

Getting Started in the State of Michigan: 11 Items for New Sponsors

What are School Nutrition Programs?

School Nutrition Programs (SNP) are the federally funded National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), Special Milk Program for Children (SMP), and Afterschool Snack Program (ASSP). They provide nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free breakfasts, lunches, snacks, and milk to children each school day and during the summer months in public schools, nonprofit private schools, and residential childcare institutions.

1. **Application and Agreement with Michigan Department of Education (MDE):**

Each sponsor that would like to participate in School Nutrition Programs must apply by completing the Child Nutrition Coordinated Application in NexSys. For questions regarding the application process, please contact mde-schoolnutrition@michigan.gov.

2. **Food Service Contract(s):**

The School Food Authority (SFA) may choose to carry out the responsibility of operating School Nutrition Programs in several ways:

- operate meal service directly without assistance (self-operating);
- contract with a food service management company (FSMC) to manage the food service operation;
- contract with a vended meal company or other commercial or community entity to provide vended meals or work with another School Nutrition Program Sponsor in a Sponsor-to-Sponsor agreement.

Per Federal program regulations, a competitive procurement is required when the SFA chooses a FSMC or vended meal provider. If the district is interested in becoming a site under a different Sponsor's food service operation, or another type of Sponsor-Sponsor Agreement, refer to item No. 3: Alternate Agreements between SFAs.

The SFA is required to follow a specific process in order to obtain a food service contract in compliance with School Nutrition Program requirements. This process takes time and is typically done the year prior to, or at least several months in advance to, when service will begin. MDE will provide prototype bid documents to the SFA and assist the SFA in determining the structure and scope of services for the food service contract.

The procurement process for a food service management company or a vended school meal contract include a pre-review requirement and may require prior written approval from MDE depending on whether the informal or formal procurement process is required. Key questions/considerations:

- Does the school district want a food service management company contract or a vended meal contract?
- How many sites will be included?
- What types of meals will the SFA serve?
- What is the scope of the services requested?
- What is estimated student participation?
- Will service staff be included in the contract?
- What might the aggregate total of the entire food service contract be in the first year?

SFAs are required to consult with MDE for guidance on the proper process before procuring this service. For information, guidance, and to obtain prototype bid documents to begin the procurement process, contact MDE-FSMC-Vended@Michigan.gov.

3. **Alternate Agreements between SFAs:**

Under an Alternate SFA Agreement, legal and financial authority for the food service operation in the School Meals Program is officially transferred from a Local Educational Agency (LEA) to another SFA. The contract must state that the SFA is accepting total legal and financial responsibility for the newly incorporated meal program(s). This includes distributing USDA commodities and complying with all program regulations. The contract must state that the incorporated LEA is relinquishing its authority to operate the specified school meal program(s) to the SFA. MDE has an alternate agreement form available in the MEGS+ application SFAs must use to assist in formulating the written contract agreement between the SFA and LEA. For questions on Sponsor-Sponsor Agreements contact MDE-FSMC-Vended@Michigan.gov.

4. **United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Foods:**

SFAs participating in NSLP are eligible to receive USDA Foods, formerly known as commodities. Entitlement used to purchase USDA Foods is calculated using prior year lunch claims multiplied by current USDA entitlement rate. USDA Foods are procured by the USDA while further processed foods are procured by their chosen consortium. School districts must be participating in the NSLP and join a consortium to receive USDA Foods. For any questions on USDA Foods, contact Jaime Malnar at 517-335-3792 or malnarj1@michigan.gov.

5. **Community Eligibility Provision:**

Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) allows schools, groups of schools, or an entire district to serve each student a free breakfast and lunch. To qualify, the school/group/district must have an Identified Student Percentage (ISP) of 40% or higher. Identified Students are those that are directly certified free, homeless, migrant, runaway or foster. The ISP is multiplied by a factor of 1.6. For example, an ISP of 50%, multiplied by 1.6 equals 80%. In this case, 80% of all the reimbursable meals served would be reimbursed at the free rate and 20% at the paid rate.

6. **Free and Reduced-Price Meals for non-Community Eligibility Provision Sponsors:**

All schools participating in NSLP or SBP must make free and reduced-price meals available to eligible children. At the beginning of the school year, information letters must be distributed to the households of children attending the school. This letter informs families about available Child Nutrition Programs and that free or reduced-price meals or free milk may be available to children. The letter must also contain information including, but not limited to, instructions for families on how to apply and income eligibility guidelines.

Each SFA is responsible for collecting and processing free and reduced-price applications and alerting families of resulting determinations. The [Eligibility Manual for School Meals](#)ⁱ provides detailed information on this process.

7. **Meal Pattern Requirements:**

School meals must meet [lunch](#)ⁱⁱ and [breakfast](#)ⁱⁱⁱ meal pattern requirements and [nutrition standards](#)^{iv} for specific age/grade groups based on the latest Dietary Guidelines for Americans. The current meal pattern increases the availability of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains in the school menu, as well as limits certain fats and reduces calories and sodium. While school lunches must meet Federal meal requirements, decisions about what specific foods to serve and how they are prepared are made by local SFAs.

8. **Counting and Claiming Meals:**

Federal reimbursement is provided for each meal that meets program requirements and is served to an eligible student. To obtain reimbursement, trained school personnel must accurately count, record, and claim the number of meals served to students by category (free, reduced-price, and paid). Different procedures can be used to count, record, and claim meals. A sponsor should assess what type of Point of Service/counting system will best meet the needs of the operation. It may be a roster system, ticket system, CEP meal count form (if applicable), or electronic Point of Service system.

9. **Compliance Reviews:**

The Administrative Review (AR) provides a comprehensive evaluation of School Nutrition Programs to ensure that participating SFAs comply with all program requirements. Both Critical and General Areas of Review are included in this process. Critical areas include Meal Access and Reimbursement and Nutritional Quality and Meal Pattern. Other Federal programs reviewed in applicable schools include Afterschool Snacks, Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, and Special Milk Program.

Resource Management (RM) Reviews monitor School Food Authorities' (SFA) compliance with Federal regulations that support the financial health of the school meal program's Nonprofit School Food Service Account (NSFSA).

Procurement Reviews assess compliance with Procurement rules and regulations while providing technical assistance and resources related to procurement.

Please view [Compliance Reviews \(Administrative and Resource Management\) \(michigan.gov\)](#)^v for additional information.

10. **Technical Assistance and Training Opportunities:**

MDE's SNP provides multiple opportunities for free and low-cost training for SFAs. Resources are available on the MDE SNP website, USDA website, and many partner websites. MDE SNP staff are available by email and phone to provide support and technical assistance for all program areas. Core Competencies for New Directors is a year-long virtual class that meets monthly. The training is open to all potential, new, and existing sponsors, and staff. The training agenda covers all aspects of the School Nutrition Programs.

11. **Professional Standards:**

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has established minimum professional standards requirements for school nutrition professionals who manage and operate the NSLP and SBP. The standards include hiring requirements with minimum educational standards for new local school nutrition directors and annual training standards for all school nutrition professionals. Hiring standards are based on local educational agency (LEA) size. For complete information about the Professional Standards, visit the [USDA Professional Standards webpage](#)^{vi}.

ⁱ https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/cn/SP36_CACFP15_SFSP11-2017a1.pdf

ⁱⁱ <https://www.fns.usda.gov/nslp/national-school-lunch-program-meal-pattern-chart>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.fns.usda.gov/sbp/meal-pattern-chart>

^{iv} <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/nutrition-standards-school-meals>

^v <https://www.michigan.gov/mde/services/food/sntp/topics/compliance-reviews-administrative-and-resource-management>

^{vi} <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/professional-standards>