



STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
LANSING


GRETCHEN WHITMER
GOVERNOR

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STATE SUPERINTENDENT

MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 15, 2024

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

FROM: Dr. Diane L. Golzynski, Deputy Superintendent
Finance and Operations 

SUBJECT: Best Practices When Serving More School Meals

Michigan School Meals has been a tremendous success for school year 2023-2024. Meal counts are up statewide! Students are being served healthy and wholesome school meals every day. This improvement would not have happened without the strong work and support of the staff in your districts. The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) would like to thank you and your teams for your support and excellent work.

MDE acknowledges that with all the success, there are challenges due to the increased number of students eating school meals. This memorandum provides some solutions to consider for working through current challenges and planning for next year.

Challenge - Time to Eat

Solutions to consider:

- Use alternative breakfast models: consider using breakfast models beyond the cafeteria that work best for each site, such as breakfast in the classroom, grab-and-go stations throughout schools, and/or second chance breakfast (serving breakfast between first and second period).
- Breakfast as instructional time: per the [Pupil Accounting Manual Sec 2-8, h](#), breakfast in the classroom (for example, during homeroom or first period) while instruction occurs may count as instructional time.
- Add additional points of service (POS): reorganize your meal service lines to speed up service. Think about adding more grab-and-go stations and/or adding POS kiosks. Add reimbursable meal vending machines.
- Add additional serving space: are there other locations where meals can be provided? If adding more meal periods is not an option, could meals be served and eaten somewhere other than the cafeteria (e.g., extra classrooms)?

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- Adjust the duration of meal periods: add additional time to meal service to ensure students have enough time to eat. The [Center for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) recommends at least 10 minutes of seat time with a meal for breakfast and at least 20 minutes of seat time for lunch.
- Add more meal periods: if limited by space or service, adding extra meal services may be necessary to ensure all students have enough seat time and time to eat. Note that school lunch must be served between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. according to ([7 CFR 210.10\(l\)](#)). Information about requesting a meal service time waiver is at the end of this document under Additional Information.
- Adjust the format of the school day next year: adding additional time to the school day may need to be considered for the following school year. Consider labor contracts for teachers, aids, and support staff if planning additional minutes to the school day.

Challenge – Food Service Staffing and Scheduling

Solutions to consider:

- More prep time: with an increase in meals served, you may need to hire additional staff and/or increase staff hours to prepare meals.
- Add shifts: consider adding a second shift (e.g., evening shift) to have space and time to prepare meals.
- Add a perpetual job posting: work with the district human resources department to have a food service position posted on an ongoing basis.
- Take employee recruitment to the next level: promote open job positions at parent pick-up with lawn signs, hand out fliers at parent-teacher conferences, and post weblinks in community social media groups.
- Review staff contracts: increasing pay, providing bonus pay, or other benefits may attract and retain staff.
- Promote the benefits of working in school nutrition: school day hours, no nights or holidays, and a rewarding career that impacts children’s academic success.

Challenge - Food Waste

Solutions to consider:

- More time to eat: if students do not have adequate time to eat, food waste increases. See the Challenge - Time to Eat above for solutions to consider.
- Review production records: kitchen production records can identify opportunities to modify menus and production. Take items off the menu that few students choose.
- Review Offer versus Serve (OVS) practices: ensure the current service model meets [OVS guidance](#) and students are allowed to select individual components (e.g., don’t bundle components, pre-plate meals in advance).
- Plan separate menus for different grade levels so portion sizes are appropriate. Consider fewer options for elementary students to choose from to avoid overwhelming students.
- Use share tables: share tables are a great way to reduce post-consumer waste. Review the [Share Tables Administrative Memo](#) for guidelines and application of the food code.

- Encourage student consumption: provide options so students take what they like and eat what they take. Help students understand the importance of eating the healthy food they select.
- Correctly implement Offer versus Serve: three food components at lunch are a reimbursable meal. An [OVS training module](#) is available with more information.
- Get student feedback: acquire students' feedback with taste-testing events, surveys, and suggestion boxes. Food advisory boards are required for sponsors with a Food Service Management Company (FSMC) contract, but a best practice for all. See the [Requirements for Advisory Boards and Student/Parent Input in School Nutrition Programs for FSMCs Memo](#) for additional information.
- Serve fresh and local foods: serving a variety of foods, including fresh and local fruits and vegetables, can improve meal quality and acceptability. Maximize your programs and bottom line with the 10 Cents a Meal for Michigan's Kids and Farms grant and the USDA Department of Defense Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (USDA DoD Fresh).
- Conduct a food waste audit: for assistance, contact Aaron Hiday from the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) (HidayA@michigan.gov).
- Composting: consider ways to use post-consumer waste. Could you start a school [composting program](#)? Or contract with a local compost facility?
- Donate leftovers: is there an opportunity to donate leftovers safely? Schools that wish to donate food to local humanitarian organizations have protections under the [Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act](#). It is important to note that donating food to feed livestock is not covered under the federal Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Act, and there are [federal laws](#) that pertain to feeding leftovers and food scraps to animals. For guidance on donating food to livestock, contact Tim Lyons (LyonsT1@michigan.gov) or Chris Schafer (MDARD-AnimalFeed@michigan.gov) at the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD).

Challenge – Equipment and Storage

Solutions to consider:

- Equipment maintenance: think about your equipment needs now. Maintenance costs increase with heavier use, but maintenance can extend the life of equipment. If you have broken equipment, you'll need to decide on the best solution – repair or replace it?
- Equipment replacement: take into consideration that the equipment supply chain is slow and orders can take months to fulfill. When purchasing equipment, use the [Pre-approved Food Service Equipment List](#) for purchases. If considering equipment beyond the approved list, reference the memorandum [When do you Need Pre-Approval for Food Service Equipment Purchases?](#) or contact MDE-Fiscal@michigan.gov. The [Equipment Assistance Grant](#) may also help provide funding. District procurement policy and procedures must be followed. Visit MDE's website for more [Procurement Resources](#).
- Increase storage space: you can repurpose unused areas for storing food service items (e.g., equipment and shelf-stable inventory). Please note that an [Equipment Approval Request Form](#) found in GEMS/MARS through MiLogin for Business is required when designating a new space for this purpose.

- Add more deliveries: if storage is limited, increasing the number of deliveries and staff to receive products can increase the turnover of inventory.
- Communicate regularly with vendors and distributors: keep partners updated with quantities of food and supply needs.

Challenge – Special Dietary Needs

Solutions to consider:

- Reasonable accommodations are required for special dietary needs. The [MDE Special Diet Accommodations Guide](#) provides more information.
- Multidisciplinary approach: Special dietary needs accommodations are a team effort. Hold monthly meetings with administration, nursing (if available), and the food service director to identify, monitor, and evaluate special dietary accommodations. For medical conditions (e.g., allergies, intolerances, diabetes), use consistent documentation ([Special Diet Statement](#)), Individualized Education Programs (IEP), and 504 plans (where applicable).
- Keep communication open with parents and students.
- It is strongly encouraged to make accommodations for dietary preferences, including religious preferences ([State Aid Budget Sec 30d\(3\)](#)). These accommodations must meet the meal pattern to qualify as reimbursable.
- Offer a daily vegetarian entrée: meatless entrees can be a solution for multiple dietary requests.

Additional Information

Meal Service Time Waiver:

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) regulations ([7 CFR 210.10\(l\)](#)) specify that schools and institutions participating in the NSLP must serve lunches during the period of 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

If you need to request a waiver to serve lunches outside the times of 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. you will need to:

- Request the exemption in the Coordinated Application on the Meal Pattern Exceptions and Variations Page in the School Nutrition Program (SNP) Only section.
- Send your plan, including the sites and meal service times, to MDE-SchoolNutrition@michigan.gov.
- The Michigan Department of Education will confirm approval of serving lunches outside of 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.

Please send an email for additional information or questions to MDE-SchoolNutrition@michigan.gov.

cc: Michigan Education Alliance
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