



Austintown Local Schools
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Date: September 7th, 2020

To: Parents of All Austintown Students

From: Alexis Weber, Food Service Director

Regarding: Implementing the USDA Benefit Waiver for Free Meals

Dear Parents,

The USDA signed an extension and modification to School Nutrition Program waivers, in which we are selecting to exercise our participation in these extended benefits. **This means that starting on Tuesday September 8th, all breakfast and lunch meals served to Austintown students will be FREE for everyone.**

No action is needed from parents in order for their student(s) to receive these free meal benefits. Students can simply come to the breakfast/lunch line and get their free meals. Contacting the Food Services department regarding participation is not necessary.

The changes to how we are able to operate our Child Nutrition Programs under these waivers are new to us and we are still navigating how to implement these flexibilities so I ask that you stay connected and check back for updates frequently. Visit AFFoodServices.com for the most up-to-date information.

We know that these flexibilities/benefits will help our families and students, but we also know that they are temporary. There will be a cutoff date for when we must return to normal operations and serve student meals at prices based on meal status (free, reduced, or full pay).

Although I am still awaiting further guidance from the Ohio Department of Education on some aspects of our operations, I am including some answers to questions that I do know. Please read the below responses thoroughly.

Sincerely,

Alexis Weber

Alexis Weber, RDN, SNS
Food Service Director



Questions/Answers Serving Free Meals to All Students Effective Tuesday September 8th, 2020

Question 1: When will all breakfast and lunch meals be free for all Austintown students?

Answer: Starting Tuesday September 8th, all breakfast and lunch meals served to students will be free of charge.

Question 2: Who is eligible to get free breakfast and lunch?

Answer: All Austintown students are able to received free breakfast and lunch beginning on Tuesday September 8th, 2020 during this extended benefit period. The benefits can end at any time per the USDA. We will keep you informed of when the benefits end.

Question 3: How long will my student be able to receive free meals?

Answer: Currently, the benefits waiver is extended through December 31 2020. However, the USDA has complete authority to end the benefits and waiver extension early and with little notice. So, at any point in time, we will have to pivot back to standard operations and charge meals at prices based on student meal benefit status (free, reduced, paid).

Question 4: Are families REQUIRED to complete a Free and Reduced price meal benefit application in order to get free meals starting on September 8th?

Answer: No. Students can receive a free breakfast and lunch starting on September 8th without having an approved meal benefit application on file. However, it is **STRONGLY ENCOURAGED** that families continue to submit free and reduced meal benefit applications as usual for three reasons:

- 1) When the USDA exits the benefit waiver, we **MUST** return to serving meals at the Board approved prices. Households would continue to receive free meal benefits **ONLY** if they are approved via an application.
- 2) Free and Reduced meal benefit applications are used to help our school receive academic funding for instruction and activities in the classroom.
- 3) The Food Service Office still needs an approved application or school fees waiver in order for students to receive free school fees, so please still submit an application for meal benefits.

Please visit LunchApplication.com to submit an application today.

Question 5: Do I need to let the Food Service Department know that I would like my student to participate in the program and receive free meals?

Answer: No. Please DO NOT contact the food service department regarding participation in receiving free meals. You can simply discuss this new program with your student and have them come to the cafeteria to receive their free meal during their breakfast/lunch period.



Question 6: Is this new program open to any student in our community?

Answer: No. Students must be actively enrolled in Austintown Schools (grades Pre-K-12) in order to receive these benefits. We are using our point of sale and student information system to verify student enrollment.

Question 7: How will this affect the food service operations for serving Option 1 learners?

Answer: Our food service operations will look normal for Option 1 learners. Students will still be able to come through the meal service line, make some food component selections, and use their student ID number to access their meal account to complete their transaction. The biggest difference will be the decreased exchange of payments as all meals will be free. See the [Option 1 Learners – Food Service Information](#) for more details.

Question 8: How will this affect the food service operations for serving Option 2-3 learners?

Answer: Our food service operation plans will remain the same for Option 2-3 learners. Reservations **MUST** still be made each Sunday by 6:00 P.M. for meal packages. Meals will be assembled in meal packages for weekly pick-up on Thursdays from 4:30 P.M. – 6:00 P.M. This is for Austintown students only. Again, the biggest difference will be the decreased exchange of payments as all meals will be free. See the [Option 2/3 Learners – Food Service Information](#) for more details.

Question 9: What about meals purchased during the first week of school, Aug 31 – Sept 2?

Answer: These meals have already been served under the standard National School Lunch and Breakfast Program according to your student's meal status. These new benefits do not affect the meals served during the first 3 days of school.

Questions 10: What is included in a free breakfast or lunch meal?

Answer: Breakfast includes a grain component, fruit and/or juice, and milk. Lunch includes a meat/meat alternate and grain based entrée, fruit, vegetable, and milk. Students will receive a complete meal or make appropriate meal component selections in order to receive breakfast and lunch meals for free.

Question 11: What if I have money loaded on my student's meal account?

Answer: Money on your student's meal account will remain available and can be used to purchase extras, if desired.

Question 12: What if I have meal debt on my student's meal account?

Answer: Parents are still responsible for the meal debt accumulated on their student's meal account. These flexibilities will not eliminate the current debt on a student's meal account. Meal debt notifications via email, letters, and One Calls will still be sent.

Question 13: Are extras or a la carte items included with the free meal?

Answer: No. Extras or a la carte items are available for purchase with cash in hand or money on account. No charging of extras.



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Question 14: Can my student just receive a free milk, without the entire meal?

Answer: No. Purchasing a single milk carton is an a la carte item and the price is \$0.50. This is a USDA rule.

Question 15: Can I still pack my student's lunch?

Answer: Yes. You may still choose to pack your students meal if desired. However, your student's access to free breakfast and lunch will remain available to them. They may receive free meals at any point and on any day you'd like.

Question 16: Can my student purchase lunch some days and pack on other days?

Answer: Yes.

Please stay connected with us and visit the Food Services website for the most up-to-date information.

AFFoodServices.com