

Becoming an SFA and Managing Your Meal Program

A comprehensive guide to completing the [School Food Authority](#) application process and strategies for running an effective meal program

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About School Food and Wellness Group

We are a full-service child nutrition consulting firm aimed at providing comprehensive professional services for all Child Nutrition Programs. We partner with over 300 schools across the U.S., with 23 of those located across New York City. Our team consultants work with schools on SFA setup, management of the meal program, vendor procurement, audit support, and much more. Our intimate knowledge of **National School Lunch Program** regulations allows us to act as trusted subject matter experts to charter school leaders.

Quick Facts - NYC Clients	Impact
Work with 10 SFAs across 23 campuses throughout New York City	Over 5,500 students are impacted daily by our program management
Managed new SFA process for 2 new clients in 22-23	Transition from DOE to their vendor of choice allows them to bring in fresh meals to over 900 students daily
Directly oversee the management of \$4M in federal and state funds	With our support, SFAs are sustaining healthy and innovative meal programs that service their school communities
Managed the vendor procurement process for 5 SFAs in 22-23	Schools were able to procure vendors that provide fresh, healthy meals, while allowing them to operate their programs with a net profit
Provided audit support services to 9 SFAs across NYC in 21-22	Each SFA closed out with little to no findings <i>and</i> no fiscal findings
Provided guidance to 2 SFAs to recoup lost reimbursement	Recovered over \$75,000 in lost revenue that can be used to improve the program



Why become an SFA?

Every school is different, and every school has different goals for their meal program. If your school wants more control over its operation, the USDA allows schools to become School Food Authorities and manage the program on their own.

In NYC, charter schools typically follow two paths:

- Utilize DOE SchoolFoods to provide meals
- Become their own SFA and use the vendor of their choice
- Become their own SFA and implement a self-op model

Advantages of becoming an SFA include:

- More control over meal program operations
 - You can choose your own vendor or cook meals in your kitchen
 - You dictate delivery times, when meals are served and where, and what kinds of meals you serve (hot, cold, unitized, bulk, etc.)
- Utilizing vendor partnerships for innovative programs like chef demos, catering, nutrition education, etc.
- Can apply for various grants to support your meal programs

Where to Begin?

Each spring, SED releases an updated application and schools interested in becoming their own SFA must submit a request to receive it. The application process can take more than 12 weeks to complete, and consists of multiple rounds of emails with SED reviewing and revising documents.

Prior to the application being released, there are steps you can take to ensure you have enough time to complete deliverables so the application is properly and promptly completed. You cannot claim meals until all of your documents have been reviewed and your application is approved, so the sooner you begin the preparation process, the faster your application will be completed.

Although the approval process can be roughly 12 weeks, we recommend budgeting 9 months for the entire process.

Required Documents	
1	A completed School Food Authority (SFA) Application
	<u>Tab 1:</u> Recipient Agency (RA) Information - Must be completed. If your SFA is adding more than 1 RA, use the Additional RA Information Tabs (Tabs 9 & 10) <u>Tabs 2-4:</u> Estimated Reimbursement, Staff Chart, Budget - Must be completed. If your SFA is adding more than 1 RA, combine the RA's information to fill out Tabs 2-4 <u>Tab 5:</u> Financial Form- This must be filled out for Non-Public Schools ONLY <u>Tabs 6, 7 & 8:</u> Professional Standards, Operational & Administrative Processes, Civil Rights - Must be completed <u>Tabs 9 & 10-</u> Must be used if you are adding additional RA's <u>Tab 11:</u> The Attestation - Must be completed
2	You must have a Unique Entity Identifier, or a UEI (currently, the DUNS number, which is a unique nine-character identification number provided by Dun & Bradstreet (D&B) free of charge, is the official UEI) and be registered in the System for Award Management (SAM)
3	Payee Information and W-9 Form
4	Child Nutrition Management System (CNMS) Administrator Password Application
5	Documents verifying Professional Standards hiring and training requirements
6	Menus for each meal your SFA is applying for (designated by age-grade group)
7	6 Cent Certification Documents (include meal pattern waivers your SFA is seeking approval for)
8	Permit to Operate a Food Service for each RA the SFA is applying for (if applicable)
9	Community Eligibility Application (CEP) (if applicable)
10	Prohibition Against Meal Shaming and Student Charge Policy
11	Updated School Year Calendar
12	Direct Certification Matching Process (DCMP) - no documentation required with the New SFA Application
13	501(c)3 Tax Exempt Documentation for each RA (Non-Public and Charter Schools only)

Step 1: Initial Documents

Before you begin the SFA application process, it is important to gather your supporting documents ahead of time to ensure the process is smooth and without delays.



A great time to begin gathering documents is early Winter

- Current registration with the Secretary of State
- Approved Articles of Incorporation
- Be a 501(c)(3) with a valid exemption letter
- Current W-9
- Current DUNS/UEI number
- Current BEDS code
- Current Food Service Permit (new campuses must request a health permit and pre-inspection from DOH)
- Food Service Director identified
- Point of Sale procurement and set up

In the Spring, SED releases all CNP forms

- SFA/RA applications
- CEP application
- FSMC IFB templates and renewals

Step 2: Procurement

Which contract type is best for my SFA?



All schools have their own meal program goals and operational limitations, which is why it is imperative that you understand the pros and cons of each contract type.

Vended Meals

- No approval needed by SED, which means procurement timeline can be short
- Contract involves the vendor only delivering and dropping off meals
- No vendor staff; SFA provides staff to serve meals
- Typically the per-meal price is under the reimbursement rate

Food Service Management Company (FSMC)

- Approval must be obtained by SED before soliciting and awarding a contract
- FSMC cooks on site or delivers meals daily
- FSMC provides staff to serve meals
- FSMC is responsible for meal program compliance, including completion of daily, weekly, and monthly paperwork
- Typically the per-meal price is at or above the reimbursement rate



Vended Meals Procurement

Vended meals contracts are those contracts in which a school uses an outside vendor to produce and deliver meals to the school. SFAs are responsible for the management of the meal program and the vendor is only responsible for making meals, delivering them, and providing compliance documentation.

- Request for Proposal (RFP) can be used for the procurement of vended meals
 - Allows schools to solicit a number of proposals and pick a vendor that meets their predetermined criteria
 - No NYSED template, however all procurement regulations must be followed



FSMC Meals Procurement

Food Service Management Company (FSMC) contracts are those in which a school contracts an outside company to manage all aspects of the school food service operation. This includes producing and preparing meals, serving the meals, managing the POS, and reconciling the daily paperwork.

- **Invitation for Bid (IFB)** must be used when procuring an FSMC
 - Must use SED IFB template and cannot make changes to the template
 - Must be approved by SED before advertising and must be advertised for at least 7 days
 - IFBs require the SFA to award the contract to the lowest bidder
 - IFB becomes your contract once finalized
- ***Health Permit under FSMC**

Things to Consider When Procuring

Starting a meal program independent from DOE can be complicated if you do not have a roadmap built. We recommend gathering your school leadership to discuss the following when thinking about your contract:

- Facility space
 - Where will you prepare and serve meals?
 - Electrical upgrades to support equipment
 - Notifying co-located schools about your intention to become an SFA
- Equipment needs
 - What do you need and where will you place it?
- Will you serve pre-packaged or bulk meals?
- Staffing needs, including serving of meals and operational management of the program



Step 3: Menu

As part of the SFA application, you need to submit a planned menu that shows your vendor or FSMC is following the meal pattern requirements and is providing your school with reimbursable meals.

- Request a sample menu from your vendor for each meal platform that you are applying for (breakfast, lunch, snack, supper)
 - Menus must show how meal pattern requirements are met for each grade level (K-5, 6-8, 9-12)
 - Work with your vendor to get menu certification documents
- Submit to SED along with your application materials for review and approval
- Notify your vendor that the menu should not be a customer-facing document, but rather a menu that shows meal portions and meal patterns



Step 4: Policies & Procedures

As an SFA, you must show how your school will meet compliance with CNP regulations.

These policies and procedures include:

- Local Wellness Policy (LWP)
- Food Safety Policy (HACCP)
- [Managing your meal program budget](#) (SFW webinar linked)
- Procurement Policy
- Code of Conduct
- Meal Charge Policy and Meal Counting Procedures
- Civil Rights Policy
- Training Plan



Policies and Procedures must be submitted after steps 1-3, once you have access to your Business Portal. They must also be updated each year at the beginning of the school year and new staff must be trained on them to ensure the program runs compliantly.



Step 5: Final Touches

Once your SED representative has reviewed your application materials, they will have you answer a series of questions related to your understanding of the meal program regulations in the NYSED Business Portal.

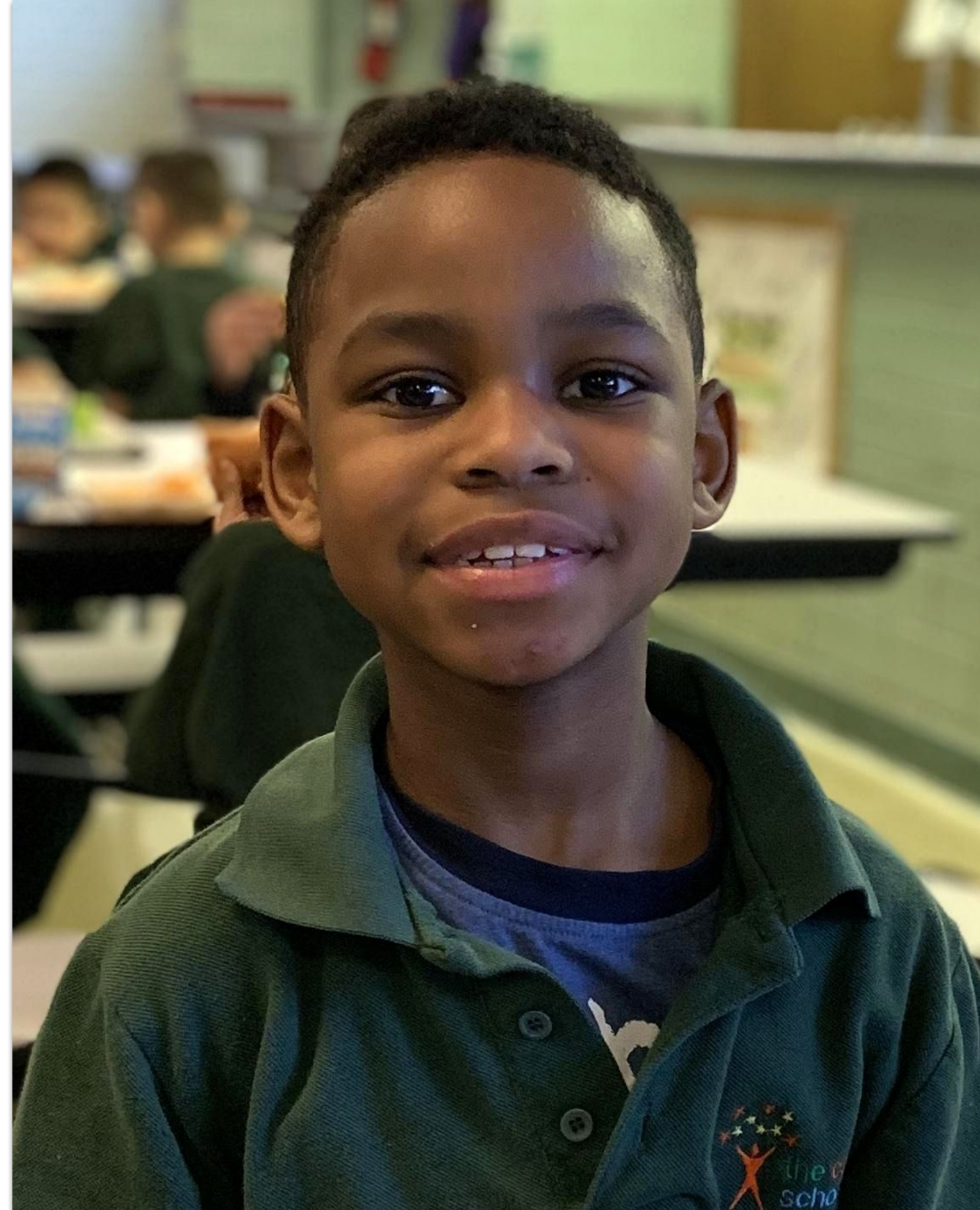
Once you answer those questions, you will be prompted to upload your Policies and Procedures and be granted access to the [Child Nutrition Management System \(CNMS\)](#). Your meal program will be managed in this portal.

Next steps include:

- Staff training
 - Professional Standards
 - Equipment operation
 - Serving of compliant meals
 - Food safety certifications

Additional Meal Programs

- **After School Snack Program (ASSP)**
 - Can apply for this program with SFA application
 - Meals are claimed under NSLP
 - Can be served in extended day or in after school programs
- **Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) Supper**
 - Application process begins in August, for October start
 - Operated by New York Department of Health, not SED
 - Must have an after school enrichment program
 - Can serve a daily supper to all students (after school)
- **Fresh Fruit and Veggie Program (FFVP)**
 - K-8 schools eligible, must be an approved SFA for at least one year
 - Allows you to serve fruit and veggies between meal services in the classroom (with a educational nutrition component)
 - Grant is \$60 per student for the year





School Year Support

Managing the meal program requires a team of dedicated individuals that are **focused on operating the program compliantly**. Make sure your SFA provides adequate staffing resources to managing the administrative side of the program.

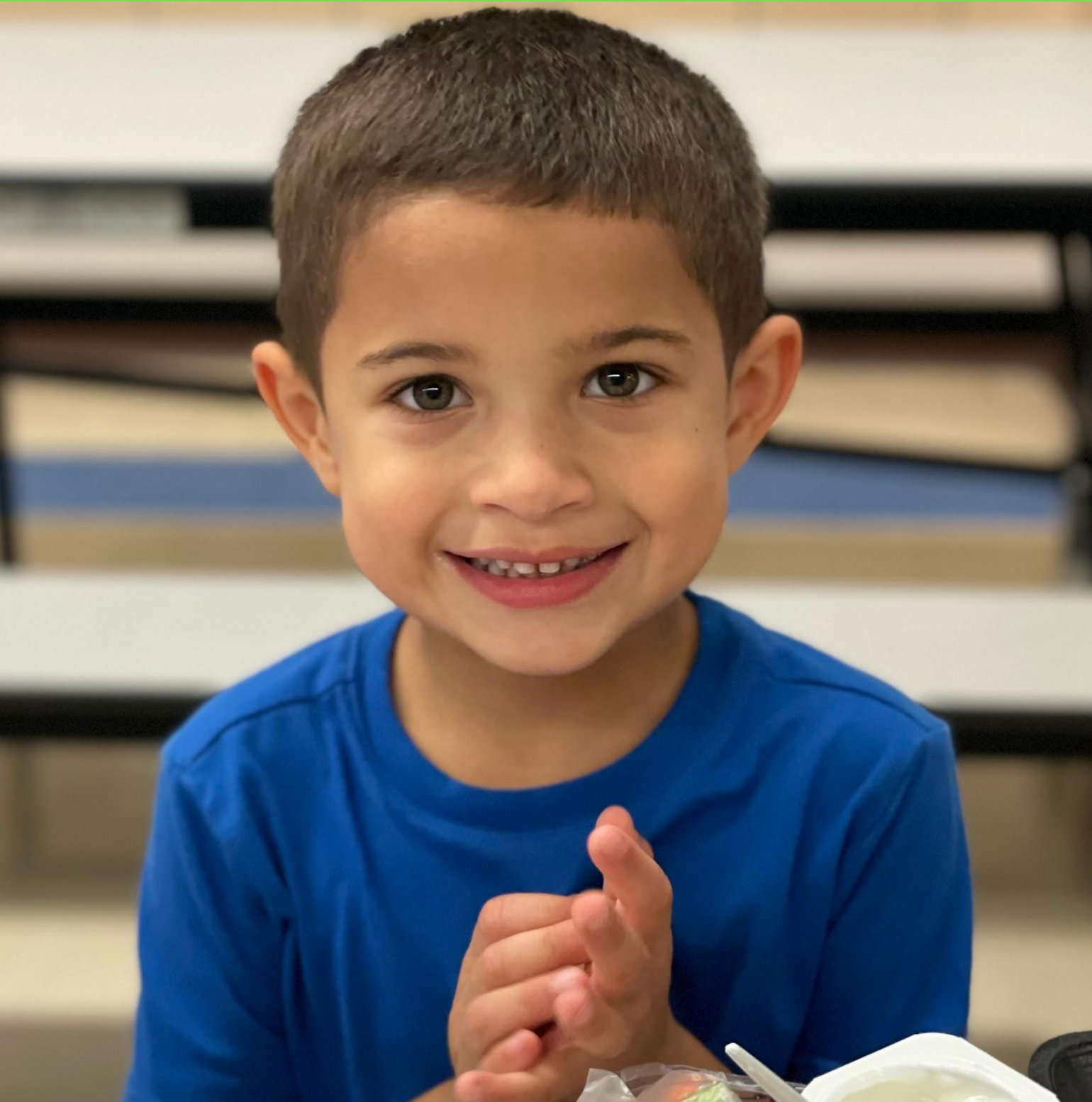
These tasks include:

- Designating a Food Service Director who will be the point of contact for the CNP
- Program monitoring to ensure compliance with **NSLP** guidelines
- Managing the POS (tracking meals in the serving line)
- Reconciling the POS and submitting monthly claims
- Reviewing vendor invoices for errors
- Processing Free and Reduced meal applications
- Regular State reporting, including financial analysis, running Direct Certification list, etc.
- Managing all aspects of the State administrative reviews (audits)

If you plan ahead and dedicate enough resources, you can operate a great meal program while staying fully compliant with CNP regulations!

Important Reminders

Even when the application process is running smoothly, sudden challenges can arise that can slow things down!



- When procuring an FSMC, do not underestimate the time needed to complete the process
 - SED has a detailed template and rules that must be followed
 - Vendor bid materials and contract must be submitted without errors or the process will need to be redone
- If operating a vended program, make sure to determine who will prepare and serve meals, count meals, complete the daily paperwork, clean the cafeteria space, etc.
- Purchasing the right equipment can take several months; consider the supply chain challenges across the country
- Health permits and health inspections are taking longer than usual to complete due to staffing challenges at DOH
- Set a realistic budget that accounts for:
 - Facility and/or electrical upgrades
 - Equipment purchases
 - Leftover meals that cannot be claimed
 - Staff labor
- Expect to run a deficit in Year 1

Conclusion

Becoming your own SFA, brings many benefits to your students and school community by allowing you to set the standard for how you want your meal program to operate. It is a great option for schools looking to improve the quality of meals served while dictating when and where you will serve your students.

If you need support managing the process or just need some direction, reach out to us and we'd be happy to assess your situation and set up a plan for your school.

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