

September 2022

Dear Parent/Guardian,

We are thrilled to be serving your child for the 2022-2023 school year! To kick off the new year, we wanted to share a few things you and your child can look forward to when it comes to mealtime and get an inside look at the new recipes, concepts, and programs we'll be introducing this fall.

Food Kids Love to Eat

Chartwells' team of chefs and dietitians are working to bring even more variety to our menus featuring new recipes with kid-approved foods. This year we're serving up:

- Breakfast for Lunch!
- Chicken Pasta Alfredo
- Homemade Macaroni and Cheese

Free and Reduced-Price Meals

Thanks to statewide waivers for funded meal programs, school meals are again free to all Massachusetts students.

Our goal is to continue to support all students and families by ensuring those who need free meals at school continue to receive them – especially understanding that the pandemic has created new hardships for many families, including those who have never previously relied on school meals. We also understand that many households have not submitted a meal application in two years.

We encourage all families, regardless of income, to complete and submit a short, confidential school meal application prior to the start of the school year. Parents or guardians can submit this application online at www.epsd.us or in person at your child's school office. This is imperative to ensure all students lunch accounts are up to date and all students are receiving their maximum benefit at state and local levels.

Food Allergies and Special Dietary Needs

We recognize the critical importance of our approach to supporting students and families who manage food allergy issues every day and work closely with the families of students who have food allergies and medical conditions that require a modification to their menu. Our approach involves coordination between parents and guardians, school nurses, school administrators, and food service professionals in the school's/district's food allergy and medical conditions protocol.

If you would like your child to receive meal accommodations for food allergies or a medical condition impacting the diet, please ensure that you submit the required documentation to your child's school nurse and that you receive confirmation from the Food Service Director, Ken LePage, or Administrative Assistant, Kristyn Zantouliadis, that documentation has been received and a modification plan is in place.

In order to modify the school meal, we must have a written Medical Statement on file signed by a licensed medical provider (physician, physician assistant, or nurse practitioner). The statement must identify the following:

- Information about the child's impairment that is sufficient for understanding how it restricts the child's diet,
- An explanation of what must be done to accommodate the child's disability, and

- If appropriate, the food(s) to be omitted, texture modifications, and recommended substitutions.

For any children who are currently receiving meal accommodations, please contact Ken or Kristyn, to review the meal accommodation plan, which may require additions or amendments based on the ongoing supply chain issues.

As part of our protocol, café managers review food labels for foods used to produce special meals daily; however, we are facing unprecedented food supply issues and while we are doing everything we can to minimize disruptions to our program, we do expect to experience continued shortages and substitutions. Therefore, we may encounter situations where product substitutions are made that contain different allergens or have a different nutritional profile than our usual menu items. As a result, we may need to provide a meal that is different than previously identified for students with special dietary needs to ensure that the meal served to them remains in adherence to their needs as outlined in their medical forms.

While we have posted signs in the cafeteria encouraging students with food allergies or other dietary concerns to speak up, we encourage you to remind your child to be sure to check with the cafeteria manager regarding product substitutions that may not be reflected in the posted menu. We will make every attempt to update Nutrislice in real-time, but please do not solely rely on nutrition or allergen information on Nutrislice to accommodate allergies or medical conditions in the event of last-minute menu changes.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your student's allergies or dietary needs, please don't hesitate to reach out to Ken or Kristyn. We are committed to providing safe meals for all students.

Programs that Encourage Fun and Discovery

Chartwells continues to inspire healthy eating habits and spark a culinary curiosity to last a lifetime through fun and engaging programs, including:

- **Discovery Kitchen:** Designed to make nutrition education fun and entertaining, Chartwells chefs and dietitians have worked together to create curriculums that get kids cooking, trying new foods, and learning about what they're eating. Each month has a different theme and activities will be adapted for the current meal programs.
- **Mood Boost:** This innovative program helps elementary and middle school students connect what they eat with how they feel. It features recipes and characters that focus on six moods: Smart, Happy, Confident, Alert, Strong and Calm.
- **Student Choice:** Giving high school students a voice in deciding what food concepts are featured and new menu items that will be available, Student Choice brings the latest food trends to school menus.

Inviting Environments & Happy Cafeterias

Students need a place to eat where they can connect with others, recharge, and enjoy a sense of happiness, especially following a year where kids weren't able to always sit and enjoy a meal with their classmates.

Menus and Nutrition Facts are at Your Fingertips

Through Nutrislice, an innovative app, students, parents and faculty have access to school menus, including nutrition information, allergens and photos. Nutrislice can be downloaded for free from the App store (iOS) or Google Play (Android) and is available on desktop and mobile devices. Menus are also available at www.epsd.us

Celebrating Our School Lunch Heroes

As kids advance from grade to grade with new classes and different teachers, the dedicated lunch ladies and men in the school cafeteria are often one of the few constants throughout the academic journey. Whether they're at the ready with a spoon, spatula, or welcoming smile, these school lunch heroes go above and beyond to not only serve foods kids love to eat, but to ensure that students leave the cafeteria happier and healthier than they came in.

We are always looking for talented individuals to join the dining services team with perks including, family friendly schedules, no night or weekend work, and more. For more information, visit the Comass USA website.

Through sharing our passion for great tasting food, instilling a desire for food discovery, and most importantly, providing nourishing meals, we're excited to continue serving up happy and healthy to your children in the year ahead.

We love hearing from parents, and your feedback is important to us. Please reach out to our team with any questions or comments. We're looking forward to a great school year!

Thank you,

Ken LePage, Food Service Director

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