



## 2025 Position Paper Talking Points

The MN Free School Meals Program has been a great success in ensuring all of our students have access to balanced meals to nourish their school day

- Operational requirements and additional needs have naturally risen with increased student participation in breakfast and lunch

### **Preserve the integrity of the nutrition account (Fund 2):**

Only expenses directly associated with serving school meals should be allowed under Fund 2.

- Our nutrition fund already covers many indirect costs related to serving meals
- It's imperative these funds are available to address increasing costs of labor and menu improvements, not be allowable for building projects such as remodeling
- Financially self-sufficient school nutrition programs must be able to reinvest funds to ensure students continued access to appealing, nutritious foods

### **Avoid state-imposed meal pattern mandates:**

Research shows school meals are the healthiest meals American children eat, *current* federal standards require meals meet calorie, sodium and fat limits and offer students fruits, vegetables, whole grains and entrees with lean proteins.

- Imposing additional state nutrition standards would add a severe layer of complexity and cost, making the program financially unfeasible for schools
- Industry partners are already working to develop menu items to meet forthcoming federal requirements being phased in starting July 2025 with new limits on added sugar and additional limits on sodium in 2027

### **Require a 15-minute minimum for individual student seat time in the cafeteria:**

All students need at least 15 minutes in their seat with their food to comfortably consume school meals and maximize nutritional benefits

- Providing ample time once a student is seated also cuts down on waste, ensuring the investment in free school meals for all is fully benefitting our students

Each school has its own unique operations, service models and cafeteria set-up so there is no one-size fits all solution – what works in one school may not be a solution elsewhere, even within all schools across the same district

- Solutions will require coordination between building administration and school foodservice to determine how best to achieve 15 minutes of seat time balanced with instruction time

### *If asked about possible solutions:*

A collaborative effort between school nutrition professionals and building administrations is needed to address the need for seat time. Some scenarios and solutions include:

- Adjustments to transition time to the lunch room from classrooms
- Set-up and line management could be improved with one-time equipment investments or updates to the physical space
- In some cases, staffing challenges can be a burden to running more serving lines, supporting hiring and retention in school foodservice is a long-term priority
- Assessing older kitchens and cafeterias that haven't had infrastructure updates may need to be modified to suit current needs