

Dept. of Public Instruction: Wisconsin schools surpass 1 million meals served to students during public health emergency

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MADISON — More than 1 million meals have been provided to Wisconsin students since the closure of K -12 school buildings because of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to claims filed to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. Since March 18, 2020, 447 school food authorities and sponsors in Wisconsin have provided meals through the National School Lunch Program's [Seamless Summer Option](#) and the [Summer Food Service Program](#), which allow meals to be served free of charge to children 18-years old and younger living in low-income areas. "Making sure students have consistent access to nutritious meals is essential," State Superintendent Carolyn Stanford Taylor said. "Ensuring our children have healthy food to eat is a result of school officials working together with their local communities, who have found unique strategies to continue providing meals to those who need them during the public health emergency." For those unable to travel to meal pickup locations, the USDA grant-funded program, [Emergency Meals-to-You](#), allows eligible local education authorities in rural areas to work with households to deliver meals directly to homes through the mail. Additionally, [the USDA has launched an interactive map](#) to help families locate sites where meals are being served when schools are closed. For the most up-to-date information on meal pick up or delivery, families should call or check their school district's webpage. The USDA National Hunger Hotline also remains a helpful resource for families seeking food assistance. The hotline can be reached at 1-866-3-HUNGRY Monday through Friday (from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. CST). The DPI has leveraged its many partnerships across the state to reach students and families in need of assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic. The department has

received 21 nationwide waivers to date for its nutrition programs. In March, when public schools informed the department they were nearing storage capacity to continue taking monthly food orders, USDA Foods products were rerouted from state warehouses to county food pantries throughout Wisconsin. Through the DPI's partnership with the Wisconsin Department of Health Services to administer [The Emergency Food Assistance Program](#), over 200,000 pounds of food have been distributed to families in need. Last week, [the Wisconsin Department of Health Services announced](#) it would provide more than \$140 million in food benefits to families for March, April, May, and a portion of June. The appropriation is part of the Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer, a new national program providing assistance to families of children eligible for free or reduced-price meals dealing with school closures. The funds offset the cost of meals that would have otherwise been consumed at school.

If you would like to be a community partner and help keep Wisconsin families fed, the DPI is seeking additional applicants to become sponsors for the Summer Food Service Program. Applications will be accepted through June 15, 2020. For more information on how to apply, [visit the Summer Food Service Program's webpage](#). For more information on the DPI's efforts to provide meals through the Wisconsin Child Nutrition Programs during the COVID-19 pandemic, [visit the department's webpage](#).