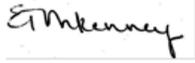




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Date: January 20, 2016

To: Superintendents of Schools with Prekindergarten Programs
Prekindergarten Program Contacts

From: Betsy Kenney, Supervisor of Education Programs 

Subject: Guidelines for determining if mealtime may be included when calculating a prekindergarten program's instructional time

This memorandum responds to the many questions our office receives in regard to whether or not mealtime can be included when calculating the instructional hours of prekindergarten programs for three and four year old students.

Historically, the practice of the Office of Early Learning has been to define the length of the school day for prekindergarten programs in the same manner as K-Grade 6, which excludes mealtime. As full-day prekindergarten programs have become more prevalent throughout the state, the Office of Early Learning has received questions more regularly and has been asked to consider what are, if any, circumstances in which mealtime can be counted as part of a daily instructional schedule.

Mealtime in a prekindergarten classroom is an important part of a young child's development and learning. There are many learning opportunities to be planned for when including mealtime in the instructional day. These may include experiences with food, encouraging self-help skills, language and vocabulary development and mealtime behavioral expectations. Mealtime can also provide a natural environment for young learners to share in conversations that build relationships with peers and adults. If your program chooses to include mealtime as part of the instructional day, it should be a positive experience for each child and must include meaningful adult-child interactions and opportunities for learning.

Listed below are specific guidelines offered to help districts determine whether their prekindergarten mealtimes qualify to be included as part of the instructional day. It is the expectation of the Office of Early Learning that these guidelines be closely adhered to when choosing to define meals as instructional time. Therefore, the below examples should be either followed as described or have a comparable level of adult-child interaction, consideration, and learning elements that are met during the entire mealtime, including set-up and cleanup, and are incorporated into each daily meal.

Mealtime that can be counted as instructional time should include, but not be limited to:

1. Teachers and paraprofessionals participating in mealtime by:
 - a. Maintaining required staff to student ratios and qualifications; and
 - b. Being seated among the children at the meal tables; and

- c. Participating, facilitating and guiding in meaningful extended conversations; modeling appropriate mealtime behavior with supportive guidance; and facilitating problem solving and turn taking.
- 2. Mealtime setting should allow for:
 - a. Reciprocal conversations between adult/child as well as child/child in guided topics that are of interest to and relevant to children;
 - b. Comfortable and relaxing conversations that facilitate literacy development by encouraging new vocabulary; and
 - c. Accommodations for learning opportunities for students who finish mealtime before their peers (e.g., engaging in conversations; additional activities appropriate for mealtime setting).
- 3. Daily mealtime instructional planning should give thoughtful consideration to the five domains of the New York State Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core (http://www.p12.nysed.gov/ciai/common_core_standards/pdfdocs/nyslsprek.pdf):
 - a. Approaches to Learning (e.g., gaining independence, problem solving, asking questions, making connections to prior knowledge);
 - b. Physical Development and Health (e.g., handwashing; healthy eating habits; setting a table, pouring liquids);
 - c. Social and Emotional Development (e.g., mealtime manners: please, thank you, you're welcome, excuse me; utensil usage; sitting at a table to eat; chewing with mouth closed; enjoying mealtime routines);
 - d. Communication, Language, and Literacy (e.g., engage in small talk; listen while others are talking; name and discuss foods; discuss likes and dislikes); and
 - e. Cognition and Knowledge of the World (e.g., discussions about customs, foods and family traditions; distinguishing left from right; applying one-to one correspondence; using positions words; shapes, size and texture).

For additional information, here is a helpful link for purposeful mealtime planning: <http://www.naeyc.org/tyc/article/turn-mealtime-into-learning-time>.

Please be advised that when SED staff from the Office of Early Learning conduct monitoring visits, they will be looking carefully to see that these guidelines and expectations are met in order to justify that the classroom mealtime be included as part of daily instructional time. If you have any questions, contact the Office of Early Learning at (518) 474-5807, or email OEL@nysed.gov.