



STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
LANSING


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GOVERNOR


SUE C. CARNELL, Ph.D.
INTERIM STATE SUPERINTENDENT

MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 9, 2025

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

FROM: Dr. Diane Golzynski, RDN, SNS, Deputy Superintendent 
Division of Business, Health, and Library Services

Emily Laidlaw, Deputy Director 
Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential

SUBJECT: Family-Style Meals in Early Childhood Classrooms

The purpose of this memorandum is to clarify family-style meals for use by school food service staff and school business officials.

Family-style meals create positive opportunities to instill healthy habits in young children as a foundation for healthy choices in life. Snacks and mealtimes provide daily opportunities for positive child/adult engagement, which encourages the practices of participatory learning conversations that build relationships between children and adults.

According to [MCL 388.1632d](#), section 5e, Great Start Readiness Programs (GSRP) must use a developmentally appropriate curriculum, as determined by the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential (MiLEAP). In the [Great Start Readiness Implementation Manual Section: Program Administration and Staffing](#), MiLEAP has determined that grantees must adhere to the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)/National School Nutrition Programs nutritional guidelines (page 12) and that snacks and meals in GSRP are a part of the curriculum (page 14). There is no cost to families for snacks or meals provided in GSRP at any time. This is true regardless of family income or whether a program participates in School Nutrition Programs, Child and Adult Care Food Programs, or does not participate in a federal food program.

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Food preparation and presentation

Food is sent to the classroom in serving bowls and on platters along with appropriate serving utensils. It is not pre-plated, pre-portioned, or individually wrapped. Milk should be served from a pitcher, but half-pint cartons can be used.

Food portions:

Food portions must meet the minimum U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) meal pattern requirements, regardless of how they are served to the children. The required portion sizes in the preschool meal pattern are minimums. Always prepare extra food, as each child has a different appetite.

Steps to provide enough food for each child:

- Calculate at least the [minimum amount](#) of food needed per child.
- Prepare for spillage or contamination and have additional helpings available. Best practice would be to have 5-10% extra servings available.
- Place all serving bowl(s), plate(s), and/or pitcher(s) on the table where the children are seated for the meal and snack.
- Mark fill lines on cups so there is a minimum of 6 fluid ounces for meals and 4 fluid ounces for snacks.
- Teachers and aides should help the children serve themselves. For meals claimed under the National School Lunch Program, children must take a ¼ cup of fruit or vegetable.

Adult servings:

Teachers will need to model family style meals with children, therefore food portions need to be included for teachers. Full meals for both lead teachers and associate teachers must be counted and paid for by GSRP funding. If only sampling the meal to model family-style, a single meal can be counted and shared between lead teachers and associate teachers.

Communication:

The key information to share between classrooms and the food service department is the:

- Number of students present each day.
- Number of students seated at each table.
- Age groups of students being served.
- Need of backup supplies of cups or utensils and cleaning supplies for the classroom.

Meal counting:

For proper meal counting, children are seated at the table, all foods that meet the meal pattern, including milk, are offered in appropriate quantities, and the meal is marked on the meal count form by name prior to the children leaving the table.

Billing:

The food service program must receive revenue for all food provided. There are several different ways the early childhood classroom billing may be set up:

- If the school food service department is the sponsor claiming the meals, it must bill the GSRP or Head Start classroom for the meals, snacks, and extra food portions provided that are not covered by federal reimbursement. GSRP funding may be used to cover the cost of meals and snacks. That includes the meal prices for paid and reduced eligible student meals, adult meals, and extra food portions.
- If the school food service department is vending meals to a Community-Based Organization (CBO), and the CBO is the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) sponsor claiming the meals, the food service department needs to bill the CBO for the vended meal price that fully covers all costs that were established in the agreement.
- For pricing guidance of preschool meals based on specific situations, please contact MDE-Fiscal@Michigan.gov.
- For what type of agreement or contract is needed, contact the procurement and contracts team for more information at MDE-FSMC-Vended@Michigan.gov.

Snack claiming: Snacks served during the school day must be claimed under the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and not the National School Lunch Program (NSLP).

For further information on family-style meal instruction, refer to page 15-16 of the [Great Start Readiness Implementation Manual Section: Program Administration and Staffing](#).

Resources

- Partner Resources
 - [Family Style Meal Service With Children in the CACFP](#): includes operator booklet, posters, and training slides
 - [Crediting Tip Sheets in Child Nutrition Programs](#)
 - [Serving School Meals to Preschoolers](#)
 - [Reducing the Risk of Choking in Young Children at Mealtimes](#)
 - [CACFP Meal Pattern Posters](#)
- Michigan Department of Education Resources
 - [Is it a Grain-Based Dessert?](#)
 - [Creditable and Non-Creditable Foods Guide](#)
 - Online training modules: [CNP: Preschool Meal Pattern - Overview](#) and [CACFP: Family-Style Meal Service - Overview](#)

Contact information for meal program: MDE-SchoolNutrition@Michigan.gov and MDE-CACFP@Michigan.gov

cc: Michigan Education Alliance
Confederation of Michigan Tribal Education Departments