



## MDE Updates for MSNA Members:

The Minnesota Department of Education has been awarded a number of exciting new programs and funding to better children's lives and learning environments this past legislative session. It was a historical year of wins for children and schools. As many new initiatives are just getting started, school nutrition teams have already seen success with Minnesota Free School Meals (MN-FSM). In record time, the school nutrition staff have worked to communicate these exciting changes with parents, guardians, children, and the community. In addition to implementing these changes, many schools partnered with smaller schools in the area through joint agreements to ensure students have access to these meals. Our department is not only hearing of the incredible increases to breakfast and lunch participation, but we see the numbers as well. My hope to all school nutrition staff in Minnesota right now is to understand that history is being made and it couldn't be successful without the amazing staff who work every day to ensure students receive healthy meals. For most in this industry, providing healthy free school meals has been a career goal, and to look at this moment and see this amazing goal be met is quite emotional.

To the school nutrition staff in Minnesota; I thank you.

This year, our department has a number of goals aimed to help improve the processes for our school nutrition teams. We have a number of technology projects in the works around the Cyber-Linked Interactive Child Nutrition System (CLiCS) to improve the application process and the administrative review process. Application screens are already in process, new screens are set to begin rolling out for school year 2025. Our department is also reviewing guidance documents as well our website layout to create ease in finding and using the guidance documents.

I am also aware of the issues surrounding the communication of the USDA commodities. This year the fall store of DoD Fresh Fruit and Vegetable was not able to be ordered due to an entitlement calculation issue with technology stemming from how the programs operated during the pandemic and the failure of USDA to procure a new contract for DoD in Minnesota. Communication is another large goal of ours: not only will I will be working with our team on creating communication to better explain this particular issue, but we'll be improving out communication in the future.

The last goal I want to introduce is our goal to increase advisory groups made up of school and community nutrition staff to guide these changes to be the best they can be for the end user. Getting input on what we do from those that operate these programs is important to the long-term success. These are big goals, but I know we can get them done.

Thank you for all you do and for a great start to this historic school year.

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