



Food and
Nutrition
Service

Braddock
Metro Center

1320
Braddock
Place
Alexandria,
VA, 22314

July 30, 2020

Suzanne Davidson
Director, Child Nutrition Unit
Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, Arkansas Department of Education
2020 West 3rd Street, Suite 404
Little Rock, Arkansas 72205

Dear Ms. Davidson:

This letter is in response to the Arkansas Department of Education's (AR DOE) June 16, 2020, request to waive the requirement that reimbursement for Provision 2 schools must be based on the number of meals served to children eligible for free and reduced price meals during the base year. The request would assist schools that were unable to complete a Provision 2 base year during school year (SY) 2019-2020 due to school closures as a result of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

Specifically, AR DOE requested a statewide waiver of the requirements of 7 C.F.R. 245.9(b)(3)(i) and 245.9(b)(3)(ii) to allow the State to approve schools that were conducting a Provision 2 base year in SY 2019-2020 to use data from months when schools were in full operation when determining reimbursement for non-base years. The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) recognizes that in the public health emergency caused by COVID-19, schools conducting Provision 2 base years were unable to collect a complete set of base year data and would need to conduct an additional base year to participate in Provision 2 if a waiver is not granted. In their request, AR DOE indicated that it would be burdensome for schools which conducted a base year in school year 2019-2020 to collect applications again in school year 2020-2021.

To grant a Section 12(l) waiver, the NSLA requires that the waiver must facilitate the purpose of the program, the public must receive notice and information regarding the proposed waiver, and the waiver will not increase the overall cost of the program to the Federal Government. FNS finds that AR DOE's waiver request satisfies these statutory requirements.

Based on the exceptional circumstances relating to COVID-19, and pursuant to the waiver authority granted at section 12(l) of the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (NSLA) (42 U.S.C. 1760(l)), FNS approves AR DOE's waiver request through August 31, 2020. Therefore, effective immediately, through August 31, 2020, AR DOE may approve schools that were conducting a Provision 2 base year in SY 2019-2020 to develop their claiming percentage using data collected when school was in full operation.

Provision 2 schools are permitted to calculate an annual claiming percentage using the days the school was in full operation (prior to school closures due to COVID-19) and apply the annual percentage to all months during the non-base years. Provision 2 schools

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opting to use a monthly claiming percentage may calculate their percentage by using monthly claiming percentages for the months schools were open and in normal operation. For the months schools were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, these schools would use an annual claiming percentage based on the days they were in operation in SY 2019-2020.

The waiver authority at section 12(l) of the NSLA also requires FNS to periodically review the performance of any State or eligible service provider that was granted a waiver. Therefore, AR DOE must annually provide to the FNS Southwest Regional Office a written report quantifying the impact of the waiver, as described below.

The report must include the following:

- A description of how the waiver impacted children's access school meals;
- The number of SFAs that used the waiver; and
- A summary of findings associated with the waiver.

FNS appreciates AR DOE's commitment to work with SFAs to meet the nutritional needs of children during a challenging time. If you have questions, please contact the Southwest Regional Office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Angela Kline". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Angela Kline
Director
Policy and Program Development Division

cc: Shannon Jones