



This document was last updated on 10/15/2020. 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

Benefits of Open Sites

There are so many variables this school year and many decisions to be made around the best way to provide meals to students. One of the most important decisions this year is whether to operate closed enrolled sites or open sites. Though options should be weighed at the local level, there are many benefits to choosing the open site option, a decision that can help reduce food insecurity throughout the state. Any School Food Authority (SFA) may opt to operate closed or open sites through Seamless Summer Option (SSO) or Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) this school year. Closed sites, sometimes called closed enrolled sites, serve meals only to students enrolled in a particular school or program. For program accuracy, meals served at these sites require enrollment documentation for each individual student. **Open sites, on the other hand, serve meals to all children 18 and under (SFSP) or 21 and under (SSO).**

Please note that school sites may operate closed and open meal programs simultaneously, most likely while doing hybrid learning. Students eating in school in their classroom or cafeteria will be claimed as a closed enrolled school site while grab & go service may be served as an open school site. While both closed and open sites are options to SSO or SFSP districts, **it is recommended that SFAs strongly consider making grab and go sites open to ease administrative work and reach more kids.**

Open Site Advantages

- Serve all children in the community free of charge including siblings in your students' households, homeschooled children, and students enrolled in other districts
- Increase meal counts to generate more revenue for your program
- Reduce administrative burden, as individual student information is not required
- Reach your community at large and build engagement with your meal program - open sites will be advertised on Project Bread's meal finder map at meals4kids.org/meals



Misconceptions About Open Sites

We'll be overwhelmed with the number of meals we have to serve:

You may experience an increase in volume if you serve children outside of the district, but the increase is likely to be very manageable, and can help your program financially. Strategies such as pre-ordering systems can be implemented to assist with meal forecasting. Meal programs like Grab & Go sites generally serve fewer students than in-school meal programs, so meal counts are unlikely to increase significantly above typical levels.

We can't handle serving unenrolled students:

Serving through open sites increases federal reimbursement and allows meal programs to be self-sustaining and more profitable. From a revenue standpoint, more meals served means more reimbursement. If you are experiencing financial hardship, the best way to increase revenue is by serving more meals and claiming more reimbursement. Consistently high meal counts will allow SFAs to retain staff and minimize furloughs.

We won't be able to predict the number of meals we should prepare:

While there will always be fluctuations in demand for meals because of meal times, weather, or holidays, these counts do remain fairly consistent, and fall into a rhythm after a week or two. Meal counts may change somewhat throughout the school year but generally do so gradually, allowing for time to adjust.

Serving meals to all kids is unfair to our students:

Open sites provide equity to communities by allowing children of all ages to access free meals and better serve families with additional unenrolled children in the household. At the same time, serving meals to other children in the surrounding communities will generate more revenue for your program, allowing you to better serve your students in years to come.

There is no significant difference in the time spent and revenue received by having open sites vs. closed sites:

For closed enrolled sites, individual student information must be collected at POS. For open sites, the only information needed is the total number of meals served. Therefore it speeds up the process for distributing meals, resulting in less administrative time for your staff. Because there are typically more meals distributed at open sites, your food service department will also receive more federal reimbursements, thus increasing revenue.



Once we decide to operate closed enrolled sites or open sites, we cannot change:

DESE announced that districts may change their site type at any time. If you would like to do so, notify your DESE consultant. Also, please notify Project Bread by contacting cnop@projectbread.org so that your open site can be added to or removed from the state meal finder map.

Since all districts are offering meals we don't need to have open sites because students are all receiving meals in their home districts:

While it is easy to assume this, it is not accurate. There could be many obstacles such as limited sites, distance and travel time to sites, inconvenient or limited times to pick up meals, etc. Since March, one in six Massachusetts households with children are food insecure, which is an alarming increase from one in nine households prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. By having open meal sites, more families can easily access meals and more children receive healthy and nutritious meals.

Closed sites are easier for families:

For in-school closed sites serving meals to students in the classroom or cafeteria, this is true, but this has always been the case. As many schools are operating in a hybrid model or are fully remote, Grab & Go meals are the option for students at home. If the Grab & Go site operates as an open site, families may easily pick up meals for all of their children at the open site most convenient for them regardless of where or if they attend a district school. For example, a family may have a three-year-old at home, a child who attends the public elementary school, and a child who attends a regional Voc Tech school twenty miles away. If there are Grab & Go meals for remote or hybrid learners at their child's public elementary school and it is a closed enrolled site, the parent or caregiver may only pick up meals for that child. If it is an open site, they may get meals for all three of their children, which makes open sites a better choice for families, and results in larger meal counts for the school nutrition program.