



Food and
Nutrition
Service

March 28, 2020

Braddock
Metro
Center

Brigette Hires
Program Manager, Child Nutrition Programs
Ohio Department of Education
Office of Integrated Student Supports
25. S. Front St.
Columbus, OH 43215

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Braddock
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Alexandria
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Dear Ms. Hires,

This letter is in response to the Ohio Department of Education's (ODE) waiver request to maintain children's access to meals during the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, submitted March 13, 2020. ODE requests a waiver of the restrictions on site eligibility requirements in the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and National School Lunch Program (NSLP) Seamless Summer Option (SSO). Specifically, ODE requests to waive the requirement that open sites must be located in areas where at least 50 percent of NSLP participants are eligible for free or reduced price meals. Instead, Ohio requests the flexibility to allow non-area eligible school food authorities (SFAs) in good standing to feed students under the Emergency School Closure provision of SFSP and SSO.

In its request, ODE asserts that Ohio has several SFAs with sites that do not meet the area eligibility requirements under SFSP and SSO regulations, but still have students who need program meals. ODE states this waiver would allow SFAs experiencing school closure during the pandemic to operate and utilize perishable foods that were encumbered for use in school meals programs. ODE states that this waiver will maintain children's access to the SFSP and SSO meal service during school closures related to the pandemic. To maintain children's access to meals, and to support families experiencing financial hardship, ODE requests to waive the requirement at 7 CFR 225.14(c)(3) to conduct a regularly scheduled food service in "*Areas in which poor economic conditions exist.*"

Pursuant to the waiver authority granted under Section 2102(b) of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (P.L. 116-127) (the Act) to approve waivers that may increase cost to the Federal Government and have the purpose of providing meals and meal supplements, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) approves this request. However, State agencies must have a plan for ensuring that new meal sites are targeting benefits to children in need, for example, children who may be newly eligible for benefits due to the economic impacts of COVID-19. State agencies should work with local Program operators in developing their plans as local Program operators are best situated to determine how to provide these assurances. This approval applies to sites operating during temporary school closures related to COVID-19. Additionally, FNS reserves the right to withdraw this approval subject to availability of funding.

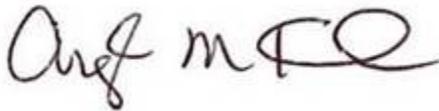
Therefore, effective as of March 18, 2020, this waiver allows SFSP and SSO sponsors in good standing to operate open sites in areas approved by ODE and consistent with the State plan, but that are not located in “*Areas in which poor economic conditions exist*” as defined at section 13(a)(1)(A) of the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (NSLA) and as referenced in regulation at 7 CFR 225.2, 225.6(c)(2)(i)(G), 225.6(c)(3)(i)(B), 225.6(d)(1)(i), 225.14(c)(3), and 225.16(b)(4). This waiver remains in effect until June 30, 2020, or until expiration of the federally declared public health emergency, whichever is earlier. FNS recognizes that there may be a continued need for this waiver, and will carefully assess the situation on an ongoing basis.

As required by this waiver approval, ODE must submit a report to the Secretary not later than 1 year after the date such State received the waiver. The report must include:

- A summary of the use of this waiver by the State agency and local Program operators,
- A summary of how new meal sites were targeted to benefits for children who were previously eligible or newly eligible for program benefits due to the economic impacts of COVID-19, and
- A description of whether and how this waiver resulted in improved services to Program participants.

FNS appreciates ODE’s commitment to work with sponsors to meet the nutritional needs of children during a challenging time. If you have questions, please contact the FNS Midwest Regional Office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Angela Kline". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Angela" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Kline".

Angela Kline
Director
Policy and Program Development Division

Electronic Copy: Samia Hamdan, MWRO
Christine Vineyard, MWRO