



These days it's hard to read, talk, or think about much else than COVID-19. Like many of you reading this, all of us at the Rudd Center are now working from home. This time has brought a range of personal challenges. In my house, the problem of “not enough bandwidth” comes up figuratively - and literally - at least once a day. In response, it makes sense to loosen up some of the rules and expectations. When resources are particularly limited, the most important thing is to keep everyone safe and healthy.

Two of the systems we study at the Rudd Center – schools and food banks - are working to do just that by providing food to their communities. Schools face the unprecedented challenge of feeding children who are not in the building. We've heard of schools that **send meals on school buses**, and programs that **mail students boxes** of shelf-stable foods. Our colleagues at the Tisch Center have put together a **database** of how districts around the country are feeding students during closures.

To facilitate these innovative solutions, many of the USDA's rules about how school and child care meals should be served have been **waived** – including the nutrition standards. Food banks are also facing significant **challenges** – in particular, fewer volunteers and reduced retail donations.

Just a few weeks ago, if you had asked me about schools and food banks, I would have focused on the significant changes they have made in recent years to improve the nutritional quality of the foods they provide. In fact, earlier this month we published an **editorial** about the success of the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act, and last month we released the final report from a year-long project to define a set of **nutrition standards** specifically designed for food banks.

So, where does this leave us today? Some would argue that nutrition standards are something that can be put aside during the Coronavirus crisis while we focus on getting food – any food – out the door to all of the people who need it. While this is certainly an unprecedented time with an urgent and critical need for food assistance across the country, keeping nutrition front of mind remains important **because** so many people are now reliant on systems like schools and food banks for a significant proportion of their food. Providing access to a nutrient-rich diet is critical to support public health.

The USDA asks local child nutrition program officers to **maintain and meet the nutrition standards for each program to the greatest extent possible** and stands ready to provide technical assistance. Feeding America has also **been working to support** food banks in their network, and locally here in Connecticut, **Foodshare** and the **Connecticut Food Bank** are committed to providing nutritious food for people in need.

Thank you to the front-line responders who are continuing to provide the most nutritious foods they can to keep our communities safe and healthy. Supporting their efforts is necessary to mitigate further health disparities as a consequence of this pandemic. To learn what you can do to help, you can find your local food bank **here**.

With gratitude,
Marlene Schwartz