Guidance for Using Meal Clickers to Count Reimbursable Meals for the School Nutrition Programs

This document provides guidance for schools on the considerations for using a meal clicker to count reimbursable meals and afterschool snacks at the point of service in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), and Afterschool Snack Program (ASP) of the NSLP. The point of service is the moment in the food service operation where a determination can accurately be made that a reimbursable free, reduced-price, or paid meal has been served to an eligible child or that a reimbursable snack has been served to an eligible child.

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Schools Eligible for Using Meal Clickers

Only certain types of schools may use meal clickers to count reimbursable meals and afterschool snacks at the point of service. Meal clickers are allowed for schools that do not track students based on their free, reduced-price, or paid eligibility status, i.e., special provision schools including schools participating in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP).

Considerations for Using Meal Clickers

Using meal clickers presents certain challenges. Before implementing this option, school food authorities (SFAs) must consider the questions below and ensure that the school can successfully meet all meal counting requirements.

1. **Does the SFA have a written standard operating procedure (SOP) for using a meal clicker?** All schools must develop policies and procedures to ensure the integrity of meal and snack counts and must provide training for staff. Inaccurate meal counts can occur when an SOP for meal clickers is not available, and staff do not follow appropriate procedures. The SOP must instruct staff on what to do if they accidentally miscount the number of students that take a reimbursable meal or afterschool snack; and must also indicate how staff will record their clicker meal/snack counts on a daily edit check worksheet to support the claim for reimbursement. For guidance on edit checks, refer to the "Edit Check Forms" section of the CSDE's Meal Counting and Claiming for School Nutrition Program webpage.

2. **Does the person using the clicker have multiple responsibilities during the meal service?** Some examples of other responsibilities include distributing meals or afterschool snacks to students and observing the serving line to see if it needs to be replenished. When a staff member has multiple responsibilities, they can become distracted and not use the clicker accurately. This can lead to inaccurate meal/snack counts.

3. **How will the food service director monitor the schools using meal clickers to ensure that meal counts are accurate?** The food service director must develop a written procedure to check meal/snack count records for errors each week, such as missing information and fluctuations in numbers. This procedure should include a process for monitoring operations (including on-site visits) to ensure that schools are following the correct meal count procedures and identifying potential compliance issues.

4. **Are there additional staff available during the meal service to ensure that the flow of students does not distract the person taking the meal counts?** It is important for the school to have sufficient staffing during the meal or snack service to maintain an organized and efficient process. To prevent distractions for the person responsible for taking meal/snack counts, the school should have designated staff to help manage the flow of students.

5. **What process will the school implement to monitor those students with special dietary needs if there is no software program that flags a student that needs special accommodations?** The school must implement a process to ensure that all students receive the proper accommodations during the meal or snack service. For additional guidance, refer to "Identifying Students with Special Dietary Needs" in section 2 of the CSDE's *Guide to Meal Modifications in the School Nutrition Programs*.

When Schools Should Not Use Meal Clickers

The CSDE does not recommend using a meal clicker d in schools with multiple serving lines since it is not possible to ensure that second meals are not counted. Multiple serving lines are often seen in high schools and middle schools.

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Using a Daily Meal Count Check Off Form

Schools may find it more accurate to use a daily meal/snack count check off form to count students as they receive a reimbursable meal or afterschool snack. The example below shows a daily check-off form for meal service.

Daily Student Meal Count

Cross off each number in order as each student receives a complete snack. Students must receive **all meal components** before a reimbursable meal can be counted.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45
46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60
61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75
76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90
91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100	101	102	103	104	105
106	107	108	109	110	111	112	113	114	115	116	117	118	119	120
121	122	123	124	125	126	127	128	129	130	131	132	133	134	135
136	137	138	139	140	141	142	143	144	145	146	147	148	149	150

Today's attendance:_____Total meals served (students only):_____

Examples of daily meal/snack count forms include the CSDE's *Afterschool Snack Program (ASP) Daily Snack Count and Production Record for Grades K-12 in Site/Area Eligible Schools* and *Daily Meal Count Form for the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)*.

Resources

Afterschool Snack Program (ASP) Daily Snack Count and Production Record for Grades K-12 in Site/Area Eligible Schools (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/asp/forms/daily_count_asp_grades_k-12_ site_area_eligible.pdf

Daily Meal Count Form for the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/sfsp/meal_count_form_daily_sfsp.pdf

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Edit Check Forms (CSDE's Meal Counting and Claiming for School Nutrition Programs webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-counting-and-claiming-for-school-nutrition-programs/edit-check-forms

Guide to Meal Modifications in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/specdiet/guide_meal_modifications_snp.pdf

Meal Counting and Claiming for School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-counting-and-claiming-for-school-nutrition-programs

For more information, visit the CSDE's Meal Counting and Claiming for School Nutrition Programs webpage or contact the school nutrition programs staff at the Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 504, Hartford, CT 06103-1841. This document is available at https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/forms/mealcount/guidance_meal_clickers_snp.pdf.

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   1400 Independence Avenue, SW
   Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or
2. fax: (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or
3. email: program.intake@usda.gov

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