

March 26, 2020

## School Nutrition Eligibility and Limitations

While Governor Bullock's school closure order asked schools to continue feeding students during the time the buildings were ordered closed, the order had created some confusion in the field that the Office of Public Instruction wants to clarify.

- 1) Not all districts participate in USDA School Nutrition Programs for various reasons including eligibility, size of the community, or local decision not to participate. The Office of Public Instruction can not provide reimbursements for meal service provided during the school closure if the district is not a participant of USDA School Nutrition Programs, such as the National School Lunch Program.
- 2) The USDA waiver provided to the Office of Public Instruction for the Summer Food Service Program allows eligible Summer Food Service Program sites to provide non-congregate feeding. To be able to operate a Summer Food Service Program during unanticipated school closures, current USDA regulations still require communities to meet the 50% free and reduced or area eligibility requirements to run an open site. This waiver does not allow participation by communities that do not meet these requirements. Communities that qualify for the Summer Food Service Program are allowed to operate during unanticipated school closures, such as for COVID-19. Currently there are 246 Summer Food Service Program sites that have been approved.
- 3) If a community does not qualify for the Summer Food Service Program, a district may continue to access their National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program if providing distance educational services. In order to utilize this program, a district must send an e-mail to their school nutrition specialist certifying they are providing educational services during the school closure. This notice must be sent to the OPI and is separate from information they may provide in their plan provided to Governor Bullock's office.
- 4) Districts should contact their nutrition specialist directly to discuss options for their community. The OPI will work with communities to find the most inclusive and beneficial program to meet their needs while still following federal requirements.
- 5) The OPI is currently in the process of requesting a federal waiver to eliminate the eligibility requirements for the Summer Food Service Program during unanticipated school closures. Please continue to visit the webpage, [www.opi.mt.gov](http://www.opi.mt.gov) to see new waivers and program changes as they are provided.