



Feeding Bodies. Fueling Minds.™

2024 Position Paper

As the dedicated professionals planning, preparing and serving healthy free meals to nourish students, Minnesota School Nutrition Association (MSNA) members request state and school district officials continue working in partnership with each other and nutrition professionals to ensure quality meal experiences are available to all Minnesota students.

As expected, implementing the Free School Meals Program has resulted in increased student participation in breakfast and lunch programs. The positive outcome of feeding more students yields additional operational requirements and considerations, as such, MSNA shares the following requests:

- **Budget more student seat time in the cafeteria:**

Current allotted time for lunch is not sufficient for students to comfortably consume meals. With consideration for schools' unique operational and service factors, allotting ample time once a student is seated with their meal is crucial for them to maximize nutritional benefits of complete, balanced school lunches and lessen the amount of uneaten food being thrown away. Additionally, adequate nutrition and social breaks support students' physical and mental well-being, contributing significantly to overall academic performance. ***We support [HF 3556](#) and the requirement to ensure all students have a minimum 15 minutes of seat time within the lunch period to consume meals and reduce food waste.***

- **Provide milk reimbursement:**

A required component currently provided for free as part of a reimbursable school breakfast or lunch, milk provides important nutritional benefits within a balanced meal. Students should have equal access to a free serving of milk stand-alone during school meal service if they bring a meal from home. ***We urge support for [HF 3471](#) which would require reimbursing schools 50 cents per one serving/carton of milk provided to students who otherwise do not choose a reimbursable meal.***

- **Eliminate old meal debt:**

Prior to enacting the Free School Meals Program in SY 23/24, school districts/schools that did not qualify or opt-in to district-wide free meal service through the Community Eligible Provision or other means were required to charge students who were not eligible for free or reduced price meal benefits. Accrued unpaid meal debt remains a burden on families that also threatens school district budgets. ***A one-time infusion of state funds should be provided to the MDE for school nutrition programs to apply for retiring old meal debts.***

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About the Minnesota School Nutrition Association

The Minnesota School Nutrition Association (MSNA), founded in 1956 as a state-wide association with local chapters, is a non-profit association of over 2,500 members who work to ensure that all children have access to healthy meals and nutrition education in Minnesota.

For more information about MSNA and upcoming events, please visit www.mnsna.org.