

## 2021 Summer Food Update

by Shane Hoffman, Plain City Public Library, OH

As we all know, Covid has changed everything we do. Unfortunately, those changes have not generally been for the better. We have adapted. We have overcome. We have moved much programming to the web, and we have Zoomed to our heart's content and well beyond. One bright side to all of this is that we now get to see everyone's pets on a regular basis.

Hunger did not take a break due to covid. In fact, it has seen a dramatic increase. Thanks to the USDA granting waivers to the way the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and Afterschool Meals (CACFP) work, many of the barriers libraries have faced have been eliminated. It was recently announced that those waivers have been extended through the 2021-2022 school year. What are these changes, and what does this mean for the future?

As for the changes to these systems, each state has the discretion to implement fully, partially or not at all. Therefore, you will need to visit your state's administering agency to see exactly how those changes are at work in your state.

Waivers in place:

1. Eligibility reduced from 50% Free and Reduced Price Lunch participation at nearest school to nearest school simply participates in National School Lunch program. That means that well over 99% of the US is now in an eligible zone.
2. Congregate feeding is no longer a requirement. You can now do grab and go meals.
3. You are no longer limited to only serving one meal at a time. You can provide a week's worth of grab and go meals at a time, up to ten during the summer and five during the school year.
4. Meal times are now more flexible and parents can pick up grab and go meals for their children.

Keep in mind that your library does not have to be in an eligible area to run a program. You merely have to serve the meals at an eligible location. This is a great opportunity to make partners and increase visibility in your community. We operate or have helped set up six in our community since the pandemic began.

What does this mean going forward? I was able to attend the 2021 National Anti-Hunger Policy Conference this March. At this conference we heard from several people from Feeding America, FRAC and other organizations. We also heard directly from Senators Debbie Stabenow and John Boozman along with Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack. I was also able to sit in on phone calls with two of the three members of Congress who represent me. The results of all that information were very positive.

Hunger issues are relatively bipartisan, especially since the pandemic began. There has not been this much energy to work on Childhood Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR) for a very long time. CNR is the process by which Congress looks at and updates laws regarding childhood nutrition, such as SFSP and CACFP. It is supposed to happen every five years but has not been looked at since 2010. Even then, many of the pieces governing these programs are still in place from the 1980's or even 1960's.

There is recognition that the waivers in place have had a huge impact on local communities. There will

almost certainly be formal action taken this year or next to update these programs with the positive outcomes waivers have produced at the forefront of the discussion. The only real question seems to be just how many of these waivers will make it into the updates and if they will go as far as they do now. The good news, of course, is that it looks like many provisions will be updated, eligibility increased, and paperwork decreased.

The overall result is that, from now through the end of next school year at least, libraries should be able to take advantage of changes to SFSP and After school Meals to increase access to nutritious meals for youth in our communities. We also have hope that the increased access and ease of implementation will be extended, to some degree, going forward.

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