



# THE OUTLOOK

A Monthly Newsletter for School Nutrition Programs

## FUNDING *opportunity*

### Apply for NSLP Equipment Assistance Grants

**T**he U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service provides funding to the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to provide equipment assistance through competitive grants to School Food Authorities (SFAs) participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). ISBE has been allocated \$1,062,275 to award grants to SFAs in this round of funding.

ISBE is issuing a Request for Proposals (RFP) for SFAs to apply on behalf of their NSLP schools for grant funding. SFAs can request funds to replace, renovate, or purchase new kitchen equipment that is needed to serve healthier school meals, improve food safety, and/or expand access to school meals.

In regard to eligibility, all Illinois SFAs participating in the federally funded National School Lunch Program are eligible to submit an application for schools under their jurisdiction. An SFA is defined as a governing body that is responsible for the administration of one or more schools and has the legal authority to operate NSLP therein. In addition, any SFA with a previously approved agreement on file to operate the National School Lunch Program (per 7 CFR 210.9(b)), and that would otherwise be operating NSLP in school year 2021-22, may continue to access NSLP



**The deadline to apply for the NSLP Equipment Assistance Grant is 4 p.m. Jan. 14.**

Equipment Assistance Grants while utilizing the flexibilities granted under the [Nationwide Waiver to Allow the Seamless Summer Option through School Year 2021-2022](#).

All SFAs meeting the above criteria are eligible to apply, but priority will be given in the following areas (based on school nutrition program year 2020 [annual eligibility data](#), where applicable): schools where 50 percent or more of the enrolled students

are eligible for free or reduced-price meals; schools that have not previously received a NSLP Equipment Assistance Grant within the last five award years; schools that also participated in the School Breakfast Program; and schools that prepare meals on site using district-owned equipment or, through this grant, will be able to start preparing meals on site without a school-to-school agreement or vended or food service management contract.

For full details, see the Notice of Funding Opportunity and information on how to apply which are posted on the [NSLP Equipment Assistance Grant webpage](#). The deadline to apply is 4 p.m. Jan. 14, 2022. If you have any questions regarding this funding opportunity, contact Emily Durbin at [edurbin@isbe.net](mailto:edurbin@isbe.net).

## NEWS BRIEFS



### TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

USDA's Team Nutrition initiative is excited to announce the release of the **Meal Components web quiz**, available at [fns.usda.gov/tn/quizzes/meal-components](https://fns.usda.gov/tn/quizzes/meal-components). This quiz focuses on meal components and meal pattern requirements. It is the latest addition to the collection of Team Nutrition web quizzes that cover a variety of nutrition topics, available at [fns.usda.gov/tn/quizzes](https://fns.usda.gov/tn/quizzes).

### FOOD SAFETY



The University of Illinois Extension will be offering another "Food Handler Training With COVID-19 Guidance." The next one is set for 2-4:30 p.m. Jan. 27. This is an Illinois Department of Public Health approved training. Participants will receive a certificate good for three years. [Register online by clicking here.](#)

A training on "Food Allergies in School Nutrition" is scheduled for 2:30-4:30 p.m. Feb. 10. [Registration is under way already online; click here.](#)



### UPCOMING TRAININGS

The Institute of Child Nutrition has Virtual Instructor-Led Trainings scheduled in December and January. The trainings are free but limited to 25 participants per session. Sign up at <https://theicn.org/vilts>.

## FOOD DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM

# SY 23 Annual Order Period Opens Jan. 3

**T**he School Year 2022-2023 annual order period for the Food Distribution Program opens Jan. 3. The three spending options include, USDA Foods, DOD Fresh, and diversion to processors.

The diversion to processors option will close in in the Illinois Commodity System from Feb. 21 to Feb. 25, so that ISBE Nutrition Department staff can compile truck loads. It will re-open Feb. 28 for final changes. All diversion to processor requests are due by March 4.

Please refer to the [ICS Instructions](#) for step by step instructions on placing an order. Please refer to the [How to Place an Annual Order](#) rec-

orded training for additional guidance. For those interested in the diversion to processor spending option, please review the [USDA Foods Show webinar and processor materials](#). Processors have provided videos, product information sheets, commodity calculators and more.

We understand that the continuing pandemic and supply chain disruptions will make it difficult to forecast your needs for next year. However, USDA has kept their order dates consistent with prior years, therefore, states must keep their order dates consistent.

Please email [fdp@isbe.net](mailto:fdp@isbe.net) with questions.

## Order Copies of the Guide to Professional Standards for School Nutrition Programs

**T**he updated [Guide to Professional Standards for School Nutrition Programs](#) is available [to order in print](#) from Team Nutrition. This resource provides a comprehensive guide to all Professional Standards topics. It also provides useful information regarding available trainings in the Professional Standards Training Database and tracking annual training using the Professional Standards Training Tracker Tool (PSTTT).

The guide also introduces training reward badges – a fun way to pro-

mote training and recognize staff who have completed their annual training. Sticker pages of the new training reward badges are included with the printed version of the guide. Additional badge stickers are available [by ordering](#) the accompanying resource, [Professional Standards Training Reward Badges](#).

Order the printed copy today, while supplies last, of the Guide to Professional Standards for School Nutrition Programs at <https://pueblo.gpo.gov/TN/TNPubs.php?PubID=15082>.

# Reminder: VSR Deadline Dec. 15

**T**he Verification Summary Report is due Dec. 15. Nov. 1 marked the opening of Steps 2-5 of the VSR in the Web-Based Illinois Nutrition System (WINS). This is when schools report the results of the Verification process, which started Oct. 1 and includes counting approved Household Eligibility Applications. For the Verification process, schools reach out to a small percentage of households to verify income.

There are two sets of instructions based on whether or not sponsors collected and approved Household Eligibility Applications (HEAs):

If you have no approved HEAs and are therefore exempt from the Verification process and Step 1 of the VSR, please proceed to Step 2 at this time.

- [Districts With No Approved HEAs: Instructions for VSR Step 2 and 5](#)

If you have completed the Verification process and Step 1 of the VSR, please proceed with the remaining steps.

- [Districts With Approved HEAs: Instructions for VSR Steps 2-5](#)

**Do we have to do the Verification process since we are doing the Seamless Summer Option and all meals are free?** Many Seamless Summer Option sponsors will be required to do the Verification process and then submit results in the VSR. The key question is do you have any approved Household Eligibility Applications from July 1, 2021, to Oct. 1, 2021. If you do, then the Verification process is required. Those operating the Seamless Sum-

## Frequently Asked Question

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mer Option are not required to distribute and collect HEAs, but many still do because they can be tied to fee waivers, grants, and other processes. Others in SSO may have opted to use alternative socioeconomic forms. If for any reason, you have any approved HEAs between July 1 and Oct. 1, federal rules require the Verification process.

**Sponsors with approved HEAs who have not completed the Verification process or Step 1 on the VSR**, should review [September's Verification announcement](#) and then access the [School Year 2021-2022 Verification Process and Verification Summary Report training](#) prior to beginning Steps 2-5 of the VSR. A PDF of the slides for this recorded training are also posted

online at <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/21-22-verification-training.pdf>.

Verification resources, forms, and sample letters are all available on the ISBE website at <https://www.isbe.net/Pages/School-Based-Child-Nutrition-Documents.aspx>.

The annual Verification process started Oct. 1. The U.S. Department of Agriculture is requiring all School Nutrition Program sponsors who received and approved Household Eligibility Applications between July 1 to Oct. 1, 2021, to conduct Verification for School Year 2021-2022. This includes both those participating in Seamless Summer Option (SSO) or the National School Lunch Program/School Breakfast Program.

# Waiver Submission Process Update

**P**er the U.S. Department of Agriculture available waivers, ISBE will continue to collect specific waiver requests for any sponsor that meets the criteria for such non-congregate/meal time/parent pick-up waiver for IN PERSON learning students for the second semester of School Year 2021-2022 (Jan. 1, 2022, through the end of the official school year).

As we have navigated through the first semester of School Year 2021-2022 with most schools operating in-person learning and in-person meals, we anticipate that the need for the continued flexibility will decrease. Please carefully review your program operations and all the USDA guidance, as the requirement is stated to provide normal school meal operations to the maximum extent possible, which includes meals at school for all in-person learning students.

Finally, please note that this USDA flexibility is ONLY available for COVID specific reasons and must only be used for a short duration when COVID specific reasons impact meal service operations. Thank you for your efforts to meet the USDA requirements and offer healthy, nutritious federally reimbursable meals to students at school.

Schools do NOT need to submit this waiver request to provide non-congregate meals to students that are remote learning due to COVID such as quarantined students. ISBE will collect required USDA data from schools regarding this waiver in the spring of 2022.

Prior to the submission of this request, please ensure that you have carefully reviewed the USDA guidance as well as considered all the requirements listed below:

- Seek approval from your local health department to determine if your menu meets local health requirements to ensure temperature and holding times required for children to transport meals home.
- Use your regular point of service system to track students who receive reimbursable meals.
- Ensure your method of distribution allows students to decline reimbursable meals.
- Ensure one reimbursable meal per student per meal service per school day is claimed.
- Work towards serving meals on-site within the foreseeable future (4-6 weeks).

**Sponsors must complete School Sponsors Waiver No. 3 \*Extension\* for non-congregate, mealtime flexibility, and/or parent pickup of meals if they need to utilize these waivers for in-person students because of COVID specific reasons from Jan. 1, 2022, through the end of the official school year.**

Sponsors must complete School Sponsors Waiver No. 3 \*Extension\* for non-congregate, mealtime flexibility, and/or parent pickup of meals if they need to utilize these waivers for in-person students because of COVID specific reasons from Jan. 1, 2022, through the end of the official school year. Any waiver requested should only be used for the time needed due to COVID-19, as all sponsors should work towards compliance with all USDA program requirements, operating the school and community nutrition programs as normal, such as meals served and consumed on campus directly to students at the normal meal times.

There is no formal approval letter that is sent out after submission of the waiver request. We understand the need for the flexibilities with the pandemic and sponsors can use them accordingly. ISBE Nutrition Department staff will reach out if we need more information or clarification. We stress maintaining detailed documentation supporting use of all waivers available for School Year 2021-2022.

Please continue to maintain documentation to support the utilization of any of the USDA flexibilities offered for SY 21-22. ISBE Nutrition Department will reach out later to collect data from sponsors on the utilization of them. We recommend some sort of supply chain disruption journal to log and note all issues (dates, product, quantities, contacts made, etc.)

A list of Child Nutrition Programs nationwide waivers and flexibilities is available at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/disaster/pandemic/covid-19/illinois>. Visit the [SNP Back to School Conference webpage](#) for more resources, including ISBE update webinars on Oct. 12, Nov. 16, and Dec. 14.

# Know the Requirements for School Districts

**P**ublic Act 096-0734 (amends Public Act 095-0155), amends Section 20 of the Childhood Hunger Relief Act (105 ILCS 126/20). This amendment requires a school district to implement a summer breakfast and/or lunch program for the duration of the summer school program in all schools where 50 percent or more of the student population is eligible for free or reduced-price meals AND that have a summer school program.

This amendment applies to all schools that meet the above criteria, including those schools not currently participating in any federal Child Nutrition Program. There is an opt-out clause in the legislation, but it must be completed by Jan. 15.

[The legislation](#) along with [Question and Answers](#) are accessible [on the ISBE Website](#). For more information about Summer Meals, visit ISBE's [Summer Food Service Program](#) and [Seamless Summer Option](#) webpages.

Staff from our Nutrition Department is available at (800) 545-7892 or (217) 782-2491 for technical assistance with reimbursement or program operations.

## Important Dates to Remember

**Jan. 15:** Deadline to submit written Opt-Out Request to your regional superintendent of schools.

**Feb. 15:** Deadline to develop and keep on file the district plan to conduct a summer lunch and/or breakfast program for each school where at least 50 percent of the students are eligible for free or



reduced-price school meals AND that have a summer school program.

Sign up for the Summer Food Service Program training if participating in the SFSP. For more information on SFSP, visit <https://www.isbe.net/Pages/Summer-Food-Service-Program.aspx>.

**Prior to March 1:** Regional superintendent of schools must convene a public hearing to hear testimony from the school district and interested community members.

**March 1:** Deadline for regional superintendent to:

- Inform the school district, in writing, of his or her decision, along with the reasons why the exemption was granted or denied.
- Provide a listing to the Nutrition Department of all districts that applied to opt-out, along with the affected schools, whether the exemption was granted or denied, and the reasons for the action.

**Public Act 096-0734 requires all school districts in Illinois planning to operate an academic summer school or enrichment program in a building with 50 percent or more of the students eligible for free or reduced-price meals must operate a summer feeding program for at least the duration of the program.**



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## Events, Meetings, and Deadlines

- Dec. 14 – [Talk to ISBE Tuesday webinar](#)
- Dec. 15 – [Verification Summary Report deadline](#)
- Dec. 24 – ISBE offices closed for Christmas Day
- Dec. 31 – ISBE offices closed for New Year's Day
- Jan. 3 – [SY 22-23 Food Distribution Program Annual Ordering Period Opens](#)
- Jan. 14 – [Deadline to apply for NSLP Equipment Assistance Grants](#)
- Jan. 15 – [Summer Food Service Mandate Opt-Out Provision deadline](#)
- Jan. 17 – ISBE offices closed for Martin Luther King Jr. Day
- Jan. 27 – ["Food Handler Training With COVID-19 Guidance"](#)

Please note this is not a complete list of Nutrition Department events, meetings, and deadlines. Visit us online at [www.isbe.net/nutrition](http://www.isbe.net/nutrition).

## What's New?

- [CACFP: Read the New Issue of Mealtime Minutes](#)
- [ICN Offers Free Virtual Instructor-Led Trainings for Child Nutrition Professionals](#)
- [Supply Chain Disruptions in the Child Nutrition Programs](#)

Watch for our latest news and posts under What's New? at [www.isbe.net/nutrition](http://www.isbe.net/nutrition).

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To file a program complaint of discrimination, complete the [USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form](#), (AD-3027) found online at <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/USDA-OASCR%20P-Complaint-Form-0508-0002-508-11-28-17Fax2Mail.pdf>, and at any USDA office, or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

1. **Mail:** U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights 1400 Independence Avenue, SW Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
2. **Fax:** (202) 690-7442; or **Email:** [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).

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