



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

MAY 09 2014

Dr. Brenda Cassellius
Commissioner
Minnesota Department of Education
1500 Highway 36 West
Roseville, Minnesota 55113-4266

Dear Dr. Cassellius:

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, I would like to take a moment to reiterate and clarify a USDA policy that seems to be the subject of confusion in some school foodservice operations.

While meals offered through the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program are *generally* intended to be consumed in a designated area, we recognize that it's not always possible for children to finish all components of their meals within the timeframes allotted. We have heard countless anecdotes of—and have witnessed first-hand—children simply not having adequate time to finish their meals while in the cafeteria. We would like to clearly state that **USDA allows students to take meal items outside of the foodservice area**. In fact, we 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.

We continue to encourage schools to allow a reasonable amount of time for students to consume their meals. Meanwhile, we 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*.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kevin W. Concannon".

Kevin W. Concannon
Under Secretary
Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services