



Nutrition Services

By Cindy Hogenson, Nutrition Services Director

Getting Creative During COVID-19

The Nutrition Services Department has gotten creative to ensure students have access to school meals during fluctuating learning schedules. Pre-COVID-19, Nutrition Services strived to offer a wide variety of choices in the cafeterias allowing students to choose their own items and customize their meals. Now, menu variety and self-service options have been put on hold as we strive to eliminate the spread of germs.

Meal service has been streamlined to speed up the process for socially distanced students to get their food and return to their classroom where many of them are eating. In some cases, grades alternate between eating in the classroom and in the lunchroom with just a couple of students per table. To help minimize student contact, some schools have traded in reusable trays for disposable take-out containers. Colorful self-serve salad bars have been replaced with individually packaged servings that are dished up by Nutrition Services staff.

Along with making sure students are fed quickly and safely when in school, Nutrition Services is also making sure students have meals to take home for distance learning days. At the end of each in-person school day, bagged meals are ready for students to take as they leave for the following distance learning day. Nutrition Services simplifies the meal process for students in the Virtual Academy by packaging a week's worth of meals to be picked up once a week. For the first time, Nutrition Services is providing meals for the upcoming winter break, which will consist of seven breakfasts and lunches. [Those meals must be preordered with this form](#) by Thursday, December 17 at 4:00 p.m. Households will receive three grocery bags of food for each student.

Menu planning for bagged meals requires new considerations, including which types of food can be packaged to withstand the backpack trip home. These bagged meals also consist of food items that can be easily prepared by students at home, even if they do not have a parent to help or access to an oven.

Because of the pandemic, school nutrition programs across the country have been asked to run increasingly complex operations, filling a critical need for families facing disruptions to their schedules, health, and finances. Recognizing this need, the U.S Department of Agriculture (USDA) extended the emergency summer meal program that will provide free meals through the school year. The current USDA extension of free meals is scheduled to expire June 30, 2021.



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While we all look forward to the pandemic ending, some Nutrition Services changes may very well be the “new normal.” Elementary schools have adjusted to breakfast in the classroom so well that some schools have already decided to make it permanent. Principals report calmer environments and fewer stomach aches. Additionally, staff working in the kitchens have had the great pleasure of interacting with students and parents in a new way when distributing bagged meals. They have been able to experience first-hand appreciation from families all for the hard work they do.

Through all of the changes, Fargo Public Schools is proud to serve families by providing students with nutritious foods to help fuel their education. The Nutrition Services team will continue to rise to the occasion and adapt when needed to help keep students and staff members safe.

