations would be required to conduct on-site monitoring visits and reviews once the current waivers expire on August 31, 2020.

Please contact your state agency for more information about these and other state-requested waivers. State agencies are eligible to use all nationwide waivers without application, but they must still elect to be subject to the waiver by notifying their USDA Regional Office.

Resource: [Meal Service Options for SY20-21](#)

This No Kid Hungry resource reflects nationwide waivers and guidance available as of July 23, 2020. It provides additional details beyond what has been included here, such as potential challenges under current waivers.

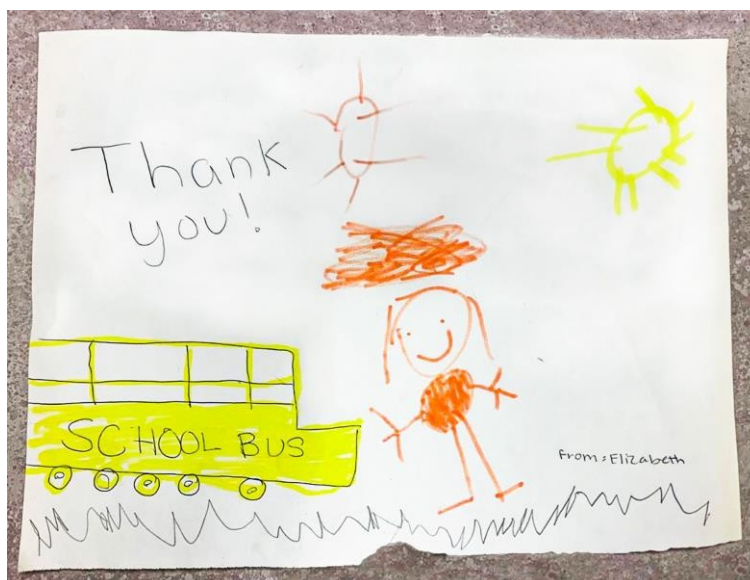
Reach Out for Support

If you still have questions, know that you're likely not the only one! This situation is unprecedented for all of us. We are here to support you.

You can visit bestpractices.nokidhungry.org for more resources or email us at bestpractices@nokidhungry.org.

[Subscribe](#) to our newsletter to stay up-to-date on the latest news and check out our upcoming and recorded [webinars](#).

We also recommend that you keep your state agency informed about your needs and challenges. They are working diligently on your behalf to ensure you have the flexibility to continue feeding kids, no matter what lies ahead.



FINANCIAL RECOVERY


School nutrition departments have dealt with unprecedented challenges providing emergency meals during the coronavirus crisis and in the process, many have incurred significant debt. For those looking for opportunities to "bounce back" financially in the coming school year, there are solutions that can provide win-win outcomes for both school nutrition departments and the children they serve.


Community Eligibility Provision


The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) provides school meals to students at no cost to them. With food insecurity rising amidst growing unemployment due to the coronavirus, CEP will be more important than ever for students and families in the coming school year. At the same time, rising SNAP participation may make CEP a more financially viable option for many schools and districts.

The annual deadline to elect CEP has been extended to August 31, 2020 this year. SNAP participation has increased in many places, which means identified student percentages (ISPs) have also increased. Many families have faced losses to household income, making it difficult to put food on the table. Meanwhile, school nutrition departments are facing the unique challenge of serving meals to students during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. For all of these reasons and more, this school year presents a unique opportunity to adopt or expand CEP; or to start a new 4-year cycle.

Why elect to participate in CEP?

 **CEP will make meal counting and claiming easier.** Under CEP, only the total number of meals served needs to be counted rather than tracking the number of meals served by free, reduced-price or paid status.

 **CEP can help eliminate school lunch debt.** All meals are served to students at no cost to them– that means no new school lunch debt.

 **CEP can generate revenue for school nutrition budgets.** Because CEP increases participation in school meals (by eliminating the barrier of cost to all students), schools often see a higher financial return under CEP than under traditional counting and claiming by fee category. *Note: financial return varies by ISP.*

If you are considering adopting or expanding CEP, here are some tools that can help:

- Take a fresh look at the benefits of CEP during COVID-19 with this [infographic](#) from Johns Hopkins.
- Prepare for conversations about adopting or expanding CEP with our [talking points for district administrators](#).
- Reach out to your superintendent, school board and/or principal using our [template letter to school administrators about adopting CEP](#).
- Have a conversation with your school business official using points from our [CEP financial considerations](#) resource.
- Conduct SNAP outreach with our [customizable SNAP outreach toolkit](#) to both support families in your community and ensure that eligible students are captured in your ISP.

For more information and resources, visit:

bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/programs/community-eligibility-provision

FEMA Public Assistance Grants

Districts have incurred significant costs serving meals during the coronavirus emergency, including expenses for meal delivery, staff hazard and overtime pay, personal protective equipment, and packaging. Public Assistance grants available from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) may be able to cover some unreimbursed expenses associated with emergency meal service not covered by other federal aid. Ask your superintendent if they have considered whether FEMA Public Assistance funds could cover your district's COVID-19 response costs, including expenditures related to meal service.

[Resource: FEMA Public Assistance Grants](#)

This No Kid Hungry resource provides an overview of FEMA Public Assistance grants and examples of how these grants may be used by schools and other entities to help combat hunger during the COVID-19 emergency.

The CARES Act

The federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act allocated billions of dollars in emergency relief funds to cover costs associated with COVID-19. Some states- including California, Virginia, and North Carolina- have allocated money from CARES Act funds to explicitly support programs that provided emergency school meals and now need financial relief. Ask your state agency if CARES Act funds have been made available to specifically support school meal programs.

If your state school nutrition agency indicates the funds are not available specifically for school meals, many school districts automatically received CARES Act funds through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund, known as ESSER, that can broadly cover expenses school districts incurred in response to COVID-19, including those related to the provision of school meals to eligible students during school closures. Ask your superintendent if ESSER funds are available in your school district to support your school meal program needs.

[Resource: The CARES Act – An Overview of Federal Funding That Can Be Used for School Nutrition](#)

This No Kid Hungry resource provides an overview of the CARES Act and the three major streams of funding that are potentially available to support school meal programs.

Offer Meals in the Classroom & Grab & Go

Many districts are planning to implement alternative delivery models like meals in the classroom and grab & go meals as a means to support social distancing, however the benefits to these programs are far reaching. [Research](#) shows that student participation increases significantly when alternative delivery models, like Breakfast in the Classroom, are implemented. Increased participation can result in increased revenue while ensuring that children get the critical nutrition they need.

Provide Meals for Distance Learners

Many districts are preparing to educate and feed students on new schedules including half-days and alternating days. Most scenarios include an option for some kind of virtual or “distance learning” that supplements in-person learning by 50% or more. By providing meals to students on/for their distance learning days, districts can increase their meal counts (compared to only serving the students who are present for in-person learning) while ensuring that students get the critical nutrition they need. **Be sure to check with your state agency around any mandate that students be provided meals whether they are engaged in in-person instruction or distance learning.**

MEAL SERVICE MODELS

School Schedule Scenarios

Before discussing meal service models, it is important to first understand the context in which meals might be served during school year 2020-2021. Across the country, districts are considering these potential instruction plans or schedule scenarios:



100% Distance Learning: All students learn remotely full-time.



Grade-Level Return: Younger students return to school while older students continue distance learning or vice versa.



Targeted Return: Some students return to school for in-person learning while others learn remotely. This could be based on family preference or household circumstances (i.e. essential workers may send their children to school full-time or some families continue distance learning full-time if a family member is high-risk for COVID-19 complications). This could also be based on equity considerations or other risk factors (i.e. students with individualized education programs or English language learners are prioritized for returning to in-class instruction).



Blended Learning/Hybrid Model: Many or all students in some or all grades return to in-class learning part of the time while distance learning the rest of the time. This gives more students an opportunity for in-person learning while reducing the number of students in school buildings or riding school buses at any one time. Examples include:

- A & B Schedules: Groups of students rotate through in-class learning.
 - › One group may go to school on Monday and Wednesday while another group goes to school on Tuesday and Thursday; Friday is a distance learning day for all.
 - › One group may go to school three days one week and two days the next, alternating with another group.

› One group may go to school for an entire week and learn remotely the following week, alternating with another group.

- AM/PM Schedules: Students are divided into groups; one group that attends school in the morning and one group that attends school in the afternoon.



100% In-Class Learning: All students return to school full-time with enhanced cleaning and social distancing protocols. *These districts should be prepared to adopt another model should a coronavirus outbreak occur within a school or the number of cases in the community surges.*

In all cases, district leaders must refer to state and local guidelines to determine what is allowable in their geographic area under current conditions. Additionally, they should consult critical stakeholders within the district, including teachers, parents, the school nutrition director, business and operations officials – including those overseeing transportation and custodial staff – and community partners, such as those who provide afterschool programming or care for children of essential workers.

[Resource: Lunch Assist](#)

Lunch Assist has a variety of free COVID-19 resources including tools, checklists and templates to help you prepare for back-to-school meal service.

Recommended Meal Service Models

Recommended Meal Service Models:

Meals Consumed at School

Below is an overview of recommended meal service models for feeding students who are at school for in-person learning. Additional details for each model can be found on the next pages of this toolkit.



Meals in the Classroom:

Modeled after Breakfast in the Classroom, meals are packed per classroom and delivered to those classrooms, typically in rolling bags, by school nutrition staff or retrieved by a student or teacher.



Field Trip-Style:

Bagged meals are packed in boxes or insulated food pan carriers and delivered door to door to each classroom by school nutrition staff.



Grab & Go:

Multiple points of service (i.e. carts or kiosks) are placed strategically around the school building; may include both indoor and outdoor placement depending on climate and campus. Students retrieve their meals from one of these points of service, which is operated by school nutrition staff.



Grab & Go from the Cafeteria:

Students retrieve meals from the cafeteria and return to their classrooms to eat.

Meals in the Classroom

Best For	Districts with strong administrative support and/or a mandate for classroom-only feeding. Optimal for schools participating in CEP or Provision 2 (for ease of meal counting and claiming). Feasible in both elementary and secondary environments.
Pros	Allows for social distancing (if classrooms have been set up accordingly). Maximizes meal participation. Reduces the need for janitorial services in the cafeteria. Provides an opportunity for Social Emotional Learning. Offer Versus Service is possible, as is serving both hot and cold meals.
Considerations	Schools may need to provide additional training for teachers around Offer Versus Serve. Bags used for transport will need to be sanitized between breakfast and lunch. May require more staffing to pack and deliver the meals to classrooms.
Equipment Needs	Equipment needs will vary based on building layout, but would generally include: insulated rolling bags or tiered carts, classroom trash cans, hallway trash cans and custodian hauling equipment.
Adaptations	Teachers may distribute meal components to students to maximize social distancing. Printed rosters with barcodes may be used if scanning equipment is available. Counts for future meals may be taken in advance by teachers.

Field Trip-Style

Best For	Elementary schools with some administrative support and/or a mandate for classroom-only feeding.
Pros	Teachers can provide a count to school nutrition staff and receive pre-bagged meals for their students. Provides maximum social distancing because students have contact with their meal only. Maximizes meal participation. Teachers do not need Offer Versus Serve (OVS) training.
Considerations	May require more staffing to deliver the meals and extra labor for bagging the "field trip" style meals. Additional costs associated with bags and other packaging. All items must be individually wrapped. This is a serve-only model (no OVS option). Serving hot foods may not be feasible for some districts. More staggered meal times may be needed to allow for delivery to each classroom.
Equipment Needs	Rolling carts or flatbeds with boxes or insulated food pan carriers to hold pre-bagged meals, classroom trash cans, hallway trash cans and custodian hauling equipment.
Adaptations	Teachers can pass out bagged meals to students to maximize social distancing. Printed rosters with barcodes may be used if scanning equipment is available. Delivery to an outdoor seating/eating area is an option.

Grab & Go

Best For	Districts with some administrative support and/or a mandate for non-cafeteria feeding. Best for elementary schools and most secondary schools.
Pros	Limits student exposure to other students when only one class is sent at a time to pick up meals. School nutrition staff at the point of service maintain control of the product and compliance procedures. Staff may pass out pre-bagged meals or use Offer Versus Serve (OVS) to decrease food cost and food waste.
Considerations	May require more staffing to pack meals and to operate and stage carts. Additional costs for bags and other packaging. All items must be individually wrapped. OVS increases cross-contamination risk. Carts should be wiped down between classes. Staggered meal times for class by class pick-up is recommended.
Equipment Needs	Rolling carts, classroom trash cans, hallway trash cans and custodian hauling equipment.
Adaptations	Printed class rosters or scanning technology may be used. Service can be connected with school entry for breakfast and school exit for lunch or supper (depending on the schedule scenario and meals being provided). Students could take their lunches to the playground to eat for a non-classroom option that allows for social distancing.

Grab & Go from the Cafeteria

Best For	Districts with no administrative support for classroom only feeding. Possible in elementary schools and most secondary schools.
Pros	Provides minimum social distancing when implementing staggered service times. May still use bulk commodity foods with ease. Minimal modifications needed by school nutrition staff; most of the changes would be made by the principal and school staff. No new meal service equipment is needed.
Considerations	This model has a higher risk for cross-contamination due to all students passing through one point of service (POS). Sanitation of high contact areas is necessary between classes. Students must take meals back to their classrooms or to an outdoor area. Staff may need to individually pass out milk and condiments.
Equipment Needs	Classroom trash cans and hallway or outdoor area trash cans.
Adaptations	ID card/scanning technology or printed rosters needed to avoid key pad use. Place markers on the floor to keep social distancing while students are in line. Construct a plexiglass barrier around POS to protect school nutrition staff. Eliminate any self-service bars. Must extend lunch periods to serve in smaller groups.

Recommended Meal Service Models

Recommended Meal Service Models:

Meals Consumed Off Campus

Schools that are moving to 100% remote learning or offering a blended learning/hybrid model will be leveraging many of the same meal service strategies they have been using since March when the coronavirus emergency began.

Schools implementing a hybrid model that combines virtual and in-person learning will likely encounter more challenges as they plan to implement two meal programs simultaneously- one to feed the students who are at school and the other to provide meals to students for the days they are not present at school for in-person learning.

We recommend that you consider these meal service models for feeding students on the days that they are learning remotely:



Drive-Thru or Walk-Up Model:

As demonstrated during emergency feeding, this model would utilize parent pick-up of meals. This could occur in the pick-up or drop-off lines at each school or at select locations across the district.



Meals in the Classroom + Field Trip-Style:





Bagged meals for the next day(s) are provided to students in their classrooms ahead of school dismissal.



Grab & Go:

Students grab a pre-bagged meal or meals (quantity dependent on the schedule scenario) from a point of service station somewhere on campus as they exit school for dismissal.

Strategies for Coordinating In-School and At-Home Meal Service

-  Work with administrators to stagger school entrance, dismissal and meal times to support social distancing and the provision of on-campus and take-home meals.
-  For districts with packaging capability, consider individually wrapping items in-house. By using USDA commodity foods and DOD produce, this can help limit additional labor and packaging costs.
-  Centralizing labor in a commissary or central kitchens may allow for a greater number of meals to be served and may help reduce labor burden of staff preparing meals directly at school sites.
-  Consider dividing your staff into two teams- one team to focus on the preparation and provision of in-school meals and the other dedicated to at-home meals.
-  Individually wrapped items or meals are recommended for grab & go models or anywhere Offer Versus Serve will be implemented. Individually wrapped items may also provide more versatility for use across meal programs.
-  Menus may be streamlined so that meals sent home are consistent with those served on campus the following day. When implementing Offer Versus Serve, reduce the number of choices available.
-  Have students or families pre-order meals (using your POS system or a Google form) so that you can plan meal preparation accordingly. This can help to ensure you have enough meals available to meet demand or limit food waste.
-  Repurpose existing equipment to avoid additional costs and provide budget relief. For example, you can repurpose salad bars as grab & go carts or add wheels to certain shelving units to make them mobile.

For the most part, it is expected that in-school meals will evolve from students eating in a large group in the cafeteria to students eating in smaller groups for both breakfast and lunch, either in their classrooms or via grab & go to other spaces across the campus.

The good news is that these models build on strategies that No Kid Hungry has leveraged for years. These resources, designed to help schools implement Breakfast After the Bell (BAB), can be helpful now as you plan to implement innovative delivery meal service models:

[Best Practices to
Operate BAB Without
Universal Meals](#)

If your school does not offer universal free meals, you might be wondering how to implement alternative service models while ensuring that the counting and claiming process remains accurate. This resource highlights best practices from schools that operate BAB but do not offer universal free meals that you can apply to your program.

[Equipment Tip Sheet](#)

This resource is designed to help guide school nutrition staff in choosing what equipment would be useful for whichever BAB model you choose. Most of the guidance can be applied broadly to meals in the classroom or grab & go.

[Talking Points for
Introducing Breakfast
After the Bell to
School Stakeholders](#)

These talking points can help you get started as you introduce school stakeholders- including teachers, principals and superintendents- to BAB. Many of these talking points can be adapted beyond breakfast.

[Teacher's Guide to Classroom Set-Up and Clean-Up](#)

This resource shares best practices from teachers that have already implemented breakfast in the classroom. Most of the strategies can be applied more broadly to meals in the classroom.

[Pre-Implementation Checklist](#)

This resources outlines the important steps in preparing to launch an alternative breakfast program. The same steps are critical for more broadly launching an alternative meal service model.

[Template Letter to School Staff](#)

This template letter was designed to help you inform school staff about a new Breakfast After the Bell program and provide detailed information about how the program will work. You can use this letter as a model to provide important information to school staff about the new meal services model(s) that you'll be implementing.

[Breakfast in the Classroom Customizable Letter to Families](#)

It is important to inform families about a new program before it launches. This template letter, designed to announce a new breakfast in the classroom program, can be adapted to inform families about whichever new meal service model(s) you choose to implement.

[How School Meals Reach Kids](#)

This resource traces the path of the funding that supports school breakfast and lunch from Congress to the cafeteria. It also answers common questions that educators have about how the programs work.

[Breakfast After the Bell Myths](#)

This resource addresses common myths about Breakfast After the Bell – like that it takes away from instructional time and makes a mess.

[School Breakfast Promotion Strategies](#)

This resource highlights promotion strategies to build awareness, generate excitement and ultimately increase school breakfast participation. All of the strategies can be applied more broadly to your school meals program, although some may need to be adapted to allow for social distancing.

[School Breakfast – Healthier Than You Think](#)

This resource is intended to provide parents and educators with helpful nutritional information about school breakfast. The content can be adapted to also reflect lunch. The resource is also available in [Spanish](#).