

Best Practices: Increasing Access

Meal Times and Distribution Days

Serving meals through SSO or SFSP under current waivers provides flexibility in meal times and distribution days. Though some districts have found it useful to serve meals every day of the week, others have scaled back to a few or one single day of service each week. While offering meals on only a handful of days limits pickup flexibility for families, it provides a larger payoff for those able to attend. Districts with fully remote models or those with long lunch periods may opt to serve meals during lunch hours. While hard to predict, many districts are having more success with late afternoon pick up hours compared to morning or mid-day hours.

For example, **Blackstone-Millville Regional School District**, distributes meals 11am-12pm and 4-5pm, and has had significantly higher participation in the 4-5pm time window.



New Bedford Public Schools has had a similar experience. They have been serving meals 6:30-7:30am and 3-6pm and have found that the 3-6pm window has been far more successful. There are other districts who have slightly altered their hours and have seen participation increases (**East Bridgewater** moved from a 10am pickup to a 8:15am pickup). **Southbridge** was serving meals 11am-12pm but noted that families were unable to pick up meals at that time, especially if they had younger students in the household. The district decided to switch to one site, on one day of the week, from 3-5pm in order to accommodate families. Compared to their format before, participation has tripled with the changes. This shift has also taken pressure off of staff to serve meals every day and spend time outside during inclement weather.

Think about when families will be most available to pick up their meals or consider asking them yourself at meal sites or by distributing a brief survey. If you have the capacity, you can test multiple meal times to see which works best or [simply consult with districts like you](#). If your district switches to fully remote, decreasing the days of meal service will provide less exposure for your staff and families. However, if staff hours then become a concern, consider having food service staff help with home deliveries or focus on more scratch cooking.

Meal Bundling and Frozen Meals

In order to decrease time spent picking up meals and limit staff contact with students, districts may find it useful to serve multiple meals at a time. However, doing so brings up questions of meal quality, with students sometimes consuming meals days after pickup. Meal packs should be intentionally designed to maximize freshness and labeled by day so that they can be eaten in the correct succession. Frozen meals are a fantastic way to extend meal quality and have been popular with students. Some districts have also had success serving shelf stable meals for later in the week. **Salem Public Schools** makes frozen meals and they are included in the Grab & Go meals a minimum of four days a week. A typical lunch menu might be [Shepherd's Pie](#), a roll, fruit and a milk or [Chop Suey](#), broccoli, fruit, and milk.

This document was last updated on 10/29/2020.

Since March, **Walpole Public Schools** has operated an open SSO site and distributes 5-7 days' of food on Wednesdays at Walpole High School. They are currently serving 6000 meals/week. The bags include 7 breakfast and lunches and all items are either frozen, shelf stable or fresh. Wednesdays have worked well since all students are remote on that day and there is less traffic at the high school. However, the Police Department is helping with the line of traffic to pick up meals since there are typically more than 350 cars.

More Meal Sites

It's no surprise that offering plenty of pickup sites can increase participation. While running one site is the only feasible option for very small districts, larger ones may be able to add more sites as participation grows. This fall, DESE will allow additional sites as needed, with no location restrictions. Though adding more sites may be more expensive, extending your program thoughtfully with solid participation can increase revenue. [Grants](#) are also available to support additional sites. If adding sites is not feasible in your district, consider home delivery or bus routes. Some districts make use of food service trucks while others have had success diverting buses, using personal vehicles, and borrowing vehicles from community based organizations.

Family Surveys

Every community is different from the next in terms of size, distribution of need, food preferences, and a variety of other factors. Figuring out what *your community* needs is critical to successful meal service. While you can always just ask families what meal times and sites would be most convenient for them, a broader district-wide survey may be useful to identify barriers for the families that you don't see. Collaborate with your school administration to develop and widely distribute an online survey via [Google Forms](#) to inform strategic meal sites and service times. We've provided [some suggestions for questions to ask](#), but this is a fantastic opportunity to receive feedback on a range of issues.

New Bedford Public Schools includes a 2-sided postcard with each Grab & Go meal bag. One side has a QRC code that links to a [family survey](#) that has been most helpful in identifying issues with the meals and allows families to suggest items that they would like to see offered. The other side has a QRC code that directs families to re-heating instructions (in four languages) that are explained on their website. They also have hard copies available for those who don't have access to the internet or who prefer a hard copy.

**LET US KNOW
WHAT YOU THINK
OF THE GRAB & GO
MEALS!**



Scan the QR code using your smartphone camera app
OR
Visit: shorturl.at/lpMOT
*Survey can be completed daily!



eNewBedfordEATS | www.newbedfordschools.org
> Depts./Programs
> Food & Nutrition Services



**Reheating Instructions
for Grab and Go Meals
are available online!**

Scan the QR code using your smartphone camera app
OR visit
www.NewBedfordSchools.org and
search "reheating instructions"



- ALLERGEN NOTICE: Uncrustable peanut butter and jelly sandwiches contain PEANUTS.
- AVISO DE ALÉRGIAS: Los sándwiches Uncrustable de mantequilla de mani y mermelada contienen MANÍ.
- AVISO DE ALERGÉNIO: A sanduiche incrustável de manteiga de amendoim e doce contém AMENDOINS.
- YAKI UBIXIQ RECH Q'TABAL A WII: Ri q'luxlenwa Uncrustable rech mantequilla rech mani xuquje mermelada q'ollq r'i cham MANI.

If you have any questions or would like additional materials or resources, please reach out to Project Bread's Child Nutrition Outreach Program at cnop@projectbread.org or visit www.meals4kids.org