September 1, 2020

EASTCONN Food Services would like to extend a warm welcome back to all of our Sterling Community School students as we begin the 2020-2021 school year! We hope you were all able to enjoy your summer with your families and friends despite the COVID-19 pandemic. After planning, preparing, packaging, and distributing 149,566 meals to families in eight districts from March to June, our dedicated child nutrition teams were able to provide over 39,800 additional meals in July and August. We are truly grateful to have been able to serve our communities in this capacity through this unprecedented time.

When unanticipated school closures began at the onset of COVID-19, the USDA enacted a series of waivers that allowed our districts to operate under their "Seamless Summer Option" program. The SSO program allowed us to not only provide meals, but do so for free, to all children under 18, regardless of what town they live in, for pick-up or delivery, in bulk, without students present, and for seven days per week.

 **\*\*IMPORTANT UPDATE\*\***

 The USDA released yesterday that they will be extending the SSO waiver through December 31, 2020. Once the official guidance by the CSDE is released we will provide you with the all the details. In the meantime see the amendments to original letter in bold below:

# While we wait on the final and official guidance, please:

* We will begin the school year operating under the USDA's School Breakfast and National School Lunch Programs (the programs we typically operate during the school year).
* Only students enrolled to attend schools within your district are qualified to access the meal program.
* We will track meals through student accounts in our Point of Sale system. Therefore free, reduced, and paid meal pricing will apply**… With the expectation that a free meals for ALL will be implemented. Once issued, this extension is anticipated to end on 12/31/2020.**
	+ *Free and reduced meal applications will be sent home to every family and will also be available on your school's website.* ***We encourage you to complete so that your eligibility can go into effect once we resume NSLP in January****.*
	+ *We are strongly encouraging that if your child does not qualify for free meals and will be participating in the program should use the online payment system that your district has in place****. Hold off on online payments at this time, and know that any dollars will remain on account and remain unused while operating SSO.***
	+ ***Do Not send in payments and we will resume collecting payments once the extension expires.*** *Checks made out to the food service department and exact cash in a sealed envelope will be accepted. However, as we try to minimize cash handling, there will be no change handed out,* *and the full dollar amount sent in will be added to your students account balance*.
* Meals provided can only correlate to official school operating days (no weekend or holiday meals).
* For students participating in the hybrid model and students engaging in 5-day remote learning, meals can still be picked up for the days students are not in school.
	+ *There will be a survey sent out with more information for remote learners and meal ordering and distribution.*

# Meal procedures will look differently as we begin the school year to ensure that best practices are in place for the safety of our students and staff. Changes will be made as needed and will continue to meet all DPH, CDC, CSDE and USDA guidelines and regulations.

# *All meals will be packaged and served in closed containers and delivered to the students in their designated eating area.*

# *There will be one breakfast choice and two lunch choices daily, and each will come complete with all the required components meeting the meal pattern as outlined by the USDA.*

# *There will be no snacks for sale, and milk will be the only a la carte item available for purchase outside complete meals.*

* *We would like to suggest that if and or when your child brings lunch from home, it is in a disposable or a non-clothe style lunch bag. Stainless or plastic lunch boxes are best for proper sanitization daily.*

Our child nutrition team is looking forward to the day that our cafeterias are filled with happy tummies and smiling faces, and we appreciate all the support that we have received as we navigate through this unprecedented time.

Please email hplourde@eastconn or 860-455-1552 if you have any questions or concerns.

Best,

*H****eather***

**Heather A. Plourde**

Director of Food & Hospitality Services

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