



STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
LANSING


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GOVERNOR

MICHAEL P. FLANAGAN
STATE SUPERINTENDENT

February 27, 2014

MEMORANDUM

TO: Local and Intermediate School District Superintendents and
Public School Academy Directors

FROM: Mike Flanagan, State Superintendent 

SUBJECT: Adequate Time to Eat

Schools need to offer their students adequate time to eat a healthy lunch. This gives students enough time to be fully nourished and reduce the amount of food resources thrown away.

The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (HHFKA) allows schools the opportunity to make real reform to school lunch and breakfast programs by improving the critical nutrition for millions of children. Significant research shows that students must be properly nourished in order to be best prepared for the school day. The amount of time given to students to eat their meals could have a significant impact on their ability to receive the needed nourishment.

With an emphasis on fresh fruits and vegetables in school lunch, children need adequate time to consume all of their healthy lunch. This will also help avoid food waste. In a recent survey of Michigan superintendents, principals and food service directors, 76% of the districts responded that they do not have a policy on what is considered an adequate amount of time for students to be served and consume their school meals. In addition, 43% responded they believe their students struggle to eat their entire meal within the scheduled meal period.

Although federal rules and regulations do not specify how long a lunch period should be, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) "encourages schools to provide sufficient lunch periods that are long enough to give all students enough time to be served and to eat their lunches." Further, Michigan's State Board of Education adopted a Model Local Wellness Policy in October 2005. Recommendations specify that the school district shall ensure:

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- adequate time for students to enjoy eating healthy foods with friends in schools
- that lunch time is scheduled as near to the middle of the school day as possible
- that recess for elementary schools is scheduled before lunch so that children will come to lunch less distracted and ready to eat

Although several other states also recommend “adequate time” for lunch, five states currently have state laws that mandate a specific time for lunch: three laws specify 20 minutes for lunch and two laws specify 30 minutes.

Schools are key partners in preventing obesity by promoting physical activity and healthy eating through policies, practices, and supportive environments. Ensuring sufficient time to receive and consume a school lunch enables students the ability to finish their healthy meal and provides nourished bodies that are ready to learn.

I am calling on schools to review your policies and procedures related to the time allowed for students to eat a healthy lunch. Here are some resources to help illustrate the importance of allowing students adequate time to consume meals, and offer tangible ideas to help improve your school nutrition environment:

[School Health Guidelines](#) (see Page 12, School Health Guidelines to Promote Healthy Eating and Physical Activity)
[Eating at School](#)

Questions regarding this communication can be directed to Kyle Guerrant, Director, Office of School Support Services at 517-335-0565 or guerrantk@michigan.gov.

cc: Michigan Education Alliance