



Moving from Afterschool Snack to a Meal— It's easier than you think!

Afterschool programs serve a snack in order to keep children focused and engaged throughout the afternoon. Yet, for many children a snack is not enough. Children eat lunch hours before the afterschool program, sometimes as early as 10:30 in the morning, and need more than a small snack to make it through the afternoon. In addition, many families are struggling financially, and programs that provide a nutritious meal after school make it easier for parents to make ends meet and keep children from being hungry.

Funding is now available to serve a meal at programs that operate after school, on weekends, and during school holidays. The new Afterschool Meal Program through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) provides federal funding for a meal in addition to or instead of a snack. Any program that is located in a low-income area can receive funding to serve a meal to students 18 and under.¹ Afterschool programs can provide a supper, and programs operating on weekends and school holidays can provide the appropriate meal.

The meal can be served at any point during the afterschool program. Although it is often referred to as a supper, afterschool program staff can determine the best time to serve the meal. It can even be right when the children walk through the door or just prior to their leaving at the end of the program. Afterschool programs are encouraged to consider serving both a snack and a meal.

The meals do not have to be prepared by the afterschool program, and there is no requirement for the afterschool program to have a kitchen. Afterschool programs can purchase prepared meals or prepare meals on sites, depending on what works best for the program. Programs with limited refrigeration space can store meals in coolers if the temperature can be maintained at no more than 40° F. Afterschool programs can partner with their school district food service director to provide the meals with the afterschool program serving them. Other potential vendors include food banks and private catering companies.

Tips for Success

- Pilot the meal program at a few sites to get started.
- Keep it simple—start with cold meals.
- Approach the school district food service department first—they have experience meeting federal meal requirements and health and safety requirements.
- Market the meal as a “super snack.”

¹ Programs offering education or enrichment activities that are located in areas where 50 percent or more of the children are eligible for free or reduced price meals can receive a federal reimbursement of \$2.99 for each supper. The reimbursement rate is adjusted annually on July 1 for inflation.

The meals can be served hot or cold. In fact, many successful programs serve nutritious and appealing cold meals to children. The main entrée can be a sandwich, wrap, or pita pocket.

Meeting the Nutrition Guidelines is easy. All meals served through the CACFP must meet United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) nutrition guidelines. Meals require: one serving of milk, two servings of fruit and/or vegetables; one serving of grains; and one serving of protein.

Note: For ASES and 21st Century Community Learning Center Programs, if you serve only a meal, then each component must also meet the CA Nutrition Standards for snacks.

The California Department of Education, Nutrition Services Division, can provide additional information about the nutrition guidelines and help with menus that meet the USDA requirements. Also, check out Food Research and Action Center's (FRAC) model supper and snack menus on http://frac.org/newsite/wp-content/uploads/2009/05/lunch_or_meal_sample_menu.pdf.

Providing a meal can be an easy process for program staff. Usually, the afterschool program staff simply keeps an attendance roster, hands out the meals, and takes a meal count.

The funding grows as your program grows. The Afterschool Meal Program provides reimbursement for each meal served, so if the number of children who participate increases, so does the funding for food.

To begin serving suppers at an afterschool program, contact a California Department of Education CACFP specialist. For a complete list of CACFP specialists by region, visit <http://www.afterschoolnetwork.org/after-school-meal-program>.

For more information including frequently asked questions and a CACFP Meals Webinar, check out <http://www.afterschoolnetwork.org/after-school-meal-program>.

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Examples of simple, appealing, and nutritious meals that meet the federal guidelines:

Cold Meals

- Turkey sandwich on whole wheat bread with sliced tomatoes and lettuce, fresh pear, low-fat milk
- Tuna salad in a pita pocket with sliced tomatoes and lettuce, orange slices, low-fat milk

Hot Meals

- Baked chicken, whole wheat roll, cucumber sticks, sliced peaches, low-fat milk
- Vegetable pizza, fresh green beans, grapes, low-fat milk