

MASSACHUSETTS SCHOOL MEAL PROGRAMS

SHARE TABLE SNAPSHOT

Guidance & essential details on page 2

WHAT IS A SHARE TABLE?



- A share table is an area where students can leave unopened cafeteria-provided food items for others to take.
- A bowl, bus bin, cooler with ice, or refrigerator can be used to hold the food and keep refrigerated items at safe temperatures.
- Share tables can be set up near the condiments & utensils, after the register, or at the start of the waste sorting station.
- Share tables need to be monitored/managed to ensure only acceptable items are left, and determine how they will be handled at the end of the lunch periods.

WHY IS THERE FOOD TO SHARE?

- The goal of food and nutrition services in schools is to provide nutritious food to all students (so they can be healthy and ready to learn).
- School meals are reimbursable to districts when students take a full meal.
- A full meal consists of designated serving sizes of 5 components: dairy, grain, protein, fruit, and vegetables.
- USDA allows schools to participate in the Offer vs. Serve program.
- A full lunch meal consists of designated serving sizes of 5 components: dairy, grain, protein, fruit, and vegetables. Students must select at least 3 items. A full breakfast meal consists of designated serving sizes of 4 items from three meal components: fruits and/or vegetables, grains and/or meats/meat alternates, and fluid milk. Students must select at least 3 food items including one 1/2 cup of fruits or vegetables.
- Some students do not wish to eat the full meal and end up throwing away items.
- Even so, students unfortunately still regularly discard food such as milk cartons, whole fruits, and packaged items.
- These items can be safely shared with other students or even returned to the cafeteria for redistribution one time.

ALLOWABLE FOODS

- Must be cafeteria-provided item
- Unopened pre-packaged items
- Whole pieces of fruit with a peel
- Unopened milk in a cooling bin maintained at 41°F or below.



UNALLOWABLE FOODS

- Foods from home or food not provided by the School Meal Programs.
- Unpackaged, opened, and/or packaged items that can be opened and resealed.
- Perishable foods, when a temperature control mechanism is not in place.



Learn more at TheGreenTeam.org.

Adapted from USDA memo SP 41-2016:
The Use of Share Tables in Child Nutrition Programs.

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MASSACHUSETTS SCHOOL MEAL PROGRAMS SHARE TABLE GUIDANCE

MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION, OFFICE FOR FOOD & NUTRITION PROGRAMS SHARE TABLE GUIDANCE

GETTING STARTED

- Contact and obtain written approval from your local board of health regarding the use of share tables in your district.
- Develop written Standard Operating Procedures for saving and sharing food or beverage items that are consistent with the School Food Authority's Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) plan.
- Comply with all local and state health and food safety codes.
- Provide children and families with information about share table guidelines.
- Explain the share table concept to children and staff.
- Display signage outlining share table "rules."

FOOD SAFETY

- Maintain proper temperature (and temperature logs) by storing appropriate food components in a temperature controlled storage bin, such as an ice tub or cooler.
- Food items must be tracked and labeled and may only be redistributed for sale or reimbursement one additional time.
- Do not intermix food items from the share table with items that have not yet been prepared and served.
- Assign an employee other than the cashier to monitor the share table and to ensure food items have not been contaminated.



ALLOWABLE FOODS



- Unopened pre-packaged items, such as a bag of baby carrots or sliced apples, stored in a cooling bin.
- Whole pieces of fruit with a peel, such as bananas or oranges.
- Whole pieces of fruit with an edible peel, such as apples and pears, must be rewashed unless wrapped.
- Unopened milk, if immediately stored in a cooling bin maintained at 41°F or below.



UNALLOWABLE FOODS



- Foods not provided by the School Meal Programs (e.g., foods brought from home).
- Unpackaged items, such as a salad bowl without a lid.
- Packaged items that can be opened and resealed.
- Open items, such as an opened bag of baby carrots or sliced apples.
- Perishable foods, when a temperature control mechanism is not in place.

BEST PRACTICES & CONSIDERATIONS

- Consult your local health department and school nurse about your share table procedures.
- Review procedures regularly with cafeteria staff and monitors.
- Assign a person other than the cashier to monitor the share table and to ensure appropriate food items are collected.
- Invite students to participate as share table helpers or assistant monitors.
- If possible, locate the share table directly after the point of service, near the condiment station, or near the waste sorting line so that students interact with the share table as a natural part of the cafeteria flows.
- Use share table data to support wasted food reduction initiatives and nutrition education.
- At the end of the service day there will likely be food remaining on the share table. This food can be moved to the nurse's office, main office, after school programs or packed up for donation.
- If there are severe student allergen concerns, the share table may be only available during other lunch periods or items could be collected for donation only.

SURPLUS FOOD CAN BE DONATED

Extra food from the share table and unserved food that is not repurposed for future menu items can be safely donated.

[RecyclingWorks MA's food donation](#) best practices pages provide MassDEP and DPH-reviewed information for safe donation. Liability protections for food donations through [the Emerson Act](#), including the [Food Donation Improvement Act 2022 Amendment](#) are reviewed by the [Harvard Food Law and Policy Clinic](#).



ADDITIONAL SHARE TABLE RESOURCES

Federal

- [USDA: Use of Share Tables in Child Nutrition Programs](#)
- [2022 FDA Food Code](#)
- [Environmental Law Institute: A Toolkit for Implementing Share Tables in Municipal Schools](#)
- [Offer versus Serve Flexibilities for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program](#)

State

- [MA State Sanitary Code \(105 CMR 590\)](#)
- [2018 Massachusetts and Federal Merged Food Code](#)
- [Massachusetts Partnership for Food Safety Education](#)

Learn more at TheGreenTeam.org.

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