



"Linking the Land and the Lunchroom"

Wisconsin Homegrown Lunch

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Wisconsin Homegrown Lunch Food Policy Recommendations

Introduction

Wisconsin Homegrown Lunch (WHL) has been working with the Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD) Food Service over the past 3 ½ years to increase the offerings of fresh fruits and vegetables on the breakfast and lunch menus and to source this produce from local growers when feasible. WHL has also been inspiring student excitement about fresh fruits and vegetables through tasting activities, classroom visits by local farmers, and field trips to local vegetable farms. Our belief is, and our experience has shown, that when young people learn about where their food comes from and are engaged in the *process* of growing and preparing fresh foods, they are much more likely to try them. And when exposed repeatedly to fresh foods (without competing offerings of high sugar and fat content foods) they are more likely to eat them regularly.

Federal law now mandates that all school districts develop a wellness policy which must be implemented by the beginning of the 2006-2007 school year. (more information: www.reapfoodgroup.org/farmtoschool). The process of creating this wellness policy provides a wonderful opportunity for schools to systematically assess and improve the health and learning environments of our students. MMSD administrators are now developing recommendations for a district 'Food Policy' that will likely be integrated into a broader wellness policy at a later date.

The proposed district Food Policy will clearly have far-reaching impacts on all our students. If crafted well, it will provide a framework for creating a school food environment that encourages healthy eating habits and provides daily opportunities for consuming safe and healthful food. As parents of students in the district, and as advocates for a healthy local food system, we feel it is imperative that this policy make a strong and clear statement of MMSD's commitment to our children's health.

We recommend that MMSD, as have other school districts around the country, adopt a Food Policy that is founded upon the following core principles:

- Healthy children are the foundation of a healthy society;
- Healthy, well-nourished children are better able to learn;
- All children deserve nutritious, safe, and deliciously prepared food;
- Eating habits developed in childhood will affect health throughout life;
- Knowledge of food - how it is grown, who grows it, how it is prepared, and its connection to tradition - is integral to a healthy education

In support of these core principles, WHL offers the following information and food policy recommendations, organized into two main sections: 1) School Food Service Operations and 2) Foods Originating Outside of the School Food Service. We understand that given current infrastructural and budgetary conditions, not all of these policies could be implemented immediately. Nonetheless, by stating strong policy goals, the district will establish a clear mandate to work toward meaningful improvement.

School Food Service Operations

Background:

The MMSD Food Service is charged with the challenging task of providing meals prepared in one central kitchen to the more than 15,000 K-12 students that participate in the school meals program. Because the Food Service budget is separate from other school district operations, it needs to bring in enough revenue to support itself from sales and through federal reimbursements for free and reduced meal qualified students. With about \$0.68 per “hot lunch” to spend on food, the Food Service develops a menu that on a weekly basis meets USDA standards for calories, fat content, and vitamins and minerals. A la carte items in middle and high schools are not regulated by USDA standards nor are they restricted in cost or price.

Adherence to USDA guidelines, while setting minimum standards for nutrition, still allows for items with relatively high sugar content and relatively low nutrient density (i.e. donuts, Pop Tarts, sweet rolls and cookie dough.) These foods are offered on a daily or weekly basis in Madison schools. In addition, USDA guidelines say nothing about the amount of highly processed foods or the amount of *fresh* fruits and vegetables served. Currently a very limited number of *fresh* fruits and vegetables are offered (less than \$2.00 per student per year is spent on *fresh vegetables*).

Given that diet-related conditions such as overweight, obesity and diabetes have reached epidemic proportions among youth in America, that fewer than 15% of school children eat the USDA recommended servings of fruit and vegetables, that it is well recognized good nutrition contributes to academic achievement, and that school meals represent a significant proportion of children’s daily nutritional intake (especially children from low-income families), it is imperative that our schools assume a greater responsibility in promoting healthy eating habits. Since it is possible to meet USDA standards without providing a significant amount of *fresh* fruits and vegetables, by serving items with relatively high sugar content and low nutrient density and by modeling unhealthy eating habits (i.e. donuts are acceptable for an elementary student’s breakfast), we believe that our meal program must do more than meet USDA standards. We suggest that an appropriate food policy would express a commitment that school meals will *provide a wide range of fresh fruits and vegetables and create an environment where healthy foods will be better accepted by limiting less healthy options.*

Suggested Policies for the School Meals Program

A number school districts around the country are adopting policy language similar to our suggestions below. Links to these initiatives can be found on our website, www.reapfoodgroup.org/farmentoschool.

- Aim to be financially self-supporting. *However, the meals program is an essential educational support activity. Budget neutrality or profit generation will not take precedence over the nutritional needs of the students.* If subsidy of the child nutrition fund is needed, it will not be from the sale of foods that have minimal nutritional value and/or compete nutritionally with program meals
- Provide adequate training to district food service personnel to enhance their capacity to contribute to the district’s nutrition and health missions.

- Provide foods whose nutritional value significantly improves upon USDA Standards through provision of nutritious, fresh, attractive, tasty, minimally processed and locally grown (when feasible) items that reflect community and cultural diversity
- Encourage the consumption of nutrient dense foods such as whole grains, fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Schools shall offer a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, at least two non-fried vegetables and two fruit choices each day, and five different fruits and five different vegetables over the course of a week.
- When practical and feasible, preference will be given to products grown, processed, and/or packaged in Wisconsin and to products which are certified organic.
- Highly sweetened items, such as donuts, French toast sticks, sweet rolls and pop tarts, will be replaced by less sweetened, whole grain items such as bagels, whole grain muffins, and whole grain cereal bars.
- No individual item served by food service as part of a traditional meal, as an a la carte item or as a snack item may contain more than one third of its weight from added sugar. An exception may be made periodically for a traditional meal treat.
- Serve dessert as part of lunch meal only occasionally and then with a preference toward whole grain items like whole grain muffins or fresh fruits.
- Encourage increased consumption of water throughout the day. Staff members should be particularly sensitive to student needs for water during periods of hot weather. Each school shall determine when students may bring water bottles for use during school and establish a policy for whether or not bottles may be refilled during school
- Milk will be promoted during all meals. Milk will be available to students bringing sack lunches. *Only unflavored milk will be served during the school breakfast program.* Both unflavored and flavored milk will be available during the school lunch program.
- Soda Pop: No soda pop will be allowed during the school day including students bringing lunches or snacks.
- Food Service will be sensitive to the presence of dyes, sulfites, MSG and other additives to food by limiting their use whenever possible or finding alternative products that have fewer additives
- On A La Carte Lines:
 - Phase out sale of individual items (pizza slices) and move toward selling whole meals (i.e. pizza slice with carrots and milk).
 - Encourage purchase of healthier items on a la carte lines by charging more for less healthy items and having little or no profit margin on healthier items.
 - Develop salad bars or offer full range of salads and soups daily.
- Offer a range of healthier items for order by schools, teachers, classes, and clubs for special events.
- Encourage and promote healthy living by implementing nutrition education materials into the meal program.

Suggested Policies for the Eating Environment

- Students should be provided adequate time to eat lunch, at least 10 minutes for breakfast and 20 minutes for lunch, *from the time the student is seated.*
- Lunch periods should be scheduled as near the middle of the school day as possible. ***Recess for elementary grades should be scheduled before lunch.***
- Drinking water should be available for students at meals.

Foods Originating Outside of the School Food Service

Background

Students have access to a wide range of foods originating outside of the School Food Service such as during classroom snack time, nutrition education lessons, school fundraisers, and special school events. During such times there is a natural opportunity to offer healthy food education and behavior modeling. It is important that foods served in these venues comply with nutritional guidelines as those of the Food Service and be implemented in a way that does not compete with the school meal program.

In addition to prioritizing healthy options, foods originating outside of the Food Service need to take a number of other issues into consideration including severe food allergens (particularly peanuts), pest problems in schools, and safe food handling to minimize the risk of spreading food-borne illnesses. When setting policy to address these issues it is important that the least restrictive solutions be adopted. For instance, rather than an outright ban on homemade foods for fear that they pose an allergy or food safety risk, protocols can be put in place to ensure the safe handling of foods and that classrooms with allergic students remain peanut free.

Suggested Policies for Classroom Snacks and Food Celebrations/Potlucks

- Every effort will be made to have classroom snacks and other food activities follow the District Nutrition Standards. Emphasis should be placed upon providing healthy snacks in the classroom such as fresh fruits and vegetables, 100% juice, trail mix, and whole grain bagels, crackers, and muffins
- All students with food allergies will be identified. Teachers, administrators, and parents whose children share classrooms with at-risk students will develop clear communications and protocols to minimize exposure risks.
- Teachers and staff will be provided a list of alternative ways to celebrate birthdays and holidays in order to cut down on the amount of nutrient poor foods being consumed by students.
- Candy will not be used as an educational tool (e.g. sorting M & M's in math class, as a reward for good behavior or academic performance).

Suggested Policies for the Preparation of Foods

- The preparation and consumption of foods as part of nutrition/food education activities is encouraged as a way to familiarize students with new foods, and expose students to various cultures through food customs.
- All food preparation shall follow standard food safety protocols. No preparation of raw meat is allowed. When feasible and appropriate, school kitchens will be made available for nutrition/food education lessons involving the preparation of food.

Suggested Policies for Fundraising Activities

- Give strong consideration to offering healthy food items or non-food items (books, gift wrap, candles, plants, flowers, school promotional items, etc) as part of fundraising activities.
- All fundraising projects involving the sale and consumption of food within and prior to the instructional day will be expected to make every effort to follow the District Nutrition Standards when determining the items being sold.
- Items being sold that do not meet the District Nutrition Standards may be acceptable for student consumption within moderation (i.e. limit quantity sold to an individual student).
- Items being sold that do not meet the District Nutrition Standards may be acceptable when offered on an intermittent basis.
- The vending of candy will not be permitted on school property. Non-vending sale of candy will be permitted only at the end of the instructional day. Candy is defined as any item that contains sugar (including brown sugar, corn sweetener, corn syrup, fructose, glucose {dextrose}, high fructose corn syrup, honey, invert sugar, lactose, maltose, molasses, raw sugar, table sugar {sucrose}, syrup) listed as one of the first two ingredients.

Suggested Policies for Nutrition Education

- Nutrition education will be integrated into the curriculum at all appropriate points (math, science, language arts, physical education and social studies).
- The school cafeteria will serve as a “learning laboratory” to allow students to apply critical thinking skills taught in the classroom.
- School gardens and composting at schools will be encouraged.

Madison Metropolitan School District Nutrition Advisory Committee

With the purposes of monitoring the implementation of the District’s policy, evaluating policy progress, serving as a resource to school sites, and revising the policy as necessary it is recommended that a District-wide nutrition committee be established. The committee would meet a minimum of two times annually with committee membership as follows:

- District Food Service Manager
- Dietician
- Parent representative from each school level
- Student representative from each school level
- Staff member representative from each school level
- Administrative representative, Co-Chair
- Physical Education and Health Program Leader, Co-Chair



Links to additional information on Wellness Policies, including model policies can be found at:
www.reapfoodgroup.org/farmtoschool