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Overview of Child Nutrition Programs

The Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) administers nine Child Nutrition and Commodity Programs:

- Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP);
- School Breakfast Program (SBP);
- National School Lunch Program (NSLP);
- Special Milk Program (SMP)
- Summer Food Service Program (SFSP);
- Food Distribution Program (FDP);
- Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP);
- Texas Commodity Assistance Program (TEXCAP); and
- Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP).

In this manual, the Child Nutrition Programs are the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), the School Breakfast Program (SBP), Afterschool Care Program (ASCP) and the Seamless Summer Option (SSO). The purpose of the Child Nutrition Programs is to safeguard the health and well being of the nation's students by providing nutritionally adequate meals each school day. This ensures that participating students gain a full understanding of the relationship between proper eating and good health. In addition, these Child Nutrition Programs provide students with learning experiences that will improve their eating habits.

National School Lunch Program (NSLP)

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is a federal entitlement program operating in public and nonprofit private and residential childcare institutions (RCCIs). It provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free lunches to students each school day. In 1998, Congress expanded the NSLP to include reimbursement for snacks served to students in after school educational and enrichment programs to include students through 18 years of age.

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), under the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), administers the program at the federal level. At the state level, the NSLP is administered in public schools, private schools and RCCIs by TDA, which operates the program through agreements with school food authorities (SFAs).

SFAs that choose to take part in the NSLP receive cash subsidies and USDA-donated commodities for each meal they serve. In return, they must serve lunches that meet federal requirements, and they must offer free or reduced-price lunches to eligible students. SFAs that

served 60 percent or more free or reduced-price lunches during the second preceding school year automatically receive an additional two cents per lunch. It is not necessary for SFAs to claim this additional reimbursement; it is automatically computed by TDA. SFAs can also be reimbursed for snacks served to students through age 18 in after school educational or enrichment programs.

Extended School Year Operation

Schools currently operating the NSLP during the school term may continue their operation during the summer for students in academic summer school programs. The rates of reimbursement, records and procedures for filing monthly claims for summer school are the same as during the regular school term.

Nutritional Requirements for the NSLP

Meals provided in the NSLP must meet the *1995 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, which recommend that no more than 30 percent of an individual's calories come from fat and less than 10 percent from saturated fat. Regulations also establish a standard for school lunches to provide one-third of the Recommended Dietary Allowances of protein, vitamin A, vitamin C, iron, calcium and calories.

School lunches must meet federal nutrition requirements, but decisions about the specific foods to serve and how they are prepared are made by the SFA.

Qualifying for Free and Reduced-Price Meals

Any student enrolled in a participating school may purchase a meal through the NSLP. Students from families with incomes at or below 130 percent of the poverty level are eligible for free meals. Those with incomes between 130 percent and 185 percent of the poverty level are eligible for reduced-price meals, for which students can be charged no more than 40 cents for lunch.

Students from families with incomes over 185 percent of poverty pay full price, though their meals are still subsidized to some extent. SFAs set their own prices for full-price (paid) meals but must operate their meal services as nonprofit programs.

School Breakfast Program (SBP)

The School Breakfast Program (SBP) is a federal entitlement program that provides states with cash assistance for nonprofit breakfast programs in schools. Beginning as a pilot project in 1966, the SBP was made permanent in 1975 and is administered at the federal level by the FNS. TDA administers the program at the state level and local SFAs administer the program at the local level in public schools, private schools and RCCIs.

Nutritional Requirements for School Breakfast

Participating schools must serve breakfasts that meet federal nutrition standards and must provide free and reduced-price breakfasts to eligible students. Participating schools receive cash

assistance from USDA for each meal served that meets program requirements. SFAs submit a claim to TDA for meals served.

Regulations require that all school meals meet recommendations of the *1995 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. In addition, breakfast must provide one-fourth of the Recommended Dietary Allowances for protein, calcium, iron, vitamin A, vitamin C and calories.

Severe Need Breakfast Reimbursement

USDA established severe need funding for breakfast for schools serving a large percentage of needy students with the idea that the increased funding would permit the serving of more nutritious breakfasts. Severe need funding is approved on a school-by-school basis. Within the SFA some schools may be eligible to apply for severe need funding and others may not. SFAs may apply any time in the school year to receive severe need funding for schools meeting the severe need criteria.

TDA will pay the severe need reimbursement rate throughout the school year to schools approved to participate.

Each school claiming severe need funding, must meet the following criteria:

- Forty percent or more of the lunches served to students during the second preceding year were served free or at a reduced price.
- The school is participating in or desiring to initiate a breakfast program.

Application for severe need rates for schools can be made through the Child Nutrition Programs Information Management System (CNPIMS) for public schools. Private schools and RCCIs wishing to apply for severe need rates should contact TDA at (877) TEX-MEAL.

Breakfast Meal Prices

Schools may charge no more than 30 cents for a reduced-price breakfast. Schools set their own prices for breakfast served to students who pay the full meal price (paid), though they must operate their meal services as nonprofit programs.

Afterschool Care Program (ASCP)

Under the NSLP, an SFA must operate the NSLP to sponsor or operate an Afterschool Care Program (ASCP) that provides students with regularly scheduled activities in an organized, structured and supervised environment and include educational or enrichment activities.

Organized athletic programs engaged in interscholastic or community level competitive sports (for example, "Pop Warner" baseball leagues, community soccer and football leagues, area swim teams) are not eligible. However, ASCPs that include supervised athletic activity may participate provided that they are "open to all" and do not limit membership for reasons other than space or security or, where applicable, licensing requirements.

ASCPs that are designed to accommodate special needs or that have other limiting factors may be eligible to participate. They may include, but are not limited to, programs targeted to students who have learning disabilities or programs for students who are academically gifted.

Snacks are provided to students on the same income eligibility basis as school meals. However, programs that operate in areas where at least 50 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals may serve all their student snacks at no charge.

Under the NSLP, SFAs are not eligible to receive reimbursement for snacks served on weekends or holidays, including vacation periods, during the regular school year unless classes held on these days are part of the SFA's instructional program and students are required to attend the classes.

Nutritional Requirements for Snacks

Snacks shall contain two different components from the following four components: a serving of fluid milk as a beverage; a serving of meat or meat alternate; a serving of vegetable(s) or fruit(s) or full-strength juice or an equivalent quantity of any combination of these foods; a serving of whole-grain or enriched bread. Portion sizes for different age groups vary.

Seamless Summer Option (SSO)

TDA administers a Seamless Summer Option (SSO) for SFAs that participate in the NSLP and SBP. The purpose of operating a SSO is to feed students in low-income areas during the summer months with reduced paperwork and to limit the administrative burden that is normally associated with operating different programs.

Campus/feeding sites for this program may include one or more open feeding site(s) within the attendance zone of a qualifying school as determined by the school officials. Qualifying sites must be located in an attendance area with 50 percent or higher free and reduced-price eligible students.

Nutritional Requirements for the SSO

Nutritional standards for meals served and claimed must meet the NSLP, SBP and ASCP meal requirements as previously described.

Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) State Mandate

Public school districts in which 60 percent of the total enrolled students are eligible for free and reduced-price meals must operate or arrange for the provision of a summer food program. Public school districts may operate either the SSO or the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) administered by the TDA.

Public school districts can be granted a one-year waiver for the following reasons:

- enrollment included fewer than 100 students,
- the cost of transportation was prohibitive,

- school buildings or cafeterias were under renovation or construction,
- an alternate sponsor already sponsored the SFSP in the area, and
- other extenuating circumstances.

For information about the SFSP, contact TDA at P.O. Box 12847, Austin, TX 78711 or by calling (877)-TEX-MEAL.

Who Can Participate in the Child Nutrition Programs Administered by TDA?

School Food Authorities (SFAs) Eligible to Participate

Any public school, public charter school, nonprofit private school or RCCI of high school grade or under is eligible to participate in the NSLP, SBP, ASCP and the SSO. Although charter schools are exempt from many state laws and regulations, they are not exempt from federal regulations regarding these Child Nutrition Programs. If the charter school decides to participate in the NSLP, SBP, ASCP and SSO, all program regulations pertaining to the respective programs must be followed.

Eligible Participants

For NSLP and SBP, a child is defined as a student of high school grade or under who is enrolled in an educational unit of high school grade or under. This includes students who are mentally or physically disabled as defined by the state and who are participating in a school program established for mentally or physically disabled. Eligible participants must be under 21 chronological years of age and enrolled.

A student is defined as an individual for whom instruction is provided in an elementary or secondary educational program under the jurisdiction of a school, school system or other educational institution. This means that students attending kindergarten and pre-kindergarten programs are eligible to participate in the NSLP and SBP. At the discretion of the SFA, students attending school on a half-day basis may participate in the NSLP and SBP. If the school board administers a Head Start Program (HSP) or Early Head Start Program (EHSP), these children may be eligible to participate as students. Contact TDA should clarification be needed.

Citizenship

U.S. citizenship is not a factor in the determination of free and reduced-price eligibility. An eligibility determination is based on household size/income or the receipt of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (formerly food stamps)/Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) for the child as reported on a completed application. The SFA must apply the same eligibility criteria for citizens and noncitizens.

Head Start Program (HSP) and Early Head Start Program (EHSP)

The purpose of the Head Start Program (HSP) and Early Head Start Program (EHSP) are to improve the educational opportunities of children before they begin regular school. Students enrolled in the HSP or EHSP and enrolled in the SFA as regular students in academic programs are automatically categorically eligible for free meals.

A list or statement signed and dated by an authorized HSP or EHSP employee qualifies these students for the free meal programs. Siblings cannot be added to the list and a new list must be provided annually.

Even Start Program (ESP)

The purpose of the Even Start Family Literacy Program (ESP) is to improve the educational opportunities of the nation's children and adults by integrating early childhood education and adult education for parents into a unified program. Adults participating in a GED program or regular high school completion program that operates during regular school hours in an eligible school may participate in meal service. To claim free or reduced-price reimbursement, the participant must be enrolled in an educational unit in the SFA and have an approved application on file. Reimbursement may be claimed for meals served to children and adults attending such programs in accordance with program regulations. All family members listed on the approved application and enrolled in the ESP would qualify to participate in the Child Nutrition Programs.

Pregnancy, Education and Parenting (PEP) Program

The Pregnancy, Education and Parenting (PEP) Program's mission is to enable school age parents, through education, to become self-sufficient, responsible, job-oriented citizens. The program's goal is to reduce the number of students who drop out of school due to pregnancy or parenthood and to recover young parents who are 21 years old or younger to the educational system. Some districts offer on-site day care for the students' children. Children of parents enrolled in this program qualify for reimbursable meals under the NSLP and SBP. For additional information about the PEP program, visit www.tea.state.tx.us/PEP.

Elderly Nutrition Program

If school meal facilities, equipment, and personnel are used for a nonprofit elderly nutrition program, the following requirements apply:

- Federal Child Nutrition Program reimbursement must be used only for meals served in the NSLP/SBP in accordance with program regulations.
- Child Nutrition Program revenues may not be used to subsidize an elderly nutrition program.
- The use of USDA-donated foods for any purpose must conform to department regulation and instructions.