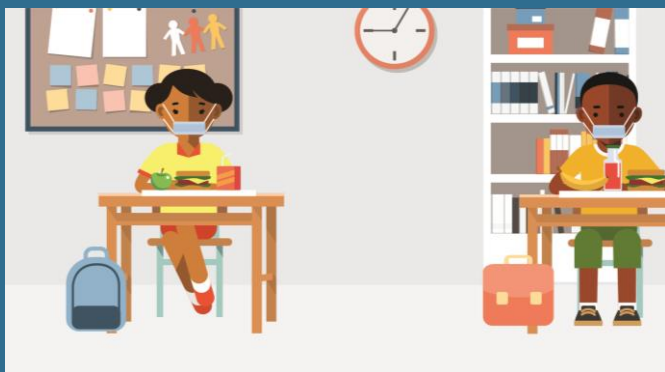


Meal Service Models Tip Sheet



This guide provides tips and considerations for popular meal service models this fall. Child nutrition directors and staff are getting creative and creating serving models that will keep children safe, the food appealing, and staff collaborating for a successful school year. TDA developed the following recommendations for using these meal service models as part of planning nutritious meals for the upcoming school year.

General Tips for COVID-19 Serving Models

1. Practice counting and claiming systems before implementation with a dry run to ensure staff understand any new processes.
2. Provide meal modifications for students with a medical statement.
3. Provide regular staff training and resources.
4. Be upfront with school administration about budget impacts for different serving models.
5. Discuss options with a task force and solicit feedback from different school leaders and parents.
6. Stay flexible and ready to adapt as schools learn these new models.
7. Check with software vendors about point of sale (POS) capabilities for modified food service.
8. Make menu variety a priority.
9. Utilize the School Café app in TDA's menu module, or an app offered by CE obtained software, to generate virtual menus to share with parents, students, and staff.
10. Reduce food waste by utilizing pre-ordering and offer versus serve. *Please note, offer versus serve is not required in senior high schools for those high schools opting into the offer versus serve meal service waiver.*
11. Lay out a clear plan of action if staff are feeling sick or if there is a confirmed COVID-19 exposure for staff and students.
12. Follow local, city, county, and state ordinances to create a physical distancing plan and other applicable public health orders.



Most school food authorities will find success in using a combination of serving models. School food authorities may use a one-size-fits-all approach for all schools or allow for creative solutions at individual campuses. Use the following information to weigh the benefits of different models.



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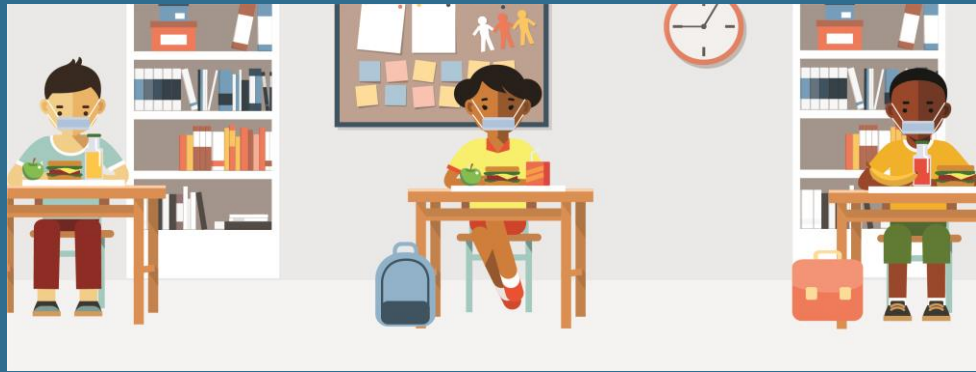
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Meals in the Classroom

Meals consumed in the classroom reduce large group gatherings and can be a good way to promote physical distance. There are varied methods of service that may be used for meals in the classroom. CEs may use one method for all meals or a hybrid of different methods.



Classroom Service

Meals are served and consumed in the classroom.

Focus on the Details

Meal Quality and Student Experience Priorities

- Use foods that are in season and keep meal appeal and presentation in mind.
- Offer vegetarian and culturally appropriate menu items often.

Considerations When Serving Both Lunch and Breakfast in the Classroom

- Increased waste removal
- Teacher breaks during lunch time
- Menu variety
- Training staff to perform meal service tasks

Creative Staffing Solutions

- Consider enlisting help of adult volunteers and other staff, but keep in mind what training would be needed.

Timing Considerations

- Develop a written and routine process for sanitizing all equipment
- Create a plan which outlines the steps for the prep time of each meal option.

Delivery and Packaging Ideas

- Use a mobile kiosk near the classroom.
- Run mobile serving lines with trays down the hallway.
- Distribute prepackaged grab-and-go breakfasts at the school entrance for students to take to their classroom.
- Create multiple lunch pick-up points throughout the school or cafeteria to reduce bottlenecks in serving times.
- Package entire meals in one container instead of individually wrapped (IW) to cut down on waste and reduce standing in line for meals.
- Create a plan for how meals will be delivered including staff assigned to distribute meals, collect meals not distributed, service equipment, and trash.
- Identify strategies for protecting staff and students, such as sneeze guards and hand sanitizer stations.



Compliance Check - Before **performing** any child nutrition tasks, make sure all staff, including teachers, are trained on how to correctly count and document reimbursable meals served in the classroom. If teachers are performing any operational tasks related to meal service, they must also complete civil rights training. [Review the NSLP FAQ to learn more about operational tasks.](#)



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Meals in the Classroom Classroom Service Cont.

Focus on the Details

Advanced Ordering Options

- Consider the use of a meal ordering system, paper or electronic
- Create a plan for how and when meals orders will be submitted, completed and served to students.
- Determine what equipment is needed for an ordering system
 - Cooling or heating equipment for transport
 - Label maker to mark orders
 - Tray sealer to safely transport meals

Develop a plan for ensuring the accuracy of counting and claiming

- What are the actions needed to ensure accurate counting and claiming?
- Who will be assigned to complete each task?
- What resources are needed to complete counting and claiming? For a manual counting system? For an electronic system? For a combined manual and electronic system?
- What strategies will be used to verify all counts?
- What strategies will be used to prevent overt identification?
- What charge policies need to be modified to meet the needs of modified meal service?

Serving Equipment

- Watch this [Meals in the Classroom presentation](#) for an overview of equipment and creative equipment uses that may work for you.

Tips to Provide to Teachers and Teacher Aides

- Consider utilizing students to assist with cleaning or order-taking.
- Alternate the order of meal delivery to avoid having the same student always receiving their food last or first.

Menu Ideas and Suggestions

- Collaborate with Partners
 - Cycle menus offer a great way to think seasonally, plan, and keep variety a priority. Your ESC may have cycle meal menu or be able to provide technical assistance with developing cycle meal menus.
 - Work with distributors to keep meal appeal a priority and express your needs and wants clearly.
 - Use USDA Foods to offset some of the sales lost.
- Balance Schedules with Snacks
 - Consider an a la carte mobile cart snack during the day.
 - Timing would be based on lunch. Early lunch → afternoon snack; Late lunch → morning snack.
 - Ensure all a la carte items are smart snack compliant.
- Review the [Transitional Menu Planning Tool](#) for more ideas.



Meals in the Classroom



Cafeteria Service

Meals are served to students in the cafeteria with dining in the classroom.

Focus on the Details

Meal Quality and Student Experience

- Continue batch cooking so there is less need for IW items.
- Continue A la carte sales.

Transporting and Packaging

- Determine how items will be packaged. Options include a to-go box and meals pre-wrapped on a tray.
- Choose items that can be carried without spilling.
- Develop a plan for collecting and cleaning reusable trays and equipment.
 - Assess expected trash needs and make sure equipment is placed strategically.

Safety

- Implement additional safety precautions for staff that interact with students.
- Sanitize the serving line between each class.
- Offer hand sanitizer at the beginning of the serving line.

Safety Continued

- Use physical distancing signage in lines and throughout the cafeteria. [TDA printable floor decals](#) are available.

Logistics

- Consider how much time it will take to travel to the cafeteria and back to the classroom, including, but not limited to allowing for use of stairs or elevators.
- Perform a dry run to help assess timing and feasibility of meal service plan.
- Consider longer serving periods and how that affects staff scheduling.
- Expand lunch serving hours or consider longer serving periods to reduce the number of students in close proximity and keep students moving for multiple waves of students.
- Consider having a cashier distribute condiments, napkins, and utensils to keep students from having to go to self-serve stations.



Compliance Check - If using multiple serving lines, each line must meet the meal pattern and nutrient standard requirements for the day and week.



Meals in the Classroom Cafeteria Service Cont.



Focus on the Details

Think through using the POS systems safely to protect staff.

- Take the following steps to reduce exposure at the POS:
 - Conduct training to assist staff in managing new safety measures.
 - Install plexiglass shields or provide a face shield to be worn over a mask.
 - Allow parents to drop off money at the front office instead of exchanging cash at the POS.
 - Utilize a bar code scanner for badges or class rosters with codes.
 - Ask students to use a disposable Q-tip or pencil eraser to enter information into a pen pad device.
 - Provide hand sanitizer at each POS system.

Menu Ideas and Suggestions

- Consider a more simplified menu in the beginning to focus on other logistics.
- Review the [Transitional Menu Planning Tool](#) for more ideas



Mobile Kiosk Service

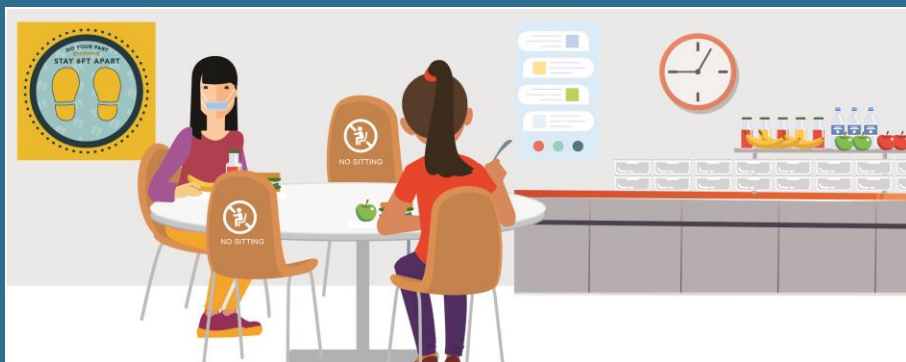


Meals can be served on mobile kiosks located throughout a campus where students get their meals and either return to the classroom or go to another physically distanced area. Mobile kiosks can help ease bottlenecks during lunch and offer quick service during mealtimes.



- **Compliance Check** - A mobile kiosk will be considered its own line when meeting meal pattern requirements and nutrition standards.

Cafeteria Dining



Schools with a small number of students attending in-person learning may be able to accommodate a physically distanced cafeteria dining. Refer to the [Socially Distant Cafeteria Diagram](#) for ideas on how to set up your cafeteria.

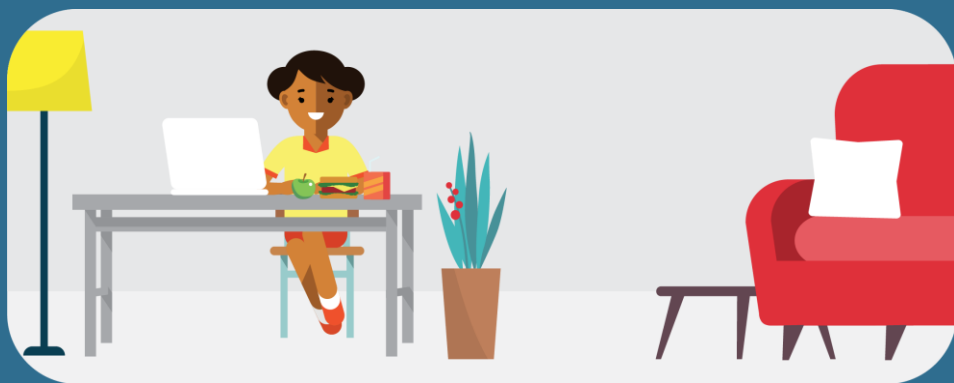


- **Compliance Check** - If using shared tables, they must be operated in accordance with the local/county/state health and food safety requirements. Depending on this guidance, shared tables might not be allowed.



Off-site Meals

Students who elect to continue remote/distance learning are provided meals through home delivery or a grab-and-go model.



Focus on the Details

Operational Planning

- Consider using updated plans from the grab and go meal operations plans from March 2020.
- Determine if the CE is best served by using the Non-congregate Feeding Waiver in conjunction with the Alternative Mealtime waiver to distribute multiple meals at once.
- Provide instructions on how to safely store and reheat meals if using a multiple meal strategy. Include the non-discrimination statement in the instructions.
- Consider if the benefits of establishing an agreement for vended meals with a larger CE will help to meet the meal service needs.

Student Accommodations

- Create a method for delivering meal accommodations for grab and go meals.
- Establish strategies to assist staff in avoiding avoid overt identification.

Logistics

- Develop a plan for meal delivery including assigning roles for each staff member.

Logistics Continued

- Develop a system for taking orders.
- Provide one meal that fits K-8 meal pattern and an additional bag of food for high schoolers that would fill out their meal. Provide a menu for what items go with what meal.
- Select service locations for each campus providing curb-side meals.
 - Consider utilizing a central kitchen or an off-campus location where households can pick up meals. This can keep off-site and on-site meal service separate and help parents have a better experience if picking up meals for multiple students.
 - Ensure meals served to students of multiple schools are claimed to the student's school and eligibility.
- Maintain daily food production records. Instructions for daily food production records for a central kitchen, receiving kitchen, and onsite kitchen can be found [here](#).



Compliance Check

- Meals must be recorded and counted on the day of intended consumption to prevent duplicate claiming and edit check errors.
- Food production records (FPRs) must be completed daily. If a school serves multiple meals at one time, FPRs must be completed in full for each meal served for each day of meals served.



Off-site Meals Continued

Focus on the Details

Think through using the POS systems safely to protect staff.

- Take the following steps to reduce exposure at the POS:
 - Conduct training to assist staff in managing new safety measures.
 - Install plexiglass shields or provide a face shield to be worn over a mask.
 - Allow parents to drop off money at the front office instead of exchanging cash at the POS.
 - Utilize a bar code scanner for badges or class rosters with codes.
 - Ask students to use a disposable Q-tip or pencil eraser to enter information into a pen pad device.

Menu Ideas and Suggestions

- Maintain meal variety and an appealing presentation.
 - Pre-cut fruit for elementary students
 - Serve seasonal fruits and vegetables and highlight if the item is Texas grown food.
- Determine what menu should be used for students on campus and those pursuing their education virtually.
- Review the [Transitional Menu Planning Tool](#) for more ideas.
- Watch the [Processing Bulk to IW webinar](#) for menu ideas and creative ways to process your bulk food into grab and go meals.

To find the tools linked in the document and additional tools to assist in the fall planning process, Visit [SquareMeals.org/FallPlanningResources](https://www.SquareMeals.org/FallPlanningResources)

This reference provides an overview of tips and considerations for popular meal service models this fall. This is not a comprehensive guide; CEs must follow all regulations, program rules, policies, and guidance. For additional information, contact the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) or refer to www.SquareMeals.org.

