June 10, 2014

TO: Chief School Administrators
Charter School Lead Persons
Administrators of Approved Private Schools for Students with Disabilities
Administrators of Nonpublic Schools

FROM: Nancy Curry, Director
Office of Student Support Services

SUBJECT: School Meal Consumption

The Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service is deeply committed to ensuring that school meals are fully accessible and provide the nutrition that children need in order to be healthy and ready to learn. With these goals in mind, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) would like to share a message received from the USDA to clarify a USDA policy that seems to be the subject of confusion in some school foodservice operations.

Per the USDA, meals offered through the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program are generally intended to be consumed in a designated area, while recognizing that it is not always possible for children to finish all components of their meals within the timeframes allotted. The USDE has heard countless anecdotes of, and has witnessed firsthand, children simply not having adequate time to finish their meals while in the cafeteria. The USDA allows students to take meal items outside of the foodservice area. In fact, they encourage this practice as a means of reducing potential food waste and encouraging consumption of healthy meals.

For food safety reasons, only items that are safe at room temperature (e.g., a piece of whole fruit) should be taken for later consumption. For other items, schools may wish to set up sharing tables to minimize food waste. Of course, program operators must follow all State and local health regulations, as well as their own Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point Plans.

The USDE encourages schools to allow a reasonable amount of time for students to consume their meals. Meanwhile, they urge program operators and other school officials to allow students the flexibility to take or share uneaten items, with food safety standards in mind. More detailed guidance can be found in the USDA policy memo SP 41-2014, Clarification of the Policy on Food Consumption Outside of Foodservice Area, and the Whole Grain-Rich Requirement.
The NJDOE thanks you for your assistance in sharing this information with appropriate staff. We know you share our concerns about ensuring that school children have the opportunity to consume all components of their meals.

NC/kad/s:directors office curry/broadcasts/School Meal Consumption5-28-14
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