



Introduction:

School backpack programs provide supplemental weekend food for students at risk of hunger. Organizations often assemble weekend “packs” in advance, sometimes packing enough for several months or a semester at a time. The packs are transported to the school and school staff slip them into the backpacks of children in need. This allows the recipients to remain anonymous, allows the donors to do the work in advance, and limits the number of people with access to the students’ possessions/backpacks.

Goals:

“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’” Matthew 25:40

Jesus’ admonitions to care for “the least of these”, to be salt and light even in the darkest places, and to bring glory to God by our good works (Matthew 5:13-16) shape our outreach efforts. As disciples of Jesus, we are called to give generously to those in need (2 Corinthians 9:6-8) and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves (Matthew 22:39).

Supplemental weekend food programs provide churches and other charitable organizations the opportunity to invest in the lives of students in ways that will yield results for years to come. **We choose to serve Jesus and love others by working to alleviate the risk of childhood hunger.**

Food considerations:

The pack contents vary according to the age, allergies, and economic status of the students. For example, some students do not have access to can openers so canned foods with pull tabs are preferred. The risk of choking must be considered in younger children.

Because of the risk of a life-threatening allergic reaction to nuts, consideration should be given to making all packs nut-free. **If a student has an allergy to nuts, no food item should be processed in a facility that also processes nuts.** This provides safety for the student and reduces liability risk for the providing organization.

Because we cannot know the allergies of other children in the recipient student’s family, nor control who eats the food we send home, we made the decision to use only food processed in facilities that do not process nuts.

Our goal is not to replace parental responsibility for the provision of food. Instead, we aim to supplement by providing an extra 500-600 calories per day.

Alternative School Options:

For “alternative” schools, in which the students do not have backpacks, we offer food to every student, regardless of the economic resources of the family. **Our only requirement is signed parental/guardian consent.** Bags of food are handed out on Thursday or Friday afternoon and often include a Scripture lesson with a coloring sheet or other worksheet (games/puzzles/word searches) to illustrate the lesson.

Food Items to Avoid:

Any item that is not shelf-stable.

Any item with an expiration date less than two weeks after the distribution date.

Any item containing nuts or processed in a facility that also processes nuts.

Vienna sausages because of the choking hazard.

Tuna/fish because of the risk of bones/choking.

Ramen noodles have limited nutritional value and are often processed in facilities that also process shellfish. They may include peanuts or are processed in facilities that also process nuts.

Suggested Food Items to Include:

Pop Tarts/Breakfast items (individually wrapped)

Instant oatmeal or grits

Canned entrees (ravioli, lasagna, beef stew, beanie weenies, pork and beans, canned chicken, etc)

Macaroni and cheese

Applesauce

Individual packets of fruit or pudding

Dried fruit

Jerky

Slim Jim-type sausage sticks

Shelf-stable individual packs of milk or yogurt

Sources for food:

Wholesalers may be willing to deliver food if it is purchased in sufficient quantities and may offer a small discount for an ongoing account. Local food banks may also be a source for food.

Our organization has purchased almost exclusively from our local Sam’s Club, with current sale prices directing our purchasing. We have found sale prices compare favorably with that of wholesalers and allow us to order online and send someone to pick up the food for us or have it delivered directly to our offices. Costco and similar stores may also be a good source for food.

We rarely buy from “thrift” stores offering groceries for “up to 70% off” because of the frequency of outdated or short-dated food.