**Maine Department of Education Child Nutrition**

**Summer Food Service Program During Unanticipated School Closures and School Year 2021**

**Site Eligibility Flexibility**

**Purpose:** This document provides guidance on how to use the Area Eligibility Waiver for Summer Food Service Program site eligibility during Unanticipated School Closures or during school year 2021 due to COVID-19.

This document also pertains to Response #52 – Nationwide Waiver to Extend Area Eligibility Waivers – EXTENSION 2. This is an extension of Maine’s Area Eligibility waiver. This waiver extension expires December 31, 2020, contingent on federal funding.

**Waiver Details:**

Specifically, MEDOE requests to waive the requirement that open sites must be in areas where at least 50 percent of National School Lunch Program participants are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Instead, MEDOE requests to locate meal distribution sites in areas that do not meet the 50 percent criteria to ensure that any child can receive the meals they normally would on a regular school day during unanticipated school closures related to COVID-19.

In its request, MEDOE asserts that it is not practicable or possible for some children to attend sites in area eligible locations, due to transportation barriers. MEDOE states that this waiver will maintain children’s access to the SFSP meal service during school closures related to the pandemic. To maintain children’s access to meals, and to support families experiencing financial hardship, MEDOE requests to waive the area eligibility requirements under 7 CFR 225.6(c)(2)(i)(G).

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) approved this request. However, Maine State Agency 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. Maine 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.

USDA issued Response #52 Nationwide Waiver to Extend Area Eligibility Waivers – EXTENSION 2 which allows the waiver to be used through December 31, 2020 (subject to federal funding).

**Guidance:**

Maine State Agency must ensure Districts/Sponsors have a plan to target benefits to children in need. However, the responsibility rests with the District/Sponsor to ensure households in need (such as those who may be eligible for benefits due to the economic impacts of COVID-19) are a focus.

* Sample plan ideas:
	+ Send additional notice to free and reduced households regarding the SFSP sites available.
	+ Send notice to all families reminding them of the free and reduced application which can be completed at any time. This is also an opportunity to market the SFSP sites available which further assist those in need. The SFSP sites provide free meals to any child 18 and under.
	+ Establish a communication plan between food service and other district staff to best target families most in need.
	+ Establish the site at the neighborhood school.
	+ Establish meal sites where there is a known need (for instance a subsidized housing complex).
* Make sure documentation to support the plan is maintained
	+ Example: copy of letters sent to households

Instructions for NEO

The following are a few tips for establishing sites in NEO using this waiver.

* NEO Summer Site Information Sheet
	+ Site Address: For mobile/delivery routes enter the address of the school the routes are associated with. Make sure to give the route a unique site name, such as “Maine Elementary School Bus Route 1”.
	+ Site Type: Open
	+ Select Appropriate Eligibility data for this site: Other Data
		- Describe: “Waiver” – District/Sponsor has a plan to target benefits to children in need.
* Complete the SFSP Extension Waiver Reporting Form on the Maine DOE Child Nutrition website [here](https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=q6g_QX0gYkubzeoajy-GTjkRg43GkTRGl8oKaTh8Y-JUOTE4WkhLM1NVTzFRU1ZZRFlHVUZPRzUwTCQlQCN0PWcu) (under Waivers, Guidance & FAQs on the COVID-19 School Information page) and opt in to Waiver #52. You must maintain your written plan on file as part of this process.