



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Department of Education Visits Spring Grove Area Middle School to Help Distribute Meals to Students

Harrisburg, PA — Today, Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) Secretary Noe Ortega visited Spring Grove Area Middle School to help food and nutrition staff package and distribute free meals to approximately 300 students and families via the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Seamless Summer Option (SSO) meal program.

"Students need access to healthy meals year-round, not just when school is in session. Programs like the SSO help ensure continued access to free, healthy meals," said Secretary of Education Noe Ortega. "I am grateful for the opportunity to visit Spring Grove Area Middle School and help distribute meals. I'd like to thank our partners in the agriculture and food and nutrition industries for their continued support of students during the school year and beyond."

The [USDA's Seamless Summer Option](#) allows for all children eighteen and under to have access to two meals a day at no charge. Many families across the commonwealth can rely on school meals throughout the school year because of the cost and the convenience. During the pandemic, the need for food nutrition programs was amplified due to economic strain. Programs like the SSO are in place to protect and promote nutrition for all students. A total of 119,382,201 meals have been distributed through the SSO and the Summer Food Service Program between July 2020 through March 2021.

"We are grateful for all of the schools and community partners across the state that have worked tirelessly throughout the school year to ensure that students have continued access to nutritious meals during the pandemic," said State Director of Child Nutrition Programs Vonda Ramp, M.S., R.D. "We are incredibly proud of schools, like Spring Grove, that are continuing these efforts over the summer for not only ensuring students have access to nutritious meals, but also for supporting local agriculture at the same time by including fresh local produce in their meals."

The Spring Grove Area School District decided to use the Seamless Summer Option at the start of the pandemic to ensure a smooth transition from the National School Lunch Program, which was familiar to local students and their families.

"For the last 15 months, we have seen how operating the SSO to provide free meals to all the children in our community provided stability and familiarity in a time that was quite the opposite," said Nutrition Services Manager of Spring Grove Area School District Melissa Freestone, RD, LDN. "I think it has helped our community and local area understand the importance of not only school meals but having balanced meals in general. It also allowed our self-sustaining Nutrition Services Department to continue operating during a time of uncertainty."

Summer meal programs are important because hunger, growth, and learning are experienced year-round, not just during the school year. Children will continue to grow and learn, and schools and community organizations are in place to support their growth and learning through nutritious food.

For a list of local summer meal distribution sites for children, please visit the [USDA's website](#).

For a recap of today's event, please visit [PAcast](#).

For more information about Pennsylvania's education policies and programs, please visit the [Department of Education's website](#). Follow PDE on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#), [Flickr](#), or [Pinterest](#).

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