WEST VIRGINIA EMERGENCY SCHOOL FOOD ACT

COUNTY TOOLKIT

PURPOSE

This is a suggested resource for schools and county boards of education (and partners) when developing plans to address student nutrition and hunger needs when access to school meals is disrupted in an emergency.

In 2022, the West Virginia Emergency School Food Act (WVESFA) was passed into law. It allows county boards of education and local level schools to develop plans and strategies to feed children when access to school meals is disrupted. Specifically, schools may:

> *"Create a crisis management and prevention plan that includes an assessment and plan to feed students during noninstructional or nontraditional remote learning days and public virtual school students that includes emergency situations that may require innovative ways to deliver food to student homes. Community support and resources should be utilized when creating this plan."*

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

Review this information and consider using it as a guide to create emergency feeding plans – or augment your existing plans. The information contained within this toolkit is not intended to be a mandate – but rather a guide or road map for designing a plan or strategy that best meets the needs of your students.

The best time to plan is before an emergency occurs. While it is not always possible to predict every variable in an emergency, planning for disasters or unforeseen events before they occur is optimal when making decisions and delegating tasks.

This resource is not intended to serve as the only resource available for use by local level teams. Other resources can be utilized. Consulting with your leadership teams, legal resources, and governing boards of directors is advisable. In the event of an emergency – you are encouraged to adhere to all local, state, and/or federal executive orders and public safety information.

SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAMS AND CHILD NUTRITION RESOURCES TO CONSIDER

When developing plans and strategies, it is important to assess current and potential child nutrition programs and assets available within your school community. The following are examples of common federal and state child nutrition programs that may be operating or available to your schools. Contact your county child nutrition director to learn more.

SCHOOL BREAKFAST PROGRAM

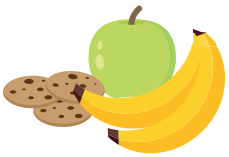
NATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM

BACKPACK AND SCHOOL-BASED FOOD PANTRIES

SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM

AT-RISK SNACK AND SUPPER PROGRAM

NATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH SNACK PROGRAM



FRESH FRUIT & VEGETABLE PROGRAM

NUTRITION EDUCATION & WELLNESS

COMMUNICATING INFORMATION WITH FAMILIES

This space provides best practices on communicating county/community resources with families.

> *"(c) Any county board may collect and compile information regarding the availability of food resources in the county during noninstructional or nontraditional remote learning days as well as include a plan that includes virtual school students and distribute this information to all students. These resources may include any public, private, religious group, or charity that will provide food to children with food insecurity."*

These publicly shared resources can be a useful tool to families year-round. The WVESFA allows county boards of education to collect and share information on community resources. Consider the following:

- Assess what community resources are available to your students and their families. Connect with local Family Resource Networks, United Ways, or faith-based organizations to get started.
- Once this information is collected – displaying it on a prominent place on your county board of education web site (and maintaining/updating it upon need) can be a helpful guide to families in need of social and other resources.
- Community resource information can also be shared on social media, county education platforms, county texting services, and periodic robocalls administered to communicate information with families.
- Back-to-school events such as orientations and open houses are a great way to let families know about community resources that are available.

Consider including state-wide resources and local resources such as:

- 211 (*West Virginia 211 (wv211.org)*)
- DHHR *DHHR Programs* (*wv.gov*)
- Mountaineer Food Bank (*FIND FOOD | MFB (mountaineerfoodbank.org*) and/or Facing Hunger Food Bank (*Programs - Facing Hunger Foodbank*)

Consider including local resources – within and external to the county school system. Examples might include, but not be limited to:

- Information on school-based pantries and backpack programs
- Local food pantries
- Community kitchens or meal service locations for the public
- Churches or groups that provide free meal boxes, holiday meal sign ups, or more.

County boards of education can deploy communication strategies that will maximize reach among their students. County web sites, social media pages, robo-calls, emails, school education platforms, school newsletters, PTA or LSIC meetings, and through community partners.

It is important to keep any information posted or shared current. If there is a change in a resource and its availability – an update should be made to the platform where it was posted (such as the web site or social media page). ***Making this information available year-round can be helpful – and not only in the time of an emergency.***

CRISIS FEEDING PLANNING

In March 2020 when West Virginia schools were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, county boards of education quickly sprang into action to ensure that meal service would continue in alignment with Governor Jim Justice's expectation that students continue to have access to meals.

County boards of education have become keenly aware of what it takes to feed students in an emergency. Lessons learned can be useful in deciding what will support similar actions in the future, large-scale or mass feeding efforts in the event of county-wide, regional, and/or state closures.

PRIORITY NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Before a Crisis Occurs:

1. Determine who your after-hours or emergency contacts will be and the chain of command. Keeping a current list will be helpful in the delegation of tasks. You may need this for each school or site that will be potential feeding sites.
2. Assess physical plant capacities
    a. Which schools or county locations would be optimal for receiving large volume of products
    b. Which schools are in areas of highest need
    c. Which school kitchens have space and or capacity to have large volume of meals prepared, boxed, or bagged
    d. Ensure the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) plan is up to date and in compliance with local, state and federal guidelines
3. Review local level procurement and existing contracts for school nutrition needs; In an emergency – emergency purchasing options may be available. Make a plan and be prepared to accommodate student special dietary needs in compliance with federal regulation.
4. Maintain an active list of available staff who would be able to assist with food preparation and potential distribution needs.
5. Maintain communication with your State Agency (WVDE, Office of Child Nutrition) to determine if any federal or state waivers are available to support feeding students in an emergency.
6. Develop a meal distribution plan in accordance with state and federal guidelines. Examples may include (but not be limited to):
    a. Meal pick-up sites
    b. School-operated delivery routes
    c. Home deliveries
    d. Community pick-up sites

PLANNING FOR SUMMER MEALS

The legislation also allows counties to conduct local training opportunities to find partners who may support or become their own summer meal site.

> *"Provide (at a minimum) an annual countywide or coordinated regional training opportunity that ensures the entity that potentially qualifies as a summer feeding site or according to the county survey, is afforded the opportunity to receive training on operation of a feeding site."*

County boards of education can work in conjunction with the WVDE Office of Child Nutrition to utilize existing online training platform and/or assist with face-to-face training sessions and outreach. Existing outreach efforts are conducted by the WVDE annually and other resources can be made available upon request.

LEARNING MORE ABOUT STUDENTS' NUTRITIONAL NEEDS DURING NON-INSTRUCTIONAL DAYS

The WVESFA has language that allows the state and public-school systems to survey students and their families about food insecurity and nutritional needs during periods of time when school is not in session. The WVDE will make a statewide tool available that can be used, shared, and distributed to collect information from all 55 counties. Public school systems in West Virginia are free to also develop their own assessment tools in addition to a statewide data collection system. Results obtained from these surveys will be used to evaluate opportunities to develop and strengthen the ways in which students have access to meals when school is not in session during the regular calendar year.

APPENDIX A:
EXAMPLES OF FEDERAL CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS DURING EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

Program	*Eligibility*	*When*	*Where*	*Eligible Sponsor*	*Number of Meals*	*Reimbursement Rate*
Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)	Children 0-18 (D-SNAP and homeless free status remains for full year)	May-September for traditional school calendar areas; October-April during unanticipated school closures (i.e. emergencies); During student vacations of 15 days or more for schools on a continuous year calendar	Area eligible locations* (i.e. schools, camps, churches, community centers, libraries, migrant centers, parks, apartment complexes)	Current SFSP sponsors; new sponsors can apply	Up to 2 meals a day at most sites (lunch and supper not allowable at the same site for the same group of kids)	*SFSP Free Rate*
Seamless Summer Option (SSO)	Children 0-18 (D-SNAP and homeless free status remains for full year and carryover period)	May-September for traditional school calendar areas; October-April during unanticipated school closures (i.e. emergencies); During student vacations of 10 days or more for schools on a continuous year calendar	Area eligible locations* (i.e. schools, camps, churches, community centers, libraries, migrant centers, parks, apartment complexes)	Current SFAs; SFAs interested can apply	Up to 2 meals a day at most sites (lunch and supper not allowable at the same site for the same group of kids)	Reimbursed at *NSLP/SBP applicable free rates* for the school year beginning July 1 of the prior calendar year
Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)	Children 0-18 and disabled adult participants	Year-round	Emergency shelters, At-Risk Afterschool centers	Child care centers, Adult day care centers, At-risk afterschool programs, Homeless/ emergency shelters, Other early education facilities	Up to 3 meals a day at designated emergency shelter	*CACFP Free Rates*

APPENDIX B:
SUGGESTED TEMPLATE LANGUAGE FOR MOU

This is to be used as a guide for starting conversations and the development of a Memorandum of Understanding when working with community partners in emergency situations. Formal agreement documents and legal agreements should be reviewed and entered in consultation with local level leadership. This framework is only a suggestion and does not imply or serve as a legal agreement or binding contract. It is only used as reference or starting tool when developing your own local level agreements.

MOU Purpose: This MOU will outline the responsibilities and segmentation of duties between _____ County Schools and (insert name of organization).

_____ County Schools will:

- Provide funding and procurement of products for the backpack program
- Advertise the program within the school community and using school media platforms
- Provide clean and organized space to be used for packing bags and storing food products
- Provide county staff to distribute weekend backpacks to students in a safe manner with dignity
- Work with community partner to source and identify new and expansion sources of funds

_____ Organization will:

- Provide volunteers (who have completed background checks and protocols) to pack bags and sort products for backpack programs
- Provide storage containers for food products at the designated area within the school and/or central office
- Will notify school contact when inventory is low and needs replenished
- Maintain confidentiality in accordance with _____ County guidelines. _____ Organization will not have access to any identifying student information.
- Provide county with funding referrals and potential new philanthropic partners and donations (if any).

Make sure to include signature, title, and date the agreement. MOUs should be revisited at least annually – or based upon need and/or request between all parties.

APPENDIX C:
SAMPLE DESCRIPTION OF A BACKPACK FOOD OR SCHOOL BASED FOOD PANTRY FAMILY NOTIFICATION

Insert Name of County and/or School Program

The (name of program) provides a weekend supply of shelf-stable food for children when school meals are unavailable on a weekend or holiday. Each food bag will contain (insert general description of contents). All food is provided at no cost to student families.

All students in need are eligible for this program. Information to sign up for the program will be sent home with students in the upcoming weeks.

This program is made possible through generous support (mention funding source).
Give credit to volunteers and participating sponsors.

For more information or questions, please contact (insert contact person, title within school system, contact information, etc.).

APPENDIX D:
TIPS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR WORKING WITH VOLUNTEERS

This is not intended to be a comprehensive or exclusive list of tips for enlisting or working with volunteers. County boards of education should follow local level procedures and general legal and human resource guidelines when entering into volunteer agreements.

- Abide by all local level volunteer procedures – including but not limited to any background checks that need to be completed before supporting efforts where your county needs volunteer assistance
- Create an authentic and clear communication system
- Enlist or assign a Volunteer Coordinator within the county board of education
- Provide orientation and training for volunteers working with your county board of education
- Set clear expectations and goals
- Supervise and provide feedback
- Recognize volunteers for their work