



DATE: November 2023

TO: School Food Authority Administrators and Food Service Managers

FROM: Christine Emerson, Director School Nutrition Programs

SUBJECT: Early Release and Meal Program Benefits

This memorandum is regarding early release days from school and the availability of school meals. If a district has an early release day and offers school meals to any students, then all students must be offered a meal (equal access). If students are in school at the time of a normal meal period, they should be provided with a meal.

For example, if the early out is scheduled at noon and the lunch period is regularly scheduled at 11:00, students should be offered lunch.

According to USDA guidance, FNS Instruction 788-2: Partial Implementation of the School Meal Programs in an Individual School, school food authorities must make program benefits available during meal service to all children attending participating schools. While a school may have legitimate problems accommodating all students within a given time or space, it is improper to arbitrarily deny a certain segment of the student body access to the lunch program.

This requirement does not include partial day students that would not normally attend school during the lunch period (preschool, kindergarten, half-day high school students).

The meal service may be different on the early out days. Students can be provided with grab and go meals rather than traditional cafeteria service.

If you have questions, please contact School Nutrition Programs at (406) 444-2501.

