



United States
Department of Agriculture



United States
Department of Education

August 10, 2009

Dear Educator:

In preparation for a potential fall wave of the H1N1 flu virus, the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services recently sent you a letter detailing specific recommendations for you to consider as you plan. One of the recommendations was to consider options for providing meals to at-risk children during school dismissals. To that end, on July 23, 2009, the Department of Agriculture (USDA) issued guidance on how schools or other community organizations can receive authorization from their States to utilize the Summer Food Service Program or the Seamless Summer Option to be reimbursed for meal service to children who qualify during H1N1-related school dismissals.

This flexibility uses USDA's program waiver authority in an effort to address concerns regarding the loss of school meals for children who qualify, many of whom depend on these meals and may not have access to other sources of food when schools are closed. Schools and other community organizations will need to work closely with their State agencies to develop appropriate plans, including methods of meal distribution that will address their particular circumstances should such school dismissals occur. Detailed information is available online at http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/Policy-Memos/2009/SP_31-2009_os.pdf.

Schools are a tremendous resource to their communities in times of crisis and emergencies. We encourage schools to be active participants in community planning, to include meal service options in your emergency planning process, and to ensure that your school food professionals are actively engaged in the emergency planning process. In addition to the alternative meal service options provided by USDA, school food service staff and facilities are a significant resource to consider as part of the overall emergency planning process. Beyond meal service to children, schools may serve as preparation facilities where voluntary organizations and other community resources prepare and deliver meals or food packages to individuals and families during emergency situations. And to keep students engaged in learning if their schools are dismissed, reading materials and assignments could be included in those food deliveries.

Schools, as an integral and trusted part of the community, are also well positioned to serve as quick and effective sources of information for families who need referrals to food assistance programs. We strongly recommend that schools partner with other community organizations to develop local emergency plans and to use the communication channels available to them, including Web sites, e-mail distribution lists, automated phone calling systems, and flyers to refer families to appropriate assistance programs.

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Our goal is to offer assistance and provide flexibility to schools as they engage in community planning to promote the health of children and families and minimize the loss of school meals in the event a fall recurrence of the H1N1 virus leads to school dismissals. We look forward to continuing to work with you toward this end and encourage schools to utilize the H1N1 information and emergency planning resources available. Helpful information is posted on several Federal Web sites including <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/school/index.html>, <http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/emergencyplan/pandemic/index.html>, www.flu.gov, <http://rems.ed.gov>, and www.fns.usda.gov/disasters/pandemic, as well as individual States' Web sites.

Thank you for all your efforts.

Sincerely,



Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture



Arne Duncan
Secretary of Education