

SCHOOL FOOD SERVICE HANDBOOK

*HOW DISTRICTS
CAN PREPARE
FOR ANYTHING.*



VANCO
EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION:

“We have no idea what to expect.”

That’s what Vanco Education is hearing from school district food service leaders we’ve served for decades.

Educators and school staff are in a position no one in the field ever anticipated. The purpose of this book is to provide helpful guidance on how schools can prepare for many food service scenarios that could happen in the upcoming school year – and how to be prepared to shift in the middle of the year. We hope you find it helpful as you make your plans.

Schools’ food service staff must be prepared for anything.











The truth is, we don’t really know what will happen when the academic year starts. Every state and district will decide for themselves how to return – or not return – to the classroom.

District operations staff and food service directors will need to be prepared for a variety of scenarios.

WHAT COULD SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND FOOD SERVICE LOOK LIKE IN THE NEW ACADEMIC YEAR?

Your food service staff should be prepared for these three scenarios, which the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) label by risk:

- **Lowest risk: Continuing with eLearning** – not going back to school buildings immediately in fall. Schools must plan for feeding your students if they're not present in the building.
- **More risk: Hybrid approach** – students return on a rotating schedule to be able to keep classes small and maintain distance. This will require feeding some students in school, and some at home. This requires considering how staffing needs would change. How would the food get to the students in the building if they're not eating in the cafeteria?
- **Highest risk: Full return to in-person classes** – all students, teachers and staff are back in your buildings. Schools must start planning now for classroom dining, staggered meals in the cafeteria and/or boxed meals.

	MON	TUE	WED	THURS	FRI
Student Group A	 Learn at Home	 Learn at School	 Learn at Home	 Learn at School	 Learn at Home
Student Group B	 Learn at Home	 Learn at Home	 Learn at School	 Learn at Home	 Learn at School

As districts and politicians continue to finalize plans, it's crucial that districts equip their schools with the tools that will make food staff successful in any – or all three – scenarios this year.



HOW WILL PLANS AFFECT FOOD SERVICE AT SCHOOLS?

The only thing certain about this academic year is that schools will need to feed their students. Vanco Education has tracked CDC recommendations for school food service, news out of many states and districts and spoken with our customers to put together this list of food service scenarios that seem most likely to occur.

One of the first items districts must address as they plan is: Waivers for meal service from the USDA Child Nutrition Programs. The USDA is allowing schools to relax certain rules to make it easier for districts to serve meals in a way that is conducive to the local back-to-school directives. Be sure to consult the [USDA Child Nutrition COVID-19 waiver list](#) and the [USDA waiver list broken out by state](#).

The American Federation of Teachers has put together a [comprehensive guide](#) for how schools can return under different circumstances. They recommend that schools make plans now to have staggered meal times. This might alter school schedules, but keeping groups in the cafeterias small is a safe tactic for both students and staff.

If students continue eLearning exclusively, how will the food service team get meals to them? Many schools learned lessons from providing meals over the spring and summer for students. Now it's time to put those lessons to use. Are students going to go to school to pick up meals? Or are school buses going to deliver them. This useful article in [EducationDive](#) discusses how these plans might play out for schools.

Food service directors must be ready for serving food in a variety of ways – and be flexible as situations can change rapidly. Consider these possibilities:



WHERE ARE STUDENTS EATING? WHAT ARE STUDENTS EATING?

Classroom dining

Many schools are considering classroom dining for students. In general, this plan calls for students to remain in their classrooms and food service staff would bring meals to them. This idea presents logistical issues that must be considered, such as:

- How will staff members get the meals to classrooms? If, for instance, a multi-level school doesn't have an elevator, is this a realistic option? Food service directors should write out a plan to help visualize what meal delivery will look like, and to raise alarms early. Also, think of alternatives – perhaps each classroom (one-by-one) will pick up meals in the cafeteria and bring them to classroom. If schools take the pick-up approach, they should consider offering pick-up in several parts of the school to avoid having large groups of students and staff.
- Next, schools will need to plan what they will serve if the food is brought to classrooms. Is a full menu of hot food feasible? Will you try to continue to offer à la carte options? Is a partial hot food menu possible? Or, will a limited menu of boxed lunches be easier to coordinate?
- Whether schools do student pick up or staff delivery, food directors will certainly need make changes with their food vendors. Condiment pumps, for instance, should be replaced by single-serving packages. And if students are taking meals to eat outside of the cafeteria, or if meals are being delivered, both approaches require purchasing to-go meal containers, which some schools might not have much experience with. Schools should begin procurement of new items like these as soon as the plan for serving meals is finalized. (These items could be in short supply as schools across the country will trying to buy them, as well.)
- Finally, if you are using a pre-order system (whether that's through your food service software or through a Google Form) food service directors sure they have a simple way to track which students get which meal, and ensure they received the meal – this will be important for meal planning and Free & Reduced Lunch reimbursements. If it doesn't, these new service models could create chaos.

Serving meals in the cafeteria

Schools that decide to have students to eat in the cafeteria must plan to keep students (and staff) socially distanced and reduce the number of physical contact points. This most likely will require a large amount of work, so staff should start planning now.

- At the point-of-sale, consider installing plastic barriers to stand between the staff member and the student paying. (Like many grocery stores are using.)
- Cash presents a couple of difficulties as schools try to reduce physical contact. First, cash can carry germs and viruses – exactly what schools are trying to avoid passing around. Second, there is a severe coin shortage across the country right now. Schools simply might not be able to guarantee they will have enough coins each day to provide change for cash transactions.
- Touch-free payment methods for cafeteria dining will help reduce surfaces students and staff touch. Swipe or scan cards for each student is one option to consider.
- Many cafeteria employees and volunteers might not be available if they're at home caring for kids who haven't gone back to school yet. Employees and volunteers at high risk for COVID-19 will not return to their positions. Additionally, some workers will not return because their own children haven't returned to school. Start thinking through your staffing needs early.



CONCLUSION:

This is a lot to consider, and schools have a very short time to make plans. To ensure a successful year of food service, district leaders must work in collaboration with food service directs.

District leaders bring distinct expertise and knowledge, which, when combined, will lead to the best possible results – no matter what food service looks like when school gets started.

As district leaders and food service directors make plans, they should keep in mind that being flexible will be incredibly helpful. Schools might end up using all meal service methods and handle meal distribution in several of the approaches outlined in this eBook.

To further help food service planning, the attached checklist highlights several questions schools should ask while strategizing for the year.

We hope this helps district leaders, food service directors and staff plan for a successful school year.

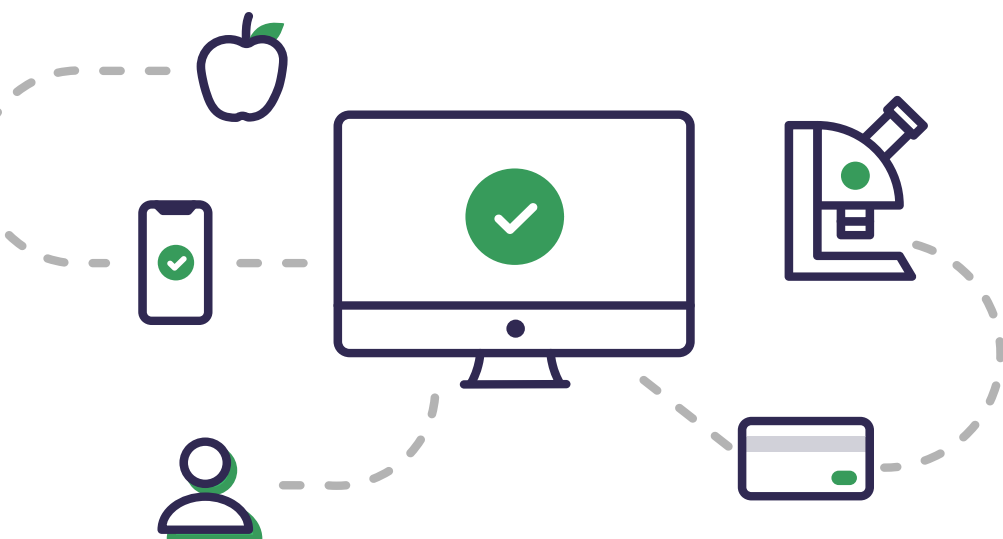
Sources & additional reading:

[Education Week: State-By-State Guide](#)
[USDA: COVID-19 Child Nutrition Waivers](#)
[USDA: COVID-19 Waivers By State](#)
[EducationNext.org](#)
[Food-Management.com](#)
[MPRNews.org](#)
[RollCall.com](#)
[EducationDive.com](#)
[CDC.gov](#)

CHECKLIST:

IS YOUR SCHOOL PREPARED FOR NEW METHODS OF FOOD SERVICE?

- ☐ *Have you planned your staff and volunteer needs for the new way your school will serve food?*
- ☐ *Does your current food service software allow you to take meal pre-orders?*
- ☐ *What would it take for your staff to make classroom meal deliveries?*
- ☐ *Can parents pay online with your current meal software?*
- ☐ *Do you offer contact-free point-of-sale hardware for payments in your cafeteria?*
- ☐ *If your current food service solution doesn't offer these capabilities, you might not be ready or nimble enough to be prepared for anything in the fall. Get in touch with Vanco Food today to see how our solutions can rapidly get your district ready for any dining scenario in the fall.*



ABOUT VANCO EDUCATION

Vanco Educations has supplied schools and districts with food service technology for more than 30 years. We know historically, cafeteria software has been difficult for school staff to manage. We support schools by making cafeteria technology easy, including touchless point-of-sale hardware, free-and-reduced meal software and online payment portals for families maintain food accounts from any mobile device.

Let us show you how Vanco Education can help you plan for food service this year.

800.323.5953

VancoPayments.com/Education

VANCO
EDUCATION